

Article

## Negative Party Identification and the Use of Party Cues in the Direct Democratic Context

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### Abstract

The use of party cues is a fundamental process of how voters adopt policy preferences. While research has shown that party identification is an important driver of political attitudes in general and policy positions in particular, we know little about how negative party identification (identifying as an opponent to a party) impacts voters' political preferences. This article aims to fill this gap in the literature by combining an experimental and observational empirical analysis of the effect of negative party identification on voters' issue preferences in the context of direct democratic decision-making. First, we analyze a survey experiment conducted during a real-world campaign on affordable housing for a popular ballot in Switzerland. Using continuous measures of party identification, we show a causal relationship between negative party identification and voters' policy preferences. Second, we use longitudinal observational data of vote choice on direct democratic policy proposals and show that voters adopt policy preferences that contrast with the policy positions of parties they oppose. In sum, the two complementary designs show that voters tend to position themselves not only in alignment with their preferred parties but also in opposition to parties with which they negatively identify. Furthermore, the results indicate that, when adopting policy preferences, negative cues may carry as much weight as positive party cues. Our analysis has important implications for understanding voters' adoption of policy preferences in general and specifically in the direct democratic context.

### Keywords

direct democracy; heuristics; negative partisanship; policy position; Switzerland

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

Party identification is widely regarded as one of the most important factors driving vote choice. While early scholars emphasized the idea that identification with political parties may be positive *and* negative (Campbell et al., 1960), over time, scholars devoted most of their attention to the positive aspect of party identification. Many studies highlight how this identification drives the

formation of political attitudes and, consequently, the decision-making process in elections and on-ballot proposals in direct democracy (Colombo & Steenberg, 2020). However, as scholars mainly focused their attention on the positive side of party identification, it is unclear how aversion to parties also influences voters' political attitudes.

In recent years, negative partisanship has gained prominence as a concept in electoral studies, and its

impact has been observed in the real world (see Nai et al., 2022). It has been shown, for example, that in the 2002 French presidential election, votes against the Front National candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen were massive (Medeiros & Noël, 2014). Similarly, the 2016 election famously triggered votes against Clinton for Republicans and against Trump for Democrats (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2019). In this article, we study whether negative partisanship has an independent direct effect on vote choice in direct democratic decision-making. Previous research has shown that negativity in direct democratic campaigns is widespread and has some influence on the mobilization and vote choice of individual voters (Bernhard, 2015; Nai, 2013; Nai & Sciarini, 2018). Based on this observation, we argue that individuals rely on not only positive party cues but also negative party cues, positioning themselves accordingly in opposition to parties they dislike. To our knowledge, this study is the first to look in detail at the use of negative party cues on vote choice in direct democracy.

We combine two research designs to test the existence and the use of the negative partisan heuristic in political decision-making. We consider the Swiss case and the direct democratic system where citizens and parties not only regularly take a position on complex policies, but voters also act on it. In this context, we conducted an experiment with a representative sample of 2000 Swiss citizens at the beginning of a campaign for a proposal on affordable housing. In this experiment, we asked all respondents about their support for the five main Swiss parties and subjected them to one of the parties' positions on the ballot. In a second study, we use observational data to investigate whether the result from our experimental study can be generalized across time and policy proposals. The results are affirmative and indicate that citizens do use negative party cues to position themselves on a large variety of ballot proposals, even when controlling for positive party cues. Thus, we provide evidence that voters use negative party cues to take positions on issues and that negative partisanship is an important driver of voters' attitudes.

## 2. Theory

Voters derive issue and policy preferences either through systematic information processing or by using heuristics (Kuklinski & Quirk, 2000; Lupia, 1994). While systematic information processing is cognitively highly demanding and requires lots of time and resources, heuristics are cognitive shortcuts that can simulate the result from a well-informed process of preference formation with low levels of information (Popkin, 1991). Since voters generally lack essential political information to form policy preferences in a complex political environment, heuristic decision-making is widespread (Achen & Bartels, 2016; Carpinì & Keeter, 1996; Colombo & Steenbergen, 2020). For the adoption of issue preferences, the partisan heuristic is arguably the most promi-

nent heuristic among the different sorts of cues voters can rely on (Kriesi, 2005). According to this heuristic, voters adopt a preference for a political issue based on their party identification. If their preferred party is in favor/against a policy proposal, voters form their attitudes in favor/against this issue position in line with the position of the party with which they identify. Previous research on party heuristics highlights their explanatory power with regard to voters' decision-making in elections and when deriving policy preferences, for instance, in the context of direct democratic votes on policy proposals (Arceneaux, 2008; Boudreau & MacKenzie, 2014; Brader & Tucker, 2012; Campbell et al., 1960; Cohen, 2003; Colombo & Kriesi, 2017; Colombo & Steenbergen, 2020; Dancey & Sheagley, 2013; Kriesi, 2005; Kuklinski & Quirk, 2000; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Lupia, 1994; Slothuus & Bisgaard, 2021a, 2021b).

Although there is a correlation between voters' ideology and policy preferences, studies tend to show that this correlation is driven by the cues voters take from parties. Slothuus and Bisgaard (2021b) show that party cues can temper voters' self-interest in policies, which indicates that even when voters have direct self-interest in specific policy output, they are impacted in their policy preferences by party cues. In another study, Slothuus and Bisgaard (2021a) demonstrate that voters in Denmark changed their preferences as soon as one of the main parties changed its position on a policy. This clearly shows that while voters may be able to position themselves in the ideological space, when it comes to specific policy proposals, they rely to a significant extent on the cues they receive from parties. Although this may vary between policies, party cues have at least a minimal independent effect (Slothuus & Bisgaard, 2021b). However, while studies have shown how positive party identification helps even voters with clear ideological positions derive policy preference, we do not know how negative party identification affects voters' preferences.

To a large extent, negative party identification mirrors the positive side of party identification. While positive partisanship leads to the desire for a party to win, the negative side of party identification leads to the desire for a party to lose. The source of negative party identification may arise from different world visions (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009) and, more generally, diverging ideologies (Abramowitz & Webster, 2018; Medeiros & Noël, 2014). In short, "the negative partisan might believe some people are in profound error ideologically" (Ridge, 2020, p. 5), leading them to aim for the failure of the parties that voters hold negative affect towards (Michael McGregor et al., 2015). Because voters who identify negatively with parties think these parties are ideologically wrong, they will form preferences that go against such parties' positions.

The close relation between the concept of positive and negative party identification leads to similar considerations regarding the use of positive and negative party cues. Positive party cues lead voters to adopt policy

preferences in line with the party position of the preferred parties, and negative party cues lead voters to form preferences in opposition to the disliked parties. However, the logic of the negative party heuristic can be challenged based on the existing literature on the impact of party alliances on direct democratic decision-making on ballot proposals. Indeed, Kriesi (2006) shows that the support for direct democratic proposals by a large alliance of parties increases the electoral support for said proposals. This seems to speak for a stronger impact of positive than for negative party identification since, in the latter case, we would expect that a ballot proposal would receive fewer votes when more parties are in favor of it. However, since we do not know how proposals supported or opposed by alliances of parties affect specific partisan—relative to non-partisan—voters we cannot know from this aggregate observation how strong the impact of positive vs. negative party cues is.

When two parties have the same policy position and voters support one but oppose the other, the voter will experience a clear cognitive dissonance, which reduces alignment with the preferred party—as aligning with it also means aligning with the opposing party. Thus, we expect that positive identification increases the support of the party’s policy position (positive partisan cues hypothesis), and negative identification decreases the support of the party’s policy position of these parties (negative partisan cues hypothesis). Figure 1 summarizes the different combinations of positions parties can have and their expected impacts on voters’ policy preferences.

### 3. Research Designs

To test our hypotheses, we rely on two complementary studies in the context of Swiss direct democracy.

Switzerland has long relied on popular ballots at every level of government: national, regional, and municipal. The direct democratic institutions of the popular initiative and referendum allow voters either to propose new constitutional features or to confirm or reject laws adopted by parliaments or municipal councils. At the national level only, Swiss voters voted on 463 ballot proposals since 1960 (Swissvotes, 2022) compared to 15 national elections, making it the most prominent form of political participation in the country. Swiss direct democracy is ideal for testing hypotheses related to the use of the partisan heuristic because such frequent popular votes provide many opportunities to study the link between parties’ policy positions and voters’ policy preferences. These vote choices on ballot propositions also provide a behavioral and hence particularly valid measure of policy preferences. It is not surprising, then, that the political science literature has, on several occasions, relied on the Swiss case to study partisan heuristics (Colombo & Kriesi, 2017; Kriesi, 2005).

In our study, we analyze how policy positions of the five largest Swiss parties (SP, GPS, CVP, FDP, and GPS) affect the decision-making of voters on direct democratic proposals. Although over the years, more than 20 parties have been represented, these five parties have filled between 75 and 90% of the seats in the national parliament since 1971. Focusing on these five parties ensures we cover a broad ideological spectrum, with the SP and the GPS representing the left, the FDP and SVP the liberal and conservative right, and the CVP being the center.

We combine two studies with different strengths and weaknesses to investigate the effect of negative party identification on voters’ preferences regarding ballot proposals. First, we conducted an experiment with a representative sample of 2000 Swiss citizens during the

		Policy positions of party with positive identification	
		In favor	Against
Policy position of party with negative identification	Against	<b>Cognitive consonance</b> supporting the proposal	<b>Cognitive dissonance</b>
	In favor	<b>Cognitive dissonance</b>	<b>Cognitive consonance</b> rejecting the proposal

**Figure 1.** Expected effect of policy positions of parties on voters’ policy preferences depending on the type of identification.

campaign of a ballot initiative on affordable housing. Second, we used historic post-vote survey data to analyze how the policy positions of parties with which the voter identifies negatively affect their preference regarding the ballot proposal. The two designs complement each other in important ways: The experiment enables us to identify the causal effect of negative party cues providing strong internal validity but is limited to a single ballot proposal. The observational design, in contrast, provides empirical evidence that this effect can be observed for different ballot proposals. Thus, while the first design provides strong internal validity but lacks ecological validity, the second aims to fill this gap by providing evidence of voters' use of negative party cues throughout the period between 1981 and 2020.

#### 4. Experimental Evidence on Negative Party Cues

On the 9th of February 2020, the Swiss population voted on a ballot initiative on affordable housing. This initiative aimed to modify the constitution so that the state would have to intervene to build and propose more affordable housing. During the campaign, the left parties (SP and GPS) took a position in favor of the constitutional modifications proposed in the initiative, while the center and right parties (CVP, FDP, and SVP) positioned themselves against the modification. In the end, the proposal was rejected by 57.1% of the Swiss voters, with a turnout of 41.68%.

We conducted a survey experiment at the beginning of the campaign for the proposal, between the 12th of December and the 14th of January. In this survey, we interviewed a representative sample of 2,000 Swiss voters and asked them about their level of political interest, trust in government, as well as sociodemographic variables, including gender, age, and education. We then randomly assigned respondents into treatment groups in which they received information on the position of one of the five main national Swiss parties on the ballot and one control group that did not receive any additional information. The data was collected early in the campaign to ensure that the different parties did not officially position themselves on the ballot. Also, as shown in Table A6 in the Supplementary File, the treatment distribution is balanced when considering respondents' age and gender. Overall, the treatment reads as follows: "Based on the vote in the National Council, we know that *the party* is in favor/against the ballot initiative. And you, if the vote was held tomorrow, what would be your decision on the vote?" Respondents then indicated their support for the initiative with a four-point item, from *definitely yes* to *definitely no*. We added a *don't know* option and recoded the response to a binary variable indicating the respondent's support or opposition to the ballot. The control group did not see the first sentence; they just saw the second part of the question where we asked about their vote intention regarding the ballot. With the treatments, we can identify

whether the information about the party position influences the voters' preferences conditionally on their identification with the party. In so doing, we follow previous research on party cues that investigated how the party position on the issue affects voter preferences (Boudreau & MacKenzie, 2014).

Following the treatment assignment and vote intention question, respondents indicated whether they see themselves (on a scale from 0 to 10) more as a *strong opponent* (0) or a *strong supporter* (10) of the five parties. In the model, we use this as a moderating variable if the treatment (position of a party) depends on the affiliation and feelings respondents have toward this party. This measure is well suited to evaluate voters' negative attitudes toward the different parties. Individuals can identify more or less and more or less positively/negatively with a group or organization. Hence, a continuous indicator is appropriate to measure identification. This said, our measure of party support allows us to distinguish between positive and negative party identification. When voters give scores under 5, they have a negative affect toward a party, and the opposite is true when they give a score above 5. A score of 5, in turn, means that a voter has neither a positive nor a negative view of the party.

To sum up, our main variables are the assignment of a party's position on a policy proposal (treatment), the support of respondents for the five main Swiss parties (moderator), and the vote intention of respondents (dependent variable). This way, we measure the conditional average treatment effect: how the effect of a party's policy position on a voter's policy preference is moderated by the support for the party. We also add the political interest of respondents and their trust in government as they directly influence the voters' decision-making, and controlling for it might therefore make the estimates more precise. Table 1 summarizes the variables we use in our model and their operationalizations.

To evaluate the treatment effect moderated by party support, we use logistic regressions and interact each treatment with the corresponding party support. This is a very restrictive modeling strategy as we consider not only the party affiliation of respondents but the specific support for five different parties. We interact the level of support of each respondent with these five parties, and we interact their support with the treatment. By considering these five interactions in the same model, we estimate how the influence of a party's policy position on voters' preference is moderated by the party identification of the party they were treated with.

It is often debated where questions used to moderate treatment effects should be placed in randomized experiments. On the one hand, measuring the moderator variables after the treatment creates the possibility of post-treatment bias (Aronow et al., 2019; Coppock, 2019; Montgomery et al., 2018). On the other hand, placing the moderator before the treatment leads to priming effects, including when these are questions on

**Table 1.** Description of variables used in the experiment.

Variable Name	Variable Type	Operationalization
Voter's vote intention on policy proposal	Dependent Variable	0 if <i>no</i> or <i>rather no</i> , 1 if <i>yes</i> or <i>rather yes</i>
Party's position on policy proposal	Treatment	1 if <i>treated</i> , and 0 otherwise
Party identification	Moderating Variable	0 <i>strong opponent</i> , 10 <i>strong supporter</i>
Political interest	Control variable	0 = <i>rather not</i> and <i>not interested</i> , 1 = <i>rather/very interested</i>
Trust in government	Control variable	1 = <i>do not trust</i> , 2 = <i>rather not trust</i> , 3 = <i>neither trust nor distrust</i> , 4 = <i>rather trust</i> , 5 = <i>completely trust</i>

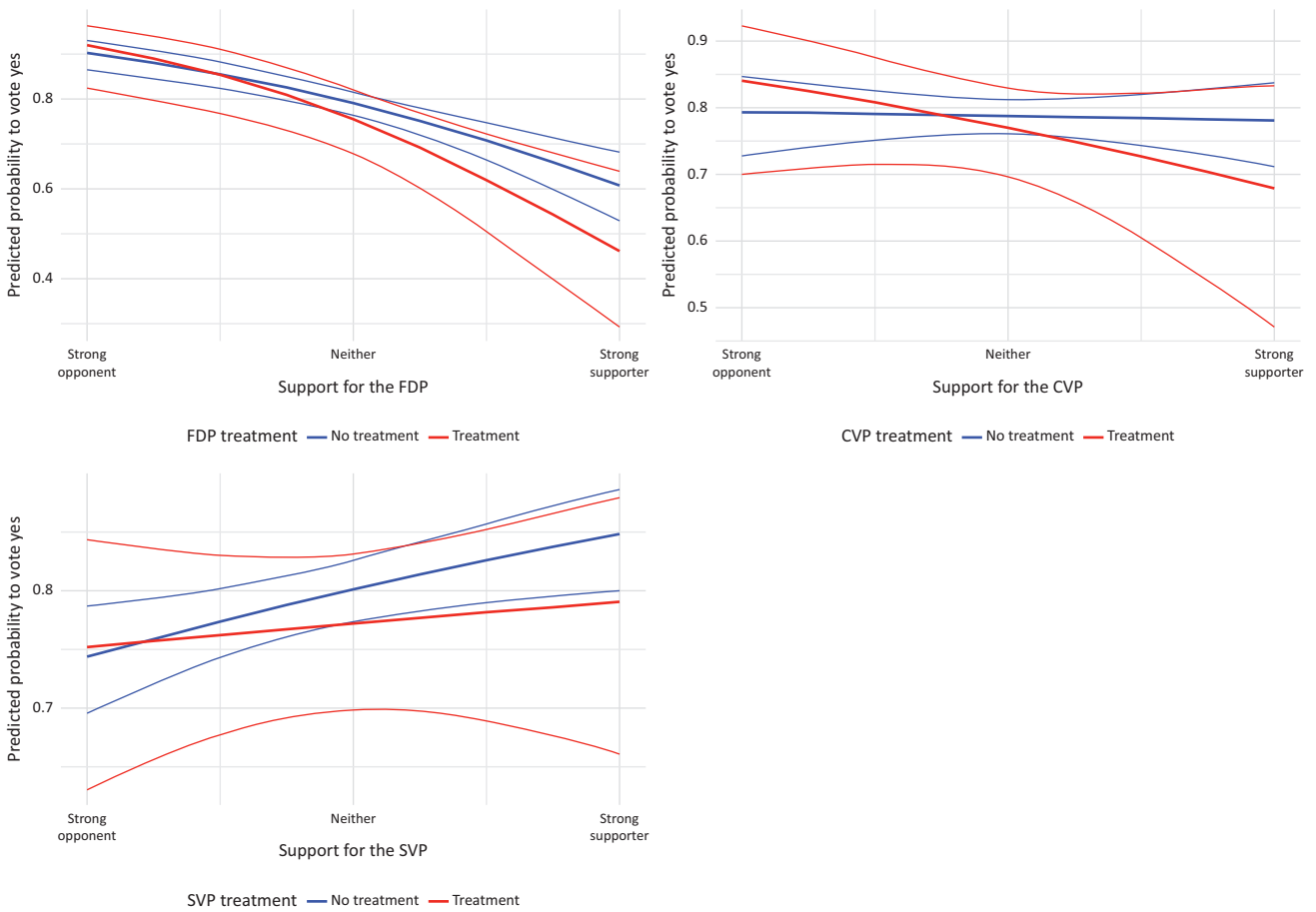
respondents' identities (Valenzuela & Reny, 2020; Walter & Redlawsk, 2019). While research on the bias of the moderator's position in surveys is still scarce, Valentino et al. (2018) found no difference in the conditional average marginal effects with pre- and post-treatment measures. Nevertheless, scholars agree that measuring moderators within a survey experiment may lead to various causal inference issues (Sheagley & Clifford, 2022). We follow Klar et al. (2020) and Valenzuela and Reny (2020), who argue that when deciding where to place the moderator variable, there must be theoretical considerations about how biases can be minimized. With regard to this experiment, we think that priming respondents on their partisan identities would be more problematic than placing the moderator variable post-treatment, as doing so could have led to an overestimation of the treatment effect. If respondents indicate strong affection/resentment towards parties, they might be encouraged to follow/defect from the party's issue position to avoid inconsistency. In contrast, the treatment of a party's policy position is less likely to influence the measure of the moderator because inconsistency is less direct. Indeed, when respondents receive the policy position of a party, it should not substantially affect their support for it. Even though respondents align their position with that of the party they were treated with, they can still indicate an aversion for the party and be consistent as there may be various reasons to share policy positions with parties. This is less the case when considering the priming effect. Indeed, when indicating strong support for a party, it is a direct inconsistency to indicate a position that goes against the party's position. Hence, following Walter and Redlawsk (2019), we measure the moderating variable after the treatment to avoid priming respondents with their party identification.

Additional analyses also suggest that our decision to measure the moderating variable after the treatment was appropriate. As a test of whether the post-treatment bias was severe, we estimated the average marginal treatment effect of the party position on affordable housing (treatment) on party support (see Table A7 of

the Supplementary File). The results show no significant treatment effect on our moderator except for the model with support for the SVP. However, even in this case, both the treatment with the SP and the SVP position shows a negative effect. This is despite the fact that these parties are clearly positioned on opposite sides of the ideological space (see Section 5, on observational evidence). While we acknowledge that this is not a definitive test, as it is impossible to test for the null hypothesis (Montgomery et al., 2018), the fact that we find no consistent relation between the treatment assignment and the moderators is reassuring.

The intuition of the model is that the party position (treatment) should have different effects on respondents who support the party whose position is seen relative to those who oppose it. In the context of the affordable housing initiative, the CVP, FDP, and SVP gave recommendations to reject the proposal, i.e., adopted a negative position. The counterfactual is no or a neutral position of the party since the respondents in the control group were not treated with the vote recommendation of the respective party, and the parties had not decided on their vote recommendation yet. Thus, we should see that supporters of the CVP, FDP, and SVP should indicate greater opposition to the ballot when they receive the treatment (positive cues hypothesis). In contrast, respondents who are opponents of these parties should adopt a vote intention more favorable to the affordable housing initiative when they receive the treatment (negative cues hypothesis).

Figure 2 presents the results of the interaction between party support and the treatment for the parties, where we stated that they were against the proposal. The results of the interactions go in the expected direction. Indeed, we observe that party supporters are more opposed to the proposal when they receive the treatment, and party opponents are more supportive of the proposal. Interestingly, the direction of the relationship between support for the SVP and voters' preferences on the proposal changes for treated and untreated respondents. While there is a positive relationship between

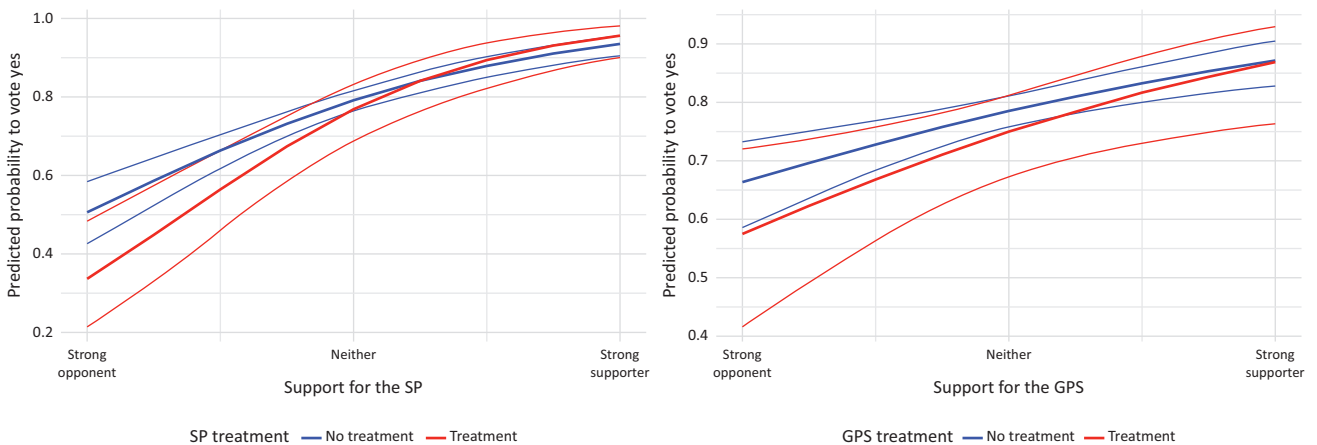


**Figure 2.** Moderating effect of party support and the treatment on voters’ preferences on the affordable housing initiative for parties who are against the ballot proposal (FDP, CVP, and SVP).

support for the SVP and support for the ballot proposal in the control condition, this relationship turns negative for respondents who received the treatment. However, for every party, the size of the confidence interval also suggests that this effect is rather small and not significant. Thus, while Figure 2 shows that the interactions between parties’ support and the treatment go in the expected

direction, we do not find significant effects for parties who positioned against the proposal—a point to which we will return below.

We now turn to the treatment of parties who positioned in favor of the affordable housing initiative (SP and GPS). Figure 3 presents the interaction effects between the treatment of parties in favor of the initiative



**Figure 3.** Moderating effect of party support and the treatment on voters’ preferences on the affordable housing initiative for parties who are in favor of the ballot proposal (SP and GPS).



and the support for the party on voters' preference for the proposal. It shows that these interactions also go in the expected direction. Indeed, opponents are more against the proposal, and support is higher among the party supporters who received the treatment. The effect also appears substantial if we compare the effect size of positive and negative party cues, where we see that voters who oppose the SP or the GPS were more impacted by the vote recommendation than voters who support them. Despite the strong relationship between party identification and voters' preference, we find evidence that treating respondents with parties' position influences the formation of voters' preferences, conditional to their identification with the party.

Overall, the results of the experiment show that the causal effect of parties' positions on voters is not uniform and is moderated by the level of support for the party. This provides evidence that voters use both positive and negative party cues to take a position on policies.

Although all interaction terms go in the expected direction, different factors may explain the lack of significance of the conditional treatment effects. First, our modeling strategy is very restrictive, and party support is already a strong predictor of voters' positions. Second, the ballot proposal for affordable housing can be easily linked to ideology as it directly relates to the economic inequality issue. Hence, although parties had not yet communicated their official positions on the ballot, voters may have been able to guess them. This said, although most of our results are not significant at conventional levels, all conditional average marginal treatment effects go in the expected direction. To evaluate whether this result can be generalized, we turn now to the study with observational data.

### 5. Evidence on Negative Party Cues From Observational Data

To test our hypotheses on many policy proposals, we merged two datasets. First, the VoxIt data (Kriesi et al., 2017) contains post-survey data on 297 ballot proposals that the Swiss population voted on between 1981 and 2016. Second, the VOTO (FORS, 2020) data consists of post-vote surveys of 13 ballot proposals that took place between 2017 and 2020. Thus, we analyze the effect of party vote recommendations on the vote choice of party voters over more than 300 ballot proposals.

The data contains information on party vote recommendation (our measure for parties' policy positions), respondents' party affiliation, and vote choice, among others. However, in contrast to the experiment, we do not know how respondents feel toward parties with which they do not identify. To operationalize negative party identification, we use results from the experiment and measure the correlation between the support for the different parties. Figure A1 in the Supplementary File presents the correlation between the different measures of party support and shows that the correlation between

support for the different parties follows a left–right divide. Indeed, we see that there are strong negative correlations between the GPS and the SP (on the left) and the SVP and FDP (on the right). As a center-right party, support for the CVP is not strongly negatively correlated with support for any other party. These divisions between Swiss parties have deep historical roots. Glass (1978) already provided evidence that the SP, the FDP, and the SVP positioned themselves on opposite sides of the ideological space in 1972. More recent work of Hug and Schulz (2007) has shown that the ideological positions of Swiss parties are very stable over time. Scholars have also emphasized that—despite a certain shift in the cleavage structure (Kriesi, 2015)—the main division among Swiss parties has remained stable since 1960 and that the left has concentrated around the SP and GPS (Durrer de la Sota et al., 2021). Thus, voters who identify with one of the two main left parties are likely to negatively portray the two most prominent parties of the right (the FDP and SVP).

To provide empirical evidence on the long-lasting division between left and right Swiss parties, we use the historical survey data of the observable study (FORS, 2020; Kriesi et al., 2017). First, Figure A3 of the Supplementary File plots the average left–right self-position of voters that identify with the different parties over time. It shows that the divide between Swiss voters who identify with the left and right parties is constant. As identification is strongly related to ideology, we think it is reasonable to posit that voters who positively identify with one of the left/right parties are likely to identify negatively with a party on the other ideological side, not only during the affordable housing initiative—for which we could observe it—but more generally. This is also what the parties' positions on direct democratic proposals suggests. Indeed, Figure A2 in the Supplementary File shows the share of ballot proposals on which the four different parties took the same policy position. The figure shows that while the SP and the GPS share the same policy position on ballots more than 90% of the time, they often do not share their position with the right parties. This shows that voters who identify with the left and right parties not only position themselves at the other end of the left–right scale, but that they also experience a strong division between these two blocks with regard to their policy positions in direct democratic votes. We thus derive that voters who identify with the SP and GPS are more likely to see themselves as opponents of the FDP and SVP and voters who identify with the FDP and SVP are likely to see themselves more as opponents of the SP and the GPS. Negative party identification is largely driven by ideological divergence. As we show, the ideological divergences between left and right Swiss parties have deep historical roots. We thus analyze how right/left voters form preferences using left and right parties' positions. Although this operationalization of negative party identification has clear limitations, we think that these are compensated for by the important advantages of this very large dataset.

We estimate how voters' preferences who identify with left or right parties are influenced by the position of the left and right parties on the issue. For instance, we test how the position of SP and SVP voters are influenced by the interaction of the SVP and SP positions as well as the party the respondents' support. We only test the moderating effect of pairs of parties' policy positions. For instance, a model that estimates the moderating effect of the SP and SVP positions limits the analyses to SP and SVP voters. Finally, we control for the policy positions of the five main parties (CVP, FDP, SVP, SP, and GPS) independent of the interaction terms, and the strength of parties based on the share of seats in the national parliament. We control for the latter as it influences the potential threat they represent and the institutional type of ballot (initiative, facultative referendum, and mandatory referendum), as these institutions affect the level of support for ballot proposals.

The model evaluates the effect of opposing parties' positions on proposals relative to each other. We thus run four models for all the combinations identified: SP versus SVP, SP versus FDP, GPS versus SVP, and GPS versus FDP. We first show the two models that include the SP in the interaction, followed by the models with the GPS included in the interaction.

Figure 4 presents the results of the interaction between the positions of the SP and the SVP (on the left) and the SP and the FDP on the right. We see that the SP's position on ballots has no effect on the preferences of SVP voters when the SVP takes a position against the proposal. However, when the SVP positions in favor of the ballot, their voters' preferences are moderated by the SP's position, i.e., they are more opposed to the proposal when the SP supports it.

Similarly, we see that SP voters oppose more proposals that are supported by the SVP when the SP positions against them. If we look at the right side of the figure,

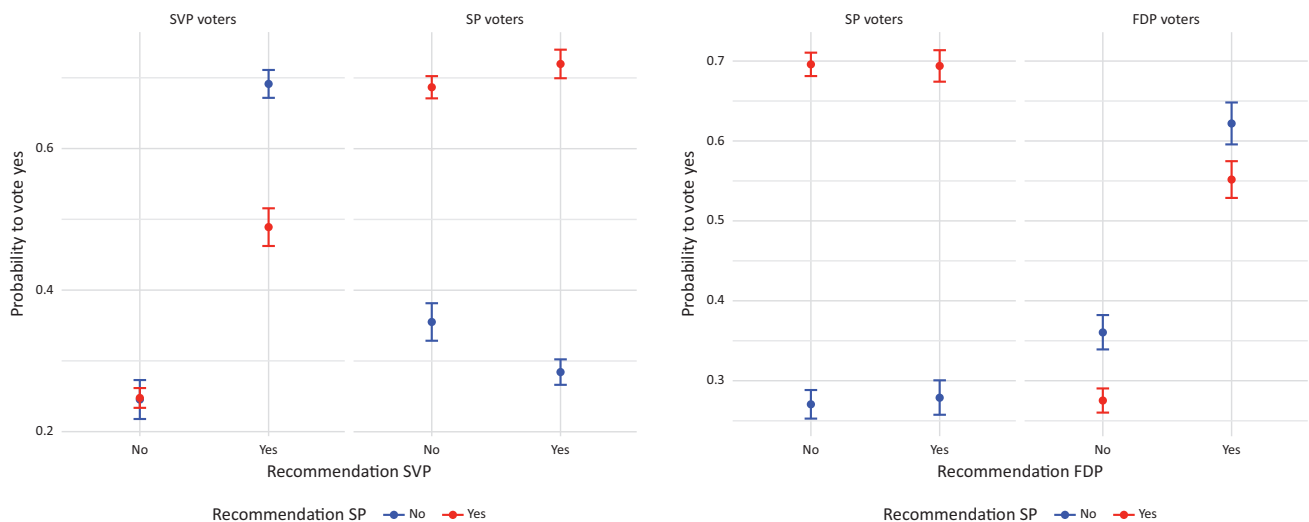
we see that while the FDP position does not affect the preferences of SP voters, the opposite is not true. Indeed, FDP voters align less with the FDP position when the SP shares the same position than when the FDP and SP have diverging positions.

Although the moderating effect of the opposing party's position on voters' policy preferences is not uniform, Figure 4 shows that SP voters oppose SVP recommendations and SVP voters adopt preferences against those of the SP. Also, it shows that while SP voters are not affected by FDP positions on ballot proposals, FDP voters oppose significantly more proposals when the SP supports them than when it positions itself against them.

Figure 5 plots the moderating effect of the GPS's positions, and the SVP or FDP positions. First, on the left side of the figure, we see that SVP voters react negatively to GPS positions. SVP voters oppose significantly more proposals when the GPS positions in favor of them. For GPS voters, we see that the SVP position on ballot proposals does not affect their preferences when the GPS supports the proposal. However, they react negatively to the SVP's position when the GPS opposes the proposal. Indeed, in this case, they are even more against the proposal than when the SVP is in favor of it.

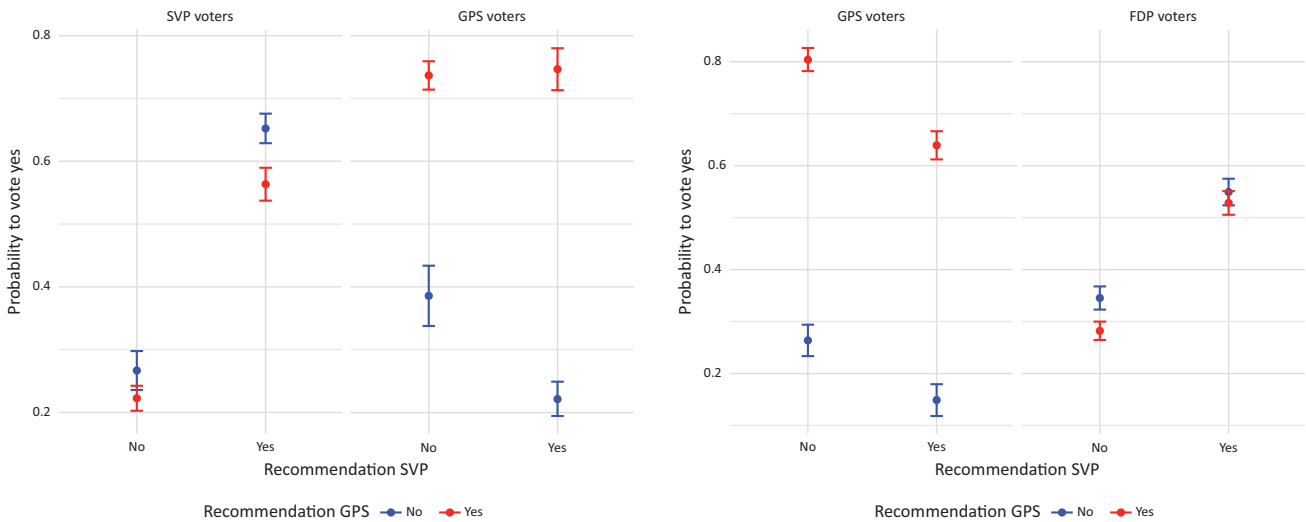
On the right side of the figure, we see that the FDP and GPS voters react negatively to the other party's position. Indeed, GPS voters oppose proposals more when the FDP is in favor of them than when the FDP opposes them. Also, FDP voters oppose the proposal more when the GPS supports it than when it opposes it.

Overall, the evidence based on observational data presented in the second study of this article supports our hypotheses and shows that voters adopt preferences in opposition to the position of opposing parties. Left-party voters tend to take a position against the right parties and *vice versa*.



**Figure 4.** Moderating effect of the policy position of the SP and SVP (left) and FDP (right) on voters' positions on ballot proposal by party affiliation.





**Figure 5.** Moderating effect of the policy position of the GPS and SVP (left) and FDP (right) on voters' preferences on ballot proposals by party affiliation.

**6. Conclusion**

This article studies the use of negative party cues on voters' policy preferences. Using experimental and observational evidence, we show that the use of negative cues drives the decision-making process in the direct democratic setting. We also show that it has a complementary explanatory power to the use of positive party cues. These results have consequences for the role that negative partisanship plays in the decision-making process.

However, the consequence of negative party identification may be even larger than has been discussed so far in this article. Indeed, our results suggest that core party voters will align less with the position of the party they identify with in the event of a large alliance of parties for a ballot proposal. We show that the support for the left and right party positions by voters who identify with these parties is higher when the parties have opposite positions. Thus, parties with opposing views may have an electoral disadvantage in defending a common position. Indeed, in this case, we show that the support of the party position by the core voters is lower than when opposing parties' positions are in opposition to each other. The use of negative party cues—and negative partisanship in general—may have a detrimental effect on the formation of party coalitions in democracies as it may give dissonant cognitive information to parties' core electorate and generate vote defection in subsequent elections.

Our article presents evidence that supports the fundamental aspects of negative partisanship in voters' attitude formation. However, several aspects limit our ability to draw definitive conclusions on the importance of negative party cues. First, our experimental design is limited to a single policy proposal with a clear left–right divide. We think that future studies should conduct experiments on ballots with different ideological divi-

sions to deepen our understanding of the importance of negative party cues. Second, our observational study relies on a crude operationalization of negative partisanship because, in our context, there were no surveys available that measured negative party identification. Hence, in order to gain additional insight into the role of negative party identification, political surveys should systematically include questions that enable research to have precise operationalization of the negative side of partisanship. This would complement recent studies—with this special issue as a prominent example—that show that the negative side of party identification is an essential component of various aspects of party competition, voting behavior, and the quality of democracy in general.

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**Conflict of Interests**

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

**Supplementary Material**

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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