



European  
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DEPARTMENT  
OF POLITICAL  
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SCIENCES

## Leaders over parties?

The personalization of politics and voting behavior  
in contemporary Western democracies

Frederico Ferreira da Silva

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to  
obtaining the degree of Doctor of Political and Social Sciences  
of the European University Institute

Florence, 05 July 2019



European University Institute

**Department of Political and Social Sciences**

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## Abstract

This thesis is a compilation of four empirical studies analysing the impact of the personalization of politics on voting behaviour in contemporary Western democracies. The process of personalization of politics has been theoretically described as resulting from the cumulative effects of three factors: a) an individualization of voting behaviour emerging from the erosion of cleavage-based voting and consequent process of partisan dealignment; b) transformations in the structure of mass communication, particularly with the diffusion of television as voters' main source of political information and parties' preferred channel of political communication; and c) a process of party change and adaption to a changing environment, reshaping their electoral profiles, modes of operating and organizational structures. The present thesis attempts at providing empirical evidence of these theoretical linkages by (i) demonstrating how personalization ultimately results from the decline of the role of partisanship in guiding vote choice, and therefore is the consequence of partisan dealignment; (ii) providing evidence of the impact of the change towards a television-based media diet in driving the personalization of vote choice; and (iii) accounting for the role of party organizational change – namely through the introduction of more open leadership selection procedures and further concentration of powers at the leadership position – in heightening leaders in contemporary politics. Furthermore, it explores a novel avenue concerning leadership effects by investigating whether leadership evaluations can also impact voters' turnout decisions.

It relies on two types of data sources: one dataset constructed using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project and the Political Party Database; and one original dataset pooling over 129 national election surveys conducted in 14 Western democracies in the period between 1961-2016.

The results contribute to the ongoing scholarly debate on the topic by providing extensive evidence for the electoral dimension of the personalization of politics.

**Keywords:** Personalization; party leaders; voting behavior; elections; turnout.





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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **The Personalization of Politics: scope and definition**

The last century marked the rise and fall of mass politics in West European democracies. The age of social encapsulation and mass electoral participation anchored in long-lasting partisan alignments has been replaced by increasing electoral volatility (Pedersen, 1979), decreasing electoral turnout rates (Blais & Rubenson, 2003; Franklin, 1994), and massive decline in partisan membership (van Biezen et al., 2012; Scarrow, 2014) as well as partisan attachments (Berglund et al., 2005; Dalton, 2000). Political parties have lost much of their grip as agents able to aggregate interests into collective identities. Moreover, as parties have transformed essentially into office-seeking organizations, they have been perceived with increasing skepticism by voters (Mair, 2013). The linkage function has been compromised by a perception of diminished responsiveness, sparking feelings of disenchantment with politics, disengagement and overall political apathy (Mair et al., 2004a).

The latter half of the century introduced changes in the structure of mass communications in Western societies, as television quickly spread among Western households. Combining visual and audio elements, it rapidly became a major source of political information for Western voters. Linked to this technological development, these societies have undergone a process of mediatization of politics, tightening the interdependence between the media and the political realms (Mazzolenni & Schulz, 1999; Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). This new reality carried profound implications in political parties' communication strategies, forced to adapt to the new paradigm of mass communication. As an image-based medium, television favors a personality-based type of communication based on individuals, thus highlighting politicians vis-à-vis political parties. Telegenic candidates, with a strong personal appeal and favorable appearance became key to election campaigns ran in the television era, and examples television-born candidates abound in recent elections, from former movie-star Ronald Reagan to media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi.

Partly as a result of these transformations, the current century has been characterized by the increasing pervasiveness of the personalization of Western democracies. Ever since the legacies of Trudeau, Reagan or Thatcher, party leadership has been held by the public opinion and media alike as a decisive element of politics. Leaders' personalities are widely discussed,

media pundits permanently analyze their performance as well as personal lives, televised debates are considered decisive elements of electoral campaigns, and voters are claimed to increasingly make their voting decisions based on their assessments of candidates.

Numerous studies have attempted at conceptualizing, theorizing and empirically testing the personalization of politics over the last three decades. Lauri Karvonen (2010: 4) argues that “at the core of the personalisation hypothesis is the notion that individual political actors have become more prominent at the expense of parties and collective identities”. Similarly, Rahat & Sheafer (2007: 65) define it as “a process in which the political weight of the individual actors in the political process increases over time, while the centrality of the political group (I.e., political party) declines”. These overwhelmingly consensual definitions of the phenomenon comprise an important aspect: the definition of personalization as a diachronic *process* of political change through which, across time, political parties as collective bodies lost importance, whereas individual political actors have been gaining relevance in the political arena. The temporal argument subjacent to the processual definition constitutes, at the same time, the most notorious source of scholarly skepticism towards the personalization of politics. The inability of empirical studies to, in general, demonstrate the existence of a longitudinal trend evidencing a growing importance of individual actors in the political process across time, led multiple authors to question whether we are actually witnessing a personalization of contemporary democracies (Karvonen, 2010; King, 2002). Alternatively, others have proposed the term “personalized” politics to designate a context in which politics revolves around individual political actors, but in which no substantial differences in their relative importance vis-a-vis political parties have been identified across time (Rahat & Kenig, 2018).

Aside from the processual definition of personalization, another fundamental aspect to retain concerns the *relational* character of the phenomenon. Not only does personalization presuppose an increase in the importance of individual political actors, it entails that such prominence benefits, and may even be even contingent, on a concomitant decline in the weight of political parties as collective agencies of aggregations of interests. As such, individual politicians become more relevant *in relation* to the political parties they represent. As with the longitudinal argument, this feature is at the origin of the persisting inconclusiveness of empirical studies in this topic, as most of them do not objectively analyze the personalization in relational terms, focusing exclusively on the importance of politicians and often neglecting the declining role of political parties.

More recently, a distinction has also been made between centralized and decentralized personalization (Balmas et al., 2014). The first type relates to the most common process in which a single politician (i.e., party leader; prime-minister) becomes more important while the relevance of the rest of the political group (i.e., political party; cabinet) declines. The second concerns a more diffuse process, through which multiple individual politicians (i.e., candidates as a whole; ministers; parliamentary group) gain relevance compared to the whole political party.

The personalization of politics is a multifaceted phenomenon which can manifest through various dimensions. In one of the latest contributions to the topic, Rahat & Kenig (2018) distinguish between three different avenues: institutional, media and behavioral personalization. Institutional-level analyses characterize reforms enhancing the political weight of individual politicians at the expenses of the political group. The burgeoning literature on this dimension describes, for example, processes of party reorganization entailing a democratization of leadership selection procedures, where increasingly broader selectorates are given a say on who should lead the political party, sometimes even through primaries open to non-party members (Cross & Blais, 2012; Cross & Pilet, 2015; Pilet & Cross, 2014; Sandri, Seddone & Venturino, 2015). Within this tradition, there are also more decentralized transformations taking place, for instance at the electoral system level, allowing citizens the possibility to select the candidates they prefer to represent them, and thus actively influencing the composition of legislative bodies (Renwick & Pilet, 2016). Other studies have focused instead on the heightened role of the executive leadership within governmental institutions – once party leaders get to power –, which has arguably become increasingly independent from the remaining cabinet members, turning contemporary prime-ministers into more than just *primus inter pares* (Müller-Rommel & Blondel, 1993; Poguntke & Webb, 2005a).

Media personalization analyses tend to place communication as the dependent variable, investigating politicians' increasingly influential role in political communication. In this case, personalization is mostly perceived as a byproduct of the wider process of mediatization of politics, whereby “the importance of the media and their spill-over effects on political processes, institutions, organizations and actors has increased” (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014: 377). These are interrelated processes with mutually reinforcing feedback mechanisms, whose implications reflect both on the changing patterns of political communication and on the media's personalized focus on individual political actors. As the profile of individual politicians is boosted by personalization and the technological innovations in mass communication,

particularly with the advent of television and its subsequently acquired status of main source of political information for voters, parties reconfigured their political communication strategies so as to cope with the new environment (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Mazzoleni, 1987). Over the last decades, we have observed a shift in the shape and content of political messages, increasingly centered increasingly upon politicians rather than political groupings (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). Party symbols became progressively replaced by pictures of candidates, executives became named after their leaders, and even party labels were, at times, substituted by politicians' names. Campaigns were built upon the persona of candidates, as these have become a major asset, essential for the electoral aspirations of modern political parties (Swanson & Mancini, 1996). The same type of process can be registered regarding the media coverage of politics, much more concerned with politicians' individual characteristics or personality traits (Mughan, 2000). Political parties' ideologies, programmatic proposals, issue stances and overall collective aspects have been relegated to a secondary spot (Graber & Bucy, 2009). Privatization and intimization came as natural consequences of the media's ubiquitous focus on politicians' personalities (van Aelst, Sheafer & Stanyer, 2012).

A third dimension has been coined behavioural personalization, referring to the behaviour of politicians and voters. For the former, "it reflects a change in their patterns of behavior, from team players who act together and coordinate their moves to separate individuals with uncoordinated actions" (Rahat & Kenig, 2018: 121). The latter aspect, pertaining to the personalization of voting behavior, designates a higher consideration of individual political actors in the mechanisms guiding voters' decision making-process. Importantly, this happens at the expenses of the consideration of broader ideological preferences, partisan attachments or overall collective identities (McAllister, 2007). This framework situates fundamentally within the field of electoral research and most of its empirical studies attempt at measuring the influence of voters' assessments of political leaders in their vote choice. The present dissertation fits specifically within this dimension of the personalization of politics, discussed in further detail in the coming sections.

### **The origins of the personalization of politics: a theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework at basis of the personalization of politics lies at the intersection of electoral research, party politics and political communication. Drawing from these fields, this phenomenon is generally conceived as a consequence of changes in the composition and



behavior of Western electorates, the technological transformations in the structure of mass communication and political parties' responses to this increasingly complex changing environment.

First, the personalization of politics is claimed to be the outcome of a decline in the relevance of political parties as collective aggregators of interests and their ability to structure political behavior. Social groups and political parties have been closely aligned along the main social divisions of European societies for a great part of the twentieth century (Bartolini & Mair, 1990). The crystallization of these cleavages into longstanding alignments structuring political conflict led to the formulation of the freezing hypothesis, under which "the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with but few significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s" (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967: 50). Citizens' embeddedness in those cleavages and the consequent encapsulation by class-mass political parties was largely guaranteed by the mobilizing agency of intermediary bodies, such as trade unions and religious institutions (Bartolini, 2000; Lipset, 1981).

The post-war period was characterized by the disintegration of the alignments linking voters to class-mass parties. Along the process of modernization, socio-economic development significantly improved the living standards in Western societies, contributing to a mitigation of the social divisions at the roots of group-based identifications. At the same time, it also carried an expansion of educational opportunities, providing citizens with higher skills, resources and motivations to independently relate to politics, and decreasing the functional utility of partisan heuristics. Cognitively mobilized citizens need not to rely on parties as cues for political action, as they are arguably able to autonomously process and interpret political information. All these factors translated into an erosion of cleavage-based voting (Franklin et al., 1992), and a more general pattern of partisan dealignment, weakening the longstanding bonds attaching citizens with political parties in Western Europe (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000). Its most concrete manifestations are the decline in party membership rates (van Biezen et al., 2012; Scarrow, 2014), voter turnout rates (Blais & Rubenson, 2013; Franklin, 2004) and party identification (Berglund et al., 2005; Dalton, 2000) in Western democracies. As a result of this pervasive process, it is argued that partisan attachments became less determinant in guiding individual electoral choices throughout the twentieth century. Free from their partisan ties and more general collective identifications, citizens' voting behaviour became increasingly individualized (Dalton, 1996) and susceptible to short-term electoral factors, be it political issues, economic assessments or leader evaluations.

In parallel, these same societies experienced a wave of technological innovation, with particular implications on mass media communication patterns. As social desintermediation and cognitive mobilization, in a context of partisan dealignment, distanced citizens from political parties, the media progressively took on many of the mobilization and mediation functions traditionally operated by party organizations (Dalton et al., 1998).

The development of technological media and, in particular, the arrival of television brought about profound transformations in the relationships between political parties and the electorate at large. More than a mere change in the platform of communication characterized by the combination of audio and visual elements, this new medium encompassed an anthropological revolution (Sartori, 1989: 43), entailing a broader cultural change in Western societies with substantial repercussions in the nature of democratic politics. From an epistemological point of view, it represents a change from a print culture to a new paradigm where objectivity emanates from what is *seen* (Postman, 1986). The characteristics of television also impose conditions on how the messages reach citizens and what type of messages are conveyed. Compared to newspapers, televised news are more synthetic because further restricted in space/airtime (Mondak, 1995, p. 78) but still seen as a credible source of information by most voters (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999: 256), allowing them to obtain political information at low cost. Television watchers also have less control over the quantity and speed at which information is provided to them, whereas newspapers readers can allocate as much time as they need to process information. The type of content is affected too, as “some claim that the visual aspects of television and practices of television news organizations lead to a different product: compared to newspapers, television news content supposedly emphasizes individuals’ attributes such as political candidates’ personalities at the expense of issue coverage” (Druckman, 2005: 464). For all these reasons, the changes in the structure and composition of mass communication to a media environment dominated by a television-based paradigm created a set of conditions favourable to the consideration of individual political actors, placing them at the centre stage of contemporary politics.

This new setting transformed the way in which political parties relate to citizens through the mass media. As television news became the most important source of political information for Western electorates, parties’ communication strategies adapted by increasingly focusing political communication on their visible faces: party leaders (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Graber, 1990).

“Since television is by definition a medium for which pictures are indispensable, personalizing the coverage of politics has a structural advantage compared with the coverage of political programmes or political institutions such as the political parties. Visualization is the most important format criterion of television. This constraint furthers personalization in television broadcasting at the expense of more abstract issues and institutions” (Ohr, 2011: 13).

Leaders became the vehicle through which political parties communicate with voters in the personality-driven communication paradigm set by television. Political campaigns are now centred around political leaders, televised debates are a key factor much anywhere in the world, leaders learn marketing techniques to become more appealing and communicate more effectively with voters, and their traits, personality and overall suitability for the job are widely discussed in the media (Arbour, 2014; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Seawright, 2013). In sum, the transformations in the structure of mass communication, most notoriously with the development of television and its chief role in Western societies’ media composition, have decisively contributed to a personalization of politics, demanding an adaptation from political parties to this new context.

The development into catch-all and cartel party types was political parties’ response to the changing electorates and the transformations in the mass communication structure. On the one hand, modernization, individualization and dealignment, have all undermined the foundations of class-mass parties, depriving them of their core constituencies, grounded of profound social divisions and group-based identifications. On the other hand, the television-based paradigm of mass communication provided incentives for political parties to personalize political communication, adapting to the characteristics of the new highly pervasive medium.

For one thing, this translated into a degrading of these parties’ *classe gardée*, deemphasizing ideological concerns by adopting a valence style of politics targeting the median voter (Katz & Mair, 2018). Unconstrained from tight ideological commitments, these types of parties are more able to effectively respond to voters’ ever-changing demands, broadening the spectre of attainable voters by relegating ideological stances in favour of a more pragmatic mode of operation (Gunther and Diamond, 2001; Katz and Mair, 1995; Kirchheimer, 1966). Secondly, it resulted in a higher profile of the leadership within parties’ internal organization structure (Katz & Mair, 1995; Kirchheimer, 1966; Mair, 2013; Lobo, 2008). Party leaders have

come to enjoy more influence within both political parties and the cabinet, when in office (Poguntke & Webb, 2005a). Additionally, the democratization of leadership selection procedures (Cross & Blais, 2012; Cross & Pilet, 2014), often through the implementation of either closed or open primaries ‘invoke[s] a direct relationship between voters and candidates that can weaken the cohesiveness and the intermediary role of the party organs’ (Pennings & Hazan, 2001: 271) while at the same time elevating the power and autonomy of the leaders. As party leaders become more responsive to their wider selectorates, their internal legitimacy and authority became reinforced, allowing them to bypass middle-level party strata. As a consequence, leaders gain more autonomy to steer the party in their preferred direction and their growing influence both in the party and the executive arguably affects their perceived importance over policy-decisions among voters (Blondel & Thiébault, 2010).

The confluence of these socio-political developments is claimed to have set the conditions for the emergence of a progressive personalization of politics in Western parliamentary democracies. Among other aspects, all the described factors are argued to have contributed to a higher influential role of leaders over voting-decision mechanisms. However, the existing literature on the personalization of voting behavior is largely non-cumulative and therefore unable to identify a clear general trend in this respect. Among other factors, the employed approaches have been too narrow, restricted to limited political contexts and adopted disconnected methodological approaches, leading to inconclusive and sometimes contradictory outcomes. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the discussion about leader effects on voting behaviour is still partially unresolved among specialists (Barisione, 2009). A great deal of this disagreement can be explained by the fragmented nature of the research developed so far, producing little more than partial knowledge on a given country or time-period. In the next section, the existent literature on leader effects on the vote is analysed in detail to identify points of consensus, sources disagreement and existing gaps worthy of attention.

### **Leader effects on voting behavior: a review of the literature**

The idea that, in contemporary democracies, “electoral outcomes are now, more than at any past in the past, determined by voters’ assessments of party leaders” (Hayes & McAllister, 1997: 3) has been spreading among journalists, political pundits and general public opinion. Candidates running for office are now perceived as powerful electoral forces, able to shape voters’ decisions and to decisively influence the electoral fate of their political parties. Leaders’ personalities are

subject of intense media scrutiny, seldom even beyond their politically relevant characteristics. However, while the importance of leadership on the vote is barely contested in common public discourse, the claims of a personalization of voting behavior have been more cautiously received by scholars.

Academics have been interrogating about the role of leaders in democratic elections ever since the first pioneer studies on electoral research. Since then, and up until now, like the study of any other determinant of the vote, this has been carried fundamentally by means of survey research, given that national election surveys are the most widely available and reliable source of data for cross-national analyses of patterns of voting behavior (Bittner, 2011; Thomassen, 1994; 2005). In specific, the importance of leaders has been assessed essentially through one of two distinct strategies: a) measures of leaders' personality traits, and b) feeling thermometers. The first have the advantage of being "much closer to what is in fact intended to be calculated — that is, what is added by a leader qua leader, in terms of a particular trait, or set of traits to a party choice" (Lobo, 2014b: 366-7). However, their availability is extremely restricted across election studies, harming comparative efforts. Feeling thermometers usually ask respondents to rate party leaders in a dislike-like scale and are "the most frequently included type of question about leaders in election studies" (Bittner, 2011: 16). They offer an increase comparability across studies that comes at the cost of a simplification and higher conceptual blurriness (Fiorina, 1981).

Empirical studies about candidate effects on the vote have a longstanding tradition in Presidential systems. Particularly in the United States, research on presidential candidates' influence over individual voting decisions dates back to the first efforts of electoral research in the mid-twentieth century (Campbell et al., 1960). Among other aspects, these studies attempted at measuring to what extent do voters decide based on their assessments of the candidates running for election. The characteristics of the American presidential system place a greater emphasis on individual political actors, both within the structure of American political parties and the system of government. It unsurprisingly follows that voters have been found more prone to perceive candidates as especially decisive for political action under such political system. Numerous works account for the importance of presidential candidates for voting behavior and electoral outcomes in the United States (Miller & Shanks, 1982; Kinder, 1986; Stokes, 1966; Wattenberg, 1991), where their importance has been asserted quite consensually.

Since the final decades of the last century there has been a growing scholarly interest for leader effects also in parliamentary contexts (Bean & Mughan, 1989; Stewart & Clarke,

1992). Parliamentary systems present voters with “a structural situation where the crucial choice is between parties rather than the personal stands and qualities of prime ministerial candidates” (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000: 51), and as such their institutional characteristics arguably discourage voting decisions based on leader evaluations. However, as a result of the process of personalization of politics, it has been hypothesized that leaders have become more relevant for electoral decisions also in parliamentary democracies, which are now increasingly resembling presidential contests. Within this framework, a vast array of empirical studies has been carried with the aim of determining whether leaders matter for voting decisions in the traditionally highly party-centered European democracies (Bittner, 2011; Garzia, 2012; Mughan, 2015).

The fact that leaders somehow play a role in electoral decisions also in parliamentary democracies is, today, a relatively undisputed claim among students of electoral research. The question has then moved beyond, into understanding variation in leader effects across different contexts (Aarts, Blais & Schmitt, 2011; Lobo & Curtice, 2014). The complexity of parliamentary systems implies a less straightforward assessment of the importance of leaders for voting decisions. For one thing, comparing leader effects in the United States versus parliamentary democracies implies moving from a single case study to a comparative analysis or, at least, to a series of case studies. Furthermore, in the European context alone, there is substantial variation concerning, for example, electoral systems, party types, and even characteristics of voters, all stemming from the fact that despite a shared regional historical tradition, we are dealing with different polities. This heterogeneity contaminated electoral research on the personalization of voting behavior, leading to a compartmentalization of studies according to specific contextual features. An ample collection of case studies has devoted to measure leader effects in single countries in isolation, including, for example, Germany (Kaase, 1994), France (Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2014), the Netherlands (van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2010), Norway (Midtbø, 1997), Italy (Bellucci et al., 2015; Garzia & Viotti, 2012), Portugal (Lobo, 2006; Lobo & Silva, 2018), Spain (Rico, 2014), Greece (Dinas, 2008), Croatia (Rudi, 2014) and Romania (Gheorghiuță, 2014). Aside from the European context, single-country analyses of parliamentary democracies have also been carried with respect to Canada (Johnston, 2002), Australia (McAllister, 2015) and New Zealand (Bean, 1993).

Research has then moved to comparative analyses of multiple countries to understand whether this is part of a generalized trend spread across Western parliamentary democracies (i.e., Bittner, 2011; Costa & Silva, 2015; Curtice & Holmberg, 2005; Nadeau & Nevitte, 2011). Other studies have looked comparatively into variations of institutional designs, for example,

according to the regime type or electoral system characteristics (Curtice & Lisi, 2014). Regarding the latter, a few studies concentrated specifically in the distinction between Westminster democracies and the remaining parliamentary democracies, since the former arguably potentiate a more candidate-centered type of politics (Bean & Mughan, 1989; McAllister, 2011; Mughan, 2015). Leader effects have also been compared across different types of political parties (Aardal & Binder, 2011; Lobo, 2008) and governmental arrangements (Formichelli, 2014). Micro-level comparative analyses have also been carried, focusing on differences on leader effects across diverse types of voters, whether it be according to their degree of partisan dealignment (Gidengil, 2011; Lobo, 2014b) or their patterns of media consumption (Gidengil, 2011; Rico, 2014), amongst other features. Finally, a restricted number of studies has compared leader effects across time, directly investigating whether leaders have become more important determinants of voting decisions (Curtice & Holmberg, 2005; Garzia, 2014; Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011). The examples given so far do not intend to provide a fully exhaustive account of the literature but rather to depict the overall diversity of approaches to the topic encountered in the works published to this date.

While informative about the extent and the conditions under which leaders matter for voting behavior in parliamentary democracies, the disparate empirical focuses of these studies inevitably led to a panoply of mixed results, casting doubts on the general existence of a personalization of voting behavior. In sum, as Lobo (2014: 366) rightly noted, a major problem with this type of research “is that it is often not cumulative”, since existing studies are inconsistent in the measurements used to capture leader assessments and largely disagree about the most adequate estimation procedure. As a result, this research strand has been received with far more criticism in the European parliamentary context. For example, Curtice & Holmberg (2005: 17) maintain that “voters’ evaluations of party leaders appear to be as unimportant now as they were when they were first measured”. In a similar vein, Karvonen (2010) finds no evidence supporting a growing effect of leaders across time. King (2002: 216) goes as far as questioning the overall importance of leaders as determinants of vote choice, when contending that “the almost universal belief that leaders’ and candidates’ personalities are almost invariably hugely important factors in determining the outcomes of elections is simply wrong”. In contrast, a substantial amount of studies provides a contrary account, indicating a relevant impact of leaders over voting preferences (i.e., Costa & Silva, 2015; Garzia, 2011, 2013; Gretz & McAllister, 1987; Mughan, 2015; Stewart & Clarke, 1992).

Positive cases have also been criticized for the possible relationships of endogeneity between leader evaluations and partisan attachments, under which leader effects are no more than mere reflections of previous partisan preferences (Campbell et al., 1960). This is a potential problem especially in European parliamentary democracies, where partisanship has been demonstrated to play an even stronger role in explaining vote choice (Rosema, 2006; Thomassen & Rosema, 2008), leading to a further difficulty in disentangling leadership and partisanship effects in such context. However, more methodologically sophisticated empirical analyses have recently demonstrated, quite convincingly, the existence of an independent effect of party leader evaluations on vote choice (Garzia, 2014; Garzia & De Angelis, 2016). As a consequence, while the overall majority of the literature seems to concur that voters' evaluations of leaders are an important determinant of voting decisions, disagreements subsist in the field regarding

Besides the different empirical approaches, the reasons for such discrepancies are manifold. First, some disagreement seems to lie on an epistemological debate surrounding what constitutes leader effects on the vote. For example, much of the views expressed in King's (2002) edited volume, one of the most critic works on the topic, result from the expectation that, in order to be considered meaningful, leader effects must decisively and directly affect electoral outcomes (net leader effects). However, while leaders may not solely decide electoral outcomes, they certainly can have a significant influence on how citizens' cast their voting preferences, and most studies concur that a positive significant effect on the probability to vote for a party is sufficient to speak of the existence of an effect.

Similarly, another source of disagreement derives from a conceptual debate on the personalization of voting behavior. In this line, it is contended that leader effects may exist but one cannot talk of a personalization of voting behavior unless such effects have been growing over time. The few studies which have explored the temporal hypotheses have reached mixed results (for null results, see: Curtice & Holmberg, 2005; Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011; for positive results, see: Garzia, 2014). Consequently, while not necessarily opposing to the demonstration that leader effects do exist, many scholars have criticised the arguably erroneous use of the term personalization to classify something that, in their view, should correspond to a context of personalized politics (Rahat & Kenig, 2018).

The inability to empirically demonstrate a cross-time increase in personalization links to another important problem, related to the lack of appropriate comparative and longitudinal survey data. Publicly available data sources hardly allow for a longitudinal assessment of the



phenomenon. In most European election studies, time-series are often rather short and, in some cases, measurements of leader evaluations are not consistently available. Another aspect explaining previous null findings is the fact that the empirical analysis of these studies only extends until the end of the century (Curtice & Holmberg, 2005; Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011). In doing so, they exclude what is likely the most critical period in leader effects — the most recent elections of the twenty-first century. More recent analyses, including latest elections, seem to support this conclusion, finding an increasing impact of leaders (Garzia, 2014).

## **Data sources**

This dissertation relies on a number of data sources, from pre-existing datasets, to evidence gathered from previous publications. In what follows, the main datasets used as an empirical base for the several chapters are succinctly described, as well as their main strengths and limitations.

### ***The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)***

The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) is a collaborative project standardizing post-electoral surveys from participating countries under a common module of survey questions. So far, the CSES has launched four modules: Module 1 (1996-2001), Module 2 (2001-2006), Module 3 (2006-2011) and Module 4 (2011-2016). Its main advantage is ensuring comparability across countries via the administration of the same survey questions in each national electoral study, which are then pooled into a single dataset. The high data quality standards of the CSES are another important virtue of this dataset. In the CSES dataset, evaluations of leaders from the main competing parties are consistently measured on a 0-10 dislike-like scale. Chapter 4 and 5 make use of modules 3 and 4 of this dataset.

Comparability efforts often come at the cost of restricted data availability and the CSES is no exception. Notwithstanding its positive aspects, the CSES dataset lacks many important variables for electoral research, particularly to test some of the research questions of this study. For example, questions about respondents' patterns of media consumption are surprisingly absent from all four modules of this dataset. For this reason, for the purpose of this dissertation, the CSES data had to be complemented with additional data sources.

### ***The Political Party Database (PPDB)***

The Political Party Database (PPDB) has been recently made publicly available, providing students of political parties with a valuable new source on party-level data. The Round 1 of this collaborative effort is based on an expert survey conducted in 19 countries, covering 122 political parties between 2010 and 2014. The database contains over 300 variables describing aspects related to party organizational structure and practices (Poguntke et al., 2016).

This resource has the merit of collecting and standardizing information which otherwise might have only been available by reading political parties' statutes (more often than not, these are only available in the original language). In doing so, it disseminates an important source of information which was previously unavailable to a significant share of the scientific community. The main limitations of this dataset are the high number of missing data entries and the fact that, for most variables, there is only one data point available. These are issues that will likely be solved in subsequent releases but which, nonetheless, imposed constraints on the analyses carried in the present dissertation.

The PPDB was an important asset for the analyses carried in chapter 5, devoted to analyzing variations in leader effects across party organizational features. In particular, this chapter drew upon the variables on leadership selection procedures and the index of leadership strength.

### ***The West European Voter (WEV)***

Despite the abundance of cross-national national election survey data, either in isolation or in comparative research projects, comparative research has not fully exploited the potential of these resources when it comes to the study of leader effects. Existing cross-national projects involve large numbers of academics from multiple backgrounds within electoral research and therefore diverse research interests. The unfortunate result is that while relevant variables for addressing the research questions of this dissertation may have been collected in a way or another in the original surveys, they have been systematically dropped from the harmonization process. For example, as has been highlighted, the CSES provides leader evaluation batteries for all countries and relevant political parties but no measure whatsoever about respondents' patterns of media exposure. Conversely, the European Election Study (EES) series does rely on

extensive media exposure batteries but lacks any measure of leaders' personality evaluations. However, such information is rather frequently available in the original national election surveys

The West European Voter (WEV) is an ongoing data collection and harmonization project developed within the context of the "Ambizione" project "PopTv.Net – The Personalization of Politics between the Television and the Internet", funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and based at the University of Lucerne, Switzerland. In a joint effort, the three co-authors of chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation, compiled all publicly available datasets from national election studies in West European parliamentary democracies, including both EU member states and non-members with an established tradition in the field. This effort produced a novel resource pooling datasets from 129 parliamentary elections conducted between 1961 and 2018 in 14 West European countries.

The WEV was born out of the specific necessity to test the hypotheses of chapters 2 and 3, and in response to the data availability problems earlier described. It overcomes the limitations of existing comparative projects, for example, with respect to the unavailability of simultaneous measures of leader evaluations and patterns of media exposure, intra-generational perspective and limited contextual variation. This allows to tackle the main limitations identified in previous studies, which have either investigated a large number of countries without a longitudinal dimension (Bittner, 2011; Curtice & Lisi, 2014; Gidengil, 2011; Gunther et al., 2016) or adopted a longitudinal approach but focusing on a smaller number of cases restricted to a shorter time span (Curtice & Holmberg, 2005; Garzia, 2014; Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011; Karvonen, 2010; King, 2002).

As earlier discussed, the shortage of appropriate data has been a recurrent obstacle in previous attempts at studying the personalization of voting behavior. Moreover, much of the persisting disagreement on the topic is explainable by the impossibility to accurately test the personalization of voting behavior hypothesis with the pre-existing data resources. The WEV aims at providing an empirical base to overcome these limitations and, in the context of this dissertation, contributing to the literature on the personalization of politics by testing the development of this process across time (Chapter 2) and its interrelationships with the transformations in the structure of mass communications (Chapter 3).

## **The research questions and their rationale**

The personalization of politics rests on a tripartite theoretical structure grounded on transformations on the electoral, media and party realms (Garzia, 2014; Rahat & Kenig, 2018). The empirical chapters of this dissertation attempt at addressing each of these three theoretical pillars. In doing so, this thesis aims at providing empirical support for the theoretical connections between the personalization of politics and electoral change, political communication and party change. As previously discussed, while the mutual theoretical relationships between these strands of research is largely consensual, existing studies have been largely unable to provide empirical evidence of numerous key aspects of the personalization of politics thesis. This thesis offers a collection of empirical research papers with a clear focus on electoral dimension of the personalization of politics, aimed at understanding the implications of the processes of electoral dealignment, interlinked with the transformations in the mass media structure, on the changing patterns of voting behavior in Western democracies, with particular emphasis on the importance of voters' assessments of party leaders.

Chapter 2, entitled *Partisan Dealignment and the Personalization of Politics in West European Parliamentary Democracies, 1961-2016*, provides the most complete account of the personalization of voting behaviour to this date. This chapter investigates whether leader evaluations have become more relevant across time in voters' electoral decisions and to what extent does that occur in relation to the process of partisan dealignment. By demonstrating the interdependence among these two electoral developments, it establishes an empirical linkage between partisan dealignment and the personalization of politics. While such relationship lies at the theoretical foundations of the personalization of politics thesis, no other study provides an empirical assessment of the role of partisan dealignment in the growing leader effects on the vote. Noticeably, this is done using the largest pool of countries across the longest period of time ever considered to date in studies on the topic. This constitutes an advance with respect to previous studies for a number of reasons. First, by extending the time frame, it allows to capture more cross-time variation in the determinants of vote. Second, by enlarging the pool of countries, it offers a more encompassing account of the phenomenon in Western democracies. Third, as argued before, it considers simultaneously partisanship and leadership effects on the vote, analyzing their relative importance across time and, in this way, better grasping the relationships between the declining partisan attachments and the rise of leader-oriented voting. In doing so, it contributes to clarify the most contested aspect of the personalization of politics

thesis, regarding the temporal development of the phenomenon, which had been so far unsatisfactorily addressed in previous studies due to the limitations earlier discussed.

Chapter 3, named *Image that matters: News media consumption and party leader effects on voting behaviour*, directly addresses television's role in fostering a personalized form of voting behavior. It examines whether voters' exposure to political information on television, compared to newspapers, is associated with higher patterns of leader voting. Furthermore, it proposes an important methodological innovation by considering not only frequency of exposure but also the composition of individuals' media diet. This chapter lies at the intersection between electoral research and political communication literature, illuminating on the mutual relationships between the transformations in the structure of mass communication and the changing patterns of voting behavior. Although recurrently pointed as a main driver of the personalization, television had not yet been empirically demonstrated to play a role on leader effects on voting behavior. The few studies addressing this proposition found only mixed results. More importantly, these studies were affected by methodological deficiencies which may help explaining their inconsistent results. First, virtually all existing studies are cross-sectional and/or focusing on a single country case. Second, even within the few comparative analyses, measurement issues arise due to their focus on exposure to the medium as such, rather than exposure to political news. Third, none of these studies took into account the composition of individuals' media diet, that is, to what extent their political information consumption habits are diversified across different types of media (e.g., newspapers, television). Chapter 3 addresses each of these limitations, expanding pre-existing empirical analyses to an unprecedented number of countries/elections over the longest time-frame used so far.

Chapter 4, *Fostering turnout? Assessing party leaders' capacity to mobilize voters*, explores new research paths on the topic by considering leader effects on turnout. Leaders' impact on vote choice has been demonstrated by the previous studies but whether such effect can find an echo on turnout decisions in parliamentary democracies remains completely unexplored. Partisan dealignment implied a decline in political parties' mobilization ability. As fewer individuals have attachments to political parties, they are less driven to the polls by their affective partisan bonds. Chapter 4 hypothesizes that the mobilizing potential left vacant by partisan dealignment may be fostering a type of mobilization anchored in leadership evaluations. In fact, inasmuch as the personalization of vote choices is a consequence of partisan dealignment, the same mechanisms are likely to incentivize a personalization of turnout. This chapter develops a novel theoretical framework for the personalization of turnout, while

providing an empirical assessment of the importance of leaders for turnout decisions in 25 Western democracies, using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. It offers both an empirical and theoretical innovation by inaugurating a new avenue for research on the impact of leaders in voting behavior beyond vote choice.

Chapter 5, entitled *Party Organisational Change and Leader Effects on Voting Behaviour: Democratization of Leadership Selection, Leadership Power and the Electoral Impact of Leaders*, establishes the link between the transformations in the organizational structure of political parties and the personalization of voting behavior. It addresses two fundamental questions: a) to what extent are leader effects potentiated by broadened leadership selection procedures; b) whether leaders who enjoy more intra-party power, as conferred by party statutes, have stronger effects on individual vote choice. Many of these reforms, such as the expansion of leadership selectorates, have often been carried under the assumption that they would contribute to reapproximate political parties to disengaged segments of the electorate. This chapter assesses the internal organizational reforms carried by contemporary political parties, with a particular emphasis on those directly affecting the leadership role, measuring to what extent they translate into a differentiated consideration of leader evaluations on voting decisions. It builds upon previous research on party-level variation in leader effects, demonstrating that these effects are stronger among catch-all/electoralist parties (Lobo, 2008), by exploring further contextual aspects at the party-level. This analysis is made possible by the combination of individual-level data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems with contextual-level data from the Political Party Database. The contributions of this chapter extend beyond the personalization of politics by embracing aspects of the presidentialization of politics (Poguntke & Webb, 2005a), namely through the consideration of the interrelationship between the electoral and the party faces of presidentialization.

## Chapter 2: Partisan Dealignment and the Personalization of Politics in West European Parliamentary Democracies, 1961-2016<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The personalization of politics thesis has been sustained by an increasing amount of research. Accumulated evidence in favour of the personalization thesis can be grouped into three main strands of literature. From an institutional point of view, research documents a transformation in the structure and organization of modern political parties in favour of the leadership position. From the rise of catch-all parties to the emergence of personal parties, contemporary party scholars ascribe a more prominent role to party leaders both within party organization and as executives in government. This describes a trend towards the *presidentialization* of party structures (Poguntke & Webb, 2005a). Political communication studies put the emphasis on the centrality of leaders in contemporary election campaigns, as a result of the increased visibility of these actors in a television-based *mediatization* of politics (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). Finally, a voting behaviour perspective investigates the electoral impact of political leaders as a function of increased voters' consideration of candidate evaluations in their vote choice or turnout decisions (Garzia, 2017).

Theories about the origins of a trend towards increasing personalization of politics commonly refer to several explanatory factors (McAllister, 2007). The social transformations that occurred in the second half of the last century paved the way for a shift from long-term to short-term determinants of voting behaviour. The development of the Welfare State, rising levels of education, political interest and sophistication, contributed to emancipate individuals from the partisan cues on which they used to rely, as their political skills increased and information seeking costs diminished. With voters autonomous from these decisional cues, the functional utility of party identification decreased, as voting decisions became increasingly individualized (Dalton et al., 2000).

In turn, partisan dealignment forced political parties to adapt to the new social configuration. In a setting where socio-ideological cleavages lost their importance, parties went catch-all in an attempt at broadening their appeal beyond the traditional electoral bases (Gunther

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was coauthored with Diego Garzia and Andrea de Angelis.

& Diamond, 2003; Mair et al., 2004a; Poguntke & Webb, 2005a). The resulting organizational changes have been further exacerbated by technological innovations in mass communications. With television becoming voters' preferred source of political information, parties adapted by using this media as main channel of political communication (Hayes, 2009). By prioritizing personality at the expense of substantive programmatic goals (Sartori, 1989) television forced campaigns to adapt to this “personality-based” medium (Mughan, 2000). In doing so, television not only altered parties' political communication strategies, it also transformed voters' patterns of consumption of political information, reinforcing the demand for more personalized political competition (Gilens et al., 2007; Takens et al., 2015).

In a context of progressive dealignment and pervasive mediatization of politics, researchers argue that voters give more consideration to short-term factors such as the evaluation of leaders in their voting decisions. Despite the theoretical advances and the substantial amount of research on this topic, two core points of the personalization of politics thesis remain to be properly addressed, namely the dynamic interplay of party and leader effects, and its temporal dimension.

We depart from the notion that the increasing influence of leaders can only be conceived as a function of the weakening electoral role of parties and party cues. Such theoretical stance, in coherence with dealignment premises, posits that leaders did not come to matter more *per se*. Rather, they matter more because parties came to matter less, leaving room for other (short-term) factors to intervene in voting decisions. These dynamics of electoral change can only be untangled adopting a long-term and comparative perspective. On the one hand, neither the synchronic nor the short-to-medium term would offer the inter-generational ‘historic’ breadth that our argument demands. On the other hand, only considering a large sample of heterogeneous party systems would satisfy its generality. To test this expectation, we compiled a unique pooled dataset featuring 90 post-election studies conducted in 14 Western European parliamentary democracies over the last 60 years. Our dataset overcomes the limitations of existing comparative projects, i.e., unavailability of simultaneous measures of leader evaluations and party identification, intra-generational perspective and limited contextual variation. This allows to tackle the main limitations identified in previous studies, which have either investigated a larger number of countries without a longitudinal dimension (Bittner, 2011; Curtice & Lisi, 2014; Gunther et al., 2016) or adopted a longitudinal approach but focusing on a smaller number of cases restricted to a shorter time span (Curtice and Holmberg, 2005; Garzia, 2014; Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011; Karvonen, 2010; King, 2002).



## Literature review

Over the last decades, the trajectory of voting behaviour in Western democracies has undergone the loosening of social encapsulation. The development of advanced industrialism in the mid-twentieth century, the expansion of educational opportunities, the evolution of mass media bolstering access to information also beyond partisan channels and a changing social structure and concomitant value change, they all contributed to a shift from *partisan* to *cognitive* forms of mobilization (Dalton, 2007). This process carries important theoretical implications for the study of voting behaviour insofar as it challenges the dominant paradigm in electoral research. In the social-psychological model of voting, political issues, events, and candidates, are presented to voters and interpreted by them in partisan terms (Campbell et al., 1960; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008). Because these factors come towards the end of the Michigan's funnel of causality, they are allegedly filtered by long-term partisan predispositions, and as such they are not important *per se* but only *through* partisan lens. However, in the sense that mobilization becomes independent of political parties and moves from being partisan to being cognitive, voters too become self-sufficient in formulating their assessments of political candidates, and in reflecting about political issues or events. Hence, in a context of cognitive mobilization, the functional utility of partisan cues decreases substantially, as skilled voters are capable of independently interpret political information at relatively low-cost.

In a context of erosion of cleavage voting and partisan dealignment, where voters no longer rely exclusively on partisan cues to interpret political information, short-term cognitive factors have been gaining importance within the voting calculus too. Political issues, economic evaluations and, most notably, candidate and party leader evaluations have been demonstrated to play an increasingly important role in voting behaviour (for a review, see: Garzia, 2017). However, the empirical evidence gathered so far is yet unable to provide conclusive evidence in favour of the personalization thesis when it comes to voting behaviour. The main charge to the personalization thesis has been the inexistence of a clear trend towards a greater electoral importance of leaders across time (King, 2002). In fact, this is a fundamental proposition because the personalization of politics does not only postulate that *leaders matter* but that their importance *has been growing* over time (Karvonen, 2010). An early longitudinal analysis of election study data collected in six established European democracies between 1961 and 2001 concluded that voters' evaluations of party leaders were "as important or unimportant now as they were when they were first measured" (Curtice & Holmberg, 2005: 250). Taking into account a wider number of countries and more recent election studies, Holmberg and

Oscarsson's (2011) comparative study eventually unfolded "minor" upward trends in half of the countries included in their analysis.

However, a key point of these studies is that they have longitudinally analyzed leader effects *disconnected from the role of partisan dealignment*. In doing so, they provide little information about how one of the most structural transformations in party politics in the last century may have played a role in favoring leaders at the expenses of parties. This is an important caveat, since partisan dealignment is deemed to play a central role in the personalization of politics. If, as the theory suggests, leader effects increase as a function of dealignment, the former must be analysed in relationship to an eventual decline in partisan voting. The few studies investigating this association in less than a handful of countries show some evidence of a stronger impact of leaders for dealigned voters but fail to do so in a longitudinal perspective (Gidengil, 2011; Holian and Prysby, 2014; Lobo, 2014b; Mughan, 2009).

In line with the social-psychological model of voting, a unidirectional flow of causation from party identification to leader evaluations is assumed in virtually all available studies. In this approach, the predictive capacity of leadership effects is weighed against that of socio-demographics, political predispositions and attitudes. In other words, leaders are treated as a residual category within the so-called "improved-prediction strategy" (Crewe & King, 1994: 185-186; King, 2002: 17-19). While this may be an appropriate framework in a context of diffuse partisanship, we argue that such setting is inadequate to model vote choice in a context of marked dealignment, where parties lost primacy and short-term factors are claimed to affect vote choice independently of partisan attachments. Dealignment and growing cognitive mobilization increased the amount of apartisan self-sufficient voters, who take into further consideration candidates or issues in voting decisions, instead of long-term partisan attachments. Works in the "revisionist" tradition of party identification have already showed that the relationship between partisanship and attitudes towards the candidates is actually bidirectional (Page & Jones, 1979). Some studies have even gone as far as contending that leaders may now play a role in personalizing party identifications (Garzia, 2013b; Rapoport, 1997). In other words, not only leaders have a direct effect on voting behaviour as has been demonstrated by several studies, they also seem to exert an indirect effect through partisanship. Hence, partisan dealignment led to less people identifying with parties, and even those that identify might increasingly do so because they develop a sort of attachment *through* the leader. The fundamental premises of the improved-prediction strategy are also challenged by the

occurred transformations in political parties and the mediatization of politics. On the one hand, with the erosion of cleavage-based voting and the decline of class-mass parties, the building block of the improved-prediction strategy (i.e., the predictive power of socio-demographics and political predispositions) crumbled. On the other hand, catch-all parties' electoral strategy is less reliant on long-term attachments anchored in ideological grounds. Instead, they have adapted to a context of dealignment and mediatization of politics, by using television to prime leaders' characteristics instead of substantial programmatic goals.

For these reasons, we sustain that studying why leaders have become more important across time must not be dissociated from the study of how parties became less important for voting decisions. If partisan dealignment is at the origin of the personalization of politics, as the theory indicates, leaders can only have become more relevant as much as parties have lost relevance. Hence, since theoretically these trends develop in parallel, a longitudinal analysis of leader effects across time should be carried in connection with partisan dealignment. To be sure, if dealigned voters have increased across time, the overall impact of partisanship on voting should have decreased accordingly. Consequently, leader effects should emerge as increasingly relevant, as a function of the relative impact of leaders *versus* partisanship in the voting calculus.

### **Data and descriptive evidence**

We will address the gaps and limitations in the existing literature through an original pooled dataset including 90 national election studies from 14 Western European democracies conducted in the period 1961-2016. This will allow us to test the importance of party leader evaluations on voters' behaviour across the longest time-span investigated so far. Country selection applied the following criteria. First, we restricted our sample to parliamentary democracies, as this is where a trend towards an increase in importance of party leaders is expected to occur – in presidential systems, candidates have always been pivotal. Second, we focus on Western European countries, as they have a longer experience with democratic elections (and national election study projects). Finally, amongst these countries, we only included the studies featuring party leader evaluations and party identification as these are our key independent variables. Table 1 summarizes the number studies included for each of the countries under analysis (detailed list is presented in Table A1 in Appendix).

**Table 1. National election studies included in the analysis**

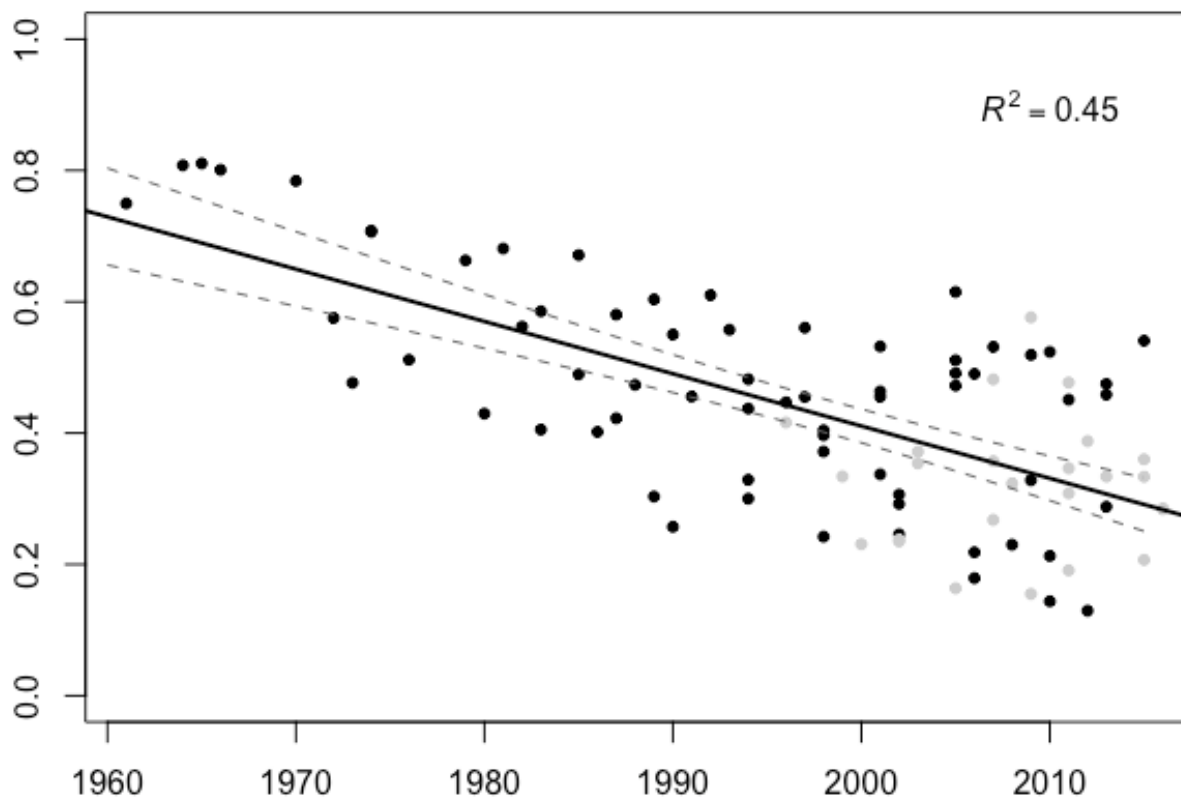
Country	Period	Time Points
Austria	2013	1
Denmark	1973-2011	7
Finland	2003-2011	3
Germany	1961-2013	13
Greece	1996-2012	3
Ireland	2002-2016	3
Italy	1990-2013	6
Netherlands	1986-2010	7
Norway	1981-2013	9
Portugal	2002-2015	5
Spain	2000-2016	5
Sweden	1982-2010	9
Switzerland	1999-2015	5
United Kingdom	1964-2015	14

As exposed in the previous sections, a fundamental proposition of the personalization of politics, and a theoretical cornerstone of the present study relates to the existence of a trend towards partisan dealignment common to modern Western democracies. Although this is not an unstudied topic, most of the academic works on partisan dealignment only take into account a reduced number of countries and are little informative with regard to the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Berglund et al., 2005; Dalton, 2000; Schmitt & Holmberg, 1995). An important exception is a recent study by Dalton (2013), including data until 2010 for ten Western European parliamentary democracies. More comprehensive data on partisan dealignment is, nonetheless, necessary to get a full picture of its relationship with the personalization of politics. Given the large comparative scope of our analysis, we are confronted with issues of item consistency. Inevitably, our partisanship measure relies on the different questions that each national election study project felt adequate to capture the political identities of the respondents in a given nation. However, we still operate in conditions of conceptual homogeneity, since all the national election studies included in our dataset tackled respondents' *feelings of closeness* to a political party – a widely available indicator signaling a long-term affective relationship, which can be meaningfully distinguished from vote choice. In the large majority of countries under analysis, respondents were offered the possibility to signal the strength of their closeness to a specific

party on a three-point scale, ranging from (1) only a sympathizer; (2) close to the party; (3) very close to the party.<sup>2</sup>

Based on our novel dataset, Figure 1 plots the proportion of respondents declaring themselves close or very close to a political party in each of the 90 studies under analysis. The figure provides evidence of a steady partisan dealignment over the last decades in West European parliamentary democracies. It reveals a decrease of about 40 percentage points in the share of people reporting to feel close/very close to a political party over the last five decades. This depicts a rather clear trend towards partisan dealignment, confirming previous results.

**Figure 1. Percentage of party identifiers in Western Europe, 1961-2016**



*Note:* Entries in grey are for all those countries with short time-series, that is, those spanning less than twenty years and/or a minimum of six elections (i.e., Austria, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland).

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<sup>2</sup> Three-point closeness scales are available in 71 out of our 90 election studies. Exceptions are represented by the studies from Denmark and Norway, the early Dutch studies (1986-1998) and the first German study (1961). In all these instances, only the degree of closeness was investigated. Respondents in those studies were unable to declare themselves "only a sympathizer".

It could be argued that such trend is but a product of different lengths of the time-series across countries. The inclusion of more recent studies at the end of the time-series, from especially dealigned countries such as the Southern European, could be artificially pulling down the trend. To rule out this possibility, we distinguish between the countries with longer and shorter time series. As it becomes clear, the trend holds the same even if only considering the countries featuring a collection of studies covering at least a one-generation time-span of 25 years, i.e., Denmark, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (black dots in Figure 1). Indeed, the downwards trend line is only very slightly affected as a result. Once Austria, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland are excluded, R-squared only slightly diminishes (from .45 to .42).

Our results would seem to concur with the idea that "[w]hen so many nations follow a similar trend, one must discount claims that dealignment is a function of question wording, hidden partisans, or the unique political history of any one nation" (Dalton, 2013: 179). Yet, such a clear trend does not prove that partisan attachments became less important regarding vote choice nor that leaders came to matter more. To do so, we must introduce vote choice into the picture and look at how much it is influenced by parties and leaders.

To measure the importance of leader evaluations on vote choice, we choose thermometer scores over leaders' personality traits as they have now become "the most frequently included type of question about leaders in election studies" (Bittner, 2011: 16). Despite inevitable differences in question wording across countries, most of the studies allowed respondents to probe their feelings towards major parties' leaders on a 0 (dislike) to 10 (like) thermometer scale.<sup>3</sup> Figure 2 shows the proportion of voters casting a vote for the party of the leader they like the most (solid line) and for the party they feel close or very close to (dashed line). Note that the bivariate configuration of this analysis allows respondents to be included in both categories (i.e., voting for the leader they like the most *and* the party they feel close to). Overall, our claim of a decrease in the relative importance of partisan alignments in structuring voting behavior seems to be confirmed. Over these five decades, the percentage of individuals who voted in line with their party identification decreased around 40 percentage points. This decline is of the same magnitude of that previously observed regarding partisanship in Figure 1,

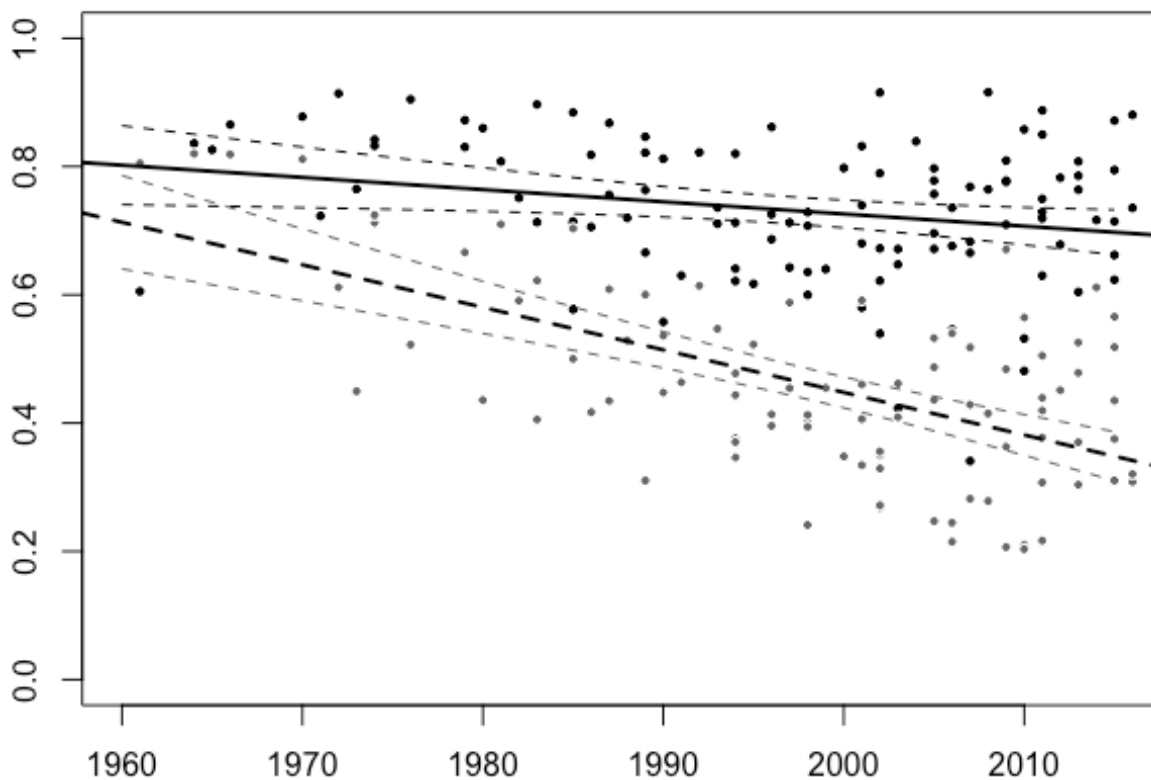
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<sup>3</sup> A 10-point feeling thermometer scale is available in 81 out of our 90 studies. In a few instances, respondents were not allowed to select the mid-point of the scale (Greece 1996 and Italy 1990-2008). The British studies conducted between 1983 and 1992 did not feature thermometer evaluations of party leaders. In this case, we resorted to the recoding strategy employed in *The European Voter* project (Thomassen, 2005).

suggesting that this is not a consequence of increased volatility from partisans but rather the result of a mere decrease in the number of partisans (see Figure A1 in the appendix). Decisively, partisanship is much less of an important factor for vote choice today.

Moreover, Figure 2 also presents initial evidence for the relationship between leader evaluations and party choice. A first glance, it would seem to suggest that leaders have always mattered – even in the golden age of partisan alignment – considering that the proportion of votes for the top-rated leader was always larger than the proportion of partisan votes, and that this proportion is fairly stable at a very high level.

**Figure 2. Partisanship and leaders as determinants of voting, 1961-2016**



*Note: the solid line indicates the trend in proportions of votes for the top-rated leader and dashed line the trend of the votes for the closest party. Both lines lie within 95% confidence intervals.*

At this point, based on the descriptive evidence presented so far, two critiques can be posed to the personalization of politics and our argument. First, as leaders always mattered, this challenges the theory's claim that leaders came to matter *more*. Second, to the extent to which leader evaluations are colored by partisan lenses, then these should have accompanied the

decreasing trend of partisanship as a determinant of voting behavior over time. However, the percentage of voters who voted for their top-rated leader has remained virtually the same over this period. Therefore, we argue that Figure 2 provides evidence to sustain a hypothesis that the declining impact of partisanship on voting corresponds to a growing *independent* effect of leaders on voting. In other words, whereas in the 1960s people may have voted for their party *and* its leader – in the lines of the funnel of causality –, nowadays more and more individuals seem to vote in favor of the leader they like the most, regardless of whether he/she is the leader of their party. This statement deserves a rigorous and multivariate assessment, which is the focus of the next sections.

### **The personalization of electoral politics in Western Europe: Multivariate analysis**

To further pursue the idea that parliamentary elections in Western Europe are increasingly resembling presidential "candidate-centered" contests, we proceed by modeling the relative importance of leader evaluations and party identification for party choice via conditional logit models. Next, we test the robustness of these results by investigating party-specific and country-specific factors.

We estimate conditional logit models considering the multiple options available to voters in European contexts by taking into account the major four party families generally available in practically every country at any point in time: Post-Communists/Greens, Social-Democrats, Conservatives/Christian-democrats, and Liberals (full list of parties included for each country is presented in Table A4 in the appendix).<sup>4</sup> The party families were coded according to the Comparative Manifesto Project classification. We acknowledge the existence of differences and transformations in the composition of these party families over the last century. For this reason, we have analyzed each party family independently with regard to its

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<sup>4</sup> Post-Communists and Greens are effectively two distinct party families. However, we decide to pool them together as a pragmatic solution to the relatively scattered simultaneous presence of both categories. Moreover, similar to the case of Conservatives and Christian Democratic families, which are also pooled together, the two parties are on the same side of the class cleavage, and generally do not perform well, or even exist, in the same election for a certain country. Finally, additional robustness (LOO) tests excluding this party family do not affect our results.



consistency across time and countries.<sup>5</sup> We found no reason for major concerns, except for the Extreme-Right party family, whose parties' patterns appear very much scattered across time and countries. Extreme-Right parties are in fact present in only 6 out of the 14 countries analyzed and only in 41 out of the 90 elections included. Therefore, we did not consider this party family in our analysis, as it would be worth of a more in-depth analysis of its own.

Because we aim at modeling vote choice, we do not include abstainers (about 25% of all respondents) in any of our models. In order to fit our conditional logit model, the key covariates are measured at the party\*alternative level. Partisanship is measured on a scale from 0 (not at all close with the party) to 3 (very close to the party), while the scale of leaders' feeling thermometer ranges from 0 (dislike) to 10 (like). Another variable of interest included at this level of analysis is ideological proximity. We share Inglehart and Klingemann's (1976: 244) conception of the left-right dimension "as a super-issue which summarizes the programmes of opposing groups".<sup>6</sup> Our ideological proximity measure is calculated as the distance in absolute value between the voter's self-placement on the left-right continuum and the position assigned to each of the parties on the same 10-point scale.<sup>7</sup>

The three attitudinal variables presented so far have been standardized as to facilitate straightforward comparison of estimates. Respondent-specific control variables (unstandardized) include standard socio-demographics (age, gender and educational level as measured by ISCED 1997 categories) and respondents' interest in politics (3-point scale ranging from "not interested at all" to "very interested"). The latter is known to relate with partisan

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<sup>5</sup> Social-Democratic and Christian/Conservatives parties are available in each and every election study. In 13 out of 14 countries they are always the same party – the only exception is Italy. Liberal parties are consistent in 11 out of 14 countries. They vary across time in Italy and Spain and are systematically missing in Greece. Overall, they are present in 78 elections out of 90. Post-Communist/Greens are consistent in 11 countries out of 14, with cross-time variation in Italy and Greece. They are systematically missing in Switzerland. In total they are present in 69 out of 90 elections.

<sup>6</sup> We acknowledge that this approach is not without caveats, but it has the undeniable merit of offering a feasible measure of ideological proximity across electoral studies spanning over six decades in multiple countries.

<sup>7</sup> Due to the lack of relevant questions -- either self- or party- placement -- it was impossible to compute ideological proximity for the respondents featured in the following studies: Denmark 1973; Germany 1961, 1972, 1980 and 1994; Portugal 2011; United Kingdom 1970 and 2010. All these studies are thus excluded from the multivariate analyses that follow.

dealignment (Dalton, 2000), as well as to affect the role of leader evaluations in the voting calculus (Lenz & Lawson, 2011).

Admittedly, our model specification is parsimonious, which results from the constraints of aggregating large amounts of data from diverse sources. The possible inclusion of further controls, such as religiosity or union membership, would imply a substantial reduction in the number of studies/cases considered, since these variables are not systematically available across countries and time. Hence, since the effects of these variables can be claimed to be indirectly accounted in the sense that they are largely subsumed into party identification and ideological self-positioning, we have privileged a maximization of the studies/cases included, as to enrich the geographical and temporal scope of our sample. Other controls besides religiosity and union membership would even more dramatically reduce the sample size.

**Table 2. Conditional logit estimates: alternative-specific models of vote choice**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Alternative-specific covariates</i>			
Partisanship	1.205 (117.94)	-	0.988 (97.38)
Leader Evaluation	-	1.717 (125.88)	1.280 (87.67)
Ideological Proximity	-1.168 (-115.63)	-1.187 (-114.26)	-0.907 (-78.42)
<i>Respondent-specific covariates:</i>			
<i>Communist/Green</i>			
Age	-0.010 (-8.02)	-0.013 (-12.14)	-0.008 (-5.70)
Gender	0.007 (0.20)	0.030 (0.96)	-0.037 (-0.88)
Education	0.263 (10.05)	0.303 (13.69)	0.204 (7.03)
Interest in Politics	0.212 (4.61)	0.072 (1.98)	0.136 (2.69)
<i>Respondent-specific covariates:</i>			
<i>Christian/Conservative</i>			
Age	0.006 (7.39)	0.004 (5.72)	0.004 (4.69)
Gender	-0.031 (-1.18)	0.032 (1.30)	-0.001 (-0.05)
Education	0.111 (5.96)	0.212 (12.34)	0.120 (5.75)

Interest in Politics	-0.000 (-0.01)	-0.014 (-0.50)	0.019 (0.53)
<b><i>Respondent-specific covariates:</i></b>			
<b><i>Liberal</i></b>			
Age	0.003 (3.88)	0.002 (2.60)	0.004 (4.75)
Gender	-0.033 (-1.12)	0.109 (3.97)	0.041 (1.25)
Education	0.319 (15.43)	0.371 (19.56)	0.276 (12.00)
Interest in Politics	0.040 (1.15)	0.020 (0.66)	0.019 (0.50)
Log-likelihood	43927.07	52203.99	35286.03
Wald chi-2	29663.94	35952.94	27334.82
N (respondents)	94451	105868	91909
N (observations)	332422	364270	317487

*Note:* Reference category: Social-Democrats. t-statistics in parentheses. All models include year and country fixed-effects.

Table 2 presents the results of our conditional logit models. At a first stage, partisanship and leader evaluations are included separately, in models (1) and (2). A straightforward comparison of coefficients suggests that leaders matter more than partisanship. Nonetheless, strong patterns of covariation between these variables are likely to occur, in line with the reasoning of the Michigan theory. In fact, once we include both measures simultaneously in model (3) the coefficient of leader evaluations decreases the most, but remains larger than partisanship and ideological proximity coefficients. This supports the claim that over the wide amount of countries and elections under analysis, on average, leader evaluations matter more than partisanship for vote choice. As per the impact of ideological proximity on voting decisions, although it holds a considerable influence, it is also inferior to the effects of leader evaluations (and partisanship) on the vote. Such findings pose a challenge to the overwhelmingly predominant claim that partisanship and ideological proximity are the most important predictors of vote choice in Western democracies (Thomassen, 2005).

For as informative as the conditional logit models can be, they provide only a rough estimate of the average relative impact of parties and leaders across countries and time. However, the conditional logit framework can hardly take into account the varying choice sets

of parties across, and even within, countries.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, a conditional logit framework would not account for the increasing number of votes cast in favor of parties in the "other" category - - something we cannot model within the overreaching party families necessary to specify our conditional logit models (see Table A2 in the appendix).

Against this background, we move to a more fine-grained understanding of the role of party and leader effects, and how they change across time, by analyzing party families separately. Through binomial regression models we model the importance of feelings of party and leader closeness for each of the parties under analysis *vis-a-vis* all other parties available during that election, so as to take into account the increasingly relevant category of "other" party voters. We also use interaction terms to test the extent to which each factor's explanatory power has changed across time.

**Table 3. Party families and the determinants of vote choice: HLM estimation**

	<b>Communist/ Green</b>	<b>Social- Democrat</b>	<b>Christian/ Conservative</b>	<b>Liberal</b>
Age	-0.015 (-14.31)	-0.005 (-9.81)	-0.001 (-2.59)	-0.006 (-8.27)
Gender	-0.013 (-0.39)	0.020 (1.08)	0.021 (1.01)	0.036 (1.53)
Education	0.218 (9.51)	-0.191 (-14.60)	0.019 (1.34)	0.233 (13.94)

<sup>8</sup> In particular, varying choice sets threaten the Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives assumption that is invoked in conditional logit models (including our application). Relaxing this assumption required modeling the variations in the choice sets. Therefore, we experimented with versions of CLM that allow for variation in voters' choice sets by interacting a choice-set indicator with each alternative-specific covariate (i.e. leader evaluations, partisanship, ideological proximity). This produces estimates that are choice set specific, but this comes at the cost of misleading generalizations. For instance, the choice set configurations usually involve one or two specific countries and therefore convey the effect of idiosyncratic context rather than the absence or presence of certain party families. Moreover, these models involve unbearable complexity. In fact, our argument of the diachronic increase in the relative importance of leaders and parties would also demand a triple interaction to model the change of the coefficients of interest over time. While this would represent a feasible option for scholars interesting in the dynamics of a single party system, or in the synchronic variation across party systems, in our long-term comparative setting a more pragmatic approach that dissects the change within party families is preferable. Readers interested in modeling choices with varying choice set can refer to Alvarez & Nagler (1995).

Interest in Politics	-0.273 (-7.23)	-0.336 (-15.63)	-0.365 (-15.09)	-0.328 (-11.90)
Ideological Proximity	-1.186 (-41.18)	-0.928 (-66.77)	-1.129 (-66.58)	-0.988 (-51.68)
Partisanship	0.711 (61.38)	1.633 (118.62)	1.410 (99.10)	1.018 (78.85)
Leader Evaluation	1.060 (41.55)	0.960 (71.20)	1.111 (66.69)	0.876 (50.80)
Year	0.010 (1.26)	-0.001 (-0.48)	-0.011 (-1.45)	0.020 (2.24)
Constant	-23.09 (-1.45)	4.00 (0.49)	20.79 (1.36)	-44.06 (-2.37)
Log-likelihood	13620.90	38892.01	31283.76	24644-73
Wald chi-2	8943.59	26608.49	22354.83	13022.18
N (elections)	59	79	77	68
N (observations)	83615	125261	120603	103065

*Note:* Table entries are Hierarchical Logit Model (HLM) coefficients with a random intercept for each election study in our sample. t-statistics in parentheses.

Our modeling strategy relies on Hierarchical Logistic Modeling (HLM) with a random-intercept at the election study level that allows to control for unobserved heterogeneity across countries and across time within countries.<sup>9</sup> The results of these models are presented in Table 3. The results confirm the existence of differences across party families, but overall partisanship appears more important for the traditional party families than party leader evaluations. Only for the parties on the left (Post-Communist and Greens) do leader evaluations matter more than partisanship. These are arguably less cleavage-centered parties, for whom party identification is arguably less relevant *a priori*.

The actual role of the dealignment process in the personalization of politics at the electoral level can only be properly addressed, however, by analyzing the evolution of these

<sup>9</sup> These include contextual differences as well as inconsistencies in question wordings across countries and elections.

predictors across time. For this purpose, we use the four models from Table 3 adding interactions with a continuous year indicator to test whether partisanship and/or leader evaluations significantly changed their effect across time.<sup>10</sup> The results, presented in Table 4, largely confirm the scenario of dealignment. The role of partisanship in explaining vote choice has significantly decreased across time for every party family. Conversely, evaluations of political leaders became a more relevant predictor for the Social-Democrats and the Christian/Conservatives party families – arguably, those that contain older parties.

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<sup>10</sup> We are aware of the methodological discussion around the interaction by product and by compression in logit models. A synthesis of all methodological advices is provided in Rainey (2016: 624). The main reason why we opt for introducing the product term is that the mechanisms underlying the dealignment framework can be understood as a conditional mechanism.

Table 4. Partisanship and Leader Effects across time by party family: Interaction effect models

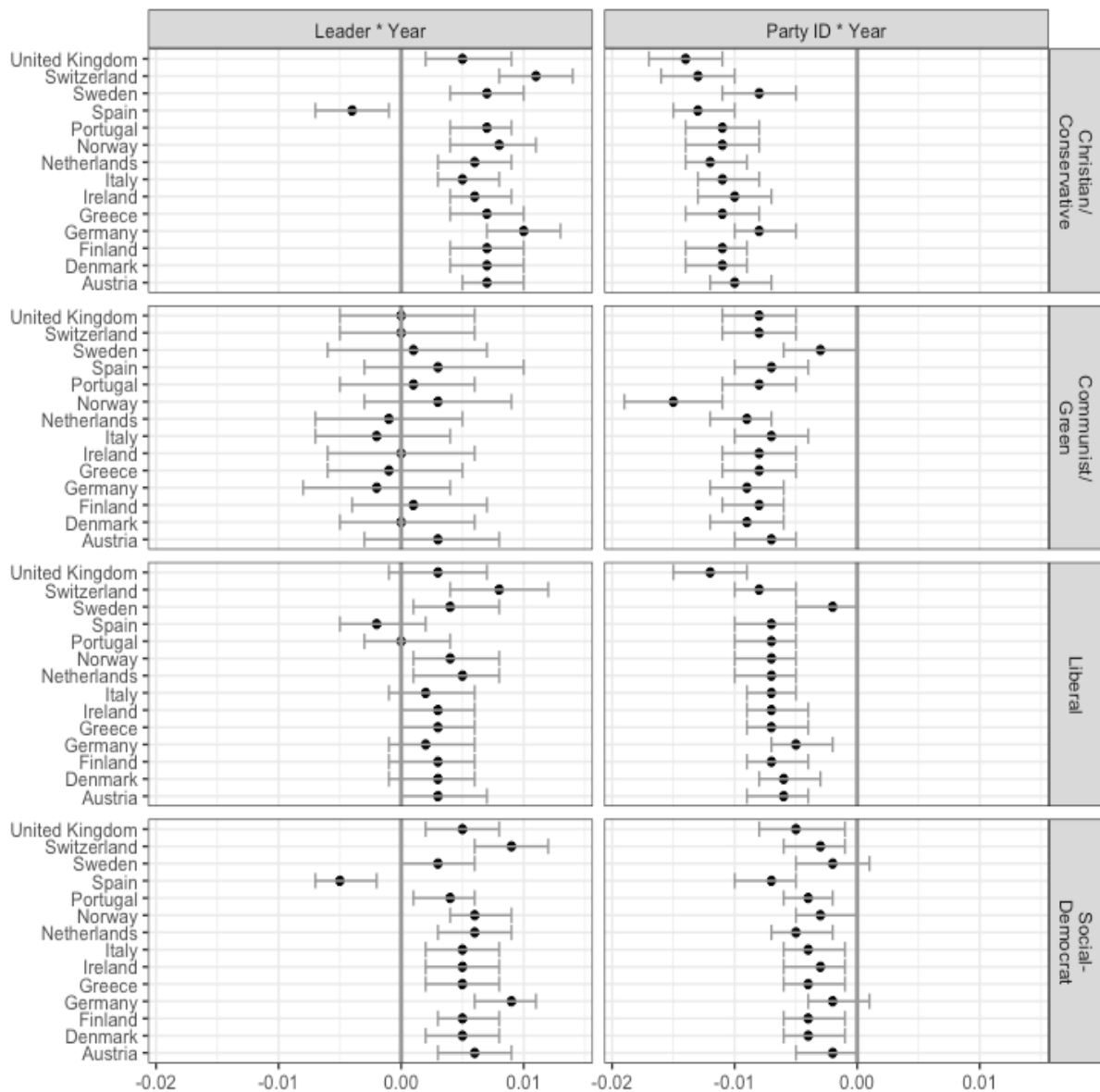
	Communist/Green	Social-Democrat	Christian/Conservative	Liberal
Age	-0.015 (-14.19)	-0.005 (-9.70)	-0.001 (-2.41)	-0.006 (-8.19)
Gender	-0.013 (-0.41)	0.020 (1.08)	0.020 (0.97)	0.035 (1.48)
Education	0.216 (9.39)	-0.190 (-14.54)	0.017 (1.17)	0.232 (13.92)
Interest in Politics	-0.274 (-7.23)	-0.334 (-15.58)	-0.363 (-15.01)	-0.326 (-11.82)
Ideological Proximity	-1.180 (-40.88)	-0.929 (-66.72)	-1.134 (-66.56)	-0.992 (-51.76)
Partisanship	1.064 (17.24)	1.775 (35.50)	1.833 (34.85)	1.287 (25.67)
Leader Evaluation	1.044 (8.55)	0.758 (13.59)	1.110 (66.58)	0.873 (50.68)
Year	0.012 (1.63)	-0.001 (-0.49)	-0.010 (-1.43)	0.019 (2.35)
<b>Partisanship *Year</b>	<b>-0.008 (-5.86)</b>	<b>-0.003 (-2.94)</b>	<b>-0.010 (-8.48)</b>	<b>-0.006 (-5.49)</b>
<b>Leader Eval. *Year</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>0.004 (3.72)</b>	<b>0.006 (4.49)</b>	<b>-</b>
Constant	-28.86	4.06	20.41	-46.09

	(-1.82)	(-1.35)	(0.50)	(0.89)	(1.34)	(1.73)	(-2.48)	(-2.19)
Log-likelihood	-13602.40	-13620.89	-38887.59	-38885.10	-31245.81	-31273.73	-24628.26	-24643.25
Wald chi-2	8862.42	8943.57	26588.94	26667.38	22316.33	22398.44	13087.95	13019.78
N (elections)	59	59	79	79	77	77	68	68
N (observations)	83615	83615	125261	125261	120603	120603	103065	103065

*Note:* Table entries are Hierarchical Logit Model (HLM) coefficients with a random intercept for each election study in our sample. t-statistics in parentheses.



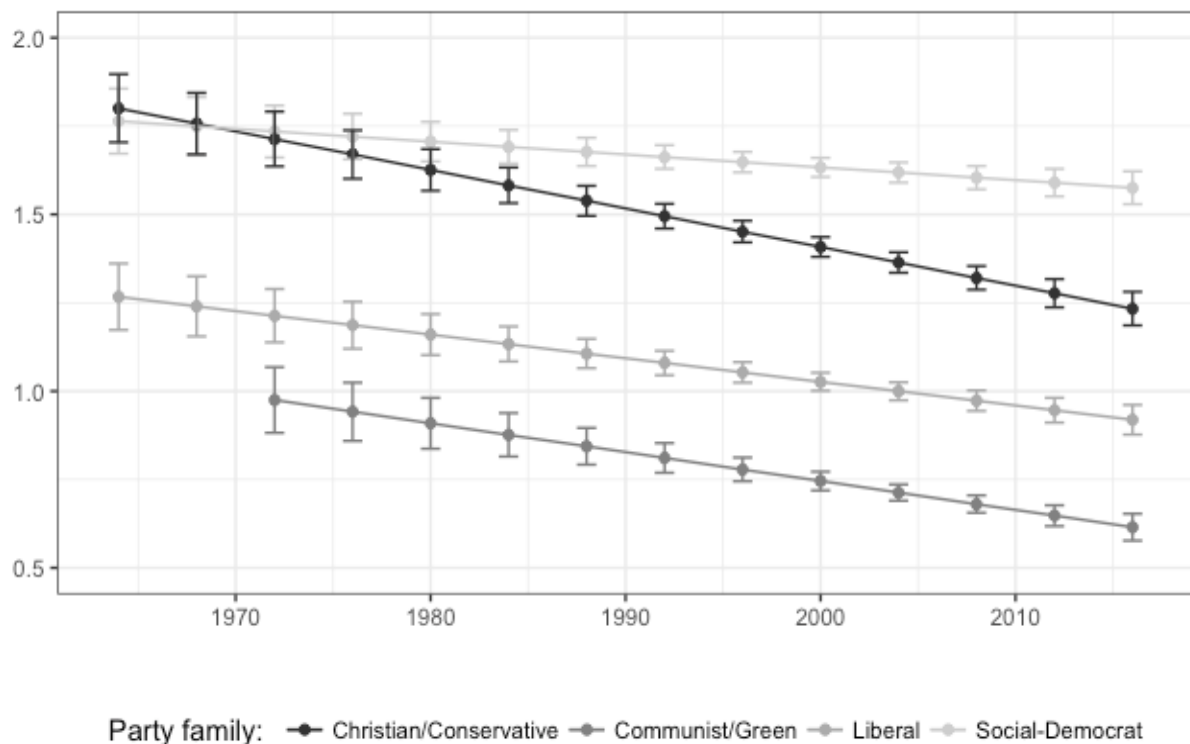
**Figure 3. Leave-One-Out Cross Validation (LOOCV) for interaction effect models**



In order to test the robustness of these findings we resort to Leave-One-Out Cross Validation (LOOCV). First, election studies were alternatively excluded one by one from the sample, to inspect if an outlier could be driving the trend. No differences were found. Second, we carried a more demanding test, by repeating the same procedure for countries, excluding them one at the time from the sample and re-estimating the interaction models. The results, as presented in Figure 3, show that the upward trend for leader evaluations was being driven by

an outlier.<sup>11</sup> After the robustness tests, leader effects seem to be stable across time for all party families. The declining impact of partisanship, however, is very robust. Regardless of country or party family partisanship's impact on vote choice has systematically decreased.

**Figure 4. The declining impact of partisanship on vote choice, 1964-2016**



Over the six decades of analysis, there is a substantial trend of partisan dealignment in Western democracies, as proved by the negative interaction between party identification and time (interactions are plotted in Figure 4). The weight of party attachments as determinants of vote choice has been clearly decreasing over the period of analysis. On the contrary, the effects of leader evaluations on the vote have neither increased nor decreased over time, again corroborating the descriptive evidence presented before. Hence, these results point once again to the idea that partisan dealignment does not necessarily reflect an increase in the electoral

<sup>11</sup> This outlier (Spain) had three elections in the last five years. This is not unimportant, since if the personalization of politics is progressive, as argued by the literature, the most recent cases should also be those where leader effects are supposed to be the strongest. Hence, the higher observed leader effects for Spain may actually be signaling a growing trend, given the higher number of recent data points.

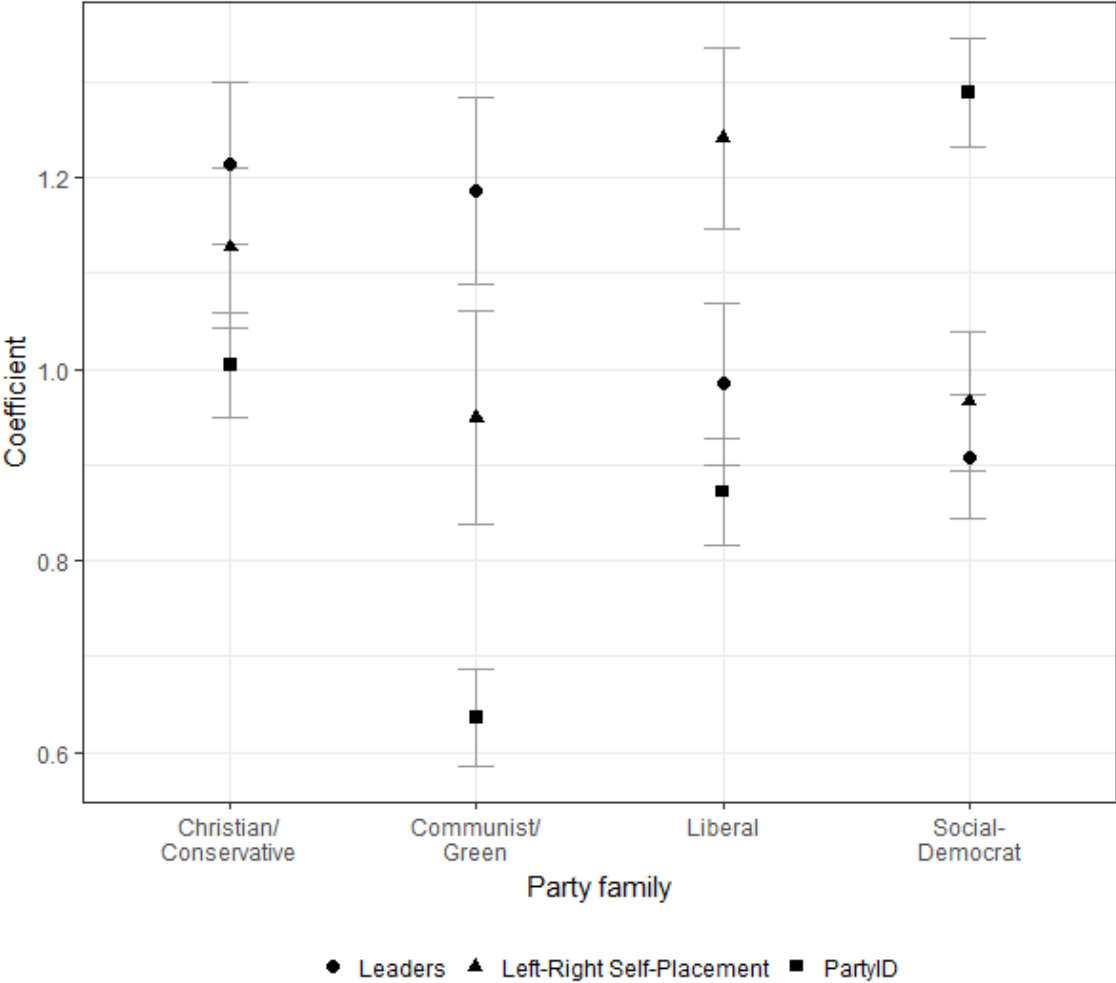
weight of leaders *per se* but rather a relative increase in the electoral impact of leaders *vis-à-vis* parties. This confirms our initial expectations regarding the necessity of analyzing leader effects interconnected with partisan dealignment.

Given these findings, it would be pertinent to understand if the decline of the effect of party identification over time was such that nowadays leaders have become more important than parties for voting decisions. To do so, we estimate the marginal effects for party identification, leader evaluations and ideological proximity only for the last election in each country. Figure 5 presents the comparison of key the estimates of interest (full estimation is presented in Table A3 in the appendix).

The results show that for voters of Social-Democratic parties, party identification still remains today a more important predictor of vote choice than the evaluations of party leaders. Despite the decline in the importance of partisan attachments observed in Figure 4 also applying to Social-Democratic parties, such decline was yet insufficient to bring partisanship's effect below leader evaluations'. In fact, this was the party family where the decrease in the effect of partisanship was the lowest. Nevertheless, if the trend holds, an approximation between the effect of both variables is foreseeable in the future. Also the impact of ideological proximity on the vote is still slightly higher than the evaluations of party leaders in this party family.

For Christian/Conservative parties, the decline in the importance of party identification has already reached a point where its effect has been surpassed by leader evaluations. Moreover, evaluations of party leaders became the most important predictor of vote choice in the model, overcoming also the effects of ideological proximity. Importantly, in the HLM models of Table 3, which average the effects across the whole time-trend, party identification still had a slightly higher effect. However, we now observe that nowadays the effects of party identification and leader evaluations are virtually the same. This is the result of the time trends in the decline of partisanship identified in Figure 4. Indeed, these party families are amongst those where partisanship's decline is more pronounced.

**Figure 5. Estimated party and leader effects on vote choice (last election in each country)**



The effect of voters’ evaluations of leaders has also overcome that of party identification and ideological proximity for voters of the Post-Communists/Greens. This only corroborates the previous findings, as already in the HLM models of Table 3 we had registered that leader effect were stronger than party identification. Leaders have always mattered more for these party families – the dealignment trend only made them even more relevant than party identification. That was not the case with regard to ideological proximity, however. The dealignment process seems to have further favored leader evaluations instead of assessments based on ideological proximity.

For Liberal parties too, the impact of leader evaluations on the vote is superior to partisanship effects. Nonetheless, concerning this party family, ideological proximity stands out as the strongest predictor of vote choice.

Overall, these results support the overwhelming importance of party leader evaluations in contemporary democratic elections. Assessments of the leading candidates running for

election are, today, a crucial determinant of vote choice. Moreover, only regarding Social-Democratic parties, is the importance of party identification superior to the effect of leader evaluations and only in the Liberal and Social-Democratic party families, does ideological proximity play a more important role than leaders in voting decisions.

## **Conclusions**

This article addressed two fundamental gaps in the study of personalization of electoral politics. On the one hand, it proposed to investigate if the theoretical link between dealignment and leader effects is empirically observable. On the other hand, it aimed at providing definitive evidence on the longitudinal dimension of the personalization of politics at the electoral level. The analysis was carried using an unprecedentedly large comparative dataset, compiled for the purpose of this study and providing longitudinal data spanning over six decades across 14 established parliamentary democracies.

The results confirm the importance of party leader assessments as determinants of vote choice in contemporary Western democracies, as a backdrop of the dealignment process. The number of individuals identifying with a political party has decreased substantially over the last half century. As such, partisan attachments have lost much of their influence as vote choice predictors, in a trend transversal to all party families. Because of that, and although leader evaluations have always been an important factor for individual vote choice, they have become an increasingly important predictor over time. Therefore, leaders came to matter more for voting decisions not because their effects have grown over time, but at the expenses of the decline in the explanatory role of partisanship. Today, only with regard to Social-Democratic parties can partisanship be claimed to matter more than leader evaluations. Considering the increasing electoral relevance of new party families in recent Western elections, particularly at the expenses of mainstream Social-Democratic parties, it can be argued that the personalization of politics at the electoral level has substantial empirical support.

Noticeably, our results are on the conservative side. With leaders increasingly responsible for shaping partisan identifications, as previous studies have demonstrated, it is likely that leaders matter even more overall. However, we are unable to capture the effects of leaders on partisan identifications due to the cross-sectional nature of our pooled dataset.

Further research can address this point through long panels, which have been increasingly fielded over the last years.

The findings of this article carry some important implications to the existing literature on the personalization of politics. Curtice and Holmberg (2005: 235) had noted in one of the few attempts at longitudinally analyze leader effects that “party leaders appear to be as important or unimportant now as they were when they were first measured”. While such conclusion is somewhat in line with our results, it missed the other side of the coin, as it does not account for the dynamic interplay between party and leader effects in a context of dealignment. Most importantly, by taking the latter into account, our results refine the temporal dimension argument subjacent to the personalization of politics. By demonstrating that leader effects have not grown over time in absolute but in relative terms, at the expenses of the role of political parties, our analysis contributes to the most contested aspect of the personalization of politics debate. Interestingly, our nuanced results provide partial support for the claims of both nay-sayers and followers of this thesis.

Furthermore, such results shed light on a crucial aspect of the connection between partisan dealignment and the personalization of politics. Dealignment seems indeed the key factor driving leader evaluations to become independent of partisan attachments. While at the beginning of the time trend, partisanship and leader evaluations were both highly important, in a framework compatible with the funnel of causality approach, dealignment progressively caused partisanship to lose predictive power, as leaders retained their electoral relevance. All this evidence suggests that voters are today looking at political leaders through their own eyes rather than through partisan lenses. Although the specific mechanism of this emancipation of leader assessments from partisan support remains confined to the temporal trend in our empirical set up, we conjecture that it is likely to depend on the coupling of voters’ greater ability to independently experience and evaluate politics, and the growing importance of visibility and image in contemporary political communication.

## APPENDIX: CHAPTER 2

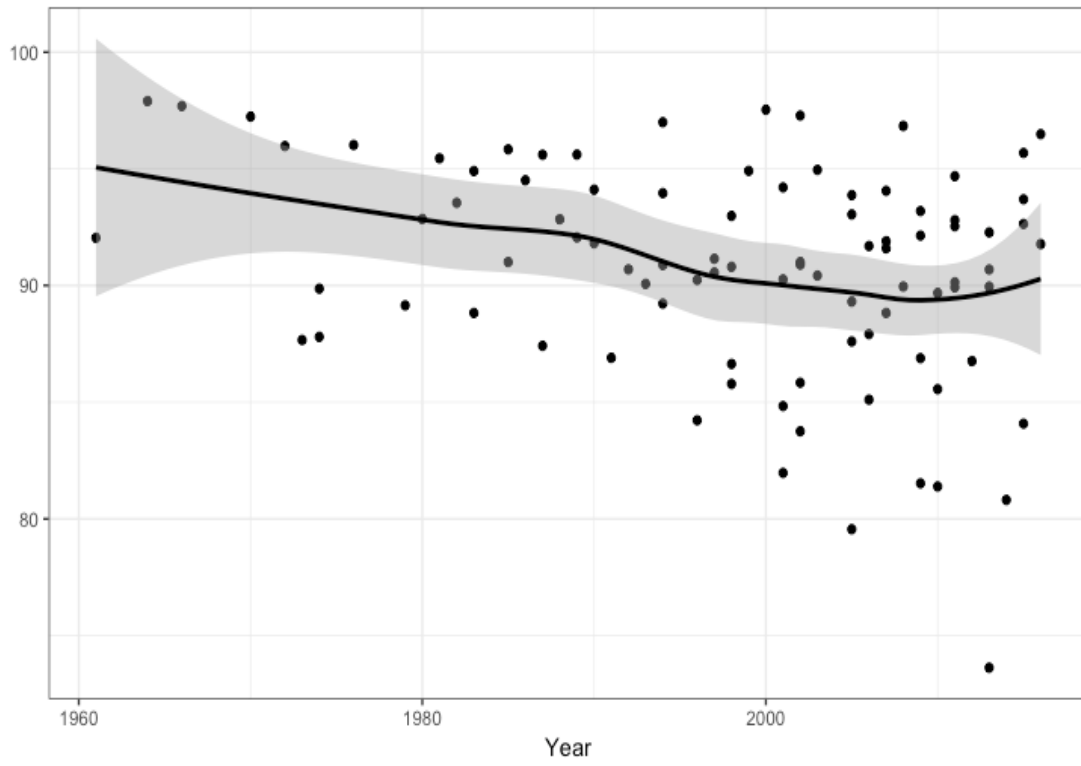
**Table A1.** Detailed list of election studies included

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Austria	2013	Germany	2013	Norway	1993	Sweden	2006
Denmark	1973	Greece	1996	Norway	1997	Sweden	2010
Denmark	1994	Greece	2009	Norway	2001	Switzerland	1999
Denmark	1998	Greece	2012	Norway	2005	Switzerland	2003
Denmark	2001	Ireland	2002	Norway	2009	Switzerland	2007
Denmark	2005	Ireland	2007	Norway	2013	Switzerland	2011
Denmark	2007	Ireland	2016	Portugal	2002	Switzerland	2015
Denmark	2011	Italy	1990	Portugal	2005	UK	1964
Finland	2003	Italy	1996	Portugal	2009	UK	1966
Finland	2007	Italy	2001	Portugal	2011	UK	1970
Finland	2011	Italy	2006	Portugal	2015	UK	1974(f)
Germany	1961	Italy	2008	Spain	2000	UK	1974(o)
Germany	1972	Italy	2013	Spain	2008	UK	1979
Germany	1976	Netherlands	1986	Spain	2011	UK	1983
Germany	1980	Netherlands	1989	Spain	2015	UK	1987
Germany	1983	Netherlands	1994	Spain	2016	UK	1992
Germany	1987	Netherlands	1998	Sweden	1982	UK	1997
Germany	1990	Netherlands	2002	Sweden	1985	UK	2001
Germany	1994	Netherlands	2006	Sweden	1988	UK	2005
Germany	1998	Netherlands	2010	Sweden	1991	UK	2010
Germany	2002	Norway	1981	Sweden	1994	UK	2015
Germany	2005	Norway	1985	Sweden	1998		
Germany	2009	Norway	1989	Sweden	2002		

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**Figure A1.** Percentage of partisans voting along partisan lines





**Table A2.** Vote choice for main party families

	<b>Communist/ Green</b>	<b>Social- Democrat</b>	<b>Christian Conservative</b>	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>Other Parties</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>(N)</b>
1960s	0,0	35,7	36,6	3,2	5,4	80,9	(3)
1970s	2,4	31,5	22,4	7,3	15,4	79,0	(7)
1980s	4,9	31,9	22,9	7,5	11,5	78,7	(13)
1990s	4,7	27,0	17,7	9,3	16,9	75,6	(18)
2000s	4,7	24,6	19,3	9,6	18,5	76,7	(30)
2010s	4,9	18,5	17,5	10,1	21,0	71,9	(19)

**Table A3.** Estimated party and leader effects (last election in each country)

	<b>Communist/ Green</b>	<b>Social- Democrat</b>	<b>Christian/ Conservative</b>	<b>Liberal</b>
Age	-0.015 (-6.73)	-0.000 (-0.22)	0.001 (1.12)	-0.005 (-3.03)
Gender	-0.003 (-0.05)	-0.018 (-0.39)	-0.039 (-0.74)	0.086 (1.46)
Education	0.196 (3.92)	-0.206 (-5.95)	-0.039 (-1.00)	0.301 (7.00)
Interest in Politics	-0.141 (-1.95)	-0.304 (-5.76)	-0.377 (-6.29)	-0.273 (-4.19)
Ideological Proximity	-0.949 (-16.55)	-0.966 (-26.31)	-1.127 (-25.91)	-1.241 (-25.87)
Partisanship	0.636 (24.61)	1.289 (44.39)	1.004 (35.25)	0.872 (31.45)
Leader Evaluation	1.186 (23.72)	0.908 (27.22)	1.215 (28.05)	0.985 (22.97)
Year	0.081 (0.87)	0.044 (0.93)	0.200 (1.92)	0.134 (0.92)
Constant	-167.3 (-0.88)	-89.5 (-0.94)	-404.9 (-1.93)	-273.3 (-0.93)
Log-likelihood	-3014.90	-6008.24	-4912.87	-4136.85
Wald chi-2	1982.74	3900.86	3402.68	2460.13
N (elections)	13	14	13	12
<i>N</i> (observations)	15124	19587	18667	17593

*Note:* Table entries are Hierarchical Logit Model (HLM) coefficients with a random intercept for each election study in our sub-sample. t-statistics in parentheses.

**Table A4.** List of parties included in the conditional logit analysis, by party family

Country	Year	Communist/Green	Social-Democrat	Christian/Conservative	Liberal
Austria	2013	Die Grünen	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs	Österreichische Volkspartei	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs
Denmark	1973	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
Denmark	1994	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
Denmark	1998	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
Denmark	2001	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
Denmark	2005	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
Denmark	2007	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
Denmark	2011	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
Finland	2003	Vasemmistoliitto	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue	Suomen Keskusta	Kansallinen Kokoomus
Finland	2007	Vasemmistoliitto	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue	Suomen Keskusta	Kansallinen Kokoomus
Finland	2011	Vasemmistoliitto	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue	Suomen Keskusta	Kansallinen Kokoomus
Germany	1961	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Germany	1972	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Germany	1976	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Germany	1980	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Germany	1983	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Germany	1987	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Germany	1990	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Germany	1994	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Germany	1998	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Germany	2002	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	-

Germany	2005	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Germany	2009	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Germany	2013	Die Linke	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Greece	1996	Synaspismos	PASOK	Nea Dimokratia	-
Greece	2009	SYRIZA	PASOK	Nea Dimokratia	-
Greece	2012	SYRIZA	PASOK	Nea Dimokratia	-
Ireland	2002	Green Party	Labour Party	Fianna Fail	Progressive Democrats
Ireland	2007	Green Party	Labour Party	Fianna Fail	Progressive Democrats
Ireland	2016	Green Party	Labour Party	Fianna Fail	-
Italy	1990	Partito Comunista Italiano	Partito Socialista Italiano	Democrazia Cristiana	Partito Liberale Italiano
Italy	1996	Rifondazione Comunista	Partito Democratico della Sinistra	Forza Italia	-
Italy	2001	Rifondazione Comunista	Democratici di Sinistra	Forza Italia	Italia dei Valori
Italy	2006	Rifondazione Comunista	Democratici di Sinistra	Forza Italia	-
Italy	2008	Sinistra Arcobaleno	Partito Democratico	Popolo della Libertà	Italia dei Valori
Italy	2013	Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà	Partito Democratico	Popolo della Libertà	Scelta Civica
Netherlands	1986	-	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	1989	-	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	1994	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	1998	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	2002	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	2006	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	2010	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Norway	1981	Sosialistisk Venstreparti	Arbeiderpartiet	Høyre	Venstre
Norway	1985	Sosialistisk Venstreparti	Arbeiderpartiet	Høyre	Venstre
Norway	1989	Sosialistisk Venstreparti	Arbeiderpartiet	Høyre	Venstre

Norway	1993	Sosialistisk Venstreparti	Arbeiderpartiet	Høyre	Venstre
Norway	1997	Sosialistisk Venstreparti	Arbeiderpartiet	Høyre	Venstre
Norway	2001	Sosialistisk Venstreparti	Arbeiderpartiet	Høyre	Venstre
Norway	2005	Sosialistisk Venstreparti	Arbeiderpartiet	Høyre	Venstre
Norway	2009	Sosialistisk Venstreparti	Arbeiderpartiet	Høyre	Venstre
Norway	2013	Sosialistisk Venstreparti	Arbeiderpartiet	Høyre	Venstre
Portugal	2002	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	CDS – Partido Popular	Partido Social Democrata
Portugal	2005	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	CDS – Partido Popular	Partido Social Democrata
Portugal	2009	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	CDS – Partido Popular	Partido Social Democrata
Portugal	2011	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	CDS – Partido Popular	Partido Social Democrata
Portugal	2015	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	-	Partido Social Democrata
Spain	2000	Izquierda Unida	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	-
Spain	2008	Izquierda Unida	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	-
Spain	2011	Izquierda Unida	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	Unión Progreso y Democracia
Spain	2015	Izquierda Unida	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	Ciudadanos
Spain	2016	Podemos	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	Ciudadanos
Sweden	1982	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1985	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1988	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1991	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1994	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1998	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	2002	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	2006	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	2010	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Switzerland	1999	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei
Switzerland	2003	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei
Switzerland	2007	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei

Switzerland	2011	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei
Switzerland	2015	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei
UK	1964	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	-
UK	1966	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	-
UK	1970	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	-
UK	1974f	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
UK	1974	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
UK	1979	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
UK	1983	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
UK	1987	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
UK	1992	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
UK	1997	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
UK	2001	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
UK	2005	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
UK	2010	-	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
UK	2015	Greens	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats

## **Chapter 3: Image that matters: News media consumption and party leader effects on voting behaviour<sup>12</sup>**

### **Introduction**

Over the last two decades, the personalization of politics has attracted an increasing interest among social and political scientists, particularly concerning its electoral face, i.e., the impact of voters' assessments of individual politicians on their voting decisions (Karvonen, 2010; Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2011; Garzia, 2011; 2014). Rahat and Kenig (2018: 121) argue that political personalization “implies a change in behaviours such as voting, which tends to follow the evaluations of leaders [...] and is done less and less according to party loyalty, identity and ideology”. In this respect, the literature distinguishes two main processes at the origin of leaders' growing electoral preponderance. On the one hand, the weakening of long-term affective attachments to political parties, as a result of the erosion of partisan alignments over the latest decades of the twentieth century, has downplayed the importance of parties vis-à-vis leaders and leading candidates in the voting calculus (Dalton et al., 2000). The resulting transformations in structure and organization undergone by political parties have also contributed to further heightening the role of party leaders (Mair et al., 2004). On the other hand, a parallel process of media change has brought about transformations in political communication as well as on voters' patterns of consumption of political information (Altheide and Snow, 1979; Mazzoleni, 1987). Television has revolutionized the shape of political messages, tailored to suit the rapidly wide-spreading new media. This image-based medium disfavors a type of communication built on complex programmatic contents or abstract ideologies. Rather, television cultivates a personalized form of communication, grounded on the visible faces of political parties, that is, their leaders and leading candidates (Mazzoleni, 2000).

Political communication research has for long maintained that television has been decisive in increasing the electoral role of individual politicians at the expenses of partisan attachments or ideology (Lenz and Lawson, 2011; Aaldering, 2018). When it comes to the political behavior literature, however, the available empirical studies provide only mixed evidence. While some studies confirm the relationship between exposure to televised political information and increased leader effects (McLeod, 1983; Keeter, 1987; Mughan, 2000; Holian

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<sup>12</sup> This paper was coauthored with Diego Garzia and Andrea de Angelis.

and Prysby, 2014; Takens et al., 2015; Garzia, 2017), others find only partial or no evidence of a correlation between consumption of televised news and leader-centered patterns of voting behavior (Hayes, 2009; Gidengil, 2011; Elmelund-Præstekær and Hopmann, 2012; Rico, 2014). In this article, we argue that these discrepancies are primarily attributable to methodological shortcomings of three different types. First, virtually all existing studies are cross-sectional and/or single-country cases. Second, even among the few comparative analyses, measurement issues subsist due to their focus on exposure to the medium in general, rather than exposure to political news. Third, none of the existing studies considers the composition of individuals' media diet, that is, the extent to which their political information consumption habits are diversified across different types of media.

This article attempts at tackling these limitations seeking to provide evidence of the relationship between exposure to political information through different media (newspapers and television) and the importance of leaders for vote choice.<sup>13</sup> In particular, we hypothesize that a television-dominated media diet primes leader effects on vote choice, whereas a newspaper-dominated media diet hinders them. We offer an extensive empirical assessment of this hypothesis based on an original pooled dataset featuring 48 national election studies conducted in 13 West European parliamentary democracies between 1982 and 2016.

### **Television and the personalization of politics**

The later decades of the twentieth century were marked by the first symptoms of party decline in Western democracies (Dalton et al., 2011: 9-14). The decrease in the levels of turnout, party identification, and party membership are all illustrative of the fact that “parties are no longer managing to engage the ordinary citizen” (Mair, 2006: 32). Cognitive mobilization and broader social structure reconfigurations transformed electoral markets by eroding traditional cleavages and weakening party attachments, leading to a crisis of political parties (Mair et al., 2004: 2-9). As group-based identifications forging the attitudinal attachments to political parties lose much of their importance, voting becomes, essentially, an individual enterprise. Electoral volatility increases as voters no longer continuously pledge allegiance to a single political party (Dalton

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<sup>13</sup> On these bases, this paper focuses explicitly on the micro-level behavioral dimension of personalization rather than on media personalization, i.e., the degree of personalization in newspapers/television coverage (Rahat and Kenig, 2018: 118).



et al., 2000). An increasingly complex electorate, unconstrained by partisan bonds, thus came to consider a multitude of factors in their voting decisions, among which candidate and party leader evaluations stand out as an increasingly relevant factor in a context of political personalization.

The changing structure of mass communication is widely assumed to have played a role in the development of personalized voting behavior patterns (Lenz and Lawson, 2011). The combination of audio and visual elements inherent to televised communication went beyond a mere technological transformation, to entail “the greatest anthropological revolution of all times” (Sartori, 1989: 43). The visual possibilities of television gave individuals the option not only to read about what happened but also to watch. In turn, this transformed the notion of objectivity – it is no longer enough to read about it, one must see it – and conferred additional trustworthiness to televised news (Postman, 1986).

The fact that television primes images rather than written content, and that it is directed at entertainment rather than abstract reflection, imposes substantial constraints on the type of political messages to be conveyed. Unlike the written format, this setting is not ideal for communicating complex ideas, programmatic goals, ideologies or political issues. By prioritizing personality rather than abstract contents, television favors superficial coverage, communication through visual objects instead of abstract concepts, and appeals to emotions even through non-verbal communication (Hayes, 2009; Langer, 2010). In doing so, television not only altered parties’ political communication strategies, forcing them to adapt. It also transformed voters’ patterns of consumption of political information, reinforcing the demand for more personalized political competition (Prior, 2006).

The changing structure of mass communications in the second half of the twentieth century has been central in emphasizing the role of political leaders at the expense of parties, making the latter “more dependent in their communications with voters on the essentially visual and personality-based medium of television” (Mughan, 2000: 129). It thus became crucial for political parties to convey their message through visual images and personalities, “ensuring that their leaders had, for the most part, the visual appeal and communication skills that suited the new medium. When a new party leader is chosen, it is taken for granted that one of the main selection criteria is how they present themselves on television” (Dalton et al., 2011: 219).

Based on a review of pre-existing theoretical accounts, we foresee two possible mechanisms behind differentiated patterns of media exposure and leader effects. On the one

hand, it is argued that television coverage is inherently more personalized (Elmelund-Præstekær and Hopmann, 2012). Televised political news are increasingly privatized around individual political actors (Rahat and Sheafer, 2007; van Aelst et al., 2011), in a process reinforced by politicians' and parties' increasing highlight on personality (Sheafer, 2001; Strömbäck, 2008).<sup>14</sup> On these basis, leaders are supposed to matter because of their strictly personal characteristics (as conveyed by privatized political news in television). On the other hand, it has been hypothesized that the difference between mediums may depend almost exclusively on the nature of the information delivered. As television conveys more visual images and non-verbal cues, this may lead voters to more heavily rely on this additional information for their electoral decisions. The latter mechanism is well exemplified in Druckman's (2003) experiment. Reproducing the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debate for two distinct groups of subjects (via television vs. via radio), under the hypothesis that television watchers would consider additional non-verbal information provided by visual imagery or cues based on movements and appearances used every day in subjects' daily relationships, he found significant differences between the two groups. Television watchers considered Kennedy to have won the debate, while radio listeners found Nixon's performance better – the reason being advanced that television favored Kennedy's superior image even though he was not necessarily better on issues (Druckman, 2003: 563). Similar conclusions were reached by Mendelsohn (1996), who found that leader effects are trumping issue voting and partisanship's effect because of the media's role in priming candidates. Lenz and Lawson (2011) found parallel results for U.S. Senate and House elections: appealing-looking candidates are especially benefited from television exposure, in particular among less sophisticated citizens who watch a substantial amount of television. A similar pattern of image-based voting had been previously identified by Todorov et al. (2005), who demonstrate that voters' inferences of competence relying exclusively on facial appearance were a strong predictor of the outcomes of U.S. congressional elections.

A relatively scant number of articles addressed the relationship between television exposure and leader effects on voting behavior, focusing primarily on the case of the US. In their seminal analysis, McLeod et al. (1983) show that television-reliant voters are those with

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<sup>14</sup> We performed an exploratory analysis of the few available election studies conducted in Western Europe and featuring a detailed analysis of media content over the campaign (i.e., Austrian National Election Study 2013 and German Longitudinal Election Study 2009/2013). The results of the comparison of party leader mentions on television and in the newspapers unanimously point to a greater degree of personalized media coverage on television news.

the highest likelihood to use candidate image characteristics in making their voting choices. Keeter's (1987) longitudinal analysis of American National Election Study datasets collected between 1952 and 1980 supports McLeod et al.'s findings, and concludes that "television has facilitated and encouraged vote choices based on candidates' personality assessments." Holian and Prysby (2014) further extend the time frame of Keeter's analysis and again find strong effects of television exposure on patterns of candidate-centered voting.

Quite unlike the case of the US, however, single country analyses of European parliamentary democracies do not provide unequivocal support for the notion that party leaders matter more for regular consumers of televised political news. Mughan's (2000) seminal analysis of British parliamentary elections concludes that increasing use of television for political information is indeed correlated with greater leader effects. His conclusions, however, find only partial support in Rico's (2014) analysis of three Spanish elections, and no support whatsoever in Elmelund-Præstekær and Hopmann's (2012) study of preferential voting in Danish local elections. Takens et al.'s (2015) analysis of the Dutch election of 2010 provides more convincing evidence in support of the link between exposure to political information on television and the personalization of voting behavior. More recently, Garzia (2017) found evidence of the dominance of leader effects among voters exposed mainly to televised political information in the 2013 Italian Parliamentary Election.

So far, only one study by Gidengil (2011) tackled the issue from a comparative perspective. As the author concludes, "leader effects actually seemed to be weaker for voters who had the highest levels of television exposure" (Gidengil, 2011: 154). Yet, as Gidengil admits, exposure to television "is not really the most appropriate variable for testing whether leaders matter more to people who are regular viewers...A more appropriate test of the hypothesis would be to focus on voters whose main source of information was television news" (Gidengil, 2011: 154). Furthermore, her study is not complemented by the consideration of possible equal consumption of political information on newspapers, since a mixed media diet may potentially neutralize or counterbalance the candidate priming and framing effects of television.

This article builds on these insights and contributes to the existing literature in a three-fold way. First, we investigate the connection between media exposure and the determinants of voting behavior over the largest pool of countries and elections considered so far. This allows us to unfold systematic media effects regardless of cross-national variations in terms of institutional arrangements, media, and party systems. Second, we rely on measures of exposure

to political information in the media. In this way, we can remove the noise induced by news-avoiding media users. Third, we depart from an approach focusing on exposure to different media in isolation. Media types are not equally relevant for predicting leader effects. While television primes politicians' image, newspapers primarily convey non-visual content that can be assumed to hinder personality evaluations. For this reason, we make use of a compositional measure that considers voters' television diet in relation to their newspapers' reading habits, as we shall explain below.

### **Patterns of news consumption in thirteen parliamentary democracies**

The lack of suitable cross-national datasets has thus far hindered comparative research in this domain. Existing surveys either overlooked leader evaluations (i.e., European Election Study) or voters' exposure to political information in the media (i.e., Comparative Study of Electoral Systems). Arguably, this lack of appropriate data sources has posed the greatest obstacle to a comparative analysis of the mediator role of exposure to political information in the media on the emergence of personalized voting behavior. Against this background, we conducted a large-scale harmonization effort pooling 48 national election studies collected in 13 West European parliamentary democracies during the period 1982-2016. This set of elections includes all available West European election studies featuring the key variables of interest to address our research question (i.e., party leader evaluations and measures of exposure to political news in different types of media). Table 1 presents the full list of countries and elections included in the analysis (detailed study descriptions are presented in Appendix A1).

**Table 1. Detailed list of national election studies included in the analysis**

AT2013	DK2011	IE2007	NL1998	SE1988
CH2003	EL1996	IT1990	NL2002	SE1991
CH2007	ES2000	IT1996	NL2006	SE1994
CH2011	ES2008	IT2001	NL2010	SE1998
CH2015	ES2011	IT2006	PT2002	SE2002
DE2002	ES2015	IT2008	PT2005	SE2006
DE2009	ES2016	IT2013	PT2009	SE2010
DE2013	FI2003	NL1986	PT2015	UK2015
DK2005	FI2007	NL1989	SE1982	
DK2007	FI2011	NL1994	SE1985	

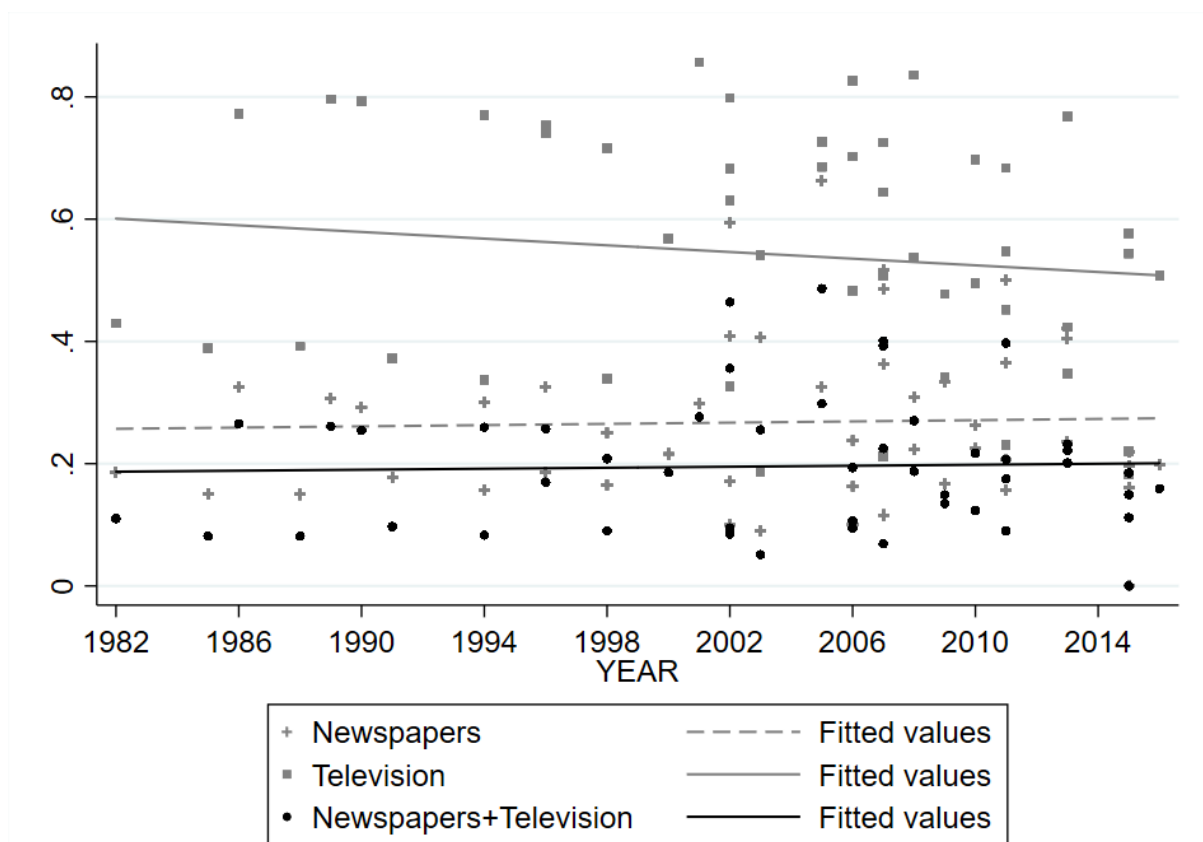
*Note:* AT=Austria, CH=Switzerland, DE=Germany, DK=Denmark; EL=Greece; ES=Spain; FI=Finland, IE=Ireland, IT=Italy, NL=Netherlands, PT=Portugal, SE=Sweden, UK=United Kingdom

It is worth noting that such measures have been introduced in national election studies relatively late, compared to the development of mass communication in Western democracies. Indeed, items tapping individuals' frequency of consumption of political information on the media were absent from European national election studies until the 1980s. By then, television had already penetrated Western societies to a large extent (Ohr, 2011). Despite such caveat, our dataset offers, to the best of our knowledge, the most comprehensive set of election studies ever considered in studying the relationship between exposure to political information and the determinants of vote choice. This large-N comparative analysis of thirteen parliamentary democracies in Western Europe covers 48 elections held in nearly four decades, thus offering a substantial improvement to the scope of pre-existing research on this topic.

Another virtue compared to previous research stems from our improved measurement strategy. Our measurements correspond to a previously-defined core conceptual definition that does not contemplate the sacrifice of conceptual homogeneity. All variables measuring media exposure must allow the respondent to (1) indicate a frequency of the media usage; (2) explicitly mention media usage for political information; and (3) must include both television and newspapers. Second, we allow for different measurement scales ranging from more fine-grained measures, such as those allowing respondents to report news exposure on a given media in number of days per week, to a minimally satisfactory scale (e.g., four values ranging from "never" to "every day") in order to extend the pool of studies included. Detailed question

wording, answer categories and recoding strategy for our newspapers and television items are presented in Appendices A2 and A3 respectively. Our minimum-common-denominator approach grounds on the idea that – whatever the answer categories – every respondent can be classified in terms of what media (if any) represents their most important source of political information. Figure 1 provides a cross-time description of the percentage of individuals reporting to use either newspapers or television, as well as both combined, as daily sources of political information.

**Figure 1.** Newspapers and television as a daily source of political information (%)



Note: Plot entries represent the proportion of respondents in each survey consuming newspapers and television news always/every day

The role of newspapers as information providers has been virtually unchanged over the three and a half decades depicted in the figure. However, it seems plausible that newspaper consumption may have suffered a decline as a result of the emergence of television, which we cannot capture due to the time-frame constraints imposed by the unavailability of media

exposure data before the 1980s. Nonetheless, we can highlight the sustained importance of newspapers as a source of daily political information for about a quarter of the electorate over the time frame under analysis.

The same data constraints apply to television. By the 1980s, television had already achieved a dominant position within Western societies and their politics. Therefore, to capture any noticeable temporal variation in exposure patterns, our data would likely need to include previous decades. In the current time-frame, if any variation is registered is a slight decline in television consumption of political information towards the later years, possibly resulting from the increasing importance of online political information. Nevertheless, television is still, by and large, voters' preferred source of information about politics.

Still, these categories are not exclusive – voters can often be exposed to political information both on television and newspapers. Insofar as television pervaded in modern societies, much any frequent consumer of political information is prone to be exposed to it – even if not necessarily exclusively – through television. Therefore, separately analyzing patterns of consumption of either media is possibly not the most informative strategy to understand their relative weight as news providers.

Since the lack of appropriate measures of voters' exposure to political information in the media has been one of the main problems identified in previous studies, special attention was given to the design of this type of measurements in the present study. In concrete, we have taken a careful reflection about composition rather than the mere quantity of media usage. This allows for the consideration of the possible overlap in the exposure to different media for political information. This approach carries two main advantages. Firstly, it allows for the consideration of the possible overlap between the consumption of political information in different mediums. For example, cognitively mobilized citizens are arguably more interested in politics and, as such, are more prone to self-selection into multiple media sources, potentially with high levels of consumption. It is a well-established finding in political communication research that more educated and more interested citizens are major news consumers (Strömbäck and Shehata, 2010; Boulianne, 2011; Strömbäck et al., 2013). Therefore, for these individuals, the visual effects of heavy television news exposure may be compensated by an equally frequent newspaper readership. Inversely, among citizens with low levels of education or interest in politics, even only occasional exposure to television may have substantial effects if not counterbalanced by newspaper consumption. Secondly, but not least importantly, a compositional approach relaxes concerns related to over-reporting of news exposure, either

originating from social desirability bias or inability to correctly recall previous media consumption (Prior, 2009). Amplified self-reports of news exposure would not affect our measure, assuming they are proportionally balanced for television and newspapers.

On these bases, we now concentrate on the proportion of individuals equally highly exposed to political information in both newspapers and television. These heavy political news consumers remain stable at about 20 percent of the electorate throughout the whole period under analysis. These individuals are essential to grasping the different preponderance of each media in the composition of individuals' sources of political information. To be sure, if we have noted that about 25 percent of individuals are highly exposed to political information on the newspapers, 20 percent are highly exposed to political information on both newspapers and television. That is, among regular newspapers readers, nearly 80 percent also consume television news frequently. This group has thus a balanced media diet, because equally composed of the two mediums. In contrast, only one-third of regular TV news watchers is also a frequent reader of politics in the newspapers. In other words, there are significantly more individuals exposed to political information exclusively through television. This has implications regarding the relative effects of image and text, as previously discussed. Whereas in a balanced media diet image and text may cancel each other out, whenever one prevails – which we have concluded to be mostly image – it will bear a disproportionate effect over individuals' political reasoning. These arguments make a case for going beyond the consideration of the mere frequency of news exposure and also taking into account the composition of individuals' media diets.

In a comparative study of news consumption gaps, Shehata and Strömback (2011) distinguish between Newspaper- and Television-Centrism. The authors identify this environmental characteristic as the critical determinant of news consumption at the individual-level, due to contagion and socialization processes. They operationalize it as the difference between the average amount of total newspaper reading minus the average amount of total television viewing for each of the countries under analysis. We apply the same logic to develop a measure of "Newspaper/Television-Centrism" at the individual-level, assigning values -1 (newspaper-centric respondent) to individuals more frequently exposed to political information on newspapers than television, 0 (balanced consumption of newspapers and television news) to individuals reporting the same frequency of news collection for newspapers and television, and +1 for television-centric respondents, more frequently collecting news over television rather



than reading newspapers. In this framework, we thus hypothesize that party leader evaluations matter more for vote choice among the latter group.

Table 2 illustrates the construction of the Newspaper/Television-Centrism typology, displaying the distribution of respondents across different levels of exposure to political information on television and in the newspapers. The preponderance of television-centric individuals in our sample becomes evident from the table, reflecting the more important role of television as a source of voters' political information over the last decades.

**Table 2. Construction of the Newspaper/Television-Centrism typology**

		<b>Newspaper consumption</b>				<i>Total</i>
		Everyday	Often	Rarely	Never	
<b>Television consumption</b>	Never	1.23% (1558)	1.23% (1567)	1.88% (2385)	6.03% (7659)	10.36% (13169)
	Rarely	1.35% (1718)	2.21% (2811)	4.38% (5562)	3.98% (5060)	11.92% (15151)
	Often	4.27% (5423)	7.23% (9193)	6.33% (8041)	5.24% (6659)	23.06% (29316)
	Everyday	20.38% (25907)	9.97% (12675)	10.5% (13348)	13.81% (17550)	54.66% (69480)
	<i>Total</i>	27.22% (34606)	20.65% (26246)	23.08% (29336)	29.05% (36928)	100% (127116)

Newspaper-Centric
  Balanced
  Television-Centric

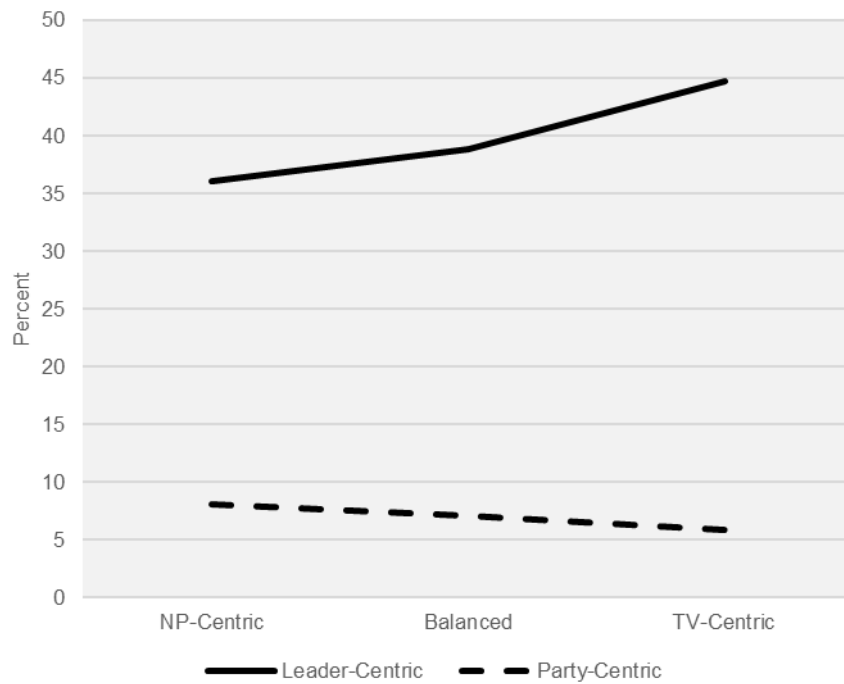
In the typology presented in the table, 12 percent of individuals are newspaper-centric while about 50 percent of the sample is television-centric. Furthermore, only one respondent out of five balances a heavy (i.e., daily) television news consumption with an equally heavy exposure to political news in the newspapers. Such figures are illustrative of the disproportionate weight of audiovisual over printed political information in individuals' media diet. If, as discussed before, an audiovisual type of political information primes candidates and

political decisions based on image considerations, as well as assessments of individual political actors, the differences in media diets observed may have significant consequences on voting behavior – an empirical issue to which we now turn to by means of multivariate statistical techniques.

### **News media consumption and party leader effects on voting behaviour**

Our statistical analysis investigates the extent to which individual patterns of exposure to political information in different media moderate the effect of leader evaluations on individuals' vote choice. In line with the theoretical framework laid out, we expect that a television-centric media diet leads to stronger leader effects on the vote. Such proposition can be preliminarily assessed by means of the analysis of the relationship between Newspaper/Television-Centrism and different patterns of voting behavior. To this purpose, we have initially decomposed our sample into the share of respondents who voted for the party they declare to identify with despite not being the party of their best rated leader (i.e., party-centric voters) and the share of individuals who declare to have voted for the party of their highest rated leader without identifying with that party (i.e., leader-centric voters). The distribution of these two categories across levels of our Newspaper/Television-Centrism index confirms our initial expectations (see Figure 2). Regardless of the disproportionate weight of television-centric voters *via-a-vis* newspaper-centric voters in our sample, a television-centric media diet appears more common amongst leader-centric voters. Such preliminary evidence is informative about the relationship between voters' media diet and their voting behavior patterns but requires further empirical analysis.

**Figure 2.** Distribution of party-centric and leader-centric voters across varying levels of Newspaper/Television-Centrism



In order to estimate the impact of party leader evaluations in a multivariate model of vote choice, we rely on party leader thermometer scores ranging from 0 (dislike) to 10 (like), since this is the most widely available measure in the election studies at hand (see Appendix A4 for details on the leader evaluation items). The effect of party leaders is tested against two crucial attitudinal determinants of vote choice recurrently present in voting behavior models: partisanship and ideological proximity. We tackle the former through a measure of respondents' feelings of closeness to a political party ranging between (0) not close to the party; (1) only a sympathizer; (2) close to the party; (3) very close to the party. This measure is widely available in European election studies, and it signals a long-term affective relationship which can be meaningfully distinguished from vote choice (Dalton, 2008). To measure ideological proximity in comparative perspective, we follow Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) and rely on the absolute value party-respondent distance on the 10-point left-right scale.

Regarding modeling strategy, varying choice sets (that is, the change in the composition of party systems across countries and/or time) pose a severe challenge in modeling vote choice in a comparative, longitudinal setting. To alleviate this problem, we initially over-impose a fixed choice-set within a conditional logit framework. In order to fit our conditional logit models, we have classified party choice into the four main party families available to voters in virtually

every country and election under analysis (from left to right: Far Left, Social-Democrats, Conservative/Christian, and Conservative/Liberals)<sup>15</sup>, and then recoded the voting variable accordingly. We acknowledge the existence of differences and transformations in the composition of these party families over the last century. For this reason, we have analyzed each party family independently concerning its consistency across time and countries – no reason for significant concerns emerged.<sup>16</sup> A full list of the classification by party family over country and election study is available in Appendix A5.

The core logic underlying our theoretical argument can be subsumed into the following proposition: a television-dominated media diet primes leader effects on vote choice, whereas a newspaper-dominated media diet hinders them. To test this proposition, we estimated conditional logit models to measure the mediating role of exposure to political information on television/newspapers on leader effects (Models 1 and 2). The key covariates included in the model (i.e., strength of partisanship, ideological proximity and leader evaluations) are measured at the respondent\*party level, while control variables (i.e., age, gender, educational level, interest in politics, exposure to political information on newspapers and television, and score on the Newspaper/Television-Centrism index) are measured at the respondent level (coefficients not shown for parsimony; for full estimation details, see Appendix A6). The first two columns of Table 3 present the results.

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<sup>15</sup> This scheme follows a pragmatic logic of complexity reduction. We are aware of the potential internal heterogeneity of these categories and still defend this decision on three main grounds. First, these categories broadly correspond to long-standing divisions mapping common socio-structural cleavages. Second, in many cases a finer grained classification would have led to an unbearable amount of missing values due to the different party system configurations in the various countries. Third, we operated an extensive array of robustness tests including Leave-One-Out (LOO) tests sequentially excluding party families and showing no substantial impact on our findings. We based our codes of party families on the classification provided by the Comparative Manifesto Project.

<sup>16</sup> Social-Democratic parties are available in each and every election study. In 12 out of 13 countries they are always the same party – the only exception is Italy. Christian/Conservative parties are present in 47 out of 48 elections. They are consistent across time in every country except Italy. Liberal/Conservative parties are consistent in 10 out of 13 countries. They vary across time in Italy and Spain and are systematically missing in Greece. Overall, they are present in 42 elections out of 48. Far Left parties are consistent in 9 out of 12 countries, with cross-time variation in Italy, Germany and Spain. They are systematically missing in Switzerland. In total they are present in 41 out of 48 elections.

**Table 3.** Leader evaluation and Newspaper/Television-Centrism: Interaction models

	<i>Conditional logit</i> <i>(Four main party families)</i>		<i>Stacked data matrix</i> <i>(All parties)</i>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<b><i>Respondent*party-level</i></b>				
<b><i>covariates</i></b>				
Leader evaluation	1.268*** (0.0183)	1.273*** (0.0184)	1.044*** (0.0086)	1.047*** (0.0086)
Partisanship	0.927*** (0.0125)	0.927*** (0.0125)	0.747*** (0.0062)	0.748*** (0.0062)
Ideological proximity	0.974*** (0.0144)	0.976*** (0.0145)	0.958*** (0.0093)	0.958*** (0.0093)
<b><i>Cross-level interaction</i></b>				
Leader evaluation*	-	0.0993*** (0.0160)	-	0.0772*** (0.0077)
Newspaper/Television-Centrism				
Log-likelihood	-22414.503	-22391.159	-103085.53	-103037.8
Wald chi-2	17063.37	17063.89	52911.95	53045.51
AIC	45137.0	45092.3	203996.3	197795.3
BIC	46714.3	46679.8	204183.0	198003.5
N (respondents)	207322	207322	439329	439329
N (observations)	58945	58945	127779	82339

*Note:* Cell entries are standardized logistic regression estimates. Standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered robust at the respondent-level. All models include year and country fixed-effects. Respondent-specific controls (age, gender, education, political interest, newspaper consumption, television consumption, and score on the Newspaper/Television-Centrism index) are included, but coefficients are not shown for parsimony. Full estimation is presented in Appendix A6. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Model 1 is the baseline model, where the relative impact of the key predictors on vote choice is tested. Standardized conditional logit estimates show the slight dominance of leader evaluations over partisanship and ideological proximity – a finding in line with the extant literature (Garzia, 2017). Model 2 addresses more directly the research question about the influence of a television-based media diet on leader effects, by adding an interaction term between leader evaluations and the Newspaper/Television-Centrism measure. The interaction term is positive and significant, suggesting that a more television-centered media diet fosters

leader effects on vote choice.

Albeit informative, our conditional logit models are unable to fully take into account the varying choices available to voters across, and even within, countries.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, a conditional logit framework cannot account for the substantial number of votes cast in favor of parties beyond these four party families – something we cannot model within the overreaching approach necessary to specify our conditional logit models. For these reasons, we considered an additional modeling strategy that relaxes the assumption of homogeneous choice-sets by estimating random-intercept logistic regression models using a ‘stacked’ data matrix. In this design, the dependent variable (vote choice) does not consist of nominal categories represented by the several parties running for election in a country in an election-year, but becomes a binary choice (0: did not vote for this party; 1: voted for this party) of vote for a generic party, repeated as many times per respondent as the number of parties contesting that specific election. This option has the advantage of not restricting the analysis to specific party families, allowing for the consideration of vote choices for any of the political parties available.<sup>18</sup> The results, in models 3 and 4 of Table 3, largely corroborate the conditional logit analysis. In Model 3, leader evaluations stand out again as the most relevant predictor of vote choice. In Model 4, the interaction term between leader evaluations and Newspaper/Television-Centrism is included. It remains positive and statistically significant with only minor changes in effect size. To better grasp the differentiated effects of leaders across levels of Newspaper/Television-Centrism, Figure 3 plots the marginal effect of our key predictors (estimates are based on Model 4, Table 3).

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<sup>17</sup> In particular, varying choice sets threaten the Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives assumption that is invoked in conditional logit models (including our application). Relaxing this assumption required modelling the variations in the choice sets. Therefore, we experimented with versions of CLM that allow for variation in voters’ choice sets by interacting a choice-set indicator with each alternative-specific covariate (i.e. leader evaluations, partisanship, ideological proximity). This produces estimates that are choice set specific, but this comes at the cost of misleading generalizations. For instance, the choice set configurations usually involve one or two specific countries and therefore convey the effect of idiosyncratic context rather than the absence or presence of certain party families. Moreover, these models involve unbearable complexity.

<sup>18</sup> Note that this strategy comes at the risk of under-specification by not including respondent-specific controls, which do not have a direct counterpart at the respondent\*party level (e.g., socio-demographics) and therefore cannot be meaningfully estimated under such framework.

**Figure 3.** Marginal effect of key predictors across values of the Newspaper/Television-Centrism index

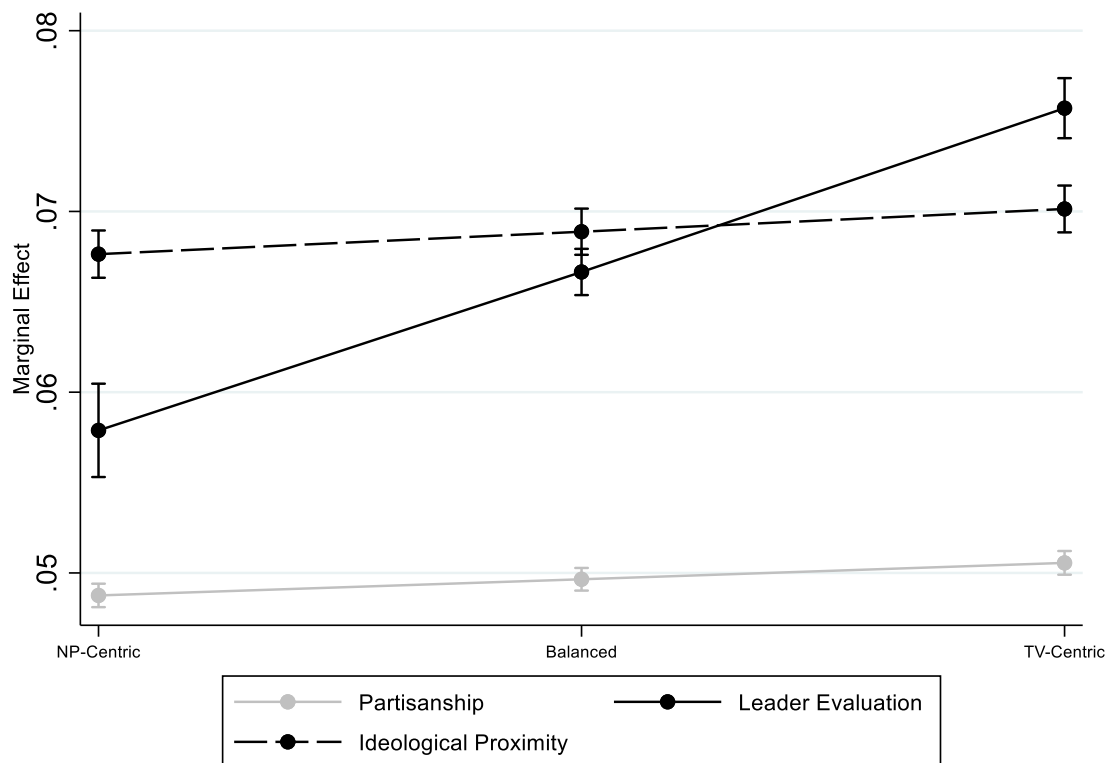


Figure 3 shows a stronger effect of voters’ evaluations of party leaders on vote choices according to individuals’ media diet. For newspaper-centric individuals, of all three predictors, ideological proximity is the strongest. For individuals with a balanced media diet, leader effects increase in importance but are yet undistinguishable in magnitude from the effects of ideological proximity. For television-centric individuals, however, leader evaluations stand out as the strongest predictor of vote choice, surpassing the effects of ideological proximity. Noticeably, both ideological proximity and partisanship remain fairly stable in the magnitude of their effects regardless of the individuals’ media diet. This confirms the privileged impact of television specifically over leader effects, providing further evidence in support of the theoretical relationship between the expansion of television and the personalization of politics.

### Robustness tests

We have checked the robustness of these findings using different strategies. We initially resorted to Leave-One-Out Cross Validation (LOOCV). First, election studies were alternatively excluded one by one from the sample, to inspect if an outlier could be driving the trend. No

differences were found. Second, we carried a more demanding test, by repeating the same procedure for countries, excluding them one at the time from the sample and re-estimating the interaction models. No country was found to affect the significance nor the sign of the interaction term. The effect size also remains virtually unaltered. As a third, even more demanding test, we excluded in turn the countries belonging to each of the three types of media systems identified by Hallin and Mancini (2004). The results provide further support to the idea that our findings are robust to case selection and are not driven by an outlier country or a distinctive media system arrangement. The results of these tests are presented in Appendix A7. Finally, we specified additional hierarchical logit models (HLM) for each of the four party families alternatively, to exclude the possibility that the results are driven by disproportionate leader effects in one party family. Again, no significant differences were found, signaling a generalized trend that is not contingent on any specific party family. Across all party families, leader effects are consistently stronger amongst television-centric individuals. The full model results are available in Appendix A8.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

This study's results go beyond pre-existing literature by providing an improved measurement and conceptualization of voters' exposure to political information in old-media platforms and its relationship to voting behavior patterns. The breadth of countries considered constitutes an unprecedented comparative effort to systematically analyze how the dominant role of television as a source of political information provides the ideal setting for the development of the personalization of politics at the electoral level. In specific, we offered three advancements versus previous studies: a large-N comparative analysis spanning over four decades, measures of frequency of exposure to political information in both newspapers and television, and a new compositional measure of voters' media diet. Significantly, the results do not seem to be driven by the specificities of media systems, party systems or countries' institutional arrangements but fitting into a pattern common to Western European parliamentary democracies. In particular, we shed light on two underappreciated dimensions of the relationship between media exposure and personalized voting behavior. First, we highlight that this connection has characterized political decisions over the last four decades. Second, we show that in order to fully appreciate the impact of television on the determinants of vote choice, it is necessary to consider the wider



media diet of the voters explicitly, computing the proportion of televised (audiovisual) exposure over (non-audiovisual) newspapers exposure.

A methodological limitation of this study is worth mentioning. Having relied on quantitative measures of exposure to newspapers and televised political information, our measures are admittedly imperfect. As we have no information on media content, we cannot be sure of the extent to which individuals were exposed to party leaders' images on the different media. Carrying a media content analysis for the entirety of our period of analysis would be unfeasible, given the obstacles for data collection (Nai, 2018). For the same reason, longitudinal media content analyses, particularly regarding television, are also extremely rare. As of today, the single longitudinal case study of Germany found evidence supporting a personalization in televised media content (Schulz et al., 2005). Given the inexistence of longitudinal accounts of media content in televised news, we have relied on other studies suggesting, alternatively, a comparison between different media (van Aelst, Sheafer & Stayner, 2011), under the assumption that television coverage provides a type of communication more centered on leaders than in newspapers, as a result of the different nature of these platforms (van Aelst, 2007; Salgado, 2007). We substantiate the findings of these studies when it comes to voting behavior, demonstrating that the distinct characteristics of these two media yield different patterns of voting, with television, in particular, favoring a personalized voting behavior. In turn, this bears normative implications. The mediatization of politics through televised political communication led, among others, to the development of increasingly personalized electoral campaigns, the consideration of particular qualities in the candidates running for office and further attention to aspects pertaining to intimization or privatization (Sheafer, 2001; van Aelst et al., 2011). These developments may progressively contribute to stronger attention from voters to superficial personal aspects of electoral candidates, rather than substantial political qualities. In fact, a number of empirical studies points in this direction, by asserting that television reliant voters are more likely to take into account politicians' personality traits related to affective, non-competence-related dimensions (Lenz and Lawson, 2011).

When it comes to the implications of our findings for the study of media effects in the age of online campaigning, social media and information bubbles, we argue in favor of their timeliness. Indeed, we believe that understanding the effects of the composition of media usage patterns on electoral mechanisms will become even more pressing in the future. Andrew Chadwick highlights that a key persistent feature of media systems, of all media systems, is hybridity. As he puts it, "all older media were once newer and all newer media eventually get

older. But older media of any consequence are rarely entirely displaced by new media” (Chadwick, 2013: 24). In other words, it may be analytically inconclusive, and even conceptually inaccurate, to gauge a medium in isolation. Nowadays, only a minority of voters collects political information exclusively on traditional media platforms. Most voters today rather gather information pooling new and old media, mixing sources in a way that is consonant with their preferences, use intentions and taste. Moreover, research on social media usage reveals the wide heterogeneity of users in terms of personality traits (Zhong, Hardin, and Sun 2011), cultural values (Lewis and George 2008), and age difference (Yamamoto, Kushin, and Dalisay 2015). Thus, hybridization of the media environment and users’ heterogeneity favor the diffusion of variegated patterns of usage of new media tools. The diffusion of the internet as a provider of political information intertwines visual and non-verbal communication in much harder-to-disentangle patterns of content exposure. In this sense, our findings speak to the necessity to understand the respective effects of visual vs. textual communication brought about by online information providers (old and new). As of today, assessing the actual individual-level effect of these new patterns would require a whole new set of measures that may track the specific content of new media usage. For instance, when it comes to politics, are Facebook users using Facebook to read posts or rather to watch Facebook live streaming videos? Are newspaper websites’ readers actually reading the news or just watching the larger amount of video content offered by these sites? Current survey measures hosted in election studies cannot disentangle these patterns. Similar measurement difficulties have been raised for traditional media as well (Goldman, Mutz, and Dilliplane 2013; Prior 2013) and, clearly, there is no ideal solution in all respects so one has to weight pros and cons of measurement strategies. New techniques gathering browsing data (Guess 2014) may provide more fine-grained measures in the specific usage of new media, but no electoral survey has included this type of data so far. For the moment, we can only speculate that acknowledged mechanisms of self-selection into the content, activated and made widespread by the extremely high-choice character of new media, will further reinforce the heterogeneity in voters’ decision-making. Much like contemporary fragmented media environment are leading to a deepened political knowledge gap and to more polarized attitudes’ distributions in the electorate, the ability to self-select into visual or written content will reinforce the voters’ decisional mechanisms. The extent to which this is - or will be - the case represents an obvious avenue for future research at the crossroad between party competition, political communication, and electoral research.

## APPENDIX: CHAPTER 3

**Table A1.** List of parties included in the conditional logit analysis, by party family

Year	Country	Communist/Green	Social-Democrat	Christian/Conservative	Liberal
2013	Austria	Die Grünen	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs	Österreichische Volkspartei	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs
2005	Denmark	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
2007	Denmark	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
2011	Denmark	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
2003	Finland	Vasemmistoliitto	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue	Suomen Keskusta	Kansallinen Kokoomus
2007	Finland	Vasemmistoliitto	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue	Suomen Keskusta	Kansallinen Kokoomus
2011	Finland	Vasemmistoliitto	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue	Suomen Keskusta	Kansallinen Kokoomus
2002	Germany	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	-
2009	Germany	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
2013	Germany	Die Linke	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
1996	Greece	Synaspismos	PASOK	Nea Dimokratia	-
2007	Ireland	Green Party	Labour Party	Fianna Fail	Progressive Democrats
1990	Italy	Partito Comunista Italiano	Partito Socialista Italiano	Democrazia Cristiana	Partito Liberale Italiano
1996	Italy	Rifondazione Comunista	Partito Democratico della Sinistra	Forza Italia	-
2001	Italy	Rifondazione Comunista	Democratici di Sinistra	Forza Italia	Italia dei Valori
2006	Italy	Rifondazione Comunista	Democratici di Sinistra	Forza Italia	-
2008	Italy	Sinistra Arcobaleno	Partito Democratico	Popolo della Libertà	Italia dei Valori
2013	Italy	Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà	Partito Democratico	Popolo della Libertà	Scelta Civica
1986	Netherlands	-	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
1989	Netherlands	-	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
1994	Netherlands	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie

Netherlands	1998	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	2002	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	2006	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	2010	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Portugal	2002	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	CDS – Partido Popular	CDS – Partido Popular	Partido Social Democrata
Portugal	2005	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	Partido Socialista	CDS – Partido Popular	Partido Social Democrata
Portugal	2009	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	Partido Socialista	CDS – Partido Popular	Partido Social Democrata
Portugal	2015	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	Partido Socialista	-	Partido Social Democrata
Spain	2000	Izquierda Unida	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	-
Spain	2008	Izquierda Unida	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	-
Spain	2011	Izquierda Unida	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	Unión Progreso y Democracia
Spain	2015	Izquierda Unida	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	Ciudadanos
Spain	2016	Podemos	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	Ciudadanos
Sweden	1982	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1985	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1988	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1991	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1994	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1998	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	2002	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	2006	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	2010	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Switzerland	2003	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei
Switzerland	2007	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei
Switzerland	2011	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei
Switzerland	2015	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei

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UK	2015	Greens	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
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**Table A2.** Detailed list of question wording, answer categories and recoding strategy for newspapers items

Country	Year	Question wording	Answer scale	Recoding strategy	Notes
Austria	2013	How often do you read newspapers to learn about political events in Austria?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Almost every day</li> <li>2. Several times a week</li> <li>3. Several times a month</li> <li>4. Less frequently</li> <li>5. Never</li> </ol>	<p><i>Always:</i> 1  <i>Often:</i> 2  <i>Rarely:</i> 3  <i>Never:</i> 4, 5</p>	
Denmark	2005	How often: reading newspaper	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Every day</li> <li>2. 5-6 times a week</li> <li>3. 3-4 times a week</li> <li>4. 1-2 times a week</li> <li>5. Less than once a week</li> <li>6. Never</li> </ol> <p><i>Number of days per week</i></p>	<p><i>Always:</i> 1, 2  <i>Often:</i> 3  <i>Rarely:</i> 4  <i>Never:</i> 5, 6</p> <p><i>Always:</i> 7, 6  <i>Often:</i> 5, 4, 3  <i>Rarely:</i> 2, 1  <i>Never:</i> 0</p>	
Finland	2003 2007 2011	How much attention did you pay to media coverage of the parliamentary elections in newspaper articles?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A great deal of attention</li> <li>2. A fair amount of attention</li> <li>3. Only a little</li> <li>4. Paid no attention at all</li> </ol> <p><i>Number of days per week</i></p>	<p><i>Always:</i> 1  <i>Often:</i> 2  <i>Rarely:</i> 3  <i>Never:</i> 4</p>	
Germany	2002 2009 2013	Here on this list you can see different newspapers. On how many days of the week on average do you read reports on political events in Germany in [NEWSPAPER] during the election campaign?	<p><i>Number of days per week</i></p>	<p><i>Always:</i> 7, 6  <i>Often:</i> 5, 4, 3  <i>Rarely:</i> 2, 1  <i>Never:</i> 0</p>	Respondents were asked how often they read news on different newspapers. We have taken the value of the respondent's most often read newspaper
Ireland	2007	On a scale 0 - 7, where 0 means never and 7 means every day, how often do you do the following? Read the newspaper	<p><i>Number of days per week</i></p>	<p><i>Always:</i> 7, 6  <i>Often:</i> 5, 4, 3  <i>Rarely:</i> 2, 1  <i>Never:</i> 0</p>	

Italy	1990	Do you usually read a newspaper? If so, how frequently?	1. Don't read 2. Less than once a week 3. 1-2 days a week 4. 3-5 days a week 5. (Almost) Every day	<i>Always:</i> 5 <i>Often:</i> 4 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 2, 1
	1996			
	2001			
	2006			
	2008			
	2013	Do you usually read a newspaper – physically or online, excluding sports' news? If so, how frequently?	1. No, never 2. Less than once a week 3. 1 day a week 4. 2 days a week 5. 3 days a week 6. 4 days a week 7. 5 days a week 8. 6 days a week 9. Every day	<i>Always:</i> 9, 8 <i>Often:</i> 7, 6, 5 <i>Rarely:</i> 4, 3 <i>Never:</i> 2, 1
Netherlands	1986	When there is domestic news in the newspapers, for example news about governmental problems, how often do you read such news?	1. (Nearly) Always 2. Often 3. Now and then 4. Seldom or never 5. Does not read newspaper	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4, 5
	1989			
	1994			
	1998			
	2002			
	2006	How often do you read a newspaper?	1. (Almost) daily 2. A few times a week 3. A few times a month 4. Seldom or never	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4
	2010			
Portugal	2002	Frequency of readership of political news in the newspaper	1. Every day 2. Several times a week 3. Once a week 4. Less than once a week 5. Never	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4, 5
Portugal	2005	During the electoral campaign, how often did you follow political news in newspapers?	1. Daily/almost every day 2. 3-4 days a week 3. 1-2 days a week 4. Less frequently 5. Never	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4, 5

2009	During the electoral campaign, how often did you follow political news in newspapers or magazines, in paper or online?	1. Daily/almost every day 2. 3-4 days a week 3. 1-2 days a week 4. Less frequently 5. Never	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4, 5
2015			
2000	During this electoral campaign, could you tell me how frequently have you followed electoral and political information in the general newspapers?	1. Every day/almost every day 2. 4-5 days a week 3. 2-3 days a week 4. Only on the weekends 5. Rarely 6. Never or almost never	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 4, 5 <i>Never:</i> 6
2008			
2011			
2015			
2016			
1982	How often do you read news and articles about politics in the daily press?	1. Never 2. Occasionally 3. Often 4. Every day	<i>Always:</i> 4 <i>Often:</i> 3 <i>Rarely:</i> 2 <i>Never:</i> 1
1985			
1988			
1991			
1994			
1998			
2002			
2006			
2010			
2003	How many days/week does R read news in the newspaper	<i>Number of days per week</i>	<i>Always:</i> 7, 6 <i>Often:</i> 5, 4, 3 <i>Rarely:</i> 2, 1 <i>Never:</i> 0
2007			
2011			
2015	I would like to know how attentively have you followed, over the last days, political affairs on [newspapers]	1. Not at all attentive 2. Not very attentive 3. Rather attentive 4. Very attentive	<i>Always:</i> 4 <i>Often:</i> 3 <i>Rarely:</i> 2 <i>Never:</i> 1
2015	Do you regularly read about politics or current affairs in one or more newspapers (either online or in print)?	1. Yes 2. No	<i>Always:</i> n/a <i>Often:</i> 1 <i>Rarely:</i> n/a <i>Never:</i> 2
United Kingdom			



**Table A3.** Detailed list of question wording, answer categories and recoding strategy for television items

Country	Year	Question wording	Answer scale	Recoding strategy	Notes
Austria	2013	How often do you use the television to learn about political events in Austria?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Almost every day</li> <li>2. Several times a week</li> <li>3. Several times a month</li> <li>4. Less frequently</li> <li>5. Never</li> </ol>	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4, 5	
Denmark	2005	How often: news on [CHANNEL]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Every day</li> <li>2. 5-6 times a week</li> <li>3. 3-4 times a week</li> <li>4. 1-2 times a week</li> <li>5. Less than once a week</li> <li>6. Never</li> </ol>	<i>Always:</i> 1, 2 <i>Often:</i> 3 <i>Rarely:</i> 4 <i>Never:</i> 5, 6	Respondents were asked how often they watched TV news on 3 different channels (TV2 News; DR1; DR2). We have taken the value of the respondent's most watched news channel
	2007 2011	How often: TV news	<i>Number of days per week</i>	<i>Always:</i> 7, 6 <i>Often:</i> 5, 4, 3 <i>Rarely:</i> 2, 1 <i>Never:</i> 0	
Finland	2003 2011	How much attention did you pay to media coverage of the parliamentary elections in television news and current affairs programmes?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A great deal of attention</li> <li>2. A fair amount of attention</li> <li>3. Only a little</li> <li>4. Paid no attention at all</li> </ol>	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4	
	2007	How much important information did you get for your voting choice from news and current affairs programmes on television?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A great deal of attention</li> <li>2. A fair amount of attention</li> <li>3. Only a little</li> <li>4. Paid no attention at all</li> </ol>	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4	
Germany	2002	How often do you watch news casts on the first or second channel? What is meant here are the news casts of ARD or ZDF, namely Tagesschau, Tagesthemen, Heute and Heute-Journal.	<i>Number of days per week</i>	<i>Always:</i> 7, 6 <i>Often:</i> 5, 4, 3 <i>Rarely:</i> 2, 1 <i>Never:</i> 0	Respondents were asked how often they watched TV news on different channels. We have taken the value of the respondent's most watched news channel
	2009 2013	On average, on how many days of the week did you watch Tagesschau or Tagesthemen on ARD during the election campaign?	<i>Number of days per week</i>	<i>Always:</i> 7, 6 <i>Often:</i> 5, 4, 3 <i>Rarely:</i> 2, 1	Respondents were asked how often they watched TV news on different channels.

				Never: 0	We have taken the value of the respondent's most watched news channel
Greece	1996	During the electoral campaign, how frequently did you follow political news through television?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (Almost) Every day</li> <li>2. 3-4 days a week</li> <li>3. 1-2 days a week</li> <li>4. Less frequently</li> <li>5. Never or almost never</li> </ol>	<p><i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4, 5</p>	
Ireland	2007	On a scale 0 - 7, where 0 means never and 7 means every day, how often do you do the following? Watch TV news	<i>Number of days per week</i>	<p><i>Always:</i> 7, 6 <i>Often:</i> 5, 4, 3 <i>Rarely:</i> 2, 1 <i>Never:</i> 0</p>	
Italy	1990 2001 2006 2008 2013	Do you usually watch news programs? If so, how frequently?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Never</li> <li>2. Less than once a week</li> <li>3. 1-2 days a week</li> <li>4. 3-5 days a week</li> <li>5. (Almost) Every day</li> </ol>	<p><i>Always:</i> 5 <i>Often:</i> 4 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 2, 1</p>	
	1996	During the election campaign did you happen to see any TV news programmes? If so, how often?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Never</li> <li>2. Less than once a week</li> <li>3. 1-2 days a week</li> <li>4. 3-5 days a week</li> <li>5. (Almost) Every day</li> </ol>	<p><i>Always:</i> 5 <i>Often:</i> 4 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 2, 1</p>	
Netherlands	1986 1989 1994 1998 2002	Could you indicate on this showcard how often you generally watch the [CHANNEL] television newscast?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (Almost) daily</li> <li>2. 3-4 times per week</li> <li>3. 1-2 times per week</li> <li>4. Less than once a week</li> <li>5. Does not own a TV set</li> </ol>	<p><i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4, 5</p>	<p>Respondents were asked how often they watched TV news on different channels. We have taken the value of the respondent's most watched news channel</p>
	2006 2010	How often do you watch a newscast?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (Almost) daily</li> <li>2. 3-4 times per week</li> <li>3. 1-2 times per week</li> <li>4. Less than once a week</li> </ol>	<p><i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4, 5</p>	<p>Respondents were asked how often they watched TV news on different channels. We have taken the value of the respondent's most watched news channel</p>

Portugal	2002	Frequency watching news or programs about politics on television	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Every day</li> <li>2. Several times a week</li> <li>3. Once a week</li> <li>4. Less than once a week</li> <li>5. Never</li> </ol>	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4, 5
	2005	During the electoral campaign, how often did you follow political news on television?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Daily/almost every day</li> <li>2. 3-4 days a week</li> <li>3. 1-2 days a week</li> <li>4. Less frequently</li> <li>5. Never</li> </ol>	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4, 5
Spain	2000 2008 2011 2015 2016	During this electoral campaign, could you tell me how frequently have you followed electoral and political information on the television?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (Almost) Every day</li> <li>2. 4-5 days a week</li> <li>3. 2-3 days a week</li> <li>4. Only on the weekends</li> <li>5. Rarely</li> <li>6. Never or almost never</li> </ol>	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 4, 5 <i>Never:</i> 6
Sweden	1982 1985 1988 1991 1994 1998 2002 2006 2010	How often do you watch Rapport (TV, national channel 2)?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 6-7 days a week</li> <li>2. 3-5 days a week</li> <li>3. 1-2 days a week</li> <li>4. More seldom</li> <li>5. Never</li> </ol>	<i>Always:</i> 1 <i>Often:</i> 2 <i>Rarely:</i> 3 <i>Never:</i> 4, 5
Switzerland	2003 2007 2011	How many days/week does R watch news on TV	<i>Number of days per week</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not at all attentive</li> <li>2. Not very attentive</li> <li>3. Rather attentive</li> <li>4. Very attentive</li> </ol>	<i>Always:</i> 7, 6 <i>Often:</i> 5, 4, 3 <i>Rarely:</i> 2, 1 <i>Never:</i> 0
	2015	I would like to know how attentively have you followed, over the last days, political affairs on [television]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not at all attentive</li> <li>2. Not very attentive</li> <li>3. Rather attentive</li> <li>4. Very attentive</li> </ol>	<i>Always:</i> 4 <i>Often:</i> 3 <i>Rarely:</i> 2 <i>Never:</i> 1
United Kingdom	2015	On a typical day, how much time do you spend watching television news or programmes about politics and current affairs?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. None, no time at all</li> <li>2. Less than 1/2 hour</li> <li>3. 1/2 hour to 1 hour</li> </ol>	<i>Always:</i> 5, 4 <i>Often:</i> 3 <i>Rarely:</i> 2

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4. 1 to 2 hours      *Never: 1*  
5. More than 2 hours

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**Table A4.** Detailed list of leader evaluation items

Country	Year	Question wording	Answer scale	Recoding strategy
Austria	2013	How much do you like the following politicians? Please rate each politician on a scale from 0 to 10. 0 means you strongly dislike that politician and 10 means that you strongly like that politician.	0. Strongly dislike 10. Strongly like	<i>none</i>
Denmark	2005 2007 2011	I would like to ask you how well or bad you think of some of our political leaders when 0 means you think very bad about the person and 10 means you think really well about the person.	0. Very bad 10. Very good	<i>None</i>
Finland	2003 2007 2011	Rate the following leaders on a scale from 0 (strongly dislike) to 10 (strongly like).	0. Strongly dislike 10. Strongly like	<i>None</i>
Germany	2002	Generally speaking, what do you think of [LEADER] ? Please use the following scale. “+5” means that you have a very positive view of this politician, whereas “-5” means that you have a very negative view of this politician.	-5. Very negative view 5. Very positive view	5-points were added to the original scale, so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10
	2009 2013	Please tell me what you think about some leading politicians. Please use the scale from - 5 to + 5 for this purpose.	-5. Strongly dislike 5. Strongly like	5-points were added to the original scale, so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10
Greece	1996	We would like to know your feelings towards some persons and social organization on a scale from 0-10. If you feel very favorable towards this person, you can give him the highest score of 10; if you feel hostile towards this person you can give him a 0 (zero); if you feel absolutely neutral towards this person, you can give him a 5.	1. Hostile 10. Favorable	Values from 1 to 5 in the original scale were recoded by subtracting 1-point, so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10 with no observations in the middle point of the scale
Ireland	2007	And what do you think of the party leaders? After I read the name of a party leader, please rate them on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that candidate and 10 means that you strongly like that candidate.	0. Strongly dislike 10. Strongly like	<i>none</i>

Italy	1990	I shall now read you a list of national politicians. For each of them tell me whether you have ever heard of them and, if so, give them a score from 1 to 10 according to your opinion of them: 1 means a totally negative judgment and 10 means a totally positive judgment.	1. Totally negative 10. Totally positive	Values from 1 to 5 in the original scale were recoded by subtracting 1-point, so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10 with no observations in the middle point of the scale <i>none</i>
	1996			
	2001			
	2006			
	2008	I shall now read you a list of national politicians. For each of them tell me whether you have ever heard of them and, if so, give them a score from 0 to 10 according to your opinion of them: 0 means a totally negative judgment and 10 means a totally positive judgment.	0. Totally negative 10. Totally positive	
	2013			
Netherlands	1986	<i>See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press</i>		<i>none</i>
	1989			
	1994			
	1998			
	2002	I would also like to know how sympathetic you find the following politicians. You can give each [politician] a score between 0 and 100. The more sympathetic you find a [politician], the higher the score you give. A score of 50 means that you find a [politician] neither sympathetic nor unsympathetic.	0. Very unsympathetic 100. Very sympathetic	The original values were divided by 10 and then rounded to the nearest integer value, so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10
	2006	I would like to know from you how sympathetic you find party leaders. To this end you can give points between 0 and 10 to the respective party leaders. 0 means that you find this party leader very unsympathetic and 10 means that you find this party leader very sympathetic.	0. Very unsympathetic 10. Very sympathetic	<i>none</i>
	2010			
Portugal	2002	Degree of sympathy for political leaders	0. Great antipathy 10. Great sympathy	<i>none</i>
	2005			
	2009	I would like to know what you think about each one of our political leaders, using a scale from 0 to 10, where ZERO means Great dislike for the political leader, TEN means that you fell Great sympathy for the leader and FIVE you feel indifference for the leader	0. Great dislike 10. Great sympathy	<i>none</i>
	2015			

Spain	2000	I'm going to read out a series of political leaders' names. Please tell me, for each one, whether you know of them and how you value their political performance.	0. Very bad 10. Very good	<i>none</i>
	2008	Grade them from 0 to 10, where 0 means that you value them "very bad" and 10 means that you value them "very good".		
	2011			
	2015			
	2016			
Sweden	1982	<i>See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press</i>		
	1985			<i>none</i>
	1988			
	1991			
	1994			
	1998			
	2002	On this card there is a kind of scale. I would like you to use it to illustrate how much you like or dislike the different [party leaders]. Use 'plus' figures for [party leaders] you like and 'minus' figures for [party leaders] parties you dislike.	-5. Strongly dislike 5. Strongly like	5-points were added to the original scale, so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10 <i>none</i>
	2006	I'd like to know what you think about each of our [political leaders]. Please rate the [political leaders] on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that [political leader] and 10 means that you strongly like that [political leader].	0. Strongly dislike 10. Strongly like	
	2010	On this card there is a kind of scale. I would like you to use it to illustrate how much you like or dislike the different [party leaders]. Use 'plus' figures for [party leaders] you like and 'minus' figures for [party leaders] parties you dislike.	-5. Strongly dislike 5. Strongly like	5-points were added to the original scale, so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10 <i>none</i>
Switzerland	2003	And can you tell me what sympathy you have for the following political figures on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "no sympathy" and 10 "very strong sympathy"?	0. No sympathy 10. Very strong sympathy	<i>none</i>
	2007			
	2011			
	2015			
United Kingdom	2015	Now, let's think more generally about the party leaders. Using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how do you feel about...	0. Strongly dislike 10. Strongly like	<i>none</i>

**Table A5.** List of parties included in the conditional logit analysis, by party family

Country	Year	Communist/Green	Social-Democrat	Christian/Conservative	Liberal
Austria	2013	Die Grünen	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs	Österreichische Volkspartei	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs
Denmark	2005	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
Denmark	2007	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
Denmark	2011	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Socialdemokraterne	Det Konservative Folkeparti	Venstre
Finland	2003	Vasemmistoliitto	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue	Suomen Keskusta	Kansallinen Kokoomus
Finland	2007	Vasemmistoliitto	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue	Suomen Keskusta	Kansallinen Kokoomus
Finland	2011	Vasemmistoliitto	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue	Suomen Keskusta	Kansallinen Kokoomus
Germany	2002	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	-
Germany	2009	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Germany	2013	Die Linke	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	Freie Demokratische Partei
Greece	1996	Synaspismos	PASOK	Nea Dimokratia	-
Ireland	2007	Green Party	Labour Party	Fianna Fail	Progressive Democrats
Italy	1990	Partito Comunista Italiano	Partito Socialista Italiano	Democrazia Cristiana	Partito Liberale Italiano
Italy	1996	Rifondazione Comunista	Partito Democratico della Sinistra	Forza Italia	-
Italy	2001	Rifondazione Comunista	Democratici di Sinistra	Forza Italia	Italia dei Valori
Italy	2006	Rifondazione Comunista	Democratici di Sinistra	Forza Italia	-
Italy	2008	Sinistra Arcobaleno	Partito Democratico	Popolo della Libertà	Italia dei Valori
Italy	2013	Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà	Partito Democratico	Popolo della Libertà	Scelta Civica
Netherlands	1986	-	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	1989	-	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	1994	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie



Netherlands	1998	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	2002	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	2006	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Netherlands	2010	Groenlinks	Partij van de Arbeid	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
Portugal	2002	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	CDS – Partido Popular	Partido Social Democrata
Portugal	2005	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	CDS – Partido Popular	Partido Social Democrata
Portugal	2009	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	CDS – Partido Popular	Partido Social Democrata
Portugal	2015	Coligação Democrática Unitária	Partido Socialista	-	Partido Social Democrata
Spain	2000	Izquierda Unida	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	-
Spain	2008	Izquierda Unida	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	-
Spain	2011	Izquierda Unida	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	Unión Progreso y Democracia
Spain	2015	Izquierda Unida	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	Ciudadanos
Spain	2016	Podemos	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Partido Popular	Ciudadanos
Sweden	1982	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1985	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1988	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1991	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1994	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	1998	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	2002	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	2006	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Sweden	2010	Vänsterpartiet	Socialdemokraterna	Moderaterna	Liberalerna
Switzerland	2003	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei
Switzerland	2007	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei

Switzerland	2011	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei
Switzerland	2015	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz	Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei
UK	2015	Greens	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats

**Table A6.** Conditional logit models: full estimation results

	(1)	(2)
Leader evaluation	1.267*** (0.0182)	1.273*** (0.0184)
Partisanship	0.927*** (0.0125)	0.927*** (0.0125)
Ideological proximity	0.974*** (0.0144)	0.976*** (0.0144)
Leader evaluation*	-	0.106***
Newspaper/Television-Centrism		(0.0173)
<b><i>Far Left</i></b>		
Age	-0.00886*** (0.00176)	-0.00899*** (0.00176)
Female	-0.0184 (0.0523)	-0.0173 (0.0524)
Educational attainment	0.138*** (0.0358)	0.138*** (0.0358)
Interest in politics	0.168** (0.0591)	0.169** (0.0592)
Newspaper/Television-Centrism	-0.0342 (0.0283)	-0.0450 (0.0285)
<b><i>Conservatives/Christian-Democrats</i></b>		
Age	0.00480*** (0.00119)	0.00472*** (0.00119)
Female	0.0228 (0.0377)	0.0209 (0.0378)
Educational attainment	0.0939*** (0.0266)	0.0933*** (0.0266)
Interest in politics	0.0743 (0.0433)	0.0773 (0.0433)
Newspaper/Television-Centrism	0.00462	0.00597

	(0.0206)	(0.0207)
<hr/>		
<i>Liberals</i>		
<hr/>		
Age	0.00556***	0.00559***
	(0.00130)	(0.00130)
Female	0.0804	0.0777
	(0.0413)	(0.0413)
Educational attainment	0.233***	0.234***
	(0.0287)	(0.0287)
Interest in politics	0.0367	0.0315
	(0.0474)	(0.0474)
Newspaper/Television-Centrism	-0.0575*	-0.0470*
	(0.0224)	(0.0227)
<hr/>		
Log-likelihood	-22422.887	-22399.027
Wald chi-2	17055.73	17052.55
AIC	45141.8	45096.1
BIC	46657.6	46622.1
N (respondents)	207322	207322
N (observations)	58945	58945
<hr/>		

*Note:* Cell entries are standardized logistic regression estimates. Standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered robust at the respondent-level. All models include year and country fixed-effects. Reference category: Social-Democrats \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table A7.** Full estimation results for Hierarchical logit models (HLM), by party family

	<b>Far Left</b>	<b>Social-Democrats</b>	<b>Conservatives/ Christian-Dem</b>	<b>Liberals</b>
Age	-0.0208*** (0.00144)	-0.00872*** (0.000839)	-0.00256** (0.000926)	-0.00821*** (0.00101)
Gender (Female=1)	-0.00876 (0.0432)	0.0464 (0.0268)	0.0227 (0.0300)	0.0402 (0.0327)
Educational attainment	0.219*** (0.0293)	-0.169*** (0.0187)	-0.0542* (0.0212)	0.198*** (0.0229)
Interest in politics	-0.212*** (0.0468)	-0.367*** (0.0298)	-0.328*** (0.0330)	-0.322*** (0.0367)
Newspaper/Television-Centrism	-0.121*** (0.0305)	0.000838 (0.0151)	-0.0389* (0.0188)	-0.0811*** (0.0197)
Ideological proximity	-1.223*** (0.0364)	-1.115*** (0.0190)	-1.394*** (0.0241)	-1.245*** (0.0268)
Partisanship	0.924*** (0.0198)	1.770*** (0.0243)	1.470*** (0.0254)	1.119*** (0.0215)
Leader evaluations	1.042*** (0.0319)	0.990*** (0.0187)	1.198*** (0.0235)	0.897*** (0.0228)
Leader evaluations *Newspaper/Television-Centrism	0.0784** (0.0277)	0.0727*** (0.0173)	0.108*** (0.0204)	0.111*** (0.0197)
Constant	-2.634*** (0.162)	0.696*** (0.108)	-0.983*** (0.173)	-1.858*** (0.193)
Random intercept (STUDYID)	-0.507*** (0.120)	-0.725*** (0.109)	-0.00196 (0.105)	0.0518 (0.114)
Log-likelihood	-7960.1508	-18468.441	-15157.122	-12881.007
Wald chi-2	5267.89	12609.67	10831.92	7258.95
AIC	15942.3	36958.9	30336.2	25784.0
BIC	16038.2	37057.8	30435.0	25880.4

N (respondents)	45040	59503	58611	47397
N (parties)	41	48	47	42

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*Note:* Cell entries are standardized logistic regression estimates. Standard errors (in parentheses). All models include random intercepts at the election study level (STUDYUD). \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Chapter 4: Fostering turnout?: Assessing party leaders' capacity to mobilize voters<sup>19</sup>

### Introduction

Recent research on voting behaviour has confirmed the existence of a trend towards candidate-centred politics. While long ago the media and public discourse had emphasized the role of individual political actors in contemporary politics, such claims had only found mixed evidence in empirical studies. More recently, a thorough consideration of the temporal dimension, the effort to develop comparative analyses, and both theoretical and methodological refinements, produced consistent evidence on the importance of leaders as determinants of vote choice (Garzia, 2014; Lobo & Curtice, 2014). However important, these contributions have moved straightforwardly to examining leaders' effects on vote choice without carefully considering their potential impact on the baseline decision to turn out to the ballot box. While leaders have been demonstrated to influence choice over different party options, this is likely to be preceded by an impact over turnout decisions. In impacting vote choice, leader effects can operate in two possible ways: a) capturing votes who otherwise would belong to his/her party's competitors or b) motivating individuals who otherwise would not vote at all to vote for his/her party. Therefore, just as party identification expresses a preference across parties which simultaneously drives individuals to vote and to select a given party rather than another, attitudes towards leaders could act in a similar fashion – if a leader is sufficiently appealing to influence vote choice, she also could be a driver of participation in the first place.

At the policy-making level, the capacity of leaders to connect with the electorate, counterbalance disengagement trends and mobilize voters to go to the ballots seems to be more widely recognised, as illustrated by the recent *Spitzenkandidaten* initiative. In an attempt to increase turnout rates in the 2014 European Parliament elections, the European Parliament's political groups have decided to publicly support a lead candidate for the presidency of the

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<sup>19</sup> This chapter has been published in *Electoral Studies* and it is reproduced in this thesis in accordance with the copyright transfer agreement signed between myself and Elsevier on October 1, 2018. The reference for the publication of this article is the following: Silva, F. F. (2018). Fostering turnout?: Assessing leaders' capacity to mobilize voters. *Electoral Studies*, 56: 61-79. DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2018.09.013

European Commission. In what constitutes an example of the importance attributed to individual political actors in contemporary politics – even at the transnational level –, for the first time voters were given the possibility to have a say on which candidate they wanted ahead of the European Commission. Facing increasing Euroscepticism and disengagement in European elections, this was perceived as an effective strategy to enhance EU democracy and promote more participated elections in a context of personalization of politics.

The generalized decline in turnout rates across contemporary Western democracies is a symptom of the dealignment process at the origin of the personalization of politics, establishing a theoretical relationship for the mechanism through which leaders could impact turnout decisions. Yet, it is still to be determined to what extent can voters' evaluations of leaders have an effect on turnout. Likewise, studies on individual-level turnout have largely disregarded the role of political leaders in stimulating electoral participation.

This study aims to fill this gap shared by the personalization of politics and the turnout literature. In this way, it attempts to offer a contribution by drawing attention to the mobilizing potential of political leaders and discussing the possible relevance of a more frequent inclusion of variables accounting for voters' assessments of the candidates running for election in turnout models.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section problematizes the relationship between turnout and the personalization of politics, shedding light on the potential mechanisms through which turnout rates can be affected by the performance of party leaders. The third section describes the data and methods used in the empirical analysis. The fourth section presents the main results, followed by a section including various robustness tests. Section 6 extends the results' section by exploring potential contextual effects of the political and electoral system as moderators. Finally, the conclusions of the study are discussed in the last section.

### **Turnout and the personalization of politics: a missing link**

The personalization of politics refers to the process through which individual political actors have been gaining increased importance compared to political parties (Karvonen, 2010). Within



the framework of this thesis, over the last decades we have been witnessing a tendency towards a greater preponderance of party leaders in the political arena (Wattenberg, 1991). This has been particularly notorious in the media discourse: political content is framed around the visible faces of political parties, executives became named after their leaders, personality profiles are thoroughly compared, and televised debates between party leaders are discussed by media pundits as a decisive factor to electoral outcomes. Also political parties have contributed to this trend by focusing their communication strategies in their leaders through the development of increasingly individualized campaigns (Lisi & Santana-Pereira, 2014; Zittel & Gschwend, 2008); broadening their leader selection procedures to wider selectorates, ultimately resulting in the proliferation of primaries in many European political parties (Cross & Pilet, 2015; Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Kenig, 2009); and enhancing the leader's role within the contemporary types of political parties by conceding them more power and autonomy to make individualized decisions (Lobo, 2008). At the electoral system level, numerous European countries have been implementing personalizing reforms, altering electoral rules so that citizens can express their preferences for candidates and have a greater decision-power over the allocation of seats (Renwick & Pilet, 2016). Lastly, multiple studies have demonstrated that voters' evaluations of political leaders have an effect on voting behaviour (Aarts, Blais & Schmitt, 2011; Bittner, 2011; Garzia, 2013a; Lobo & Curtice, 2014) and that this impact has been growing across time (Garzia, 2014; Garzia, Silva & De Angelis, 2018).

Despite recent studies having established that assessments of party leaders do have an impact on individual vote choice, research on the personalization of politics has not yet devoted attention to a former aspect of the voting decision process: the decision to turn out. The relationship between leader effects and vote choice has been drawn without any reflection on the intermediate stage when the voter decides whether to go to the polls or to refrain from voting. Since leaders were demonstrated to have an impact on voters' choices over different parties, it seems plausible that at least some of these voters are also driven to the polls by the appeal of political leaders.

The theoretical framework underlying research confirming leader effects on vote choice applies similarly to individual-level turnout. Individualization and the process of dealignment weakened the long-standing bonds between voters and political parties. Following the erosion

of cleavages which structured voting behaviour, voters have become gradually detached from the set of social and political attitudes in the origin of party identification. With individualization, group-based ideological alignments on the basis of the political cleavages have faded. This has led voters to become increasingly unconstrained from the identification bonds resulting from previous alignments with political parties (Dalton, 2012; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000). Dalton (2000: 30-31) estimates the number of individuals who identify with a political party to have declined, for example, about 18% in Sweden, 16% in the United States, 15% in Germany, and 14% in France, in just a few decades. Alignments, and the cleavages in their origin, conditioned not only vote choice but also turnout decisions. The determinants of turnout and vote choice have historically largely coincided, which is unsurprising since motivations on the grounds of decisions upon the latter are inevitably extensive to the former. Vote choice presupposes a coherent behaviour regarding turnout since it is impossible to choose between parties without having cast a vote, and the reasons which drive an individual to choose a party over another are very much associated with the reasons that lead him/her to turn out instead of abstaining. Therefore, it follows that a structural change in the determinants of the latter element of the voting calculus are tied to transformations in the more primary stage of the decision-making process. Thus, if rather than repeatedly following party heuristics, voters have become more sensible to short-term factors in their voting choice decisions – such as candidates or performance assessments –, the same factors are likely to determine turnout decisions.

Moreover, given the importance of dealignment as a key cause of the personalization of politics, and the fact that one of the most evident symptoms of this process has been the generalized decline in voter turnout rates across contemporary Western democracies (Blais & Rubenson, 2013), there are theoretical reasons to expect an effect of leader evaluations on turnout decisions. The few studies which have linked dealignment with leader effects have focused exclusively on whether leader evaluations have a higher impact on swing voters, late deciders or voters without party identification (Gidengil, 2011; Lobo, 2014a). The turnout dimension of the dealignment process has been surprisingly neglected thus far, although an analysis of turnout decisions with a particular focus on the impact of party leaders appears to be theoretically pertinent.

The potential of political leaders to act as mobilizing agents and foster turnout has recently been acknowledged by policy-makers at the European Union level. The elections for the European Parliament have historically been poorly participated, not reaching the 50% threshold of turnout since 1999. The decision for the *Spitzenkandidaten* strategy in the 2014 European Parliament elections, comes with a recognition of the potential of candidates to increase the salience of the elections and mobilize more voters to cast a ballot, “raising the turnout for European elections by strengthening the link between the elections of the representatives of the citizens with the selection and election process of the head of the European executive” (European Commission 2013: 6).

A recent study assesses the impact of this initiative on turnout decisions and finds a mobilizing effect of candidate recognition and campaign activity of the three most visible candidates on turnout; additionally, candidate recognition was also found to strengthen the impact of campaign activities on turnout (Schmitt, Hobolt & Popa, 2015). Having found such effects in second-order elections, where arguably voters still had very limited awareness of the candidates running for election, it can be argued the effect could even be stronger in first-order elections. In the latter type, campaigns are more intense and personalized (canvassing is easier, the candidates are more familiar, their presence in the media is stronger, and TV debates assume a major importance) and voters are also more prone to be recipients of political messages and information.

Noticeably, also the individual-level turnout literature has disregarded the relationship between turnout and political leaders, whether measured through voters’ evaluations of leaders’ personality traits or general leader evaluation scales. Apart from studies on American presidential elections (Adams, Dow & Merrill, 2006), the role of candidates in voters’ turnout decisions in general elections has been largely ignored. This is puzzling given the importance early attributed by Campbell and his colleagues (Campbell et al., 1960) to the general role of attitudes on voting behaviour and the specific consideration of attitudes towards candidates in their research. Furthermore, within the framework of these psychological models, attitudinal elements have often been demonstrated to be associated with turnout, as is the case with attitudes towards the EU (Kentmen-Cin, 2017) and voting and elections (Blais, 2014). Therefore, attitudes towards party leaders, as increasingly relevant actors in contemporary

politics, could also play a role in citizens' turnout decisions. In this sense, also from the point of view of individual-level turnout literature, it would be relevant to assess to what extent do leaders impact turnout decisions.

This study explores this missing link by taking a step back in the decision-making process and addressing the effects of voters' evaluations of party leaders on turnout decisions, hypothesizing that positive evaluations of leaders stimulate individuals to participate in elections. In addition, in line with previous research that demonstrated that, on vote choice, leaders may have a differentiated impact across respondents' degree of dealignment (Gidengil, 2011; Lobo, 2014a), it tests whether such leader effects on turnout are stronger on particularly dealigned voters, i.e., those lacking a party identification. Further, it also tests whether these effects are stronger for individuals who have been abstaining in past elections. The reasoning being that individuals who did not vote for the previous election are more likely to be structurally dealigned and thus more influenced by factors such as political leaders rather than party evaluations. With these theoretical expectations in mind, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H1: Voters' evaluations of party leaders have a positive effect on their probability to turn out

H2: Leader effects on turnout are particularly impactful on independent voters

H2.1.: Leader effects on turnout are inversely related to voters' degree of party identification

H2.2.: Leader effects on turnout are stronger among voters who have abstained in the previous election

Wattenberg (2000: 71-72) estimates turnout rates to have declined, for example, around 19% in France, 15% in the United States, and 11% in the United Kingdom and Germany over the last half century. If leaders are found to have a mobilizing potential and the capacity to motivate individuals who otherwise would exclude themselves from participating in elections to vote, the personalization of politics may be argued to play a beneficial role in reconnecting

voters with politics. Furthermore, the dealignment process would not necessarily mean a definitive large-scale retreat from politics but could be attenuated or even partially reversed by the positive effect of leaders.

In addition to the advanced hypotheses, a second body of expectations can be added regarding the potential moderating role of political and electoral systems on leaders' impact on turnout decisions. In line with findings from previous studies who found leader effects to be stronger in presidential contexts (Curtice & Hunjan, 2011; Curtice & Lisi, 2015), the existence of differences in leader effects across different political systems is explored. In addition, following Balmas et al. (2014) theoretical distinction between centralized and decentralized personalization, electoral systems' features favouring decentralized personalization are considered, as the latter type of personalization may depress party leader effects. In specific, it is explored a) whether (semi-)presidential regimes' institutional design is more favourable to the existence of leader effects on turnout; b) whether smaller district sizes are harmful to party leader effects on turnout; and c) whether the possibility to cast a personalized vote dampens leader effects on turnout. A further theoretical account of these relationships and the empirical results of this exploratory analysis are provided in Section 6.

Details on the dataset, variables and overall analytical strategy used to test the hypotheses follow in the next section.

## **Data and methods**

### ***Variable selection***

Given the variety of theoretical approaches to the study of individual-level turnout in contemporary democracies, difficulties arise to build a balanced model which is still able to account for the multitude of factors impacting turnout decisions. Unsurprisingly, a large number of covariates are frequently included in turnout models. However, since this is a thoroughly studied topic with results accumulated as a consequence of several decades of quality research, it is now possible to select the most accurate predictors in order to build parsimonious and informative models.

Recently, Smets and van Ham (2013) have conducted a meta-analysis of individual-level research on voter turnout, accounting for 90 studies published over the first decade of this century on ten top-journals in political science and political behaviour. In this relevant contribution the authors analyse over 170 different independent variables and rate them as a result of their performance in the studies analysed. The authors consider six models of turnout: the resource model focuses on the conditioning role of voters' resources in determining their participation; the mobilization model explores the mobilizing ability of parties and other interest groups in driving turnout; the socialization model emphasizes the role of socialization in the formation of political attitudes and behaviours; rational choice models highlight the cost-benefit calculus of turning out to vote; the psychological model centres around voters' cognitive characteristics; and the institutional model explores the influence of the political system on citizens decisions to vote.

Smets and van Ham define a variable's success rate as a result of a ponderation of its *successes*<sup>20</sup> and the *number of tests* including this variable.<sup>21</sup> For the present study, the variables with a success rate over 60% were pre-selected to be included in the individual-level turnout model, largely covering the abovementioned streams of literature. This threshold was established for theoretical reasons since many of these variables do no longer hold theoretical pertinence; methodological reasons, since from a model estimation point of view parsimonious models tend to be preferable; and practical reasons, because the larger the number of covariates, the more likely it is that they are not going to be present in all election studies considered, thus harming comparability efforts. Admittedly, this decision comes with some caveats such as not taking into account effect size but only statistical significance, although the authors come up with a proxy measure of average effect size.

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<sup>20</sup> "In the vote-counting procedure, each test of a hypothesis is considered a 'success' when a coefficient is statistically significant and has the hypothesized direction. On the other hand, the hypothesis test is considered a 'failure' when it is found not to be significant and an 'anomaly' when the coefficient is statistically significant but is in the opposite direction than expected." (Smets and van Ham, 2013, 346)

<sup>21</sup>  $success\ rate = (successes/number\ of\ tests) * 100$

### *Dataset and variable description*

The data used in this analysis is derived from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), a collaborative project which gathers data from worldwide post-electoral surveys through the incorporation of a common module in the National Election Studies (NES) of participant countries. Each country's module is then compiled in the common dataset, allowing for data comparability on elections carried in a wide range of countries across similar time periods. The full releases of modules 3 (2006-11) and 4 (2011-16) were used, yielding a total of 50 election studies from 25 Western democracies – a full list of countries, election years and respective sample sizes is available in Table A1 in the appendix.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, whenever a pertinent variable was missing from the CSES study for a specific country, in order not to exclude this country or sacrifice the model by excluding relevant variables, a more recent version of the data from that country's NES was used. Every time the NES had the missing variable it substituted the country sample of the CSES, to have more complete and up to date data – this was the case with Spain<sup>23</sup>.

The harmonization of a large number of election studies from several countries under a common framework provided by the CSES was the main reason to prefer this dataset. This facilitates cross-country analysis in comparative studies, while providing quality data on the relevant independent variables to test this study's propositions. It also avoids potential language barriers faced when collecting NES individually. Nevertheless, due to its comparative nature, the set of variables contained in the CSES modules is somewhat restricted and this constrains the number of possible covariates to be featured in the model. For example, media exposure and socio-economic status were relevant variables according to the pre-established criteria but could not be included in the model because they were unavailable.

Based on the previously established threshold based on Smets and van Ham (2013), the following variables were included (a full list of the variables, their measurements and summary

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<sup>22</sup> Countries which enforce compulsory voting were not included. Italy (2013) and the UK (2010) were added to the sample through their respective NES.

<sup>23</sup> In CSES Module 3 Spain was missing the "turnout on the previous election". Spain was also missing the variable referring to the organisational membership.

statistics is available in Table A2 in the appendix). The dependent variable *turnout* dichotomizes individuals who have voted from those who have not (0: Did not vote; 1: Voted). Age was divided into age groups (1: Less than 30; 2: 30-39; 3: 40-49; 4: 50-59; 5: 60-69; 6: More than 70), *gender* as 1: Male and 2: Female, and *education* into 1: no formal education, 2: primary education, 3: secondary education, and 4: tertiary education – these were the only socio-demographic variables added, given the decrease in the explanatory power of these variables documented in the literature and the fact that these were the only variables from the resource model surpassing the pre-defined criteria. *Organizational membership*, from the mobilization model, was built from a compound index of the following dichotomous questions (0: No; 1: Yes): “Are you a member of a union?”, “Are you a member of a business or employers’ association?”, “Are you a member of a farmers’ association?”, and “Are you a member of a professional association?”. Whenever the respondent answered positively to at least one of these questions organizational membership was coded as 1; if the respondent always answered negatively organizational membership was coded as 0. *Turnout on the previous election* refers to rational choice models and is the most powerful control. Voting is a learning and habit-forming process and hence having voted on previous elections minimizes the costs of voting for current elections and repeatedly reinforces the probability to vote along the life course. Past voting is usually highly predictive of current turnout, especially when it reports to the last elections held. It was dichotomized into 0: did not vote in the previous elections and 1: voted on the previous election. *Strength of party identification* was coded as follows: not having a party identification (0), not very close (1), somewhat close (2), and very close (3). *Political efficacy*<sup>24</sup> was measured through the question “Who people vote for makes a difference?” and *political sophistication*<sup>25</sup> was built out of three political knowledge questions identical across CSES electoral studies. These three variables are categorized into psychological models.

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<sup>24</sup> Scale from 1: Who people vote for won’t make a difference to 5: Who people vote for can make a big difference.

<sup>25</sup> 0: All answers incorrect; 1: One correct answer; 2: Two correct answers; 3: All answers correct. In Module 4, four political knowledge questions were available, rather than three. To mirror the procedure adopted for Module 3, only the first three of these questions were considered.



Political attitudes towards parties and leaders, from rational choice models, were operationalized in the variables *rating of the respondent's most liked party*<sup>26</sup> and *rating of the respondent's most liked leader*. The CSES – as all the NES used – asks respondents to rate each party and leader running for election on a 0-10 like-dislike scale, leading to a set of different variables measuring each party/leader's likeability. From a modelling perspective, including one variable per each leader and party would render the results incomparable across countries and impossible to interpret. Instead, the strategy employed was to take the value of the party and leader highest rated, among all options for each country, and create the *most liked leader* and *party* variables. Besides, it seems reasonable to assume that, in principle, if any party or leader is to have an impact on turnout decisions that will be the party or leader most liked by the respondent.

### ***Independent variables***

The use of leader like-dislike scales has been preferred over the use of variables capturing leaders' personal attributes solely due to methodological constraints, as there is no reason to assume that the same kind of relationship would not hold had the latter been used instead. Nevertheless, the inclusion of variables tapping leaders' personal attributes in European election studies (which constitute core focus of the argument) is very limited. Its use over like-dislike scales would result in a very restricted sample of countries. Since the aim of this study is to demonstrate the widespread importance of leader evaluations for turnout decisions in contemporary Western democracies, a large-N comparative approach has been privileged. Furthermore, such an approach would not be possible using the CSES dataset. As such, important advantages for comparative studies such as having harmonized variables using the same question wording across countries would have to be discarded. Finally, the availability of like-dislike scales for both leaders and parties allows for direct comparisons between them using the same measurement scales, which would be impossible using personal attributes. In sum,

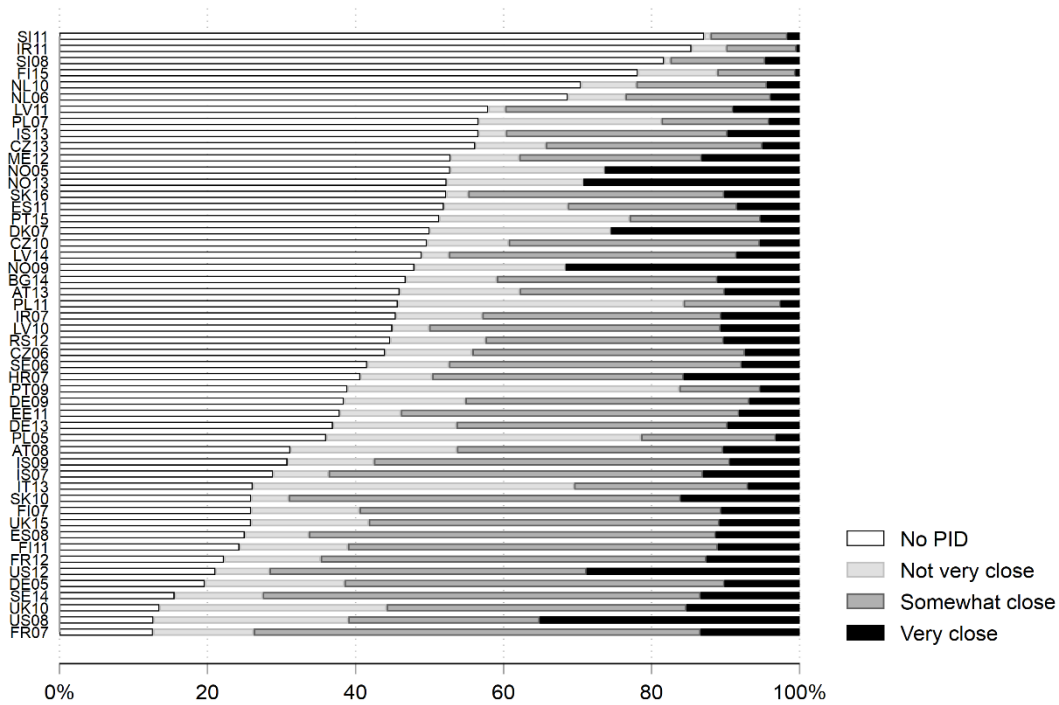
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<sup>26</sup> This variable was not available in the Spanish and the Italian National Election Studies. Propensities to vote were used in its place and coded in the same way.

despite acknowledging the potentials of a framework including leaders' personal attributes, using like-dislike scales serves better the overall purpose of the study.

Using like-dislike scales to measure both party and leader evaluations also allows to capture for short-term variations in party and leader likeability, which are not measured through party identification variables, designed to reflect the stability of an enduring affective relationship. In the context of pronounced decline of party identification over the past decades, larger shares of the electorate have been reporting not having an identification with any political party (Dalton, 2000). However, a considerable share of these individuals continues to vote, to nurture interest for politics, and even to be quite politically sophisticated (Dalton, 2012). Non-identifiers have been shown to make short-term assessments of the performances of political parties and candidates and take them into account in their voting decision (Fiorina, 1981). The increase of swing voters and late deciders also demonstrates the growing consideration of short-term assessments (Dalton, 2012; Lavine, Johnston & Steenbergen, 2012; Lobo, 2014a). In conclusion, a substantial part of the electorate does not have enduring loyalty bonds with political parties and therefore its proximity to political parties cannot be measured on a long-term basis. The considerable number of voters without an identification with a political party is noticeable in this study's data, although with some variation among election studies (Figure 1).

**Figure 1 – Distribution of strength of party identification by election study**



For this reason, the use of likeability scales for both party and leader evaluations gains pertinence because it can account for the volatility of party preferences and apply to types of voters who do not have a party identification. These range from the disengaged voter who sporadically is mobilized by a party or leader, to the politically independent assiduous voter whose ballot is not promised to any party or leader beforehand but is contingent on progressive assessments made on the run.

Moreover, the joint consideration of party and leader evaluations is important from a theoretical point of view, given the everlasting debate about party and leader effects, and their possible interdependence. Despite an overwhelming majority of studies – particularly the most recent ones – providing evidence in favour of the personalization of politics, there are also some studies finding only limited effects, or a stronger effect of party attachments on voting behaviour (e.g. Curtice & Hunjan, 2011; Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011). The same can be argued regarding election campaigns (Kriesi, 2012; Wilke & Reinmann, 2001). Hence, the phenomenon is not

entirely undisputed, as parties are still an importance reference, at least to some voters. Therefore, it is still important to consider the role parties may still hold and its interplay with leader evaluations.

Finally, the use of like-dislike scales is sometimes criticized because of being a relative measure, varying according to each individual's subjective value attribution to each point of the scale. Moreover, it has been argued that it is unclear which factors voters actually do consider when they rate parties or leaders based on their *likeability*, casting some doubts about what exactly is being measured (Fiorina 1981: 154). This distortion problem, named Differential Item Functioning (DIF), has been most notoriously addressed by Aldrich and McKelvey (1977) and, more recently, Hare et al. (2015). To account for this issue, two different measures of leader evaluations – an absolute and a relative – and their vulnerability to DIF were considered (see section 5.2. for a detailed description of the measures). While the absolute measure was halved when accounting for latent perceptual distortions, the relative measure remained virtually unaltered. In any case, the identification of a strong convergence between the two measures (as in Figure 5, section 5.2.) relaxes concerns regarding DIF.

### ***Analytical strategy***

Regarding the model estimation strategy adopted in next section, logistic regression models with fixed election-study effects were used. These models are suitable for this type of large-N analysis because they account for different sample sizes and country/election-study specificities which could produce biased the estimates. In this way, the differences in time and among countries across election studies are controlled for. As reported at the end of the results' section, the estimations were subjected to leave-one-out cross-validation tests to check for outliers which might be driving the results. The results from section 4 were also subjected to an extensive battery of robustness tests in section 5, focusing on alternative measurements of the key variables (leader and party evaluations, as well as party identification) and subjects' ex-post rationalization on reported evaluations.

In section 6, instead, the model estimation strategy considered contextual moderator variables at the election-study level, introduced to explore the existence of differences in effects

across political and electoral systems. For this reason, this time a multilevel model estimation was employed. Random-slopes were also included to gauge eventual variation in effect size across election studies.

## **Results**

The analyses are based on a logistic regression with fixed country effects for a total of 50 election studies from 25 countries. Five models were tested: model 1, including all the covariates but the party and the leader like-dislike scale; model 2, including the party like-dislike scale; model 3 including the leader like-dislike scale (and removing the party); model 4, including all the covariates plus the party and leader evaluation variables; and model 5, adding two interaction terms combining leader evaluations with strength of party identification and turnout on the previous election. A step-by-step approach to the model was preferred because it allows to observe how the party and leader evaluations variables perform both independently and together. This is desirable given the previously mentioned high correlation between them and the literature debate concerning the importance of parties vis-à-vis leaders for the vote. The results are presented in Table 1 and show a significant positive effect of voters' evaluations of political leaders on turnout.

The results from the model 1 largely reflect what has been established in the literature. Turnout behaviour on the previous election is the strongest predictor of current turnout. In fact, this is the variable with the highest impact across all the models estimated. This was expected and comes in line with the literature perceiving voting as a self-reinforcing habit formation process – once an individual has voted before, the costs of voting (namely concerning information barriers, in certain cases registration, etc.) in subsequent elections are lower, for example. Two sorts of concerns can be raised at this point regarding previous turnout's high estimates. The first is associated with the risk of tautological claims that turnout is explained by turnout (in the past). The second relates to the possible correlations between previous turnout and the remaining covariates – in particular, much of partisanship's variance may be captured by previous turnout. To address these concerns, all models were re-estimated without turnout in

the previous election. The results, in Figure A1 in the appendix, rebut such concerns, as the effects of the key predictors are only slightly altered.

The degree of party identification and political sophistication appear to also have a strong effect on turnout. The direction of the effect is as expected, placing the individuals with stronger long-term attachments with a given political party as more likely to cast a vote, as well as individuals with a higher degree of political sophistication.

Model 2 introduces voters' evaluations of their most liked party on a 0 to 10 likeability scale. This variable differs from party identification because it may reflect short-term attitudes towards political parties, whereas party identification reflects a stable attachment based on a long-term psychological identification with a political party, rooted in early socialization (Campbell et al., 1960). In this sense, a voter may have a long-term identification with a given party but presently be unsatisfied with that party's performance and *like* other more. Alternatively, she may not have a party identification at all, but at a given moment in time *like* a political party more than its competitors and be driven to vote by that feeling. These evaluations may be shaped by a number of contextual factors such as retrospective or prospective evaluations of parties' performances, chosen candidates, political events, etc. According to revisionist theories of party identification as a *running tally* (Fiorina, 1981), these short-term assessments may later on consubstantiate in transformations at the party identification level but they are primarily distinct from the concept of party identification. This distinction is confirmed by the moderate correlation (.38) between the two variables in the dataset. Party evaluations are significant and have a substantial effect size: for each point increase in the party likeability scale, the chances of turning out to vote increase by 21%.

**Table 1 - Logistic regression model of leader effects on turnout with fixed election-study effects (25 countries)**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	OR	OR 95% CI	OR	OR 95% CI	OR	OR 95% CI	OR	OR 95% CI	OR	OR 95% CI
<b>Age (groups)</b>										
Ref. category = Less than 30										
30-39	1.09*	1.01 – 1.19	1.13**	1.04 – 1.24	1.09*	1.00 – 1.19	1.12**	1.03 – 1.23	1.13**	1.03 – 1.23
	(.05)		(.05)		(.05)		(.05)		(.05)	
40-49	1.34***	1.23 – 1.46	1.40***	1.28 – 1.53	1.34***	1.23 – 1.46	1.39***	1.27 – 1.52	1.39***	1.27 – 1.52
	(.06)		(.06)		(.06)		(.06)		(.06)	
50-59	1.51***	1.38 – 1.65	1.58***	1.44 – 1.73	1.51***	1.38 – 1.66	1.57***	1.43 – 1.72	1.58***	1.44 – 1.73
	(.07)		(.07)		(.07)		(.07)		(.07)	
60-99	1.87***	1.70 – 2.06	1.95***	1.77 – 2.15	1.82***	1.65 – 2.00	1.91***	1.73 – 2.11	1.93***	1.74 – 2.13
	(.09)		(.10)		(.09)		(.10)		(.10)	
More than 70	1.61***	1.46 – 1.79	1.64***	1.48 – 1.83	1.56***	1.40 – 1.73	1.61***	1.44 – 1.79	1.63***	1.46 – 1.81
	(.08)		(.09)		(.08)		(.09)		(.09)	
<b>Gender</b>	1.06*	1.00 – 1.12	1.02	.97 – 1.08	1.04	.99 – 1.10	1.02 (.03)	.97 – 1.08	1.02 (.03)	.97 – 1.08
	(1.03)		(.03)		(.03)					
<b>Education</b>	1.32***	1.27 – 1.37	1.35***	1.30 – 1.41	1.34***	1.29 – 1.40	1.36***	1.31 – 1.41	1.36***	1.30 – 1.41
	(.03)		(.03)		(.03)		(.03)		(.03)	
<b>Political efficacy</b>	1.35***	1.32 – 1.37	1.29***	1.26 – 1.32	1.30***	1.27 – 1.33	1.28***	1.26 – 1.31	1.29***	1.26 – 1.32
	(.01)		(.01)		(.01)		(.01)		(.01)	

<b>Strength of PID</b>	1.62*** (.02)	1.57 – 1.67	1.38*** (.02)	1.34 – 1.43	1.47*** (.02)	1.42 – 1.51	1.37*** (.02)	1.33 – 1.42	1.39*** (.02)	1.34 – 1.43
<b>Org. membership</b>	1.29*** (.05)	1.20 – 1.39	1.28*** (.05)	1.19 – 1.38	1.28*** (.05)	1.19 – 1.38	1.28*** (.05)	1.18 – 1.37	1.28*** (.05)	1.18 – 1.37
<b>Pol. sophistication</b>	1.37*** (.02)	1.33 – 1.42	1.35*** (.02)	1.31 – 1.40	1.35*** (.02)	1.31 – 1.39	1.35*** (.02)	1.31 – 1.39	1.35*** (.02)	1.30 – 1.39
<b>Turnout on the previous election</b>	7.13*** (.21)	6.72 – 7.55	6.28*** (.20)	5.91 – 6.68	6.55*** (.20)	6.18 – 6.96	6.23*** (.20)	5.85 – 6.62	6.06*** (.20)	5.69 – 6.46
<b>Party evaluations</b>			1.21*** (.01)	1.19 – 1.22			1.17*** (.01)	1.15 – 1.19	1.16*** (.01)	1.15 – 1.18
<b>Leader evaluations</b>					1.16*** (.01)	1.14 – 1.17	1.05*** (.01)	1.04 – 1.07	1.03*** (.01)	1.01 – 1.05
<b>Leader*Strength PID</b>									.96*** (.01)	.95 – .98
<b>Leader*Previous turnout</b>									.95** (.01)	.93 – .98
<b>N</b>		61961	59974	59574	60690	59574	59574	59574	59574	59574
<b>AIC</b>		38570.57	36015.03	36978.34	35661.16	35623.85	35623.85	35623.85	35623.85	35623.85
<b>BIC</b>		39085.52	36537.12	37501.13	36191.87	36172.55	36172.55	36172.55	36172.55	36172.55
<b>McFadden's R2</b>		0.29	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.29

Standard errors between parenthesis. In model 5, the interacting variables are mean centered.

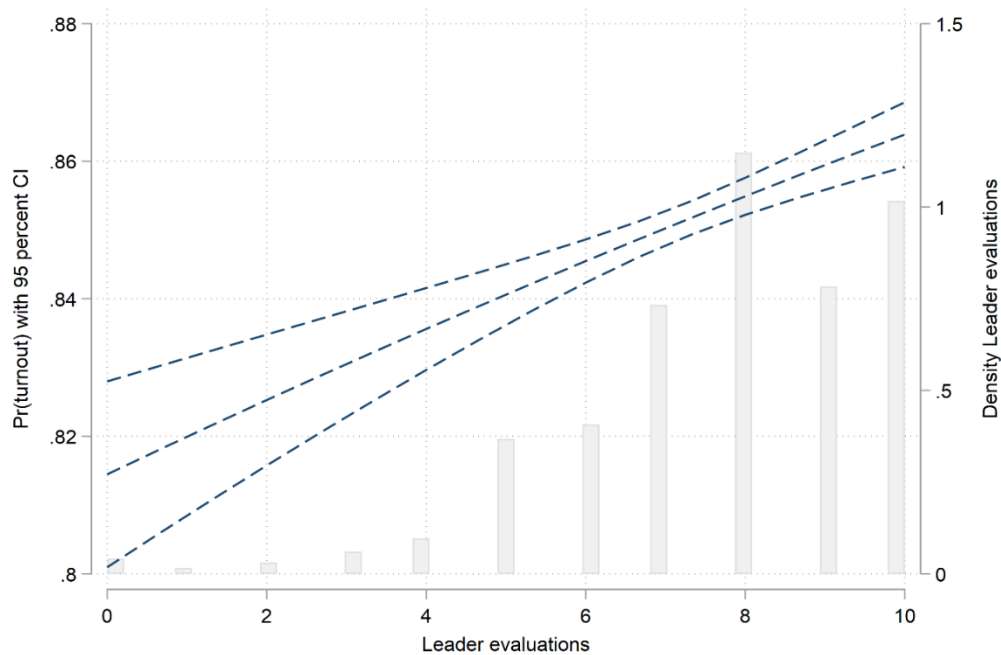
\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$



In model 3, voters' evaluations of their most liked party were replaced by voters' evaluations of their most liked leader, which proves to have a statistically significant impact on turnout. This results in only a small increase of the effect size of the degree of party identification, still quite distant from the coefficient of model 1. The other covariates remain almost unchanged. The most important conclusion to draw from the comparison of the results of model 3 with model 2 relates to the similar effect size of party and leader evaluations. This suggests that short-term evaluations of leaders *vis-à-vis* parties are of similar importance for turnout: for each point increase in the leader likeability scale, the chances of turning out to vote increase by 16%.

Inasmuch as leaders are perceived as secondary when compared to political parties, what is tested in model 4 – when party and leader evaluations are included simultaneously – consists of a fairly strong test for the impact of leader evaluations on turnout. The fact that leader evaluations are still significant and have a non-negligible effect on turnout, despite probably being underestimated because of its relationship with party evaluations, attests the relevance of this variable for turnout models.

**Figure 2 - Effect of leader evaluations on turnout (Average Adjusted Probabilities, model 4)**

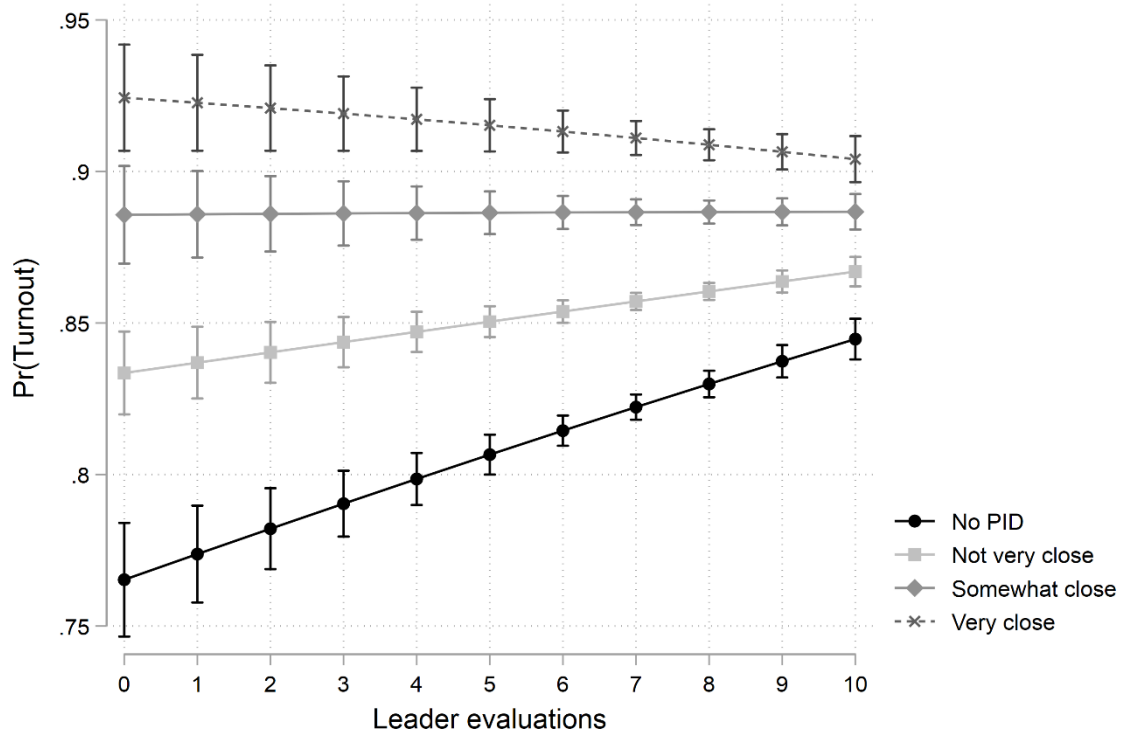


The marginal effect of this relationship is plotted in Figure 2. The increase in the probability to turn out for an average individual who rates his preferred leader on the first point of the scale (0) compared to an average individual who rates his preferred leader on the last point of the scale (10) is of about 8 percentage points. The histogram in the background of Figure 2 reflects the distribution of the leader evaluations variable. The distribution is substantially skewed towards the higher values of the scale given the nature of the variable, which intentionally selected each respondent's *most liked* leader. Despite the lower amount of cases in the first points of the scale, this did not affect too much the confidence intervals. Hence, leader evaluations do have a relevant impact on the probability to turnout regardless of the introduction of strong controls such as party evaluations, party identification and turnout on the previous election. These results confirm H1 and point towards the inclusion of voters' assessments of candidates in turnout models as a relevant explanatory variable.

#### ***Interaction effects: the moderator effect of party identification and past turnout***

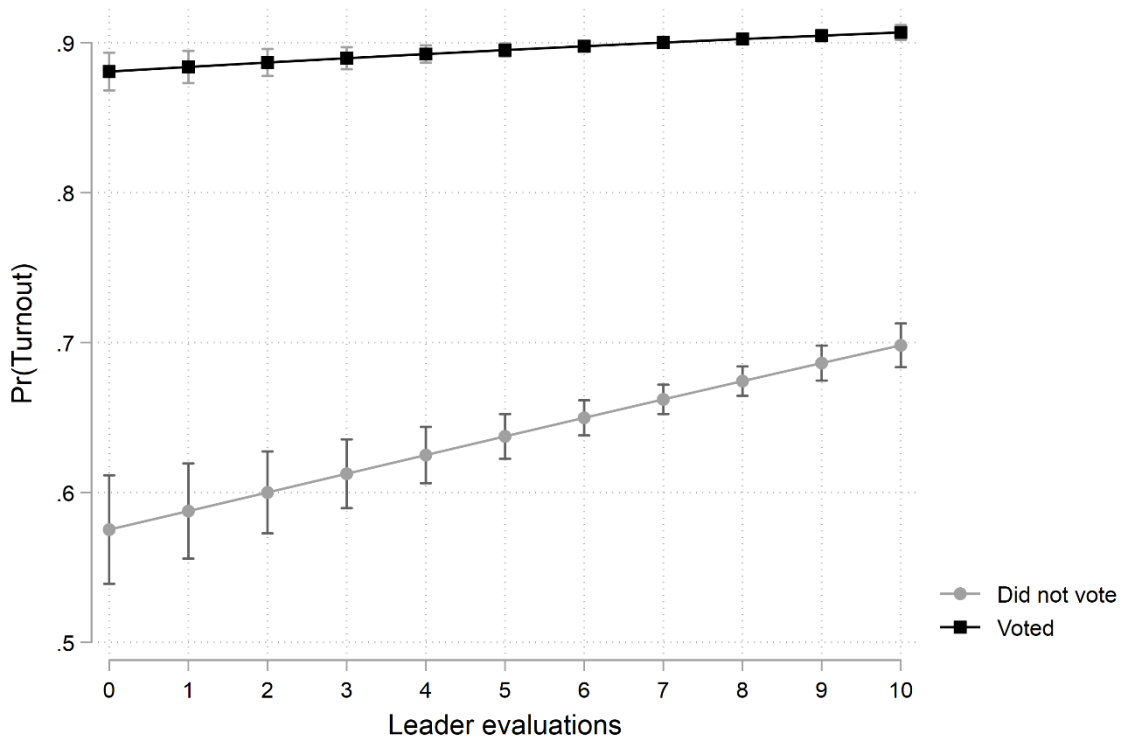
Model 5 provides a more refined assessment of the effect of leaders on turnout by adding interactions terms to the previous models. Previous research has demonstrated that voters without party identification are more detached from partisan bonds and thus are more likely to consider short-term factors such as the personal appeal of political leaders in their vote choice decisions (Lobo, 2014a). To test if the same applies to turnout decisions, leader evaluations were interacted with respondents' degree of party identification. This interaction was found to be significant, demonstrating that leader effects on turnout are particularly strong among individuals without party identification (Figure 3). In fact, as expected based on dealignment theory, leader evaluations appear to be relatively irrelevant for voters who nurture strong bonds with political parties. Conversely, for those without party identification – and, to a lesser degree, for those with weak partisan attachments –, the effect of leader evaluations on turnout decisions is fairly strong. This is a relevant finding since it points towards possible positive normative implications of the personalization of politics. Leaders seem to be particularly able to catalyse the most disengaged voters and, as such, their mobilizing potential may prove normatively desirable.

**Figure 3 – Interaction effects between leader evaluations and strength of party identification (Marginal effects, model 5)**



Still within the framework of dealignment theory, an interaction between leader evaluations and turnout on the previous election was tested. This interaction is also significant and the dissimilar effects among the two subgroups are clear (Figure 4). While the effect of leader evaluations on the probability to turnout remains fairly stable among the individuals who turned out on the previous election, there is a substantial increase, of more than 10 percentage points, on the probability to turnout among those that did not vote on the previous election. This suggests that leader evaluations are a strong factor in captivating abstainers and bringing back to voting individuals who have been abstaining for more than one election.

**Figure 4 - Interaction effects between leader evaluations and turnout on the previous election (Marginal effects, model 5)**



The results from both interactions confirm H2.1. and H2.2. and are indicative of the relationship between dealignment and the personalization of politics. Leader evaluations are especially relevant for dealigned voters who do not possess a longstanding attachment to a political party, or who have been abstaining for more than one election. Hence, while the personalization of politics was, to a great extent, a result of the process of dealignment, it can also play a role in attenuating its negative impacts, by promoting a reengagement of the most alienated segments of the electorate.

The results regarding the main effects of leader evaluations on turnout and both interaction effects reported have been subjected to leave-one-out cross-validation checks (see Figures A3, A4, A5 and A6 in the appendix for coefficient plots). These tests exclude each

election study at the time from the sample to detect if the results substantially changed, i.e., if they were being driven by potential outliers. All reported results proved robust to this test.<sup>27</sup>

The next section presents an extensive battery of robustness tests concerning the findings presented so far.

## **Robustness tests**

### ***Dichotomous measurement of party identification***

It could be argued that the impact of party identification is likely to be more accurately measured in binary terms. According to this logic, what would matter for the likelihood to turn out is if an individual has a party identification, and not the intensity of this identification. If this is true, a more refined measurement may be contributing to an underestimation of its effect. In order to assess if this is occurring, the *strength of party identification* variable was replaced by a dichotomous measurement of party identification (0: Does not identify with a party; 1: Identifies with a party). The standardized coefficients of party and leader evaluations were almost identical, as depicted in the regression output from Table A3 in the appendix. In fact, the dichotomous measure of party identification results in a higher coefficient for leader evaluations.

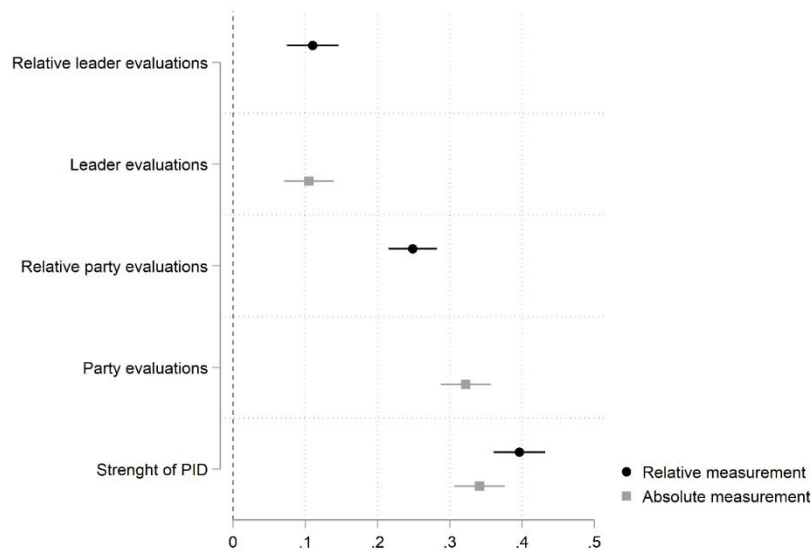
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<sup>27</sup> In addition to the models presented in this section, an additional interaction model analysing the potential moderating effect of political sophistication on turnout was estimated in conjunction with the two previous interactions (Table A4 in the appendix). Political sophistication has been considered a relevant moderator variable by previous studies (e.g., Bittner, 2014; Gidengil, 2011; Lachat, 2015). The interaction term deemed positive and significant, suggesting that more sophisticated individuals are more likely to be mobilized by party leaders. Nevertheless, in this case the model did not survive the leave-one-out cross-validation test – the Slovenian election study of 2011 was found to be driving the results (Figure A6 in the appendix). For this reason, this interaction was excluded from the models. In any case, it remains a relevant finding that leader evaluations were found not to vary according to voters' political sophistication.

### *Alternative measurement of leader effects*

The original measurement used in the previous models selected the leader respondents *liked the most* out of all the candidates running for election in their country at a given point in time. This could be considered an absolute measurement of leader effects. However, previous studies point to the importance of testing different measurements of leader effects (Mughan, 2015). An alternative measurement could be the difference between the most liked leader and the average of all leaders running for election in that country, in that year. This could be considered a relative measurement of leader effects which would capture how extraordinarily voters consider this leader compared to the other contenders. This is useful since some voters can have the tendency to rate all or most leaders similarly high (or low). Thus, the models were reran replacing the absolute by the relative measurement of leader effects, which, for each respondent, subtracts the mean of the leader evaluation variable from the rating of the most liked leader. The model comparison in Figure 5 shows that the differences between the two measurements are only minor and, most importantly, both reveal a significant positive impact of leaders on turnout.

**Figure 5 - Absolute and relative measurements of leader effects: model comparison, standardized**



### *Least liked leaders*

A proposition that has so far been untested relates to the possibility that, besides having a positive effect of turnout because voters strongly like them, leaders could also drive individuals to vote because they strongly dislike them. Examples of this kind abound in the literature on strategic voting but they are essentially directed at political parties (Downs, 1957). In a context of increasing personalization – particularly affecting populist/radical parties where the leader plays a prominent role, but also in mainstream parties in light of growing polarization (Lachat, 2015) –, some voters could be driven to the polls because they utterly dislike a candidate and want to prevent him from winning the election (Aarts & Blais, 2012). Hence, additional models were estimated including absolute and relative measurements of the most disliked leaders – reversing the procedure (and scale) used before for the most liked leaders. These were estimated for model 4 (Figure 6) and in combination with the previous measurements (Figure A2 in the appendix).<sup>28</sup>

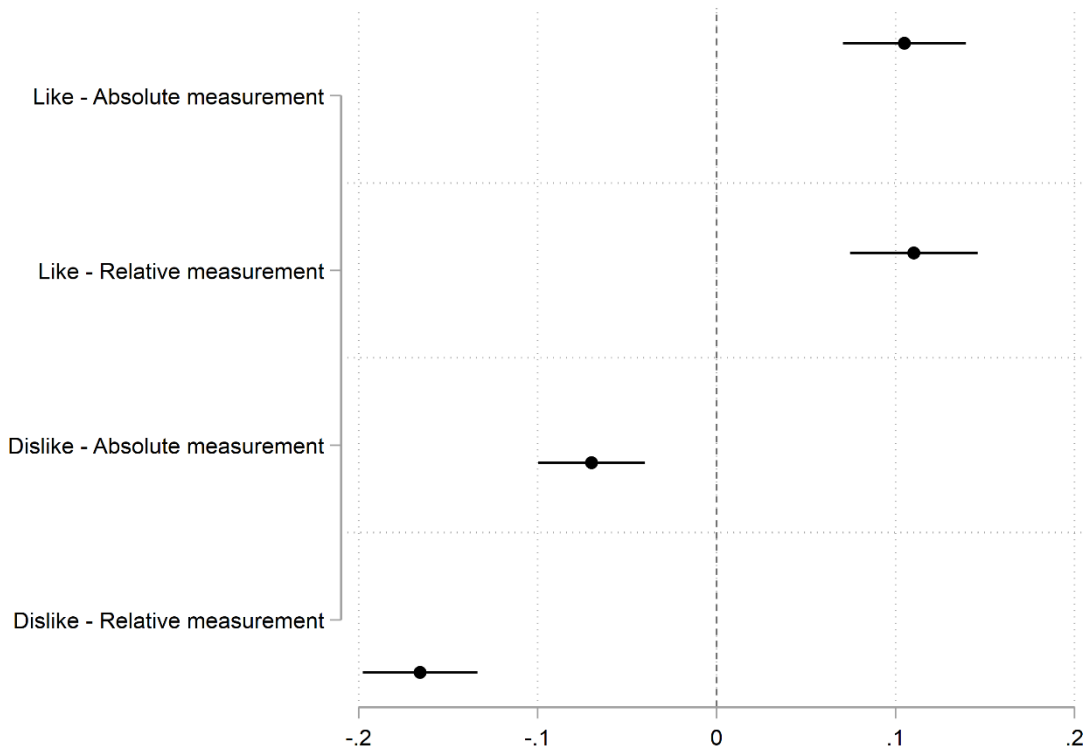
Both measurements of disliked leaders proved to have a meaningful and significant impact on turnout. The effect is particularly strong for the relative measurement. In the case of disliked leaders, the absolute measurement is probably less effective in capturing the kind of effects just described, as it may erroneously capture the common setting where a respondent ascribes a certain rating to her preferred leader and rates all other leaders equally bad – in this setting, there would hardly be an effect of disliked leaders on turnout. Instead, the relative measurement of the disliked leader depicts a setting where a leader is negatively distinguishable from the average of all other leaders (the liked and the relatively indifferent ones), what further motivates individuals to turn out *against him*.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Figure A2 in the appendix provides an estimation of the marginal effects of disliked leaders (absolute and relative measurements) while controlling for most liked leaders (absolute and relative measurements), and vice-versa. Thus, the estimates are the same as in Figure 6, but including the correspondent like-dislike measurement as a control.

<sup>29</sup> The existence of feelings of indifference towards party leaders was also considered. Indifferent individuals would be those evaluating leaders with a 5 on the 0-10 scale. However, the amount of those individuals was found not to exceed 9% of the sample. Given their relatively residual character, no further analysis was performed with regard to these individuals.

**Figure 6 - Marginal effects of most liked and disliked leaders (model 4)**



### *Pre-post assessment*

A frequent critique to existing research on leader effects concerns the possibility of ex-post rationalization by individuals. To put it simply, because most studies use data collected in post-electoral surveys, voters may be driven to adjust their answers to the actual outcome of the election. Lewis-Beck, Nadeau and Elias (2008) have documented this issue regarding economic voting, for example. If the same occurs with voters' evaluations of candidates, the data collected after the election is inconsistent with what voters had in mind when they made their voting decisions and therefore, is inapt to explain voting behaviour.

A possible strategy to assess if this is happening consists in using panel data and comparing individuals' ratings of leaders before and after the election (Garzia & De Angelis, 2016). The more similar these ratings are, the surer one can be that what is being observed is not an adjustment as a consequence of the electoral results. CSES data is purely cross-sectional and therefore such a test cannot be performed for the entire sample. However, some of the



countries in the sample have panel data comprising pre and post-electoral measurements in their national election studies. Data from Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States, referring to the same years as the ones in the sample, and thus the same individuals (but interviewed pre and post electorally), was used to perform this test.

The main test consists of re-estimating model 4 both *pre-electorally* and *post-electorally*. For the results to hold, the *post-electoral* coefficients for leader evaluations should be no higher than the *pre-electoral* ones. In addition, three other indicators were used: the correlation between the most liked leader variable and turnout *pre-electoral*; the correlation between the most liked leader variable and turnout *post-electoral*; and the correlation between the *pre* and the *post* measurement of the most liked leader. Again, ideally the *post-electoral* measures should correlate with turnout no higher than the *pre-electoral* ones. Additionally, the *pre\*post* correlation should be rather high, indicating a strong congruence between pre and post-electoral ratings.

The results from Table 2 confirm the expectation that the electoral impact of leaders does not correspond to ex-post rationalizations from voters. First, the regression models clearly show higher estimates for pre-electoral leader evaluations across all countries but Spain, where the coefficients are precisely the same pre and post-electorally. This provides rather strong evidence against any sort of ex-post rationalization. In addition, pre and post-electoral measurements of leader evaluations correlate fairly high in all four election studies, providing strong indications that what is being measured is the same. Furthermore, the correlation between pre and post-electoral leader evaluations and turnout is very similar across the four countries. Also, in general pre-electoral measurements correlate slightly higher with turnout, whereas one should expect post-electoral measurements to correlate higher in the case of ex-post rationalization.

A supplementary test was carried by taking the within-individual variation in leader evaluations across pre and post-electoral waves and estimating its impact on turnout. To be sure, such strategy was used to investigate whether such increase in an individual's most liked leader's rating, possibly driven by ex-post rationalization, affects the probability to turn out. The coefficient for the within-individual change in leader evaluations deemed not significant in both Spain and the United Kingdom, and significant ( $p=.047$ ) with a small effect in the United

States. Hence, in general these changes are irrelevant to predict turnout and therefore concerns regarding a possible ex-post rationalization effect can be relaxed.

**Table 2 - Pre-Post assessment of leader effects in selected countries: logistic model coefficients (model 4) and correlations between pre and post measurements of leader evaluations and turnout**

	Spain	United Kingdom	United States
<b>Regression models</b>			
<i>Pre-electoral</i>	.04***	.11***	.34***
<i>Post-electoral</i>	.04***	.09***	.21***
<i>Within-individual variance (pre-post)</i>	n.s.	n.s.	.08*
<b>Correlations</b>			
<i>Pre*turnout</i>	.36	.22	.17
<i>Post*turnout</i>	.30	.27	.16
<i>Pre*post</i>	.50	.46	.71

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

### **The moderator role of the political and electoral system: an exploratory analysis**

In this section, an exploratory analysis of the differences of leader effects on turnout across political and electoral systems is carried out. Certain features of political and electoral systems may provide more (un)favourable conditions for the existence of leader effects on turnout. This calls the need to consider possible contextual variations that may affect the extent to which

leaders have a mobilizing potential. The objective is therefore to identify whether leader effects on turnout can vary according to three types of factors: the regime type, the size of the electoral districts, and the possibility to cast a personalized vote.

The institutional design of presidential systems is argued to favour a candidate-centered type of politics. Increased leadership autonomy from the legislature, unipersonal executive responsibility, and popular election of the head of government are features that contribute to a perception of higher leadership profile among voters and the media in presidential countries (Poguntke & Webb, 2005a). Contrarily, in parliamentary systems, it is claimed to prevail the notion of the Prime-Minister as a *primus inter pares*, much due to the collective executive responsibility and the fact that the executive emerges and is contingent on the confidence of the legislature, making it still very much the arena of party organizations. For example, Curtice and Hunjan (2011), as well as Curtice and Lisi (2014), found evidence of a weaker impact of leaders on vote choice in parliamentary regimes compared to presidential ones. The hybrid semi-presidential design, while on the one hand including some elements of presidential systems which could play in favour of the personalization hypothesis, on the other hand is also characterized by power-sharing dynamics between the President and the Prime-Minister which may downplay the perceived profile of party leaders.

The rationale underlying the consideration of the size of the electoral districts and the possibility to cast a personalized vote is related to the concept of decentralized personalization. In their seminal article, Balmas et al. (2014: 37) distinguish between centralized and decentralized personalization, the latter referring to the cases where the “power flows downwards from the group to individual politicians who are not party or executive leaders”, such as candidates. Wauters et al. (2016) demonstrate how these two processes often involve a zero-sum logic: centralized personalization often emerges at the expenses of decentralized personalization and vice-versa. Thus, this is an important aspect to take into account, as contexts highly favourable to decentralized personalization may dampen centralized personalization, namely in the form of leader effects on turnout. Regarding district size, in smaller districts leaders could be argued to matter less, given that possible proximity connections with local politicians might overshadow party leaders. The same kind of rationale can be applied to settings where a personalized vote for a given candidate is made possible.

To assess if the results concerning leader effects on turnout can be influenced by these factors, in Table 3, model 4 was used as a baseline model for re-estimation as to account for the political and the electoral system. In specific, in model 6 a cross-level interaction between leader evaluations and the type of regime (0. Parliamentary; 1. Semi-Presidential<sup>30</sup>; 2. Presidential) was added. As per the electoral system, in model 7 an interaction between leader evaluations and the electoral district size<sup>31</sup> (number of seats) was included, and model 8 accounts for the electoral system's possibility of casting a personalized vote (0: No; 1: Yes). Cross-level interactions between the *most liked leader* variable and the contextual moderators were added in a random slope model (Table 3).

**Table 3 – The moderator role of the political and electoral system characteristics on leader effects on turnout: random effects models**

	Model 6		Model 7		Model 8	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
<b>Age (groups)</b>						
<b>Ref. category = Less than 30</b>						
30-39	1.12* (.05)	1.03 – 1.22	1.21*** (.06)	1.09 – 1.33	1.19*** (.06)	1.08 – 1.31
40-49	1.38*** (.06)	1.26 – 1.51	1.52*** (.08)	1.37 – 1.68	1.47*** (.07)	1.34 – 1.62
50-59	1.57*** (.07)	1.43 – 1.72	1.66*** (.09)	1.50 – 1.85	1.64*** (.08)	1.48 – 1.81
60-99	1.90*** (.10)	1.72 – 2.10	2.06*** (.12)	1.85 – 2.31	2.01*** (.11)	1.81 – 2.24

<sup>30</sup> Semi-Presidential countries were coded according to Elgie (2011) and an updated version of this piece by the author (2017) available at: <http://www.semipresidentialism.com/?p=1053>

<sup>31</sup> Data unavailability led to the exclusion of Spain (2011), United Kingdom (2010), Slovakia (2016), Serbia (2012), Italy (2013), Montenegro (2012) and France (2012) from model 7 and Spain (2011), United Kingdom (2010), Slovenia (2011) and Italy (2013) from model 8.

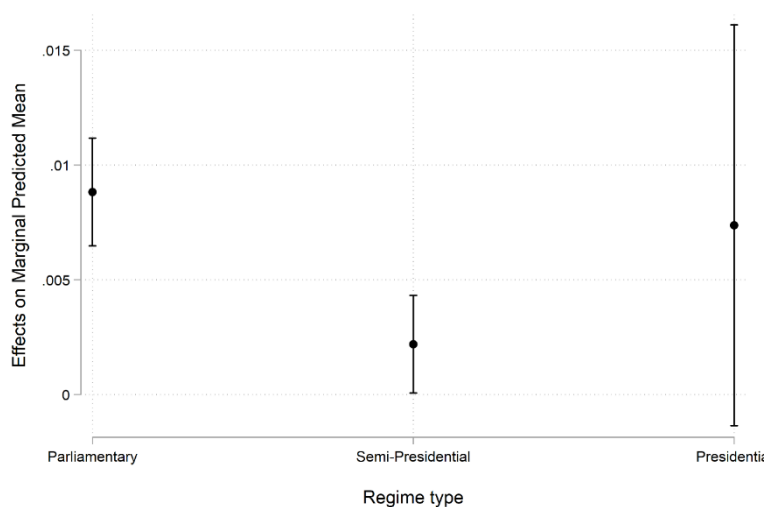
More than 70	1.60*** (.09)	1.43 – 1.78	1.74*** (.11)	1.54 – 1.97	1.68*** (.01)	1.49 – 1.88
<b>Gender</b>	1.02 (.03)	.97 – 1.08	1.00 (.03)	.94 – 1.07	1.01 (.03)	.96 – 1.08
<b>Education</b>	1.36 *** (.03)	1.30 – 1.41	1.43*** (.04)	1.36 – 1.50	1.40*** (.03)	1.34 – 1.47
<b>Political efficacy</b>	1.29*** (.01)	1.26 – 1.32	1.35*** (.02)	1.32 – 1.38	1.33*** (.02)	1.30 – 1.36
<b>Strength of PID</b>	1.37*** (.02)	1.32 – 1.41	1.38*** (.03)	1.33 – 1.43	1.36*** (.02)	1.32 – 1.41
<b>Org. membership</b>	1.29*** (.05)	1.20 – 1.39	1.29 (.06)	1.18 – 1.41	1.30*** (.06)	1.20 – 1.42
<b>Pol. sophistication</b>	1.34*** (.02)	1.30 – 1.39	1.34*** (.03)	1.29 – 1.39	1.33*** (.02)	1.28 – 1.38
<b>Turnout on the previous election</b>	6.22*** (.20)	5.85 – 6.62	5.82 *** (.20)	5.43 – 6.23	6.11*** (.20)	5.73 – 6.53
<b>Party evaluations</b>	1.17*** (.01)	1.15 – 1.19	1.13*** (.01)	1.11 – 1.15	1.13*** (.01)	1.11 – 1.16
<b>Leader evaluations</b>	1.11*** (.01)	1.08 – 1.14	1.07*** (.01)	1.04 – 1.08	1.06*** (.01)	1.03 – 1.08
<b>Political system</b>	.68** (.09)	.51 – .89				
<b>District size</b>			1.00 (.00)	.98 – 1.01		
<b>Personalized vote</b>					.72* (.11)	.53 – .96
<b>Leader*Pol.system</b>						
<b>Semi-Pres.</b>	.92*** (.01)	.89 – .94				
<b>Presidential</b>	.96 (.04)	.89 – 1.04				
<b>Leader*District size</b>			1.00* (.00)	1.00 – 1.00		
<b>Leader*Personalized vote</b>					.99 (.01)	.97 – 1.03
<hr/>						
<i>Var(political system)</i>	.44 (.10)	.28 – .70				
<i>Var(district size)</i>			.00 (.00)	.00 – .00		
<i>Var(personalized vote)</i>					.56 (.14)	.35 – .90
<i>Var(constant)</i>	.31 (.08)	.18 – .52	.54 (.14)	.32 – .90	.37 (.11)	.21 – .66

<i>N(individuals)</i>	59574	47263	51846
<i>N(groups)</i>	45	38	41
<i>AIC</i>	35694.64	27741.91	30454.06
<i>BIC</i>	35877.54	27908.42	30622.32

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$   
Standard errors between parenthesis

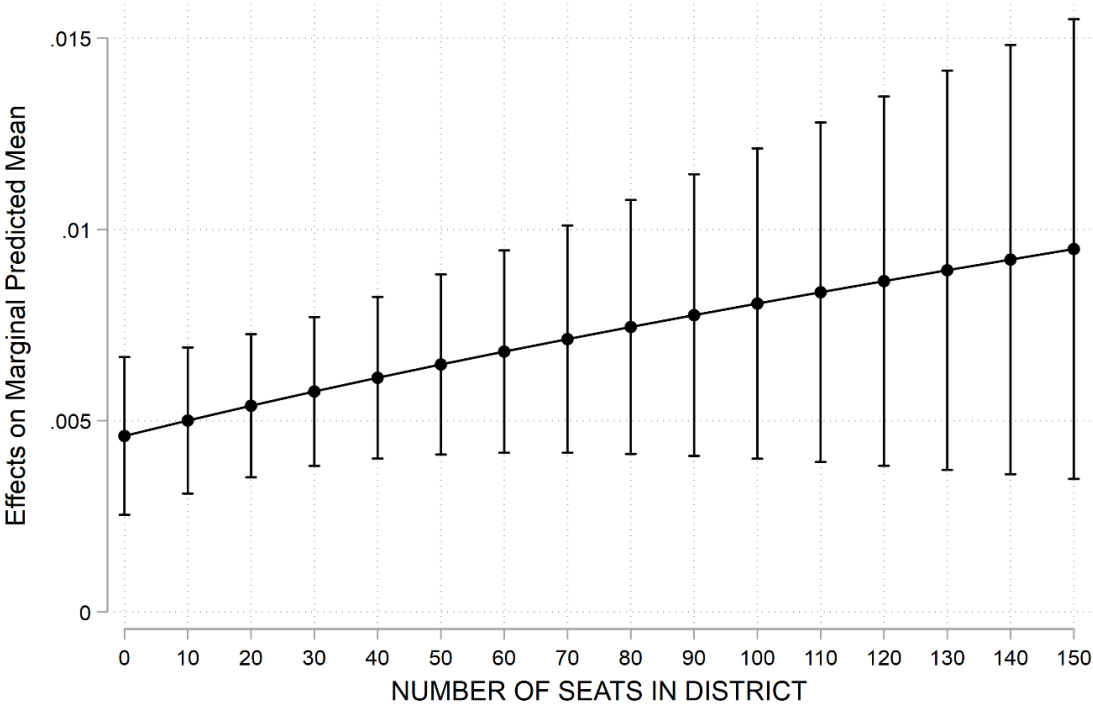
The results from Table 3 are mixed. Concerning the influence of the regime type, in model 6 the interaction between leader evaluations and the type of regime results negatively significant only with regard to semi-presidential systems, partially rejecting H3. This regime type seems less favourable to the existence of leader effects on turnout. As argued before, this could be due to the fact that, as Sartori (1997) put it, semi-presidential systems operate in a power sharing basis within a dual authority structure. This may contribute to take the spotlight away from party leaders or Prime-Ministers, since the political arena is shared with Presidents. The non-significant interaction with presidential regimes is probably associated with the fact that only one country (two elections) in the entire sample is a presidential democracy. This interaction effect was plotted in Figure 7.

**Figure 7 – Interaction effects between leader evaluations and regime type (Marginal effects, model 6)**



Regarding the other interactions, in model 7 the interaction with the electoral district's size is significant. However, the magnitude of the effect deems it virtually irrelevant. Also, there is almost no variance in the random slope at the district size level. Looking at the plotted effects in Figure 8, it becomes clear that the moderating effect of this variable is inexistent, as all variation falls within the confidence intervals. Therefore, although statistically significant, the substantial significance of this variable is irrelevant. Finally, in model 8 leader evaluations were interacted with the possibility to cast a personalized vote. This relationship was found not to be significant. In sum, the characteristics of the electoral system which could potentially downplay centralized personalization in favour of decentralized personalization have no substantial effects, at least regarding the impact of voters' evaluations of party leaders on their turnout decisions, thus rejecting H4.1. and H4.2.

**Figure 8 – Interaction effects between leader evaluations and size of the electoral district (Marginal effects, model 7)**



## **Discussion and conclusions**

This study aimed at assessing the importance of voters' evaluations of political leaders on turnout with a two-fold objective: on the one hand, demonstrate that leaders have a potential as mobilizing political agents and thus the personalization of politics can have positive normative implications for contemporary democracies; on the other hand, by providing evidence of a general trend common to several Western democracies where leaders have an effect on turnout, call for a more frequent consideration of variables related to candidates in turnout models.

The results have confirmed the hypothesis that leaders have an effect on turnout. Leaders were found to matter and to have a substantial impact on the probability to turn out in parliamentary elections. This 25-country analysis reveals that this trend is transversal across several Western democracies. As parties still retain most of their traditional mobilizing function, party leaders also carry a considerable mobilization potential in current elections.

Furthermore, the mobilizing potential of leaders was found to be particularly notorious amongst the most dealigned voters. Individuals who lack attachments to political parties and individuals who have abstained in the previous election are the ones most impacted in their turnout decisions by assessments of party leaders. While the personalization of politics has often been portrayed as an overall negative phenomenon for contemporary democracies, leaders' effective appeal to the most structurally disengaged segments of the electorate might counterbalance such views. In the last decades, Western party systems were hit by rising abstention rates, a consistent decline in support for political parties, and a generalized public sentiment of scepticism towards politics. Finding that party leaders have the potential to compensate for at least some of these malaises by being able to reconnect dealigned citizens with active political participation can make a case for a positive normative outlook on the personalization of politics.

Importantly, the results appear quite robust and do not seem to be much affected by possibly intervening features of the countries' electoral systems which could play against leader effects on turnout. More personalized electoral systems, prone to a decentralized type of personalization, seem relatively unimportant in moderating the relationship between leader effects and turnout. As per the political system's characteristics, leader effects seem to be



slightly hindered by semi-presidential regimes. A possible explanation relates to this system's dual executive nature, which may overshadow party leaders' role as fundamental actors.

This study opens some avenues for further research on the topic. First, following the mobilizing potential just described, regarding its positive normative consequences, it would be interesting to determine which aspects of voters' assessments of candidates drive them to turnout. Are these voters triggered by apolitical features or can leaders communicate party platforms more efficiently, vouch for a competent government leadership or even voice voters' demands in their public interventions in a way that develops a more personal identification than with regard to a political party? From a normative perspective, in principle, it can be claimed that if leaders have the potential to bring more individuals to participate in democratic elections, particularly in a context of decreasing turnout, the personalization of politics can carry positive consequences. However, if rather than leaders' performance-related characteristics, these individuals are driven to vote by superficial and apolitical judgements of leaders, such positive normative consequences can be questioned. An exploratory study by Silva & Costa (2018) has shed some light on this, but more extensive research is needed.

Second, additional research with the use of panel data could allow for a better perception of the role of leader evaluations in fostering turnout across time, that is, to what has this variable been becoming more relevant over the past decades – in parallel with the process of dealignment – in comparison with long-term determinants of turnout. Naturally, given the scarcity of panel data, this could only be achieved in respect to fewer countries than the ones analysed here.

Third, it would be relevant to expand on the current exploratory section on the moderating role of contextual variables. It would be interesting to consider different party types (although such data is frequently hard to obtain) or the type of electoral system (majoritarian, proportional, two-party), for example. Such analysis could provide a more nuanced account of to what extent and under which circumstances do leaders matter more for electoral participation.

## APPENDIX: CHAPTER 4

**Table A1.** List of countries and election studies included

<b>Country</b>	N	<b>Country</b>	N
Election year		Election year	
<b>Austria</b>		<b>Latvia</b>	
2008	1165	2010	1005
2013	1000	2011	1004
		2013	1036
<b>Bulgaria</b>		<b>Montenegro</b>	
2014	999	2012	967
<b>Croatia</b>		<b>Netherlands</b>	
2007	1004	2006	2359
		2010	2153
<b>Czech Republic</b>		<b>Norway</b>	
2006	2002	2005	2012
2010	1857	2009	1782
2013	1653	2013	1727
<b>Denmark</b>		<b>Poland</b>	
2007	1442	2005	2402
		2007	1817
		2011	1919
<b>Estonia</b>		<b>Portugal</b>	
2011	1000	2009	1316
		2015	1499
<b>Finland</b>		<b>Serbia</b>	
2007	1238	2012	1568
2011	1298		
2015	1587		
<b>France</b>		<b>Slovenia</b>	

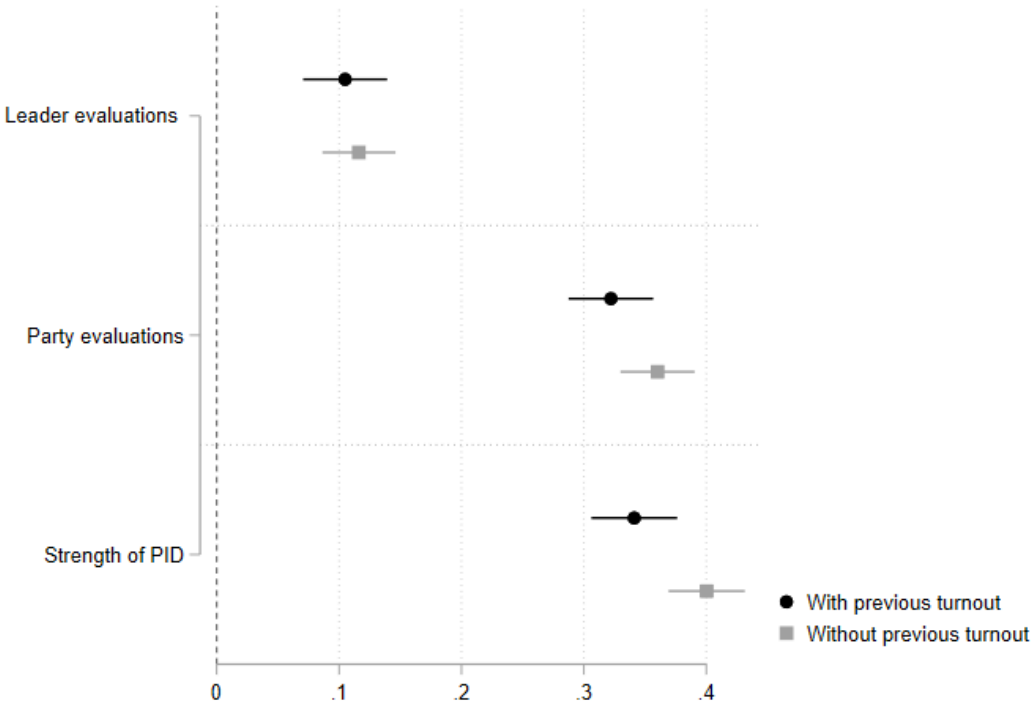
2007	2000	2008	1055
2012	2014	2011	1031
<b>Germany</b>		<b>Slovakia</b>	
2005	2018	2010	1203
2009	2095	2016	1150
2013	1889		
<b>Iceland</b>		<b>Spain</b>	
2007	1595	2008	1204
2009	1385	2011	6082
2013	1479		
<b>Ireland</b>		<b>United Kingdom</b>	
2007	1435	2010	1577
2011	1853	2015	1567
<b>Italy</b>		<b>United States</b>	
2013	1508	2008	2102
		2012	1929

**Table A2.** Summary measures of the variables included in the models

	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation
Turnout – (0: Did not vote; 1: Voted)	0	1	.82	.38
Age – Numeric	16	106	48.42	17.45
Age (groups) – (1: Less than 30; 2: 30-39; 3: 40-49; 4: 50-59; 5: 60-69; 6: More than 70)	1	6	3.36	1.64
Gender – (1: Male; 2: Female)	1	2	1.52	.50
Education – (1: No formal education; 2: Primary education; 3: Secondary education; 4: Tertiary education)	1	4	2.84	.78
Org. member – (0: Not a member; 1: Member)	0	1	.25	.44
Pol. Efficacy – (1: Who people vote for won't make a difference; 5: Who people vote for can make a big difference)	1	5	3.72	1.30
Strength of PID – (0: No PID; 1: Not very close; 2: Somewhat close; 3: Very close)	0	3	1.08	1.08
Pol. Sophistication – (0: No correct answers; 1: One correct answer; 2: Two correct answers; 3: Three correct answers)	0	3	1.51	1.01

Previous turnout – (0: Did not vote in the previous election; 1: Voted in the previous election)	0	1	.83	.38
Party evaluations – (0: Does not like the party; 10: Likes the party)	0	10	7.70	2.08
Leader evaluations – (0: Does not like the leader; 10: Likes the leader)	0	10	7.66	2.02
Political system – (0: Parliamentary; 1: Semi-Presidential; 2: Presidential)	0	2	.61	.58
District size – Numeric	0	150	22.65	40.33
Personalized vote – (0: Not allowed; 1: Allowed)	0	1	.48	.50

**Figure A1.** Comparison of the marginal effects for key variables of model 4, with and without turnout on the previous election



**Table A3.** Logistic regression with fixed country effects (25 countries) – Dichotomous measure of PID – standardized coefficients, model 5

	OR	OR 95% CI
<b>Age (groups)</b>		
Ref. category = Less than 30		
30-39	1.13** (.05)	1.04 – 1.23
40-49	1.41*** (.06)	1.29 – 1.54
50-59	1.62*** (.08)	1.48 – 1.77
60-99	1.98*** (.10)	1.79 – 2.18
More than 70	1.69*** (.09)	1.52 – 1.88
<b>Gender</b>	1.01 (.03)	.96 – 1.07
<b>Education</b>	1.36*** (.03)	1.31 – 1.42
<b>Political efficacy</b>	1.30*** (.01)	1.27 – 1.33
<b>Dichotomous PID</b>	2.25*** (.25)	1.82 – 2.79
<b>Org. membership</b>	1.30*** (.05)	1.20 – 1.40
<b>Pol. sophistication</b>	1.35*** (.02)	1.31 – 1.40
<b>Turnout on the previous election</b>	8.70*** (.90)	7.11 – 10.64
<b>Party evaluations</b>	1.18*** (.01)	1.16 – 1.20
<b>Leader evaluations</b>	1.10*** (.01)	1.08 – 1.13
<b>Leader*Dichotomous PID</b>	.96* (.01)	.94 – .99
<b>Leader*Previous turnout</b>	.95** (.01)	.93 – .98
<i>N</i>		59983
<b>AIC</b>		36011.6
<b>BIC</b>		36560.71

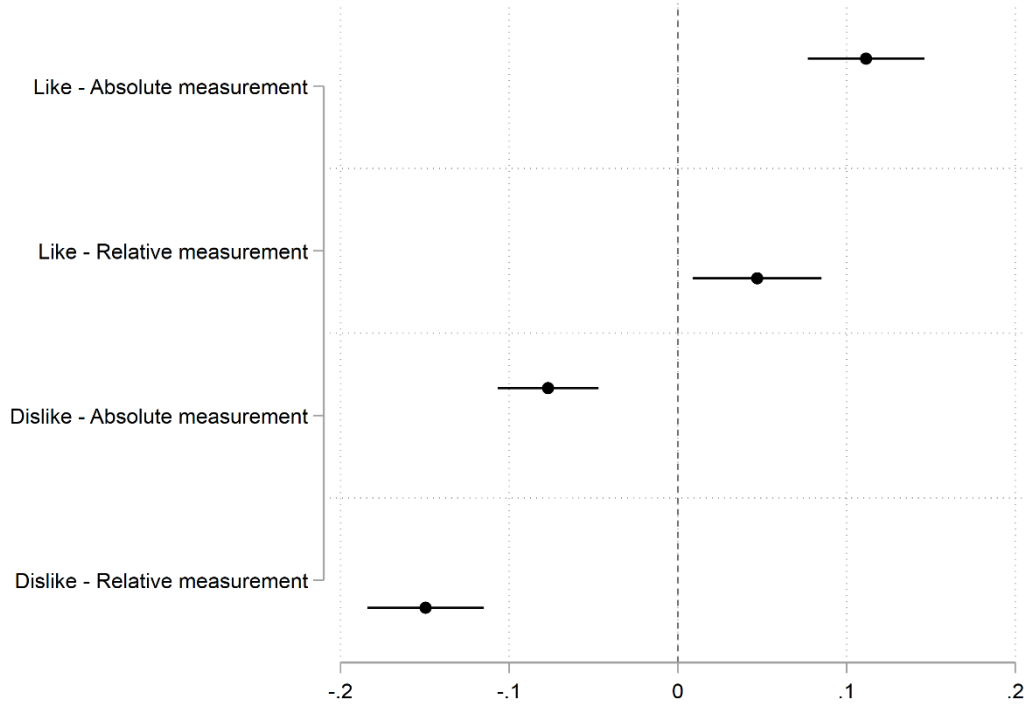
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*\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001*

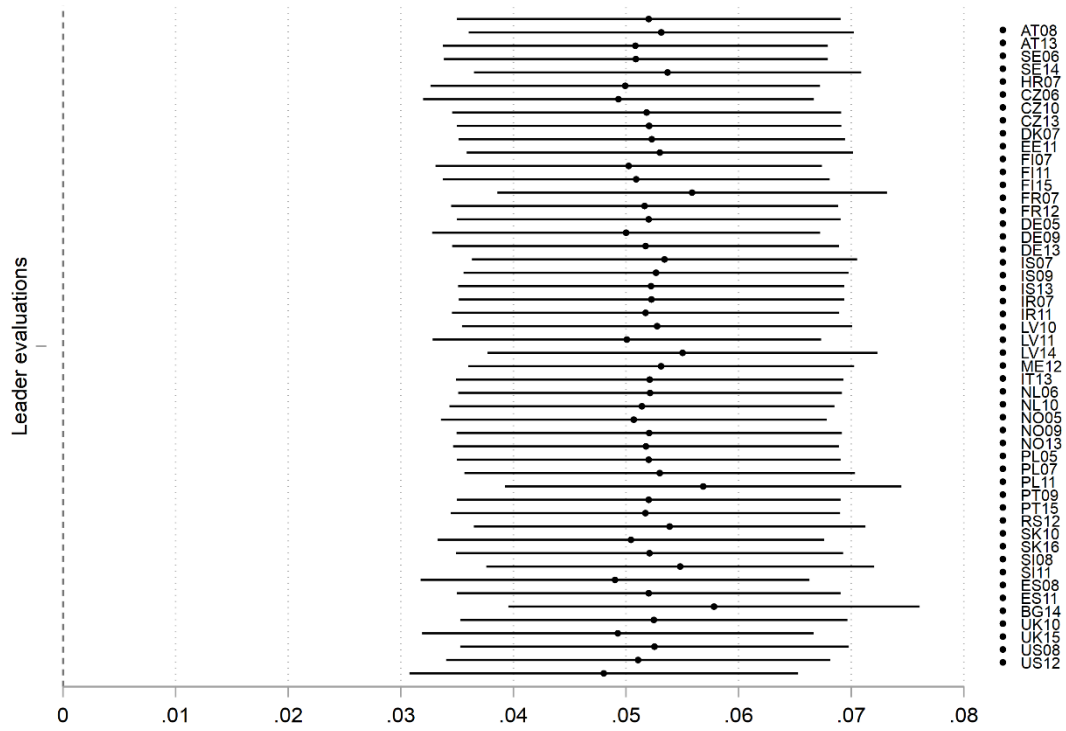
*Standard errors between parenthesis*



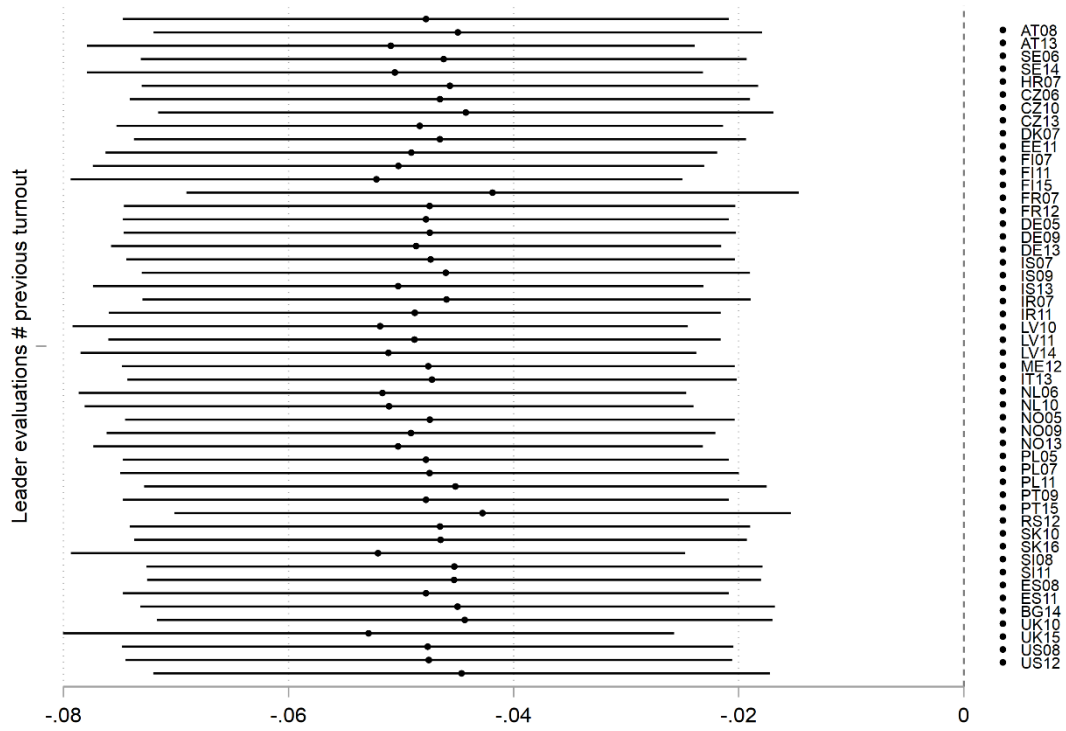
**Figure A2.** Marginal effects of most liked and disliked leaders, while controlling for most disliked and most liked leaders, respectively – absolute and relative measurements. Fixed country effects logistic regression (25 countries) – standardized coefficients, model 4.



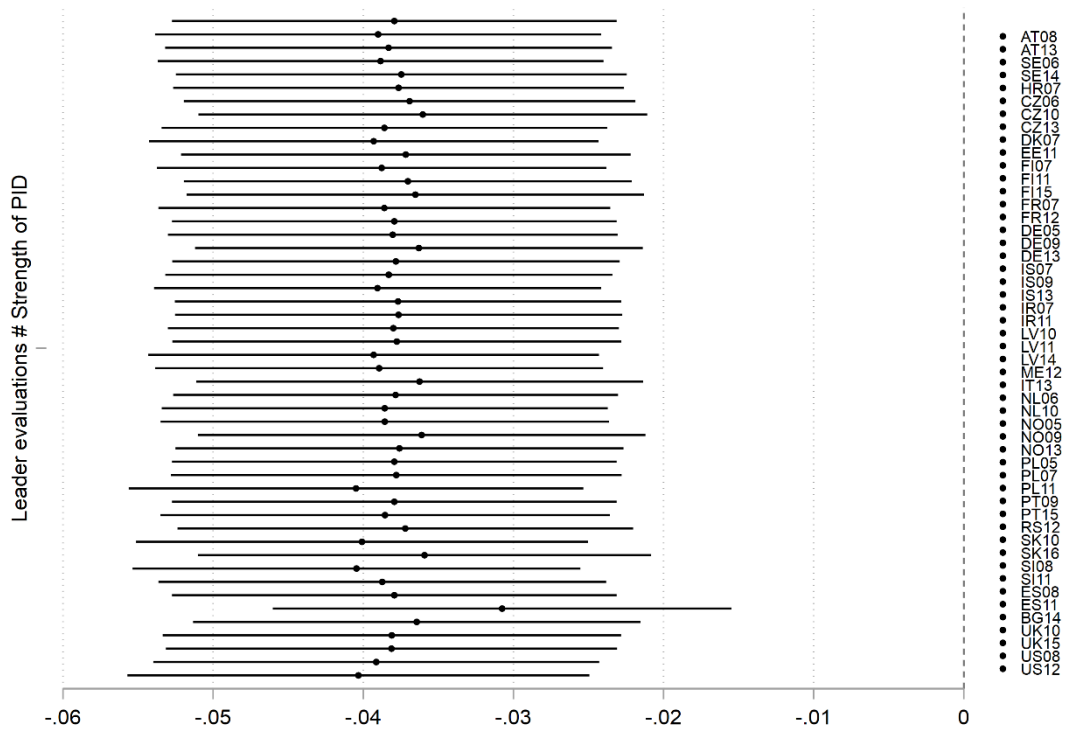
**Figure A3.** Leave-one-out cross-validation tests (LOOCV) for the effect of leader evaluations on turnout (model 4)



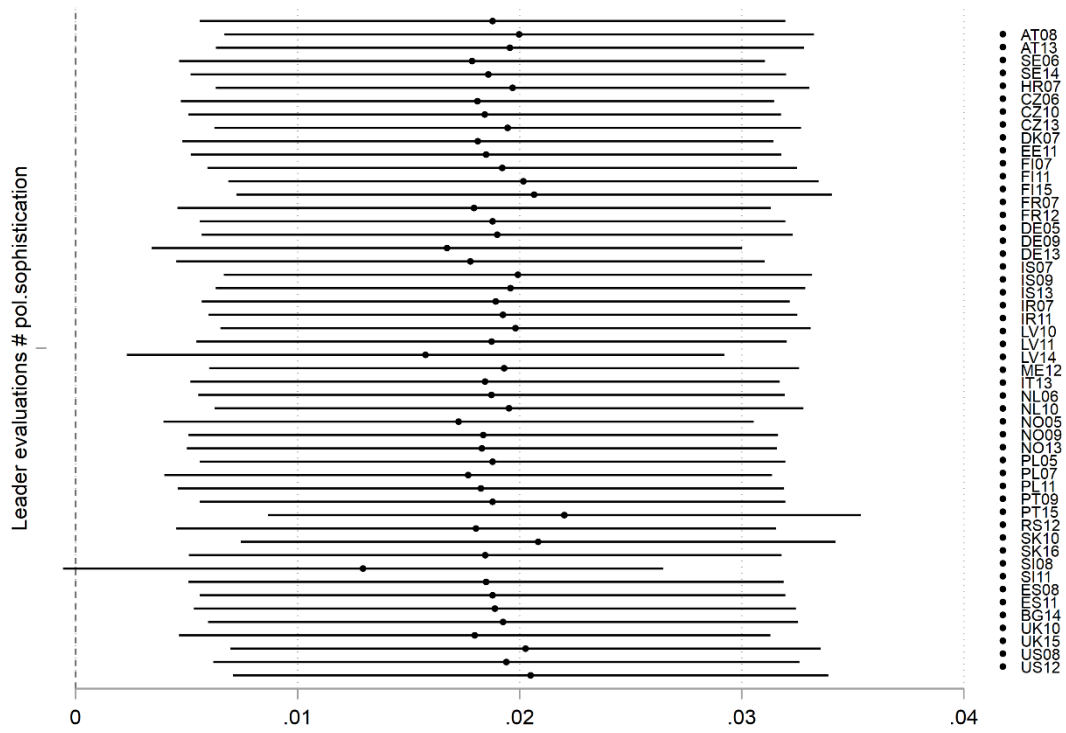
**Figure A4.** Leave-one-out cross-validation tests (LOOCV) for the interaction effect between leader evaluations and turnout on the previous election on turnout (model 5)



**Figure A5.** Leave-one-out cross-validation tests (LOOCV) for the interaction effect between leader evaluations and strength of party identification on turnout (model 5)



**Figure A6.** Leave-one-out cross-validation tests (LOOCV) for the interaction effect between leader evaluations and political sophistication on turnout (model from Table A4)



**Table A4.** Logistic regression with fixed country effects (25 countries) – Interaction between leader evaluations and political sophistication, standardized coefficients

	OR	OR 95% CI
<b>Age</b>		
Ref. Category = Less than 30		
30-39	1.13** (.05)	1.03 – 1.23
40-49	1.39*** (.06)	1.27 – 1.53
50-59	1.58*** (.07)	1.44 – 1.74
60-99	1.93*** (.10)	1.75 – 2.13
More than 70	1.63*** (.09)	1.46 – 1.81
<b>Gender</b>	1.02 (.03)	.97 – 1.08
<b>Education</b>	1.36*** (.03)	1.31 – 1.41
<b>Political efficacy</b>	1.29*** (.01)	1.26 – 1.31
<b>Strength of PID</b>	1.87*** (.01)	1.66 – 2.12
<b>Org. membership</b>	1.28** (.05)	1.19 – 1.38
<b>Pol. Sophistication</b>	1.17** (.06)	1.07 – 1.30
<b>Turnout on the previous election</b>	8.92*** (.92)	7.28 – 10.92
<b>Party evaluations</b>	1.16*** (.01)	1.15 – 1.18
<b>Leader evaluations</b>	1.09*** (.02)	1.06 – 1.12
<b>Leader*Strength of PID</b>	.96*** (.01)	.95 – .98
<b>Leader*Political Sophistication</b>	1.02** (.06)	1.06 – 1.30
<b>Leader*Previous turnout</b>	.95** (.01)	.93 – .98
<i>N</i>		59574
<i>McFadden's R2</i>		.29

<i>AIC</i>	35617.9
<i>BIC</i>	36175.59

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## **Chapter 5: Party Organisational Change and Leader Effects on Voting Behaviour: Democratization of Leadership Selection, Leadership Power and the Electoral Impact of Leaders**

### **Introduction**

In parallel to the socio-political transformations that occurred in the second half of the last century in West European democracies, political parties adapted to an environment of widespread partisan dealignment. As much of mass-parties' electoral basis got sliced by voters' disenfranchisement and erosion of collective identities, parties have developed into election-seeking platforms, deemphasizing the *classe gardée* in an attempt to reach a broader electorate who votes in an individualized way (Katz & Mair, 1995). But as the public opinion's perception of political parties progressively degraded and anti-party sentiments arose together with growing disaffection, disengagement and dissatisfaction with the political system, a crisis of representation raised concerns about the possibility of party decline (Bardi, Bartolini & Trechsel, 2014; Mair, 2013).

At the same time, the personalization of politics has set party leaders as crucial actors in contemporary politics, downplaying the importance of political parties as collective bodies. Leaders play a central role in campaigning, are the main focus of media attention and primary channel of political communication. Electorally, voters' evaluations of political leaders have been demonstrated to have a growing relevance in electoral outcomes (Garzia, Silva & De Angelis, 2018), in a trend of increasing importance of short-term determinants of voting behaviour. This process towards candidate-centered politics (Wattenberg, 1991) puts leaders as key electoral actors in contemporary democracies and has been described as the electoral face of the presidentialization of politics (Poguntke & Webb, 2005a).

As "party leaders have often been asked to cover the ruling void of today's democracies" (Musella, 2017: 95), and became more important actors not only in the media but also in determining electoral outcomes, additional incentives arose for political parties to personalize

and prime their leaderships. One of the most notorious ways in which parties have replied to this new reality was through a reconfiguration of their internal organizational structures.

To increase the quality of representation and overall democratic process and, in this way, respond to the demands of the changing electorate, parties have initiated a number of internal reforms. The transformations undergone by Western political parties in the last decades entailed organizational changes that empowered leaders at the cost of intermediate party strata, reinforced their autonomy and emphasized their role as visible representatives of the parties (Katz & Mair, 1995). These changes happened in close relation to the growing electoral role of leaders. For this reason, besides the electoral face, a party face of the presidentialization of politics is claimed to have surfaced, accounting for the increased influence of leaders on party decision-making. Among other aspects, this is characterized by rule changes empowering the leader, growing autonomy in the drafting of party programmes, attempts to bypass sub-leader strata and the institutionalization of direct leadership elections (Poguntke & Webb, 2005a).

As in the context of personalization of politics leaders have become one of the most important determinants of voters' electoral decisions, their importance for modern parties' electoral aspirations justified a heightened role of the leadership within parties' internal organization structure. Intra-party power tends to increasingly concentrate on the leadership's office, as leaders gain progressively autonomy from middle-level party strata and become more undisputed rulers within the party. Because their perceived influence over policy-making and overall party positioning gains salience amongst the electorate as a result of the stronger role of the leadership within party structure, this power shift can contribute to an additional attribution of political relevance to party leaders by voters when making their electoral decisions. Thus, more powerful leaders can potentially have stronger electoral effects on vote choice.

The democratization of leadership selection procedures follows a strategy of personalization of party leadership motivated, amongst other factors, by electoral purposes. At a time where political parties have increasing difficulty in appealing to disengaged voters, these types of reforms were often used as a strategy to reconnect with citizens by increasing the legitimacy and popularity of elected leaderships. As Sandri, Seddone and Venturino (2015: 186) put it, "the personalization of politics and the need to react to disaffection with politics are the most relevant factors that, at the political system level, are pressing political parties to adopt

inclusive methods”, opening their leadership selection procedures to all party members or even sympathizers. A leadership appointed by a broader selectorate can potentially respond more directly to the preferences of the whole electorate, thus maximising public support and electoral gains through leadership effects.

The party face has been the most understudied dimension of the presidentialization of politics. In particular, its interconnection with the remaining dimensions is yet to be researched. This article establishes a link between the party and the electoral faces of the presidentialization of politics, with the intent of investigating to what extent the presidentialization of political parties is associated with the increased electoral role of party leaders as short-term determinants of voting behaviour. To what extent do leaders from presidentialized parties have stronger effects on voting behaviour? Do more open selection procedures correspond to a higher electoral impact of leaders? Are leaders formally more powerful also more determinant in individual vote choice?

Answering these questions would allow for a better comprehension of how the changes affecting Western political parties in the last decades contributed to the presidentialization of politics. Given that this theory claims that party change was a fundamental cause for the growing importance of leaders, it would be important to have a better understanding of the mechanisms through which party change produced more electorally relevant leaders. On the other hand, it is relevant from the point of view the democratization of selection procedures and, more generally, of parties’ electoral strategies through the maximisation of leaders’ electoral potential. If leaders who are elected by broader selectorates have then stronger effects on voting behaviour, it could be argued that voters may feel more represented and therefore consider them more thoroughly in the voting decisions. If, on the other hand, more powerful leaders have stronger effects on vote choice, additional rationale is provided for parties to enhancing the leadership’s role and powers within the organization. As office-seeking is argued to be the fundamental goal of contemporary political parties (Katz & Mair, 1995), empowering leaders within the party structure may be functional to the party as a whole from an electoralist perspective. In this sense, leadership can be seen as a growing resource on which parties can capitalise. Emphasising the role of the leader and widening the selectorates may then be

conceived as attempts to maximise the electoral utility of leaders by engaging citizens at large and thus enriching the support base of both the leader and the party.

### **Party change, the role of party leadership and leader effects**

The last half of the twentieth century presented the once hegemonic denominational and mass parties with numerous challenges. Economic growth and the development of the Welfare State reduced the potential for political conflict in Western democracies and contributed to depoliticizing many of the traditional cleavages at the core of the long-term attachments of voters to political parties (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000). As voter alignments lost much of their importance, political parties too have lost much of their traditional electoral base. In such a context, vote choice became no longer a predisposition “constrained by the encapsulation of the mass of the electorate into one of the subcultural groups that the parties represent” (Katz & Mair, 1995: 7) but much more a subject of individual choice. Rising educational levels sparked an increase in citizens’ interest for politics and empowered individuals with the necessary tools to collect, interpret and process political information autonomously from partisan cues. Consequently, the functional utility of partisan bonds as tools to make sense of political phenomena was largely menaced by the growing share of cognitively mobilized citizens, unconstrained from collective identities, and deciding individually and on-the-run about politics, rather than blindly pledging allegiance to the party (Dalton et al., 2000). The advent of television, as a result of the changing structure of mass communications, while arguably expanding the accessibility to political information to more voters, also transformed the very nature of the message (Postman, 1985). The characteristics of television posed additional obstacles to the communication of abstract ideas, complex arguments, programmatic agendas or ideologies (Sartori, 1989). Thus, television emerged as counterproductive to the characteristics and objectives of mass-based parties, sharply contrasting with the previous print-based setting of political communication. Instead, this personality-based medium imposed a new standard emphasizing the importance of image and individual actors as channels for communication (Hayes, 2009). For all these reasons, this set of socio-political transformations

entailed the end of the golden age of frozen alignments and stable electoral bases, challenging the survival of mass-based parties in a changing environment (Mair, 1997).

Facing the threat of decline, and forced to adapt in order to retain their relevance in a setting where enduring allegiances no longer guarantee a solid support base, “parties have begun to transform themselves more and more into centralized and professional campaigning organizations, (...) in which the weight and direction of party strategy have tended increasingly to be located within the party leadership” (Mair et al., 2004b: 265). As many of the social changes described have contributed to a higher importance of political leaders in contemporary politics, and for voting behaviour in particular, under what has been described as a process of personalization of politics, “party politicians may take refuge in a growing leadership-centredness of politics” (Poguntke & Webb, 2005b: 16) and respond by reshaping party organisation to conscientiously accentuate the role of leaders.

The new party types emerged after this period comprise not only ideological mutation but, importantly, also organizational changes altering intra-party balances of power between leaders and members (Webb, Poguntke & Kolodny, 2007: 79). Early works on the organizational transformations provoked by the changes towards contemporary party types highlight the shift of power towards the leader, who concentrates more resources and enjoys a higher degree of autonomy from middle-rank members in the decision-making process (Kirchheimer, 1966; Panebianco, 1988). Notwithstanding the important distinctions between them, whether we refer to Kirchheimer’s (1996) *catch-all party*, to Panebianco’s (1988) *electoral-professional*, to Katz and Mair’s (1995) *cartel party*, or any of the several types comprised within Gunther and Diamond’s (2003) *electoralist* genus, contemporary types of political parties are “organizationally thin, maintaining a relatively skeletal existence except at election time (...), use modern campaign techniques stressing television and mass-communication media over mobilization of party members in order to win votes (...) [and are] characterized also by the large importance that the party leadership acquires for election purposes” (Lobo, 2014b: 364). Another important characteristic of these party types is being fundamentally motivated by electoral success (Gunther & Diamond, 2003). Thus, at a time in which voters’ evaluations of leaders running for election has become one of the most decisive predictors of vote choice – and consequently of electoral outcomes –, from an office-seeking

perspective, it was only rational for parties to attempt at maximizing their electoral potential by enhancing the leadership role.

Emphasising leaders came as a functional response for political parties in a context of partisanship decline and mediatisation of politics, as they “enjoy a capacity to appeal to the electorate at large, an electorate made up of voters who were learning to behave more like consumers than active participants” as a result of individualization and dealignment (Katz & Mair, 1995: 7). By privileging the personalities of leaders over programmes or ideology, an effective media strategy with telegenic candidates significantly reduces the utility of mass membership as a vehicle for electoral mobilization (Gunther & Diamond, 2003: 168). Facing the decline in party membership across Western contemporary parties (van Biezen, Mair & Poguntke, 2012; Scarrow, 2000), priming leaders loomed as a crucial alternative to the role traditionally played by party allegiance.

Dealignment carried not only a setting of decline of partisanship and party membership, but also a decrease in voter turnout rates and higher electoral volatility (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). Adding to this, more recently Western democracies have been fustigated by rising levels of political discontent, anti-party discourse and generalized disaffection in contemporary democracies, leading many authors to advance with a scenario of crisis of political parties (Mair, 2013). These symptoms reflect a crisis of representation, in which is claimed parties have lost a great deal of their ability to perform the linkage function with civil society's demands and to promote generalized participation (Bartolini & Mair, 2001; Schmitter, 2001; Schmitter & Trechsel, 2004). Such scenario posed new challenges to political parties in terms of their ability to reengage with voters and obtain broad public support to access power. Some of the ways in which they have responded to these new demands imposed by a changing environment were through a personalization of the political party and through organizational reforms intended to reflect more democratic and participatory practices, such as democratizing leadership selection procedures. As Mair, Müller and Plasser (2004: 11) put it, “when parties do choose to respond to changes in the electoral markets, it is often by first seeking to reform their internal organization (...), by introducing changes in their internal power distribution (...) [or to] include new methods of candidate selection which are introduced with the intention of recruiting more attractive candidates and/or to afford more leeway to the party leadership”. For example,

personalizing political parties was “the most important tool employed by centre and right parties to implement their survival strategies” in the Italian 1990s context of generalized dissatisfaction with the political system (De Luca & Venturino, 2015: 130-1).

Two fundamental organizational changes can be argued to accurately reflect the growing importance attributed to leaders within party organization: a) the institutionalization of direct leadership elections, and b) a further concentration of formal powers at the hands of the party leader. These two transformations in parties’ organizational structures and respective consequences for the role of party leadership in contemporary politics have been theorized under the presidentialization of politics thesis. The presidentialization of politics “denominates a process by which regimes are becoming more presidential in their actual practice without, in most cases, changing their formal structure, that is, their regime-type” (Poguntke & Webb, 2005b: 1). One of its key features is the growing power of political leaders in parliamentary regimes over the last decades, resulting in increasing leadership power resources, autonomy within the party and an extensive personalization of the electoral process. This results in what the authors have named the three faces of presidentialization: a) the *executive face*, corresponding to the growing independence and accumulation of power resources at the disposal of the head of government; b) the *party face*, involving a structural shift in intra-party power to the benefit of the leader, who enjoys further autonomy from the party’s middle-level elites and is freer to pursue a more personalized form of party leadership; c) the *electoral face*, translating into a higher consideration of party leaders in the voting decision process. While Poguntke and Webb provide preliminary evidence of a trend towards a presidentialization of politics in all three realms, their volume has been particularly successful in setting the agenda for further research taking place in the next decade.

Arguably one of the most relevant indicators of the presidentialization of political parties, according to Poguntke and Webb (2005b: 20), is the institutionalization of direct leadership elections. In fact, an increasingly relevant stream of literature has developed in recent years, accounting for a progressive democratization of leadership selection procedures. Many authors found evidence of a widespread trend towards more inclusive leadership selection procedures in modern Western parties, where the leader is appointed by broader selectorates

such as all party members, or even extended to supporters through open primaries (LeDuc, 2001; Sandri, Seddone & Venturino, 2015).

Cross and Pilet (2014: 6-7) identify three main factors in the origin of this democratizing process. First, as parties adapt to changes in their surrounding context, they have placed leaders at the forefront as their visible representatives and broadened their selection procedures in coherence with the overall personalization of politics trend. Second, the proliferation of democratic values, as an outcome of increased educational levels, called for more inclusive means of political participation and transparency in politics, putting pressure on parties to be more responsive and accountable to both their members and citizens through the promotion of intra-party democracy. Third, the democratization of political parties is largely a reaction to the trends of partisan detachment and overall disengagement with politics as a consequence of the erosion of the long-term aligning cleavages that once structured partisan bonds. This translated into a decline of party identification and membership to which parties have responded by granting their members and citizens in general a stronger role in the selection of the leader. As Lisi (2010: 129-30) points out, “to recover the crisis of political parties in contemporary democracies, which can to a great extent be interpreted as a crisis of their image within public opinion, parties may consider the adoption of leadership selection reforms as a means to regenerate their legitimacy and their confidence among citizens”. Therefore, the trend towards more inclusive leader selection procedures can be understood as a reflection of social developments, such as individualization and the personalization of politics, combined with disaffection, the decline of ideology and party identification (Barnea & Rahat, 2007: 382). Hence, the process of presidentialization of political parties, and specifically the democratization of leadership selection, was often used as a panacea to reengage with a progressively debased electorate in a context of party decline and personalized politics. Pilet and Cross (2014: 229) finding that 68,8% of the parties in their sample opened their leadership selection procedures to closed/open primaries after an electoral defeat is illustrative of this argument.

As lucidly put by Scarrow, Webb and Farrell (2000: 132), “in an era where many debates have populist overtones, legitimacy – the image of being ‘of the people’ – may be one of the least substitutable of the benefits which members can corporately confer. How much legitimacy



members provide may be intimately linked (...) in particular to the extent to which party leaders can claim that they and their policies have a mandate from the membership”. But as much as democratizing leadership selection procedures can intuitively be perceived as an instrument of boosting and enlarging leadership popularity, authority and legitimacy *within* the party, it is not as straightforward if, and under what conditions, could those same intended consequences transpire to the overall electorate. Naming Romano Prodi’s strategic use of primaries as an electoral strategy to increment popularity and improve electoral performance in the 2006 Italian election as an example, Lisi (2010: 131-2) stresses that parties may rationally expand the leadership franchise as an electoral asset with the goal to enhance party electoral appeal and maximise votes. But to what extent does the generality of voters respond to these changes electorally? Are leaders (s)elected through more democratic procedures stronger from an electoral point of view? Or are eventual gains in legitimacy restricted to intra-party politics and not extensible to the external electoral arena?

Another means of assessing the presidentialization of political parties is by focusing on internal power distribution, namely the recent tendency for a gradual concentration of formal powers on the leadership position (Poguntke & Webb, 2005b: 20). Here, there seems to be a trade-off between enlarged selectorates and concentration of power at the hands of the leadership: while leaders become more accountable to party members or supporters when it comes to the particular moment of appointment or removal from the leadership, they also become more independent to steer the party at their will during their mandates. As a consequence of party presidentialization, the leadership increasingly attempts to by-pass sub-leader or activist strata of the party by communicating directly with the grass roots regarding strategic questions (Poguntke & Webb, 2005b: 20). The same had been noted by Mair (1997: 148-150), who argued that cartel party leaders formally empower the ordinary party members, or even a broader range of supporters, in order to gain the necessary autonomy. Likewise, Katz (2001: 281) highlights that the increase in the nominal power of the rank-and-file members comes at the expenses of the middle-level party structures, which became deprived of most of their ability to control the leadership, rather than the leadership itself. More recently, Cross and Pilet (2014: 2) subscribed the same idea, arguing that parties controlled by middle-level elites have lost ground. These examples point to a paradox inherent to the recent democratization of selection procedures. On the one hand, the option for broader selectorates has often been

intended, amongst other factors, to overcome an intra-party democratic deficit by giving voice to rank-and-file members and reconnect citizens with the political process, while refraining oligarchic tendencies within the parties (Kenig, 2008: 241). On the other hand, in practical terms it does not seem to necessarily correspond to a more dispersed power distribution within the party and can also (un)intentionally promote more concentration of power on the leadership. Therefore, under the presidentialization of politics, a democratization of leadership selection procedures can coexist and even be instrumental to a further accumulation of powers on the leadership's office.

The higher profile of the leadership within party organization empowered party leaders with a greater pool of resources to exercise their influence and affirm their predominant role within the party. This could have repercussions beyond intra-party politics, extending to voters' perceived role of leadership. As the leadership's prerogative regarding policy-making stands out (Scarrow, Webb & Farrell, 2000), for example, this can rationally incentivise a further attribution of relevance to leader evaluations in the voting calculus: if leaders become more important in determining the party's fate, they are an increasingly relevant factor to consider in anticipating the party's policy-decisions and overall performance. Also, more powerful leaders have more resources to carry an influential leadership mandate and consequently are more likely to be primed by the media, gaining visibility and a more noticeable profile. They stand out more clearly from the party as politically relevant individual actors and thus become more salient to voters.

Research stemming from the presidentialization of politics has been especially prolific in providing evidence concerning the electoral face of the presidentialization, with numerous studies confirming the impact of voters' assessment of party leaders in their voting decisions (Bittner, 2011; Garzia, 2013a; Lobo & Curtice, 2014; Mughan, 2015). Notwithstanding the upmost relevant contribution of this stream of research in demonstrating the paramount role leaders nowadays play in the media and the electoral arena, this research has been carried in disconnection with the increasing importance of leaders within party organization under a context of party adaptation to the changing electoral markets. A meritorious exception is the study of Lobo (2008), which demonstrated that leaders of electoralist parties have a stronger impact on vote choice, thus providing evidence of a relationship between party type and leader

effects. Garzia and Viotti (2012) carried a similar analysis for the Italian case and found leader effects to be stronger in *Forza Italia* and *Popolo della Libertà*. However, the party face of the presidentialization of politics and its consequences for contemporary politics still lack a proper empirical assessment of their own. Moreover, the specific relationship between the party and the electoral faces remains largely unstudied, despite strong theoretical reasons to expect an interdependence between the two realms. In fact, Poguntke and Webb (2005b: 17) warn that “we should not overlook the fact that electoral, intra-party and intra-executive presidentialization could impact on each other”. In the same way, the personalization of politics thesis points to the interrelationship between the party organisational transformations promoting increased leadership relevance and the growing preponderance of political leaders in contemporary politics.

This study aims at addressing the link between the electoral and the party faces of the presidentialization of politics by enquiring a) whether to parties’ strategy of broadening selection procedures to boost leaders support basis, public visibility and overall legitimacy amongst voters, corresponded an increase in leaders’ electoral effects, and b) whether the intra-party organizational changes further empowering leaders within its structure correspond to stronger electoral effects on vote choice.

Considering the discussed theoretical framework, the following hypothesis can be formulated regarding the role of the party face of the presidentialization on leader effects on voting behaviour.

H1: Leaders appointed by broader selectorates benefit from a wider support basis and legitimacy that strengthens their electoral effect

H2: Leaders that concentrate a larger set of powers at their disposal, as granted by party statutes, enjoy further autonomy within the party and are perceived by the electorate as more influential, therefore impacting voters’ behaviour more decisively

## Data and Methods

In order to test the hypotheses, both data on individual-level voting behaviour and on party characteristics is required. The former type of data is provided by the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) dataset, which compiles post-electoral studies over a multitude of countries, harmonized according to a common module. Modules 3 (2006-2011) and 4 (2011-2016) of CSES were used for this study because they are the more recent ones. Considering that the discussed party changes, particularly regarding the leader selection procedure, happened essentially in the last two decades, this is the key period of interest for this study and thus older modules were not considered. In addition to CSES countries, some countries were added through their respective national election studies, whenever data on the two party-level variables of interest was available – this was the case with the British Election Study of 2015 and the Hungarian National Election Study of 2006. The main advantages of the CSES data are its reliability and comparative nature, due to the application of the same set of questions in different contexts. Nevertheless, it has the shortcoming of containing very little information at the party level, fundamental to the purpose of this study.

Therefore, in the elaboration of the dataset used in this article, the CSES data was complemented with the recently made available data of the Political Party Database (PPDB). This resource provides contextual data at the party level for 122 parties in 19 countries, including information on party rules, resources, party membership, intra-party democracy and party organization (Poguntke, Scarrow & Webb, 2016). The PPDB provided the necessary data on the power resources at the disposal of the party leader. This variable was constructed as an index of leadership power, corresponding to the sum of number of powers held by the party leader<sup>32</sup>, theoretically ranging from 0 to 9 but in practice ranging from 1 to 7, since there are no leaders cumulating more than 7 powers.

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<sup>32</sup> Leader may help select deputy leader; may summon party officials; may summon party congress; may attend party executive; may attend party congress; may appoint at least one member of party executive; must consent to coalition agreements; is designated party's 'external representative'; is expressly accountable to party congress. Each right is coded as 1 and the absence of the right is coded as 0, except for 'is expressly accountable to party congress', where the logic is reversed.

Another type of data drawn from the PPDB refers to the leader selection procedure. This variable was coded as follows: 1. Single individual; 2. Party elite; 3. Party delegates; 4. Party members; 5. All voters. However, there are no cases in this study's sample where the leader is appointed by a single individual. One limitation of the PPDB is the relatively large amount of missing data on some variables. The variables of interest of this study are no exception – data on the leader selection procedure was not always available in the dataset. This issue was tackled by using data on the leader selection procedure from the growing body of literature that has been recently published on the topic (Bucur & McMnamin, 2015; Pilet & Cross, 2014; Sandri, Seddone and Venturino, 2015).

Due to these data availability constraints, it was not possible to gather contextual party-level data for all country election studies featured in both the CSES modules used. Thus, from the whole range of studies included in that data source, our sample was restricted to a total of 15 countries analysed.<sup>33</sup>

Some specificities of the CSES dataset, inherent to its comparative nature, also impose some constraints on how to analyse parties, their leaders and vote choice. Given that parties, leaders and their number vary across time and countries, it would not be possible to analyse their impact on voting behaviour comparatively without some important transformations on the data matrix. A frequently used approach to deal with this issue is to 'stack' the data matrix according to the number of parties/leaders, so that each line corresponds to a party-respondent combination (see van der Eijk & Franklin 1996). The result is that each respondent appears in the dataset as many times as the total number of parties/leaders running for election in that country in that election year. It follows that the dependent variable vote choice, instead of consisting on a nominal configuration of the several parties running for election in a country in an election-year (what would be incomparable across countries), becomes a binary choice (0: Did not vote for this party; 1: Vote for this party) of vote for a generic party, repeated as many times per respondent as many parties run for that election. In short, the dependent variable is a dummy capturing the combination of party-voters' choice. Across that given number of

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<sup>33</sup> Australia (2013), Canada (2011), Israel (2013), Germany (2013), Iceland (2013), Ireland (2011), Denmark (2011), Italy (2013), the Netherlands (2010), United Kingdom (2015), Sweden (2014), Czech Republic (2013), Norway (2013), Portugal (2015) and Hungary (2006).

respondent-observations, individual-level constant variables remain constant (i.e., age, etc.) and party-level variables vary (i.e., leader; selection procedure, etc.). Examples of studies employing a similar approach are abundant in the literature (Aarts, Blais & Schmitt, 2011; Curtice & Lisi, 2015; Garzia, 2013a).

Given the hierarchical structure of the data, especially considering its restructuration to a stacked data matrix, a multilevel approach was initially considered as most adequate. In the stacked dataset, the number of second-level units is the actual number of unique respondents, upon which repeated respondent-party observations are nested. However, for both hypotheses, the models show virtually no variance in the random intercepts, suggesting that although the data structure is theoretically hierarchical, the hierarchical structure does not receive empirical sustenance. This was corroborated by the extremely low intra-class correlation, which did not pass the likelihood-ratio test ( $\rho=0$ ). In fact, the estimates for the random-intercept model were essentially the same as those of a logistic model with fixed-effects by election study and clustered standard errors. Therefore, the more parsimonious option for the latter type of model was preferred. Nevertheless, the estimates for the random-intercept models can be consulted in Tables A1 and A2 in the appendix.

At the individual-level, the following socio-demographic variables were included in the models: age is measured in years; gender (0. Female; 1. Male); education (0. None; 1. Primary education; 2. Secondary education; 3. Tertiary education); organizational membership, built from a compound index of the following dichotomous questions (0: No; 1: Yes): “Are you a member of a union?”, “Are you a member of a business or employers’ association?”, “Are you a member of a farmers’ association?”, and “Are you a member of a professional association?”. Party identification was coded as follows: -1. Identifies with another party; 0. No party identification; 1. Identifies with this party. Political knowledge was also controlled for due to the possible differentiated impact of leaders according to voters’ degree of political sophistication, frequently hypothesized in the literature (Gidengil, 2011; Rico, 2014). It was built out of three political knowledge questions (0. No correct answers; 1. One correct answer; 2. Two correct answers; 3. All correct answers). Still at the individual level, retrospective sociotropic economic evaluations (1. Much better; 2. Better; 3. Stayed the same; 4. Worse; 5. Much worse) were also controlled for. Finally, the key variable of interest is a leader likeability

scale (0. Strongly dislikes; 10. Strongly likes), which interacted with the selection procedure and the leadership power index provides the test to the previously formulated hypotheses.

Additionally, three control variables were included at the party-level: party family (coded based on the Manifesto Project Database: 1. Communist/Greens, 2. Social Democratic, 3. Christian/Conservatives, 4. Liberals, 5. Far Right/Nationalists, 6. Regional, 7. Special Issue, 8. Agrarian); the vote share of each party averaged across the last three elections; a variable dichotomizing competitive from non-competitive leadership selection procedures. These are meant to control for party characteristics which might influence the outcomes of interest. For example, leaders may be more important in mainstream party families such as Social Democrats and/or Conservatives because a) these have suffered the most from partisan dealignment and thus short-term factors such as leaders may play a stronger role for them, and b) mainstream parties tend to be more heavily featured in the media. For the same reasons, these parties may also be more prone to democratize their selection procedures. Likewise, parties who are electorally more relevant tend to be more often in power, enjoy more media attention and thus get more visibility. These factors may influence both the electoral effect of their leaders and their probability to implement more democratic selection procedures.

## **Results**

Each hypothesis was tested in an independent logistic regression fixed-effects model with clustered standard errors to impede a reduction of the sample size due to missing cases. Two separate models were estimated: the first tests whether leaders selected through more open selection procedures are more determinant on voters' electoral decisions (H1); the second tests whether leaders who concentrate more power resources at their disposal have a stronger effect on voting behaviour (H2).

The first model tests the possible mediating impact of the leader selection procedure on the impact of voters' assessments of party leaders in their voting behaviour. In line with the hypothesis, the expectation was that more open selection procedures would produce leaders

with a broader basis of support and legitimacy, which would in its turn reflect on their electoral impact.

**Table 2 - The moderating effect of the selection procedure on leader effects on vote choice: logistic regression model with election study fixed-effects and clustered standard errors**

	Coef.	S.E.	95% Conf. Interval	
Age	.002**	.001	.001	.003
Gender	-.025	.019	-.063	.013
Education	-.008	.015	-.038	.022
Org. membership	.054*	.023	.010	.098
PID	1.88***	.027	1.82	1.93
Political knowledge	.007	.013	-.018	.032
Leader evaluations	.433***	.024	.386	.480
<i>Party-level controls</i>				
Party family	.033*	.015	.004	.062
Average vote share	.038***	.002	.035	.041
Competitive primary	-.013	.026	-.064	.038
<i>Selection procedure</i>				
Party delegates	.140	.196	-.246	.525
Party members	.294	.204	-.106	.694
All voters	.080	.290	-.488	.647
<i>Leader*Selection</i>				
Party delegates	.025	.026	-.026	.075
Party members	.003	.027	-.050	.057
All voters	.042	.041	-.038	.122



Constant	-4.41***	.203	-4.81	-4.02
Pseudo R2		.51		
N(observations)		61246		
N(clusters: individuals)		13610		

\* p< .05; \*\*p< .01; \*\*\*p< .001

The results, presented in Table 1, disconfirm the initial expectations. The interaction between leader evaluations and the type of leadership selection procedure is not statistically significant and therefore no moderation effect was identified. In other words, there does not seem to be a relationship between the type of leadership selection procedure and the strength of leader effects on voting behaviour. This outcome rejects the proposition of H1 and suggests the limited success of broadening leadership selection procedures as an instrument of reengaging with the electorate at large through leaders' appeal. Voters seem to make no distinction of how a leader is selected regarding the way such leader is positively/negatively perceived. Inasmuch as the democratization of leadership selection procedures may arouse positive perceptions from an intra-party perspective, such benefits do not travel in a form of increased leadership effects to the global electorate. In fact, in recent European elections there are plenty of examples of primary-elected leaders who succumbed in succeeding elections. For instance, Matteo Renzi was elected for the third time leader of the *Partito Democratico* in 2017 with 69% of the votes, racing against two other candidates. One year later, the coalition led by his party in the 2018 Italian general elections got only 23% of the total votes. Similarly, François Fillon looked like a very strong candidate after the 2016 French Republican presidential primary, which he resoundingly won with 66.5% of the votes, against candidates like Alain Juppé and Nicolas Sarkozy. Notwithstanding the scandals that hit his campaign in the meantime, Fillon would not go pass the first round in the general election that took place just a few months later.

Voters' perceptions of a more powerful role of leaders within party organization – and eventual spill over effects to policy-making decision control and overall executive leadership – may have more concrete consequences on how much they weight leader evaluations when going to the ballot box. The second hypothesis established a relationship between the leader's power

resources and her impact on voting behaviour. The expectation was that leaders who have more powers at their disposal as granted by party statutes, have more leverage to exercise their influence, play a more determinant role within the party, and therefore are perceived as more influential by voters, who will then consider them as more important factors in their voting calculus.

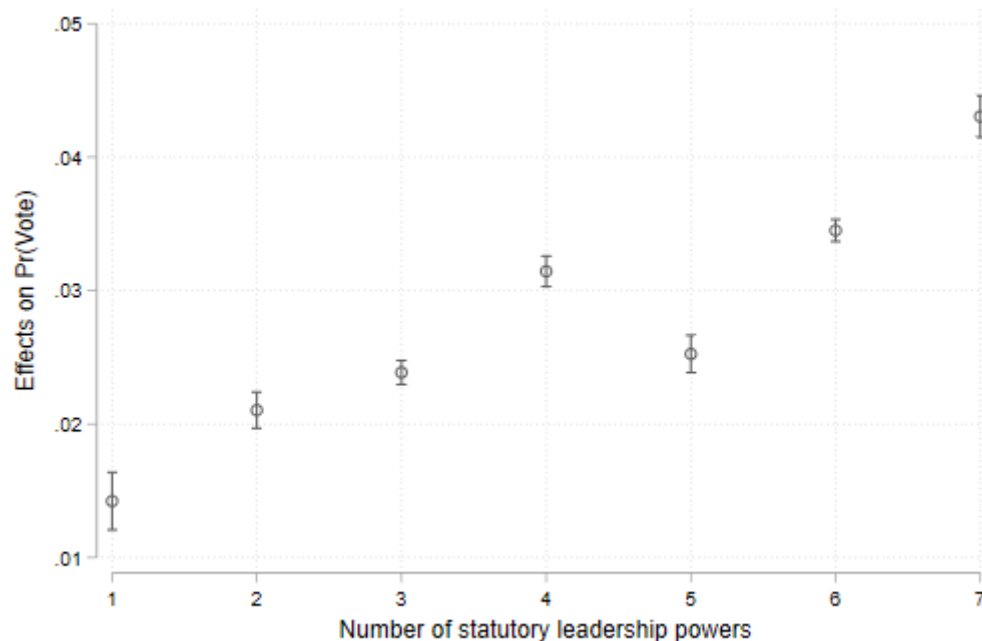
**Table 3 - The moderating effect of leadership power on leader effects on vote choice: logistic regression model with election study fixed-effects and clustered standard errors**

	Coef.	S.E.	95% Conf. Interval	
Age	.002***	.001	.001	.003
Gender	-.036	.019	-.073	.001
Education	.015	.015	-.015	.043
Org. membership	.025	.022	-.019	.069
PID	2.21***	.031	2.15	2.27
Political knowledge	.008	.014	-.020	.035
Leader evaluations	.065***	.018	.028	.101
Leadership power	-.875***	.046	-.965	-.785
<i>Party-level controls</i>				
Party family	.130***	.014	.101	.157
Average vote share	.034***	.002	.030	.038
Competitive primary	.154***	.030	.095	.213
Leader*Leadership power	.100***	.006	.089	.112
Constant	-1.69***	.136	-1.96	-1.42
Pseudo R2			.53	
N(observations)			60436	
N(clusters: individuals)			13609	

\* p< .05; \*\*p< .01; \*\*\*p< .001

The results presented in Table 2 confirm the expectations formulated regarding H2. A positive and significant interaction effect was found between the number of statutory powers granted to the leader and leader evaluations. Therefore, more powerful leaders have stronger effects on vote choice. The interaction effect was plotted for a better interpretation (Figure 1).

**Figure 1 - Interaction between leadership power and leader evaluations. Marginal effects on vote choice.**

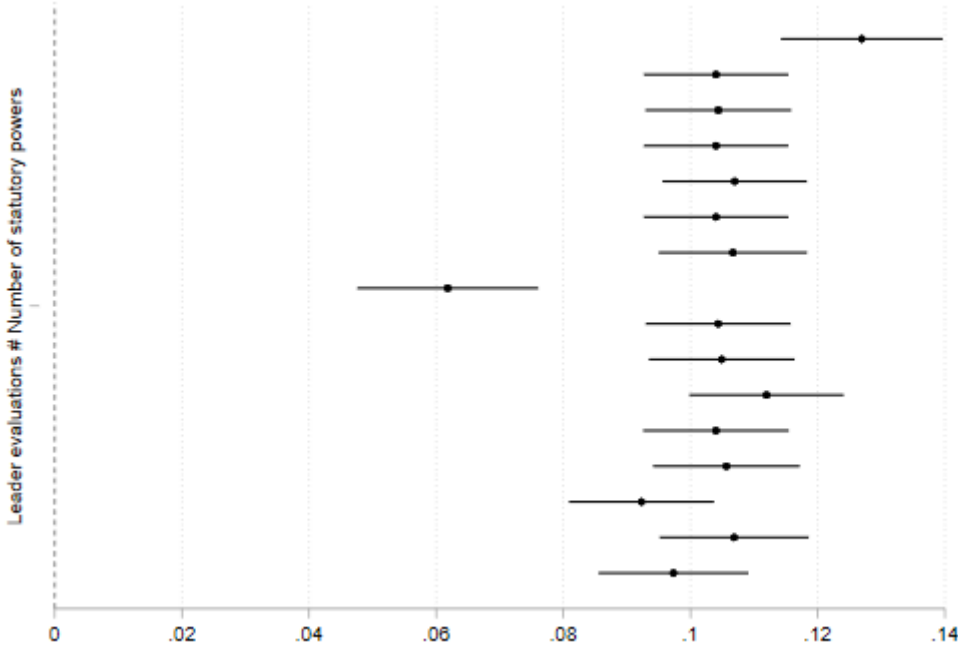


There is an incremental increase on leaders' effects on vote choice across the leadership power index – which although ranges from 1 to 9, in practice never goes beyond 7. The increase in leader effects across the number of statutory powers is not linear but the general upward trend is quite clear. Leader effects on the vote are about for times higher for a leader holding 7 statutory powers, compared to a leader holding only one. Either because voters are able to actively distinguish between more or less powerful leaders – and their eventually differentiated political impact –, or because more powerful leaders have better conditions to stand out from the party, deserve more mediatic attention and thus are more heavily primed to voters, the degree

of leadership power is relevant in influencing voting calculus. Not all leaders are the same and their power within the political party organization matters for their effects on vote choice.

Besides having been tested in different model specifications – in a multilevel random-intercept model (Tables A1 and A2 in the appendix) –, the robustness of these results was tested through leave-one-out cross-validation tests. The regression model was reran excluding each country election study at a time from the sample. The interaction remained positive and significant, demonstrating that they were not being driven by a potential outlier. The cross-validation test results are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2 – Leave-one-out cross-validation test results: the moderating effect of leadership power on leader effects on vote choice**



The results from the two models present additional refinements on the party dimension of the presidentialization of politics. In specific, they demonstrate how elements of party presidentialization may interact with the electoral dimension. While providing evidence of a congruent electoral response to the empowerment of leaders within party organizational structures, the results also cast doubts on the electoral gains of democratizing reforms, often

intended to reengage with citizens and maximise public support. The implications of these findings are further discussed in the concluding section.

## **Conclusions**

This article proposed to assess to what extent the presidentialization of political parties – through the accumulation of power in the leadership’s hands and broader leadership selection procedures – contributes to stronger leader effects on voting behaviour. In this way, it aimed at demonstrating the interconnection between the party and the electoral dimensions of the presidentialization of politics. The results stemming from the empirical analysis provided mixed evidence.

On the one hand, it was demonstrated that leaders who enjoy a higher number of powers at their disposal, as granted by party statutes, have stronger effects on voting behaviour. Hence, as leaders reinforce their dominant position within political parties, they are able to more effectively capitalise on their electoral potential. This corroborates the established theoretical argument that the transformations in Western political parties, by emphasising the role of the leader within new party types, contributed to the development of the personalization of politics, namely through higher leadership effects on voting behaviour. In the present context of anti-party discourse, partisan dealignment, and generalized scepticism towards politics, the means through which electoral gains can be potentiated are a strategic aspect to be considered by office-seeking political parties. The fact that voters are sensitive to differences in power across leaders is significant of the relevance they attribute to the role of party leadership in contemporary politics, thus providing further incentives for parties to personalize, centring their activities around the leadership’s office.

On the other hand, no statistically significant difference was found on leader effects resulting from different leadership selection procedures. Leaders selected from more open (or closed) selection procedures, do not have stronger effects on vote choice. This finding demonstrates the limits of the institutionalization of more democratic leadership selection procedures as a party strategy dedicated to maximising electoral gains through increased leader

popularity amongst the electorate. Although previous studies established that party leaders may be important actors in reconnecting citizens with politics in a context of partisan dealignment, these results suggest that such reengagement is not achieved by means of enlarged legitimacy, popularity or support basis resulting from more democratic leadership selection procedures.

Furthermore, this conclusion carries nuances with regard to the presidentialization of politics theory. As the institutionalization of direct leadership elections may enhance the leadership's popularity, authority and legitimacy *within* the party, particularly amongst rank-and-file members, such procedural incentives and its benefits do not seem to travel to the electorate at large. Two tentative interpretations can be offered in this regard. The first is related to the degree of competitiveness and combativeness of the internal electoral contest for the party leadership. Party leadership elections may often prove rather contentious. By opposing what sometimes can be considered proper factions, they can potentially create or accentuate divides within the party, compromising party unity and exposing to the general electorate the scars of the internal dispute and the flaws of the victorious leadership. Furthermore, these conflicts can endure beyond the party leadership elections, hindering party consensus and possibly wearing out or fragilizing the newly elected leadership up until general elections. A leader questioned both externally – by opposing political parties – and internally – by party adversaries –, may be then perceived by voters as less fit for the job. For party supporters, this can constitute an incentive for abstention or vote switching. Such argument fits into the well-known literature on “divisive primaries”, which confirms how quarrelsome direct leadership elections may harm candidates' electoral chances, particularly in the American context (Bernstein, 1977; Hacker, 1965; Johnson & Gibson, 1974; Piereson & Smith, 1975).

An alternative interpretation builds on May's law of curvilinear disparity, postulating that rank-and-file members tend to be more ideological than the party elite and the party's voters (May, 1973). To cope with the dealignment context, office-seeking parties attempt at vote maximisation by downplaying ideological considerations and targeting the median voter. However, with the progressive adoption of one-member-one-vote leadership selection procedures, rank-and-file members may be providing incentives for the leadership contenders to be more ideological and, ultimately, may be electing more ideologically-oriented leaders for their parties. Electorally motivated party leaders may find this membership's influence

pernicious (Scarrow, Webb & Farrell, 2000) but in a context of direct leadership elections, may be forced to be responsive to it, at least to a certain degree. Should that be the case, the appeal of these leaders to the overall electorate may be hindered by the ideological influence of rank-and-file members' purposive incentives, being counterproductive to the party's election prospects.

**APPENDIX: CHAPTER 5**

**Table A1.** The moderating effect of the selection procedure on leader effects on vote choice: random intercept model

	Coef.	S.E.	95% Conf. Interval	
Age	.002**	.001	.001	.004
Gender	-.038	.031	-.098	.022
Education	-.153***	.021	-.194	-.112
Org. membership	-.083*	.034	-.149	-.017
PID	1.89***	.022	1.84	1.93
Political knowledge	-.052**	.018	-.087	-.016
Leader evaluations	.405***	.023	.360	.450
<i>Party-level controls</i>				
Party family	-.047***	.012	-.071	-.023
Average vote share	.047***	.001	.045	.049
Competitive primary	.359***	.036	.289	.430
<i>Selection procedure</i>				
Party delegates	-.294	.175	-.638	.049
Party members	-.191	.178	-.540	.157
All voters	.176	.259	-.332	.684
<i>Leader*Selection</i>				
Party delegates	.025	.025	-.023	.074
Party members	.015	.026	-.035	.065
All voters	.059	.039	-.018	.135
Constant	-3.99***	.190	-4.37	-3.62
Variance(individuals)			.000	



N(observations)	61246
N(individuals)	13610

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\* p< .05; \*\*p< .01; \*\*\*p< .001

**Table A2.** The moderating effect of leadership power on leader effects on vote choice:

random intercept model

	Coef.	S.E.	95% Conf. Interval	
Age	.002*	.001	.000	.004
Gender	-.033	.031	-.094	.029
Education	-.147***	.021	-.187	-.106
Org. membership	-.065	.034	-.132	.002
PID	2.21***	.024	2.17	2.26
Political knowledge	-.033	.019	-.070	.004
Leader evaluations	.046**	.016	.013	.078
Leadership power	-.839***	.038	-.913	-.765
<i>Party-level controls</i>				
Party family	.069***	.012	.045	.092
Average vote share	.038***	.001	.036	.041
Competitive primary				
Leader*Leadership power	.104***	.005	.093	.115
Constant	-1.49***	.147	-1.77	-1.20
Variance (individuals)			.000	
N(observations)			60436	
N(clusters: individuals)			13609	

\* p< .05; \*\*p< .01; \*\*\*p< .001

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This thesis aimed at addressing unsettled debates on the personalization of politics, as well as shedding light on several underappreciated aspects of this phenomenon. Regarding the longstanding disputes in the subfield, it contributed to the clarification of the processual dynamic of the personalization of politics by considering a long temporal scope, and at providing empirical evidence of the theoretical linkages between, on the one hand, the socio-political developments and mass media transformations characterizing the last century and, on the other hand, the emergence of the personalization of voting behaviour in Western democracies. Answering these questions was possible thanks to the creation of an innovative dataset pooling 129 parliamentary elections conducted between 1961 and 2018 in 14 West European countries, containing information on voters' evaluations of party leaders, as well as other relevant variables to test the key hypotheses of these study, such as patterns of exposure to political information on the different media. This dataset allowed to go beyond the limited analyses of previous studies, by employing a large-N comparative approach and a longitudinal scope covering over 50 years of electoral research.

I have also explored novel avenues of research within the personalization of voting behavior. In specific, I have developed a theoretical framework under which the personalization of politics can extend beyond vote choice and also affect voter turnout decisions, putting such proposition to empirical test. This constitutes a new area under which party leaders are found to have an influence over individual voting behavior. In addition, I have also investigated whether and how the personalization of politics resonates within political parties' organizational structure, establishing a connection between the personalization and the presidentialization of politics literature. In this respect, I have given particular emphasis to political parties' organizational responses to the changing electoral environment through reforms destined to reinforce the role of the leadership.

## Overview of the findings and their implications

One of the main obstacles to research on the personalization of politics stems from the shortage of appropriate data to test the processual argument inherent to this thesis. As stated in the introduction of this thesis, previous studies are either too restricted in their temporal scope or too narrow in the breadth of countries considered in the analyses to advance with conclusive results in this regard. Because of these limitations, an ongoing debate persists on whether there is actually a trend towards a growing importance of leader assessments for voting decisions in contemporary democracies or, whether leaders have always been relevant and their current importance is undistinguishable from the mid-twentieth century. Such debate has inclusively created a demand for conceptual clarification in most recent theoretical contributions, which have assertively distinguished between personalized politics and the personalization of politics (Rahat & Kenig, 2018).

Fully understanding the processual nature of the personalization of politics thesis is important not only for a matter of conceptual clarification but fundamentally because of its theoretical implications. It is worth recalling that the theoretical background of the personalization of politics grounds on three sets of factors: a) an individualization of voting behaviour emerging from the erosion of cleavage-based voting and consequent process of partisan dealignment; b) transformations in the structure of mass communication, particularly with the diffusion of television as voters' main source of political information and parties' preferred channel of political communication; and c) a process of party change and adaption to a changing environment, reshaping their electoral profiles, modes of operating and organizational structures. In short, "the personalization of politics can be conceived as the cumulative effect of the changes occurring in the reciprocal relationships between the main actors of contemporary democratic politics: voters, parties, and the media." (Garzia, 2014: 6). It is the onset of such transformations that is argued to have set in motion the process of personalization of politics. As such, the socio-political changes in voters, parties, and the media are theoretically held as antecedent to a personalization of voting behavior. It follows that, in order for such theoretical assumptions to be valid, they presuppose some sort of *change* on pre-existing conditions regarding the impact of leaders on the vote. To be sure, should the relative importance of leaders on voting behavior be the same today as in the 1960s, dealignment, media

change and party change/adaptation could not have sparked a personalized/personalization of politics. Therefore, understanding whether leaders have become more relevant across time vis-à-vis political parties is also instrumental to assess the extent to which the theoretical triad parties-media-voters is, indeed, related to the personalization of politics thesis.

This dissertation proposed to go beyond pre-existing studies by contributing with empirical evidence of the theoretical linkages between the changes on each vortex of this triad and the development of a personalization of voting behavior, in an attempt to address its theoretical foundations. Regarding voters, chapter 2 has devoted to analysing the changes across time in West European electorates, with particular emphasis on the process of partisan dealignment and its relationship with growing leader effects on the vote. Chapter 4 has further explored the voters' dimension by examining whether dealignment could similarly be leading to a higher consideration of leader evaluations on turnout decisions. Concerning the media, chapter 3 has analysed the relationship between voters' patterns of consumption of political information in the media and voting behaviour, investigating whether a television-dominated media diet conduces to more personalized vote choices. As for parties, chapter 5 has considered recent organizational reforms carried by political parties in response to the changing electoral markets – in specific, democratizing leadership selection procedures and expanding the range of statutory powers conferred to the party leadership –, to evaluate the extent to which these are creating incentives for stronger leader effects.

While the theoretical framework presiding over the personalization of politics is, today, relatively undisputed among scholars, previous studies have not provided evidence of the interrelationship between dealignment, media change and party change on the development of this trend. Partly because of data limitations, existing research has been more concerned with demonstrating whether leaders matter or have come to matter *more* throughout time, and under what conditions, than with empirically examining the theoretical linkages between these socio-political changes and the personalization of politics. The findings presented in the chapters of this dissertation can hopefully contribute to better understanding the interconnection between the processes of electoral dealignment, media and party change, and the transformations in Western electorates leading to a personalization of voting behavior.

Chapter 2 explored the relationship between partisan dealignment and the changing determinants of vote choice in 14 West European parliamentary democracies in the period between 1961-2016. It offers the most comprehensive test to date of the personalization of politics temporal/processual hypotheses by comprising the longest longitudinal time-span under the broadest comparative analyses of countries. In doing so, it potentially contributes decisively to the most prominent debate subsisting on this topic, overcoming the data limitations of previous studies which yielded inconclusive results. Comparing the effects of leaders vis-à-vis partisanship across more than five decades, the results suggest that both critics and proponents of the personalization thesis were partially right. Leader effects did not increase over time, but partisanship effects have substantially declined. Thus, while the impact of leaders on vote choice has not increased in absolute terms, the relative importance of leader evaluations in individual voting calculus has significantly grown over this period. The conclusions of this chapter offer a more nuanced account of the longitudinal dimension of the personalization of politics, indicating that partisan dealignment is the key contextual dynamic in downplaying the electoral impact of partisan attachments vis-à-vis leader evaluations. Accounting for the dynamic interplay between party and leader effects in a context of dealignment, leaders have been shown to matter more for vote choice precisely at the expenses of political parties. Overall, this conclusion is illustrative of the theoretical relationship between the process of dealignment and the emergence of a personalization of voting behavior.

Importantly, the findings of this chapter also contribute to the literature on voting behavior, and the personalization of politics in specific, by touching upon the endogeneity concerns between leader evaluations and partisanship, which have for long motivated criticisms on studies about leader effects on the vote. The root of such concerns lies at the socio-psychological model's funnel of causality approach, under which leader evaluations are understood as little more than the result of previous partisan attachments (Campbell et al., 1960). Students of the personalization of politics have for long tried to disentangle these party-leader relationships with relative unsuccessful. In the empirical analysis of chapter 2, however, *time* appears to be the decisive element in isolating these two sets of vote choice determinants. As leader effects hold constant across time despite the marked decrease in partisanship effects, the former are demonstrated to be exogenous from the cross-time changes in partisanship, and to matter *independently* for individual voting decisions.

Chapter 3 analyzes the interrelationship between changes in the structure of mass communication and personalized patterns of voting behavior. Making use of a novel dataset combining longitudinal survey data with actual measures of political information consumption in the media, it examines whether individuals' exposure to political information through different media platforms has an impact on how much they consider leader evaluations vis-à-vis partisanship in their voting decisions. It introduces a new measurement by developing a typology of newspaper/television-centrism, taking into account compositional effects through the consideration of individuals' broader media diet. Such an approach has two main advantages. Firstly, it allows for the consideration of the possible overlap between consumption of political information in different mediums. Secondly, a compositional approach relaxes concerns related with over-reporting of news exposure.

The results from chapter 3 provide support to the yet underdeveloped theoretical relationship between media change and the personalization of politics, while also speaking to the broader question involving the importance of media for contemporary democratic elections. In specific, it is shown that leader effects are significantly stronger amongst individuals with a television-dominant media diet. The characteristics of television, such as the audiovisual component, the focus on personalities, and the type of messages conveyed, arguably favor the consideration of leader evaluations in detriment of partisanship or generic ideological aspects. While partisanship and ideological proximity remain unaffected by individuals' media diet, leader effects increase the more that media diet is dominated by a consumption of televised political information.

The contributions of this chapter are manifold. First and foremost, it provides definitive evidence of the relationship between exposure to televised political information and stronger leader effects on the vote. The change to a television-dominant paradigm of political communication and the massification of television as a source of political information for voters has been, perhaps, the more commonly advanced explanation for the personalization of politics. However, while numerous studies account for the importance of television in fostering candidate effects in U.S. Presidential elections, there was not yet any comparative evidence of such relationship in the European parliamentary context. Thus, this empirical analysis contributes to the personalization of politics literature by presenting evidence of the theoretical

linkage between a transformation in the structure of mass communication to a television-dominated context, and a personalized pattern of voting behavior. In specific, it offered three improvements *vis-à-vis* previous studies: a large-N comparative analysis spanning over four decades, measures of frequency of exposure to *political* information in both newspapers and television, and a novel compositional measurement of voters' media diet.

The possible implications ramify not only to wider voting behavior literature but also to political communication studies, in particular to studies dealing with the mediatization of politics. In this regard, the development of a newspaper-television centrism typology represents an improved measurement and conceptualization of voters' exposure to political information. The empirical translation of this new measurement highlighted the need to consider individuals' broader media diet, more than just the exposure to a particular media in isolation, since the effects of heavy exposure to one medium can be effectively counterbalanced by an equal degree of exposure to the other.

Chapter 4 focused on the role of voters' assessments of political leaders in their turnout decisions. It is argued that a context of partisan mobilization has been progressively replaced by the ability of leaders to actively engaging voters into electoral participation, standing out as increasingly relevant mobilizing agents for dealigned voters who often abstain from participating in electoral contests. The results largely confirm these expectations, as leader evaluations were demonstrated to have a significant impact on the probability to turn out to vote in parliamentary elections. Furthermore, this effect was found especially strong among dealigned voters, i.e., individuals who declared not identifying with any political party and individuals who did not vote for more than one election.

These findings carry important implications at the normative level concerning the personalization of politics. So far, the possible outcomes of the personalization of politics for democratic politics have been received with mixed views by scholars. Positive takes perceive it as a sign of a more attentive electorate looking at leaders as yet another relevant variable in their voting decision-making process, while more skeptical views claim that it corresponds to a depoliticization, in which voters judge political leaders based on superficial characteristics devoid of political content. As Western party systems suffer from rising abstention rates, declining support for political parties and a shared skepticism towards politics, party leaders



seem able to somehow counterbalance these normatively undesirable trends, actively reengaging dealigned citizens in political participation. In this sense, the personalization of politics, specifically through leader effects on turnout, can potentially carry positive normative consequences for the functioning of contemporary representative democracies.

The conclusions of this chapter open a novel avenue of research on the personalization of politics. As of today, this literature had dealt exclusively with leader effects on vote choice, neglecting the primary step of the voting decision process: turnout. Finding that leaders matter also for turnout decisions reinforces the centrality of individual political actors in contemporary democracies. These implications are yet extensible to the literature on turnout. While presidential candidates have for long been proven to have an effect over turnout decisions, the literature on turnout in parliamentary democracies has overlooked the importance of voters' assessments of the individuals running for office. The inclusion of variables tapping voters' feelings towards party leaders in individual-level turnout studies in parliamentary democracies has been virtually inexistent. Hence, the results from chapter 4 can hopefully contribute to a more frequent consideration of the ever more relevant role of party leaders in the decision to go to the ballot box.

The last chapter looked into party adaptation as a response to changing electoral markets as a function of dealignment and the individualization of vote choice. In specific, it was analyzed how the personalization of politics induced changes in party organization and internal structure and how such reforms feedback into promoting further personalization. In dialog with the presidentialization of politics thesis, the party dimension of the process deserved particular attention. Catch-all and cartel political parties have often responded to the changes in the political environment by placing leaders at the centre of their political action. As leaders become ubiquitous subjects of media attention and prove to be strong electoral assets, political parties attribute greater relevance to the leadership profile. As a consequence, over the closing decades of the last century, we have witnessed a progressive concentration of power at the top leadership of political parties.

On the other hand, facing lower electoral support, a debasing of their electorate, higher levels of volatility and a generalized sentiment of party skepticism particularly toward mainstream parties over the last decades, many parties felt the need to respond by enacting

organizational reforms destined to bring voters and their representatives closer together. One of the most frequently enacted reforms corresponded to the democratization of leader selection procedures. At a time when leaders stand out central actors in the relationship with voters, political parties sought reforms involving the leadership when trying to reengage with voters. Besides, if leaders have increasing power within parties, it is important that they enjoy a wider legitimacy conferred by a broader support base, including all party members or even party supporters.

In light of these transformations, this chapter aimed at understanding to what extent this sort of reforms promoting the leadership's role within party organization has the potential to produce electoral results by means of increased leadership effects. The results demonstrated that broadening the leadership selection procedures does not result in stronger leadership effects on the vote. When deciding how to vote, individuals do not seem to take into account, either consciously or unconsciously, the way in which that particular party leader was selected. Conversely, voters proven sensitive to the degree of internal powers held by the leadership within the party. More powerful leaders have a stronger impact on the probability to vote for that party. Voters seem to be able to distinguish more influential leaders, even when controlling for party characteristics such as party size or family.

In broad terms, the contributions of this chapter engage with the literature on party politics and with the growing body of research on the democratization of leadership selection procedures, but they speak most directly to the relationship between the personalization and the presidentialization of politics literature. For the latter in specific, it implies that, contrary to its original assertion, the interaction between the electoral and the party faces of the presidentialization of politics is more nuanced. To be sure, the institutionalization of direct leadership election, while eventually signaling a presidentialization at the party face, does not necessarily translate into electoral gains. On the contrary, a concentration of internal party powers on the leadership does seem to motivate stronger leader effects on the vote.

## **Limitations and further research**

New avenues for research can be proposed as a result of both the strengths and limitations of this thesis. As mentioned before, the verification that leaders do have an effect on voter turnout decisions calls for further research expanding on this dependent variable. In particular, it could be interesting to analyze whether the same differences across media exposure patterns are also observable with regard to turnout, for example. Furthermore, a longitudinal outlook into how this process of personalization of turnout decisions has developed is also in order to understand if we are witnessing a developing process or whether leaders have always been important for electoral participation.

The transformations in the structure of mass communication, particularly with the advent of television, are closely related to the emergence of the personalization of politics. Nonetheless, it is yet unknown to what extent can the internet equally affect the patterns of voting behavior. As a growing number of voters use the internet to collect information about politics, this could correspond to further changes in the relative importance of parties, leaders and ideology on individual voting decisions. While the internet combines characteristics of both newspapers and the television, it could potentially revert or further accentuate the importance of leaders' assessments for voting behavior. The spread of this new source of political information and increasingly used channel of political communication calls for further research exploring the relationship between media change and voting behavior, with a particular emphasis on the personalization of politics. As electoral surveys are starting to include batteries of questions tapping respondents' frequency of consumption of political information on the internet, the necessary data resources to pursue this endeavor should soon be available.

A limitation of this dissertation stems from not using panel data. Although existing data limitations have been largely countervailed by the creation of the West European Voter dataset used in chapters 2 and 3, some of the research questions could benefit from a panel design. However, existing panel surveys containing measures of leader evaluations are extremely limited in their temporal scope, hindering efforts of carrying a longitudinal analysis of the same ambition. Moreover, a large-N comparative approach would be impossible under such framework. Nevertheless, selected cases where panel data is available could be used in particular to further enquire into the causality of the relationships underlying the research

questions of chapters 3, 4 and 5. Admittedly, such approach would come at the cost of a reduced external validity but that may be counterbalanced by the enlarged scope provided by this dissertation.

Another limitation relates to the exclusive consideration of Western democracies, particularly in the European context. Even if the decision to preferably concentrate in West European democracies is justifiable by either the longer tradition of electoral studies, the higher data quality or the higher exposure to the socio-political processes leading to the personalization of politics, it is still worth exploring whether a similar trend is observable in younger Eastern European democracies. While such task may be presently hindered by limited data availability on electoral surveys in the Eastern European context, the coming years should bring to the public new datasets allowing to test similar hypotheses in this region too. In the meantime, alternative methodological approaches other than survey research may perhaps be applied to these contexts.

Finally, future studies should explore the relationship between the personalization of politics and the current growth of populist parties built upon a widely recognizable and effective leadership in the European context. It is yet unclear whether and how these two phenomena are interrelated. Despite the edification of an electoral strategy strongly anchored on highly polarizing issues, these parties also heavily rely on the ability of their leadership to communicate, engage and mobilize the electorate. Therefore, an interesting research exercise within this agenda could consist in comparing leader effects of populist party leaders with the remaining types of political parties, in order to assert the relative importance of leaders for these parties.

Having acknowledged the limitations inherent to this dissertation, it makes a valuable contribution to the broader voting behavior, political communication and party politics literature, and more specifically to the studies dealing with the personalization of politics, presidentialization, partisan dealignment, turnout and party choice, among others. The theoretical and methodological advancements of the several chapters extend the scope and contributions of previous research, illuminating on the interrelationship between the socio-political transformations of the last century and the changing patterns of voting behavior that

culminated with a personalization of politics in contemporary Western parliamentary democracies.



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