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## Why are citizens satisfied with public policies (or not) ?

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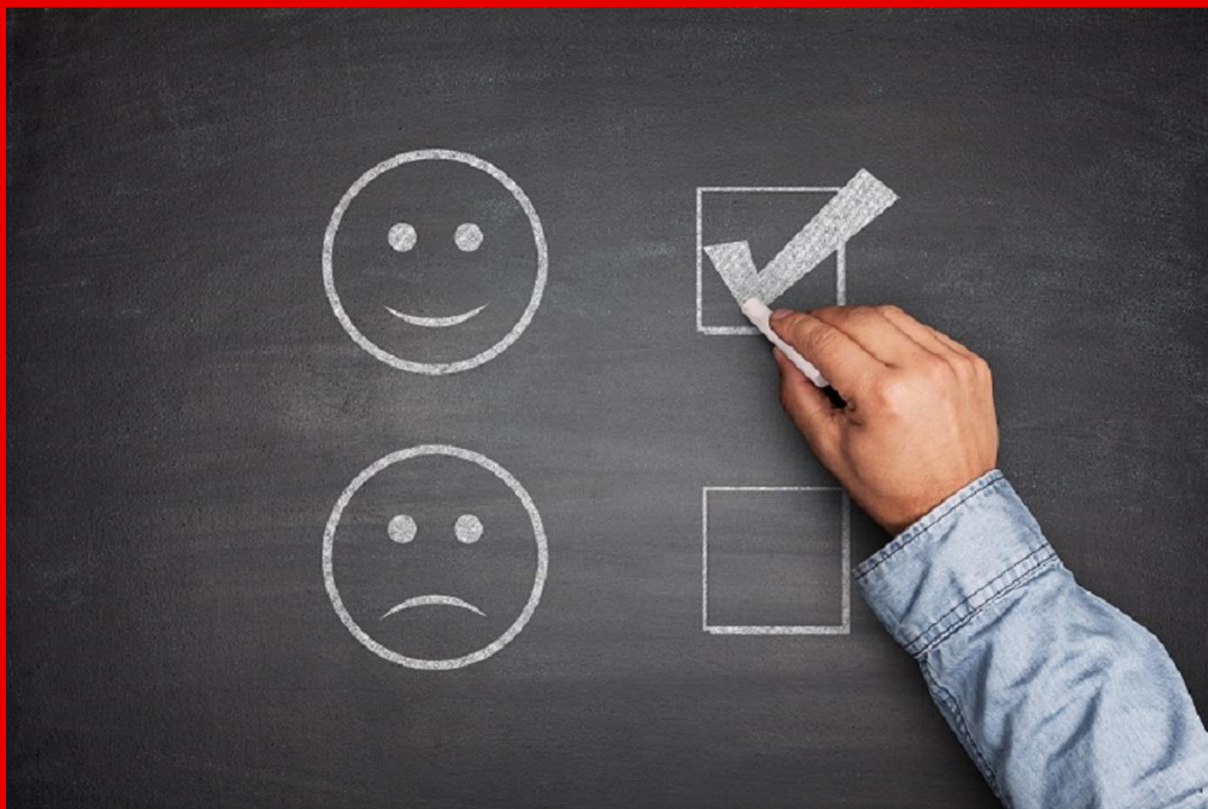
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# Why are citizens satisfied with public policies (or not)?

Mirjam Dageförde, Emiliano Grossman

**Policy Book n°3**

Juillet 2020



This policy book seeks to identify patterns and determinants of policy appreciation. We examine three aspects that influence policy preferences in detail. First, we look at partisanship and show that party identification systematically and strongly determines policy preferences. Voters who identify with parties on the right have similar preferences for government spending, preferring an increase in spending for security, order and the economy but a decrease in spending for social policies. Voters who feel closer to leftist parties, to the contrary, prefer an increase in expenditure in most of the policy fields. Second, we account for issue publics. Our analysis shows that citizens who are directly affected by a policy (e.g. pensioners and policies that concern retirement payments) prefer a stronger increase in government spending or government activity in “their” policy field. Third, our analysis addresses how the perceived importance of an issue and media attention moderate the impact of partisanship on policy appreciation. We show that both factors have moderating dimension on the role of party identification. We rely on nine waves of the Policy Priorities Survey (2014 – 2017). Our data on citizens’ attitudes encompassed 13.570 respondents. In addition, we have collected data on monthly media attention in France for each of the policy issues considered in the survey. Our analysis covers media attention of the three leading national newspapers. The implications of our study, highlighting the relevance of our findings beyond the French case and showing how our analysis might stimulate future research.

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## **Why are citizens satisfied with public policies (or not)?**

Mirjam Dageförde, Emiliano Grossman

LIEPP Policy book, 2020

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## 1 Introduction

How do citizens feel about public policy? What determines their judgments of the policy record of incumbent governments? And how do their policy judgments affect their evaluation of incumbent administrations? Inversely, to which extent is their judgement of policy performance influenced by their proximity to government parties? For governments, citizens' appreciation of public policy is a central question, especially – but not only – if they are democratically elected. Over the past decades incumbent governments have suffered increasingly from declining popularity curves. Re-election odds have reached historically low levels. In the context of increasing disappointment, distrust and even anti-political sentiment, policymaking is becoming a very tough job. Therefore, « selling » policies and their results to the public has become an end in itself, one of the few things that may – every now and then – improve popularity ratings and, at times, even improve reelection odds.

At the same time, we also know that people's substantive knowledge of public policies is very limited. Theories of representative democracy assume that – ideally – every vote should be both a retrospective judgment of policy performance and a prospective appreciation of policy pledges. Empirical work on voting behavior has regularly confirmed that the required knowledge is simply insufficient to make the kind of informed judgments that those theories imply.

In the area of public policy research itself, citizens' appreciations do not really play a very prominent role, if they are considered at all. A given public policy's targeted population or public or constituency may be taken into account in analyzing a policy's success or evolution. Formal policy evaluation, however, will not usually require that this kind of elements are investigated. A policy is considered a success if it reached the initially fixed policy goals or if it had some identifiable socially desirable outputs or outcomes. It may have improved people's awareness of certain dangers to their health, contributed to economic growth or improved car drivers' attention to cyclists.

Our work will look at all those issues, while focusing more particularly on the determinants of citizens' perception and appreciation of adopted and implemented policies. The policy-citizen link is a very complex and multidimensional relationship, though. It encompasses several different potential linkages. First, it will depend strongly on citizens' effective knowledge of policies and policymaking. What do they know about current policies? What is their individual experience of, say, transport, childcare or energy policies? A first, simple, answer is that the vast majority has little to no effective knowledge of virtually all public policies. Only a few very politicized policies may be more well-known, even by the most educated citizens, as well as some policies that directly concern certain subsets of the population.

Beyond knowledge, the second step is equally demanding. It implies that citizens are able to form a preference on this particular issue, confront it with the status quo and then form a judgment on that status quo based on their preferences. That in turn means that the citizen is in a position to evaluate the context within which a given policy was implemented and to assign responsibility for some aspects of this context. Finally, this type of judgment should ideally also make difference between the output of a policy and the attained outcome.

A third stage concerns the conclusions that citizens will draw from this process. To put it bluntly, how will their judgments of policy performance affect their political judgment? Will it influence their opinion on incumbents, affect their voting decision? Obviously, we cannot expect any mechanical or linear effect here. The issue at stake may be of minor importance to the individual. Hence, she may consider that the incumbent administration has failed in a particular policy area, but that this is not a sufficient reason to turn away from the party she feels attached to. From an opposite perspective, a major breakthrough on a crucial issue like, say, unemployment may ensure reelection.

The present work aims at providing a general discussion and empirical illustration of the majority of these questions, using the Cevipof-Liepp Dataset on “policy priorities”, which, for our purposes, contains the data of nine successive survey waves, carried out between 2014 and 2017.

We will start with a discussion about what the literature has to say about people’s relation to public policy. As we will see, most of the literature is concerned with the way in which people’s appreciation of issues, attention and policymaking affects their opinion on incumbents and, ultimately, the vote. We aim to go beyond those classical questions, wondering if the judgment on specific public policies is exclusively determined by political positions or whether or when policy-specific judgments can go against party identifications or positions.

Section 3 will look at the extent to which policy priorities are determined by partisanship. The analysis separates diverse parts of the electorate and shows whether and how voters’ nearness to political parties impacts on their preferences for changes in public policies. The results compare preferences for changes in government spending and government activity and distinguish multiple policy fields.

Section 4 shows how attitudes towards policies are influenced by personal concerns. The analysis identifies specific policies that are of diverging importance for voters, depending on their personal background. These issue publics attach more importance to policies that concerns them directly. For instance, people who are retired or who will be retired soon might care more about pensions than the younger. Furthermore, their preferences for government spending in this policy field may differ from others. We analyze whether and how attitudes of issue publics and the general public vary with regard to six policies.

Section 5 integrates media attention into the analysis. We explore how media coverage influences citizens’ policy preferences and whether media attention may compensate the effect of partisanship. The study distinguishes between diverse groups of partisans and integrates multiple policy fields.

Finally, we sum up policy preferences of the French electorate between 2014 and 2017. We identify the strongest determinants of policy preferences by concluding whether the relevance of perceived nearness to a political party, personal concerns or media attention influence preferences most. We finish by demonstrating how our study might stimulate future research on public policies and highlight the relevance of our results beyond the French case.



## 2 Citizens, policies and policymakers

Our central question concerns the reasons citizens appreciate particular public policies or not. Policymaking is a central feature of political life and political competition or, at least, it should be. Much democratic theory is based on the idea that governments and elected representatives will act in their voters' best interest. Established democracies should assure that the interests of the electorate are transmitted in the chain of representation, via political parties and representatives to the parliament and to government (Powell, 2004a). If politicians are "acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin, 1967: 135), citizens' policy preferences are reflected in governmental decisions, policy outputs and possibly policy outcomes. This obviously entails different and even potentially contradictory views of "good" representation.

### 2.1 The quality of representation

Following the work of Diamond and Morlino (2005), at least three different views of good representation can be distinguished. At its simplest level, good representation simply points to the reliability of *democratic procedure* and institutions, i.e. the fact that people are entitled to vote freely for a variety of candidates, that they can stand for elections, that contenders have access to the media etc. However simple, the vast majority of democracy indexes, such as those by *Freedom House*, the *Polity 4* database or the dichotomous classifications such as those used by Przeworski et al. (2000), rely on precisely this kind of definition. The advantage of this type of indicators is that they are easy to produce and replicate, as they are mostly unambiguous and require very little effective information-gathering.

None of those indicators is problematic for most of Europe with some exceptions. The only recurrent criticism at this level concerns the degree to which processes of delegation may deprive voters of their share of national sovereignty. There are several accounts of how delegation may water down electoral mandates. An ancient account concerns the way in which bureaucracies may highjack policymaking to their own interests or to the vested interests that control them. Policy and agency capture have been theorized regularly at least since the 1960s (Lowi, 1979, Peltzman, 1976, Stigler, 1971). More recent iterations of this kind of argument focus on the "rise of the unelected" (Vibert, 2007) and on the democratic consequences of processes of supranationalization (Majone, 1998). These arguments are regularly and – increasingly – successfully mobilized by populist movements all across Europe as part of a larger critique of representative democracy (e.g. Bickerton and Accetti, 2017).

A second dimension concerns the *substance* of representation. Here the focus is more on expectations, pledges and outputs than on procedure. Classical work on political representation discusses whether elected representatives should be considered as trustees or delegates (Burke, 1774, Eulau et al., 1959). In the first case, voters entrust them with their share of political sovereignty to do as best they can to further the voters' interests. This vision usually assumes that voters are too busy or too little interested to be knowledgeable about all decisions

to be taken, as well as the major policy takes confronting a country at a given time. They thus trust somebody who is exclusively occupied with solving this kind of problems to take the right decisions instead. Ideally, it will not be just one person, i.e. a directly elected representative, but rather a group of people, such as a parliamentary group, a party or even an electoral coalition. The choice of that person or group of people may depend on a variety of criteria. Voters may delegate on the basis of the proximity with the candidate or the group on a particular set of issues, assuming that they will represent her well also on other potential issues. The link may be even more indirect, relying on the historical positions of a candidate or a group of candidates and the voters' attachment to these positions.

The delegate-vision of representatives obviously implies a more restrictive relationship, tying the representative to the election pledges and promises that determined here electoral victory. Representative democracy does not usually rely on this type of vision of representation (Manin, 1995). At the same time, the ideal of faithful representation draws on precisely this kind of vision of representation. It is true that much "mandate theory" of political systems relies on the existence of this kind of linkage (Budge and Farlie, 1983): representatives are given electoral mandates by the voters and are expected to fulfill them. As Downs (1957) showed before them, this vision assumes that political competition is mainly about issues and their translation into public policies. Party competition takes place essentially around policy positions and promises. Voters evaluate party promises based on their proximity to her own expectations. At the extreme, the delegate is a simple executioner of the voters' expressed will.

While this vision has historically held in certain contexts, it is also largely unrealistic. It would imply that voters are able – collectively – to express a clear will. While the clarity of mandate is influenced by the institutional setup (cf. Powell and Whitten, 1993, Soroka and Wlezien, 2010), the representative usually has some liberty regarding the interpretation and implementation of that will. Voters of the same party, unsurprisingly, diverge in their opinions on given issues. On other issues, their positions may not be explicit or clear. These issues may simply not have been at the center of public attention during the electoral campaign, as they may have been considered secondary. Finally, on certain issues, politicians may be aware of divisions within their electorate. As politicians will want to minimize divisive issues, they will tend to avoid those issues (Parsons and Weber, 2011) or "blur" their position on those issues (Rovny, 2012). In a nutshell, even when a delegation-type view of representation is predominant in a given cultural or institutional setting, the reality of representation will provide representatives with an important amount of freedom. Recent critics of responsiveness tend to confirm that the capacity of people to express a will is at best limited (Achen & Bartels, 2017). Miller and Stokes (1963) developed a specific perspective on the issue of representation, focusing on the "congruence" between voters and representatives. In their initial study, the authors compared the policy-preferences of citizens with (1) the preferences of representatives, (2) MPs' perceptions of constituents' preferences and (3) the roll call votes of the elective representatives. In this line of research, distance between median-positions of constituents and median-positions of political institutions or actors was for decades the ultimate criterion for judging representation (Verba and Nie, 1972, Barnes, 1977, Converse and Pierce, 1986,

Thomassen and Schmitt, 1997, Budge and McDonald, 2007). Institutions may in turn influence the degree of congruence (Huber and Powell, 1994, Powell, 2004b, Powell and Vanberg, 2000, Blais and Bodet, 2006, Golder and Stramski, 2010). It has been shown, moreover, that this distance certainly codetermines citizens' evaluations of their political system and their representatives.

Public policy, in sum, appears to play a very important role in the theory of democratic representation. It is a central piece in the representational chain. The problem, however, is that this piece may only be approached empirically, as this requires the study of representatives' pledges, voters positions, expectations and their appreciation of government policy and representatives' work. Yet, the literature that has tried to grasp this interaction is mostly very skeptical about the very possibility of a reasonable interaction between those different elements.

## **2.2 Voters and public policy**

The question that we want to deal with here is linked to the question of representation. Research has most of the time tried to measure the extent to which judgments of public policy performance affect voting or satisfaction with democracy (or any other political regime). The importance of this indicator to judge the quality of democracy is subject to debate.

Historical approaches to political behavior tend to argue that the public's opinions on particular policies will derive from their political opinions, rather than the other way round. The dominant assumption in the literature on political behavior has probably been formulated by Philipp Converse who in the *American voter* (Campbell et al., 1960) concluded that voters were mainly "incompetent" when it comes to public policy. Their knowledge is little precise and sometimes wrong. This tended to downplay the centrality of voters' appreciation of public policy that was central to the rationalist perspective at the heart of the work of Anthony Downs (1957).

This changed only progressively, as it appeared that under certain conditions party identification or social identity, i.e. the dominant vote explanations of the Michigan and Columbia schools, simply were no longer enough to explain election results. Especially, party identification was long maybe the single most important element to explaining vote and attitudes. It served implicitly also as an indicator for examining the relation of citizens and parties. Yet, studies agree that party identification has been decreasing for decades and in some European countries, more than half of the citizens do longer identify with a political party (e.g. Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000, Dalton, 2007, Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012).

Nie et al. (1979) in particular, adopting a long-term perspective, showed that partisan identification has been declining since the late 1960s. This decline was accompanied by a greater attention to policy issues, as economic performance or unemployment were increasingly rivaled by other issues. According to Dalton, there is "a shift away from a style of electoral decision-making based on social group and/or party ties toward a more individualized and inwardly oriented style of political choice [...]. Rather than socially structured and relatively homogeneous

personal networks, contemporary publics are more likely to base their decisions on policy preference, performance judgments, or candidate images” (Dalton 1996: 346). Instead of group-representation and the focus on traditional cleavages, issues become increasingly important (Coleman, 1996, Wattenberg, 1996) and parties are more and more assessed on the basis of how they represent the positions of voters on different issue-dimensions. V.O. Key inaugurated this tradition of thought when he analyzed the surprising victory of Ike Eisenhower in 1952. While a majority of the country identified with the democrats, the emerging Cold War and the Democrats apparent unwillingness to address the issue led to the victory of a political newcomer (Key, 1966). The “defection” of voters became a new stake in political research and debate. The role of “issues” and, thus, positions on particular policy debates were increasingly seen as a potential explanation for defecting from one’s party. The 1968 presidential election was strongly structured by issues with the dissident democratic candidate George Wallace who held strong positions on crime, Vietnam and segregation (Converse et al., 1969: 1096). Other elections were to follow and a new generation of scholars started to look in detail at policy preferences. This was at least partially conditioned by the greater professionalization of campaigns, the role of the media, but also by the increasing volatility.

In recent years, the party-identity argument has regained some weight, as increasing polarization and the “culturalization” of the left-right cleavage appear to have profoundly changed political competition (Hetherington & Weiler, 2018). Achen and Bartels (2017), in particular, have recently put a lot of effort in rethinking the role of partisan identity in the US.

It remains that continental Europe probably presents a slightly different picture and that not everybody is permeated by partisan identity. It is widely accepted today that elections and campaigns rely more and more heavily on issue competition. Political communication scholars have tried to disentangle the way in which context and party strategies may draw attention or “prime” certain issues (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987, Krosnick and Kinder, 1990). As a consequence of this general trend, the awareness of issues may increase substantially, at least temporarily. On certain issues, even if voters are not experts, they may have a general feeling or opinion that can be reactivated in the campaign context (Carmines and Stimson, 1980, Erikson et al., 2002).

### **2.3 Understanding policy appreciation**

The present work is essentially about improving our understanding of what determines citizens’ appreciation of public policy. We thus take a few steps back, compared to the literature on representation, and turning the original question upside down. We consider this a central research question in the context of ever-growing dissatisfaction with governments. The business of government is becoming more and more difficult in France and elsewhere (Grossman and Sauger, 2017). Suspicion towards politicians has grown steadily since the end of the 1970s. They are permanently suspected of collusion with vested interests. Politicians are seen to be furthering their own careers and interests and to forget rapidly about the interests of their voters and constituents. More generally, voters have the impression the left-wing and right-wing

governments are pursuing undistinguishable policy agendas in the context of an ever-growing international constraint.

A second central reason to focus on policy appreciation, rather than issue voting, is that policymaking itself has been changing. Newer forms of public policy are not “command-and-control” regulation towards forms of regulation that build on self-control and incentives (Majone, 1997; Moran, 2002). While the effect of political attitudes on policy implementation at the individual level is not very well known, we assume here that it is a central element.

Hence, we explore the determinants of policy appreciation. We will analyze how other factors, i.e. those that were central in classical approaches to voting, such as party identification, influence policy judgments. Drawing on much of the literature discussed above, we will look at different aspects of relations to the party system and, more generally, the political system, to study the potential determinants of policy judgments.

For those parts of the electorate that identify with a political party, attitude formation towards policies proceeds differently than for voters who do not identify with a political party. “Identification with a party raises a perceptual screen through which an individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation” (Campbell et al., 1960: 133): Voters who feel attached to a political party will evaluate the policy-positions of that party more positively than the options that are taken by other parties. If we compare voters with and without partisanship, then those who identify with a given political party will support the policy-position of this particular party significantly more than others. On the basis of the “choice set” that is offered by political parties, and due to the overarching principles that these parties emphasize, voters are able to form opinions about issues and public policies if they feel close to a party (Sniderman et al., 1991). The heuristic function of partisanship in making political decisions is one of the main aspects that order citizens’ reasoning: „partisanship is the ultimate heuristic, because it provides a reference structure for evaluating many new political stimuli – what position does “my” party take on this issue – and making political choices” (Dalton, 2008: 173).

While research has generally evolved towards taking policy appreciations more seriously, we know little about how knowledgeable voters are and whether they care. In line with the literature on congruence, we assume that awareness of issues is supposed to be low, even though it is central to theories of democracy. It may condition satisfaction with politics and democracy, of course. We are more interested here in how it reflects back on policymaking itself.

Based on the discussions so far, we develop a first assumption, which follows the lines of classical schools explaining political attitudes. These approaches, as discussed above pay little attention to policy knowledge and preferences, as partisan identification and social identity are likely to determine political opinions. Applied to policies, we thus expect that party identification will determine the way in which people think about policies. Very concretely, we thus expect people to appreciate or to be critical of particular policies, essentially as a function of party proximity. Those having voted for the incumbent administration should be more satisfied with the status quo, while electoral losers are more likely to be more disappointed. Reasonable voters are supposed to be more responsive to information they obtain regarding specific policies.

***H<sub>1</sub>: Partisan identification (pid) determines appreciation of policies.***

Beyond partisanship, scholarship suggests that preferences for public policies might be determined by individual concerns. In this regard, the notion of *issue publics* (Converse, 1964) becomes relevant. Accordingly, the electorate consists of diverse groups of voters that follow different agendas. Issue publics differ from the general public, the mass public. The latter “do not have meaningful beliefs, even on issues that have formed the basis for intense political controversy [...] And since it is only among “members” of any given issue public that the political effects of a controversy are felt (where such “effects” include activated public opinion expressed in the writing of letters [...], the changing of votes, and the like), we come a step closer to reality when we recognize the fragmentation of the mass public into a plethora of narrower issue publics (Converse 1964: 245). As voters are not capable of being informed about all political matters, they will be more attentive to policies that concern personal interests or policies that touch on deeply rooted personal values that are relevant to the individual. If the electorate is differentiated based on these aspects, issue publics can be identified: “Most [citizens] fall into very few issue publics, the particular ones being determined by each individual’s self-interests, social identifications, and cherished values” (Krosnick, 1990: 59).

For diverse reasons, the policy interests of issue publics are particularly relevant in the political process. (1) Policies to which citizens attribute great importance are particularly relevant for candidate evaluations (Kinder and Sears, 1985, Feldman and Conover, 1983, Krosnick, 1990). (2) Ultimately, these policies are relevant for the vote-choice (Aldrich and McKelvey, 1977, Krosnick, 1988, Rabinowitz et al., 1982, Shapiro, 1969). (3) Dahl (1956) argues that democratic government needs to be responsive to minorities, but minorities which care a lot about particular policies. These groups of voters might be an issue public. If the interests of these minorities, or issue publics, would be ignored for long, democratic government might be questioned. Accordingly, there are certain policies in which government might respond to the interests of issue groups – these voters attach great importance to a particular policy and have strong preferences for a particular policy. As a result, there would be policy correspondence between government and the interests of issue publics.

Scholarship suggests that citizens’ policy attitudes are determined by diverse criteria, such as importance, centrality, ego involvement or salience (Converse, 1970, Newcomb, 1956) – but often, these terms are used interchangeably (Sherif, 1980). For his notion of issue publics, Krosnick (1990: 60) defines “attitude importance as the degree to which a person is passionately concerned about and personally invested in an attitude, and to view linkage between an attitude and values, needs, and goals as one possible cause of importance”.

These important policy attitudes are more stable than attitudes towards policies which are of minor importance to the individual, and hence quite relevant when exploring policy preferences of individuals. Citizens do know more about aspects that are relevant to policies that are important to them than to other policies which allows resisting counter-arguments

easier than in the case of policies which are less important to the individual (Ostrom and Brock, 1969). Generally, an attitude must be accessible to voters – this is the case if the attitude is frequently activated. If distinctiveness is given and if the attitude is linked to other psychological elements that influence or determine citizens' reasoning (Higgins and King, 1981, Wood, 1982, Newcomb et al., 1965). Citizens are well informed about these issues, even if they are not necessarily informed about other policies (Converse, 1964, Iyengar, 1990, Krosnick, 1990). Consequently, individual concerns let individuals care more about certain issues – and their attitudes towards these issues are comparatively well informed and stable.

However, experimental studies which manipulate both, party cues and policy information lead to contradictory results. They either show that party cues effect ignorance of policy information (e.g. Cohen, 2003; Rahn, 1993) or find that information does matter, even when partisan cues are given. Also, executives using force as the confidence procedure loose approval (Becher and Brouard 2020). Other results indicate that information can lead to a change of voter's policy attitude, defecting the partisan stereotype (Arceneaux, 2008; Bullock, 2011; Nicholson, 2012). Otherwise, voters stop to support a candidate of their party if he or she diverges from their policy preferences (Ansolabehere et al., 2006; Jessee, 2012). More precisely, if voters are exposed to election campaigns and media messages on a particular issue, their information on the issue and candidate's policy position increases. Often, voters make shifts in their policy preferences and adopt positions of preferred candidates or parties (Lenz 2012).

***H<sub>2</sub>: Being member of an issue public determines policy importance and policy attitudes.***

***H<sub>2a</sub>: Issue publics attribute more importance to the policy in question.***

***H<sub>2b</sub>: Issue publics have different preferences for changes in public policies than other parts of the electorate.***

***H<sub>3</sub>: (Salient) issues may compensate for party identity.***

### 3 Data and Methods

Our analysis is based on two different sources: (1) The Policy Priorities Survey (henceforth: PPS) and (2) media data. The PPS represents a formidable opportunity to test some of those claims for France, where issue-related analyses of political attitudes and behavior have been rather exceptional. It enables to analyze citizens' attitudes and behavior over time (see also Brouard 2016, Foucault and Brouard 2017). The following empirical analysis includes data from nine different waves, from December 2014 until October 2017. We pool nine waves of the PPS into a cross-sectional dataset including 13570 unique respondents.

Each wave contains an identical set of policy-related questions covering a great range policy areas and issues (the appendix contains the complete list of questions). Two types of questions are included. The first set explicitly ask about *spending*. The questions take the form "Do you think that the government should spend more on X?". The responses are made up of 5-point Likert scales ranging from "the government should spend a lot more" to "the government should spend a lot less". Moreover, for each of those items, respondents were asked whether they consider this issue to be important, very important, not so important or not important at all.

A second series of questions concerns the general action of government. These questions ask whether the government "should do more on X" or not. Again, answers take the form of 5-point Likert scales. As before, a follow-up question asks how important respondents consider the particular issue to be (item wording: see appendix 1.4).

In addition, we have collected data on monthly media attention for each of the policy issues that the survey deals with. For each issue we established a set of keywords<sup>1</sup> that was researched across three different newspapers, i.e.: *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Parisien/Aujourd'hui en France*. The media indicator is the average of the normalized attention by newspaper for each issue.

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<sup>1</sup> The list of keywords is available on demand from the authors.



## 4 Party identification and preferences for change in public policies

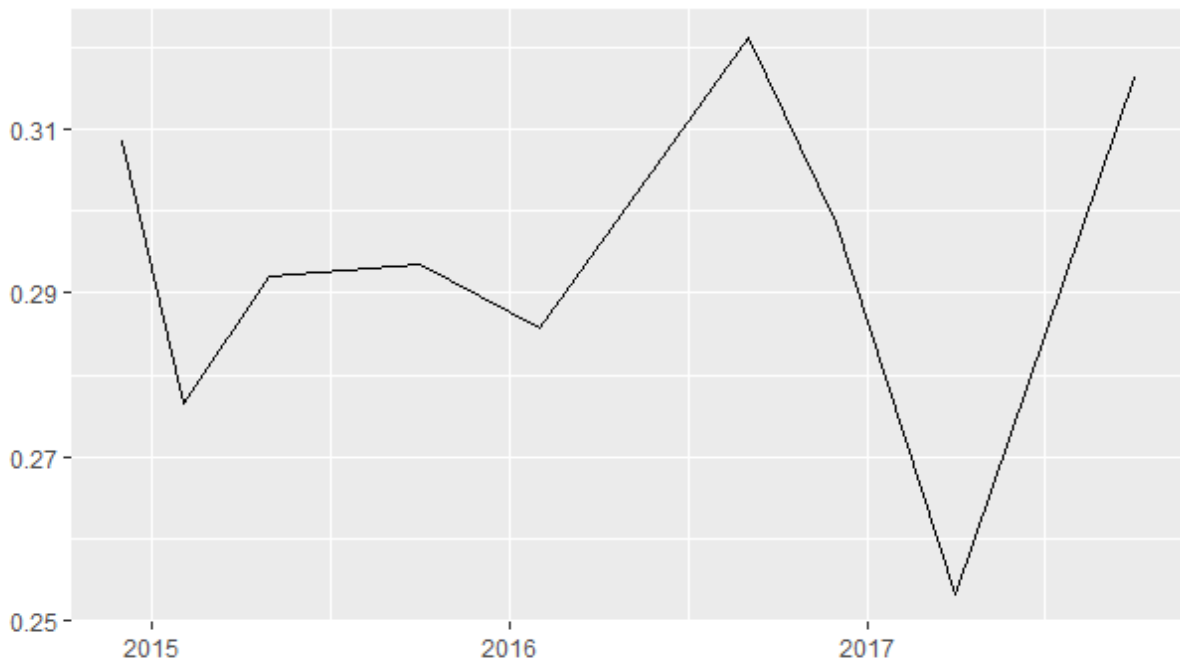
This section explores the impact of party identification on policy preferences. We proceed in several steps. First, we analyze the evolution of partisanship between December 2014 and October 2017 and identify to which parties citizens feel close. Second, we address citizens' preferences for public policies through analyzing their preferences for changes in government activity and spending. Here, our analysis reveals significant differences between diverse groups of partisans. Finally, we study partisans' preferences for changes in public policies, such as education, social security, economy or security/order.

### 4.1 The evolution of party identification

Party identification has been declining in representative democracies for several decades (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002), indicating that the link between the most important political actors that are supposed to reflect diverse societal interests in the process of policymaking is increasingly loose. Our analysis shows that indeed, the link between citizens and political parties in the 5<sup>th</sup> republic is weak. Dalton (2016) shows that France figures among those in countries in the Western world with comparatively low levels of party identification that have further diminished over the past 40 years. It trails far behind the UK or Germany, even if the latter has experienced a radical fall in party identification in the past two decades (Dassonneville et al. 2012).

As Figure 1 shows, almost one third of the respondents did not feel close to any political party between 2014 and 2017. The most remarkable change in the relation of citizens and parties occurred between 2016 and 2017: In 2016, the percentage of non-partisans increased from 28 to 32 percent and in a very short period of time voters' relation to parties changed significantly. Concurrently, France faced drastic changes in the party system: Emmanuel Macron, a former minister of the Valls cabinet, established the movement *En marche* that was later transformed into the party *La République en marche*, and set up his campaign for the Presidential elections. He won the elections and became President in May 2017.

Figure 1 - Non-partisans, 2015-2017



“Sans penser seulement aux élections, veuillez indiquer de quel parti politique vous vous sentez le plus proche, ou disons le/la moins éloigné(e) ?”<sup>2</sup>, N = 13.570.

Shortly after Macron’s inauguration and in the context of the parliamentary elections, the percentage of non-partisans decreased significantly and only 25 percent of voters did not identify with any party. This is in line with arguments about the “expressive vote”: it is the act of voting that strengthens convictions among those who are uncertain (Schuessler, 2000). This feeling, however, does not appear to be very long-lasting. In August 2017 around 31 per cent of voters did not identify with a party.

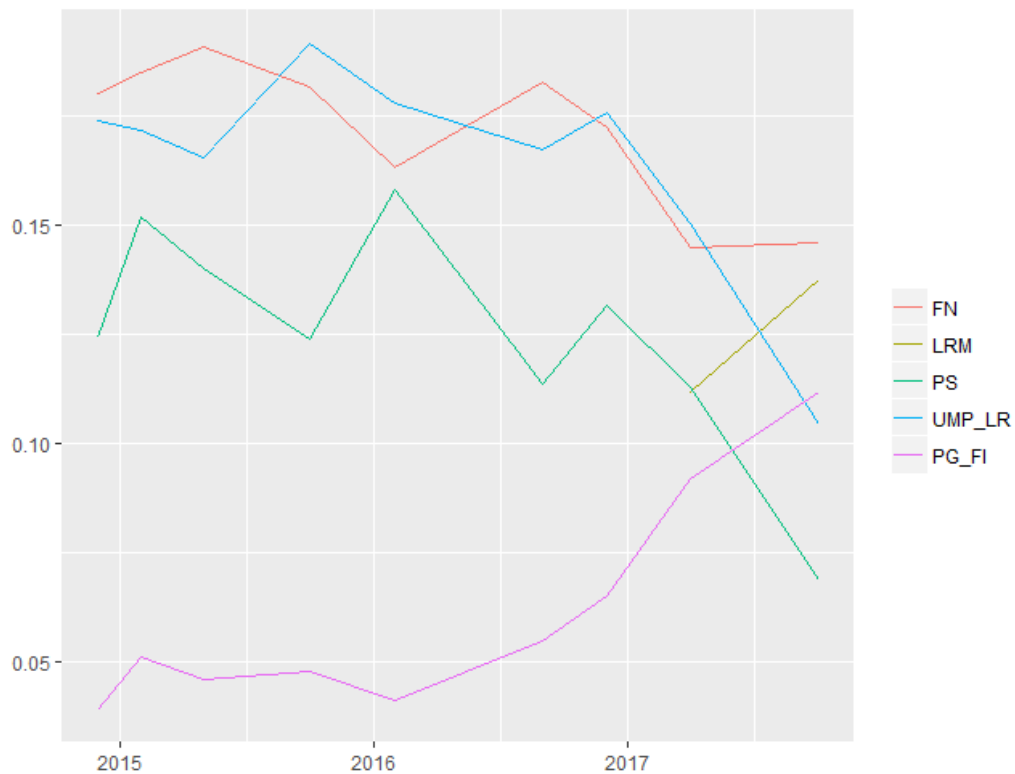
These short-term changes in partisanship are particularly remarkable as the literature suggests that party identification is one of the most stable political attitudes, influenced by socialization and the societal background of voters and deeply rooted in the belief system of voters. Instead, campaign-effects seem to be quite important to voters’ orientations towards political parties and these might be correlated to issues or the candidate.

Figure 2 shows the development of partisanship between 2015 and 2017 with reference to different political parties. Again, the most significant changes occur in late-2016 and in 2017 shortly before En Marche was established and after the movement became a political party. A list of the full party names and the parties’ positions can be found in the appendix.

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<sup>2</sup> “Without thinking only of elections, which political party do you feel closest too or the least distant from?” (our translation).

Figure 2 - Partisanship in France, 2015-2017



“Sans penser seulement aux élections, veuillez indiquer de quel parti politique vous vous sentez le plus proche, ou disons le/la moins éloigné(e) ?”<sup>3</sup>, N = 13.570.

In 2015, most of the French voters identified either with the FN or with the UMP/LR, around 17 percent of the French electorate felt near to one of these parties. By contrast, there were less voters who identified with the PS (around 14 percent) and the share of the electorate that felt close to the PG/FI was quite low (less than five percent).

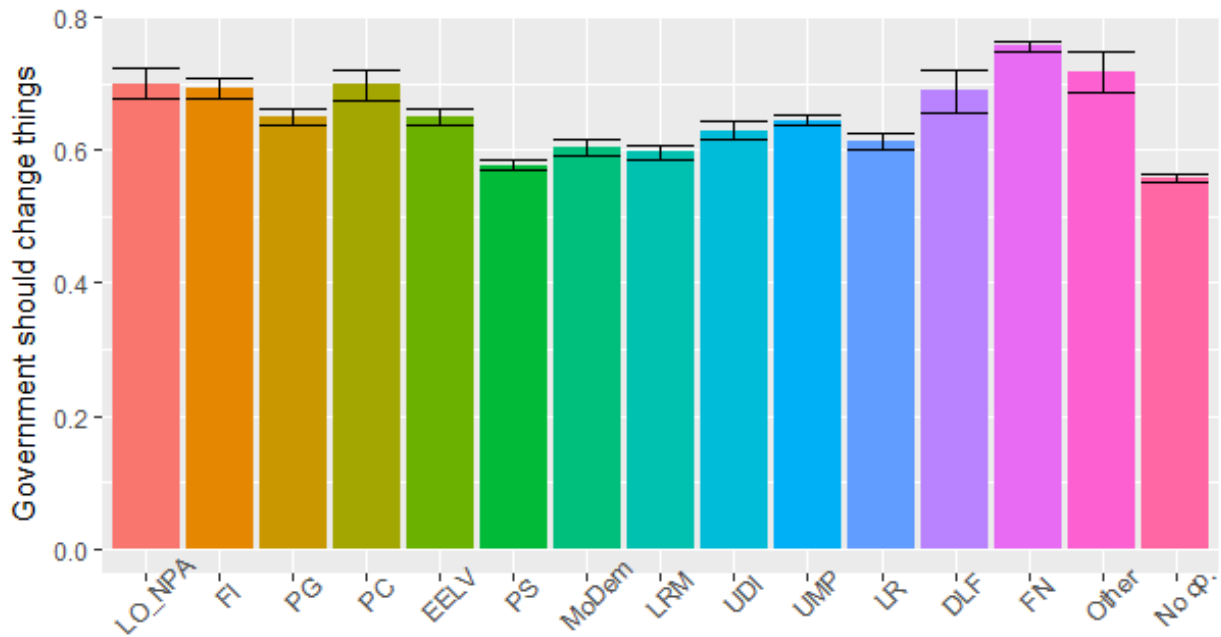
In 2016 partisan proximity had declined for all the parties, except the PG/FI. The most pronounced drop in this year concerned the PS: party identification decreased by five percent for that party. This trend continued in 2017: the large and established parties faced voters who identified less and less with them. At the same time, citizens identified increasingly with the PG/FI. However, this year was characterized by a remarkable change within the French party system with the creation of *La République en marche*, mentioned above. Immediately, a large part of the electorate felt close to this party: In spring 2017, around 12 percent of voters identified with the movement. A couple of months later, almost 14 percent of the French felt close to the party. Concurrently, the part of the electorate that identified with UMP/LR and PS declined.

<sup>3</sup> “Without thinking only of elections, which political party do you feel closest too or the least distant from?” (our translation).

#### **4.2 Public policies: Are citizens in favor of status quo or change?**

The resulting question is more fundamental for our purposes. How does party identification inform policy preferences? Or, to put it even more bluntly, does partisanship determine preferences for public policies? In this subsection, we explore the interrelation of partisanship and preferences for a change in government spending or government activity. In doing so, we distinguish diverse policy fields.

Figure 3 - Preferences for change in public policies



Scale: 0 = status quo, 1 = slight change, 2 = strong change, average scores, 29 variables.

No op. = no opinion.

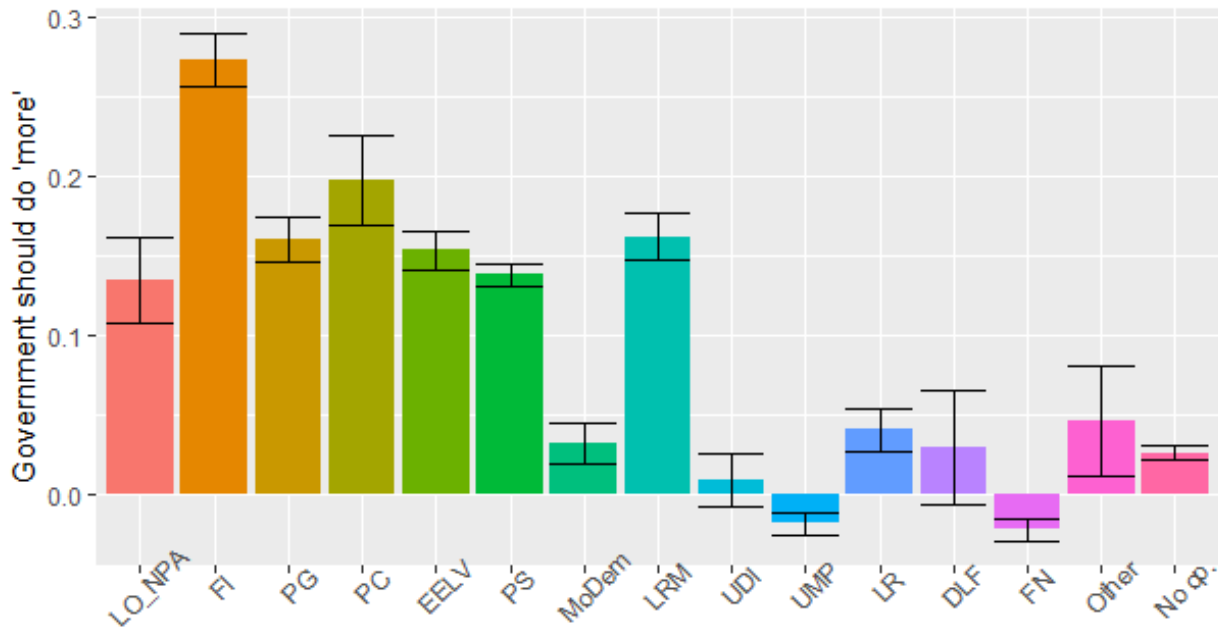
Figure 3 shows preferences for change in policies by respondents' self-reported party identification. Citizens' preferences for a change are measured on the basis of citizens' demands for a change concerning 29 policies and reports mean-scores. Our measure is based on a 3-point-scale with 0 indicating that voters are not in favor of a change, a score of 1 indicates preferences for a minor change in public policies and 2 indicates that citizens demand strong changes in public policies.

Voters' preferences for changes in public policies vary among the electorate. Most of the average scores are around 0.6, meaning that most of the French are in favor of policy changes. These preferences are mostly pronounced for voters who identify with the FN or for those who feel close to the PC or LO/NPA. Citizens who identify with parties on the extremes are those whose demands for a change in public policies are strongly pronounced.

The voters that feel close to the PS, the SO and to the new party *La République en marche* (LRM) are those who are least in favor of policy change and thus those who are most satisfied with the status quo. This is in contrast to what literature on party competition suggests. On the one hand, cleavage theory argues that the formation of new parties is caused by a lack of representation of the interests of parts of the society, which is itself in a constant change. New parties would represent interests of citizens that were not (adequately) represented before. On the other hand, according to public choice theory, parties compete for parts of the electorate – and the votes for a (new) party are caused by the strategic positioning of political parties and a successful strategy of party competition.

Figure 4 provides more detailed insight into voters' preferences for a change in public policies. It depicts voters' demand for an increase or a decrease in government activity. The figure shows average scores for electorate by self-reported party proximity.

Figure 4 - Preferences for changes in government activity



Reference = 29 variables that depict citizens' preferences for policy-change. Scale: -2 = should strongly decrease, -1 should decrease, 0 = status quo, 1 = should increase, 2 = should strongly increase. Average scores.

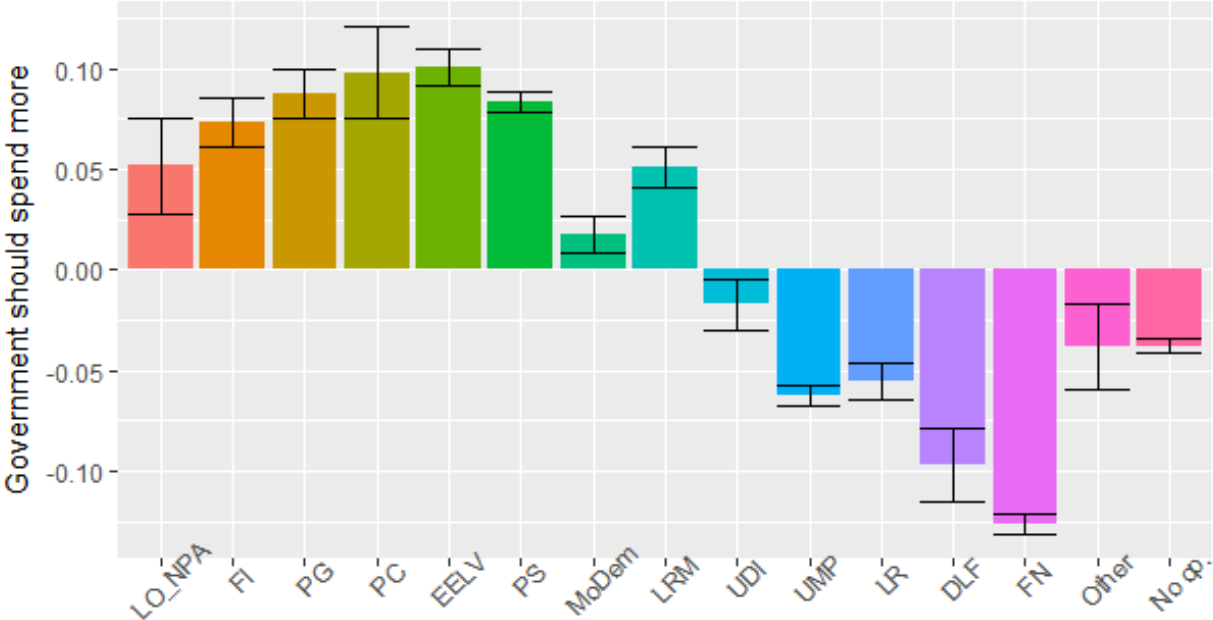
The preferences for change in government activity vary strongly among voters. Those who feel near to FI ("Unbending France", far left) are those who demand the most pronounced increase in government activity, followed by citizens who identify with other parties of the left (PC, PG, EELV, PS). Interestingly, those who identify with the party that was in government at the time are not satisfied with the status quo, either: PS-voters are in favor of more government activity. This score is similar to the result for voters who identify with the new party LRM – these prefer an increase in government activity, too. In contrast, citizens who identify with the FN are those who tend to prefer a decrease in government activity. A similar trend is visible for those who feel close to the UMP, even though this trend is minimal.

These results reveal some patterns: Apparently, voters who identify with the far left and with the far right are those with the most opposing preferences for changes in public policies – whereas citizens with leftist positions are in favor of more government activity, citizens who identify with the right prefer a decrease in government activity.

In addition to government activity, preferences in expenditure are an important criterion for evaluating public policies. Figure 5 shows to what extent the electorate is in favor of an increase or a decrease in expenditure for public policies. Demands for changes in spending differ

from the preferences that concern substantial changes. Some parts of the electorate are in favor of a general increase in government spending, others prefer a decrease and these contrasts are more pronounced than the differences with regard to government activity.

Figure 5 - Preferences for changes in expenditure for public policies



Reference = 30 variables that depict citizens’ preferences for spending on public policies. Scale: -2 = should strongly decrease, -1 should decrease, 0 = status quo, 1 = should increase, 2 = should strongly increase. Average scores across policy areas.

As illustrated above, voters who feel close to the FN and to the PC are those featuring the greatest preferences for change. But as figure 5 reveals, the direction of their preferences in spending is opposing: Whereas those who identify with the FN prefer a decrease in government spending, those who identify with the PC opt for an increase.

The majority of the electorate prefers an increase in government spending, whereas citizens who identify with the main leftist parties demand the strongest increase. And although many voters who identify with the PS supported LRM in 2017, there are remarkable differences between the preferences of the supporters of both parties: A comparison of the average scores reveals that those who feel close to the PS prefer a stronger increase in government spending than LRM-voters.

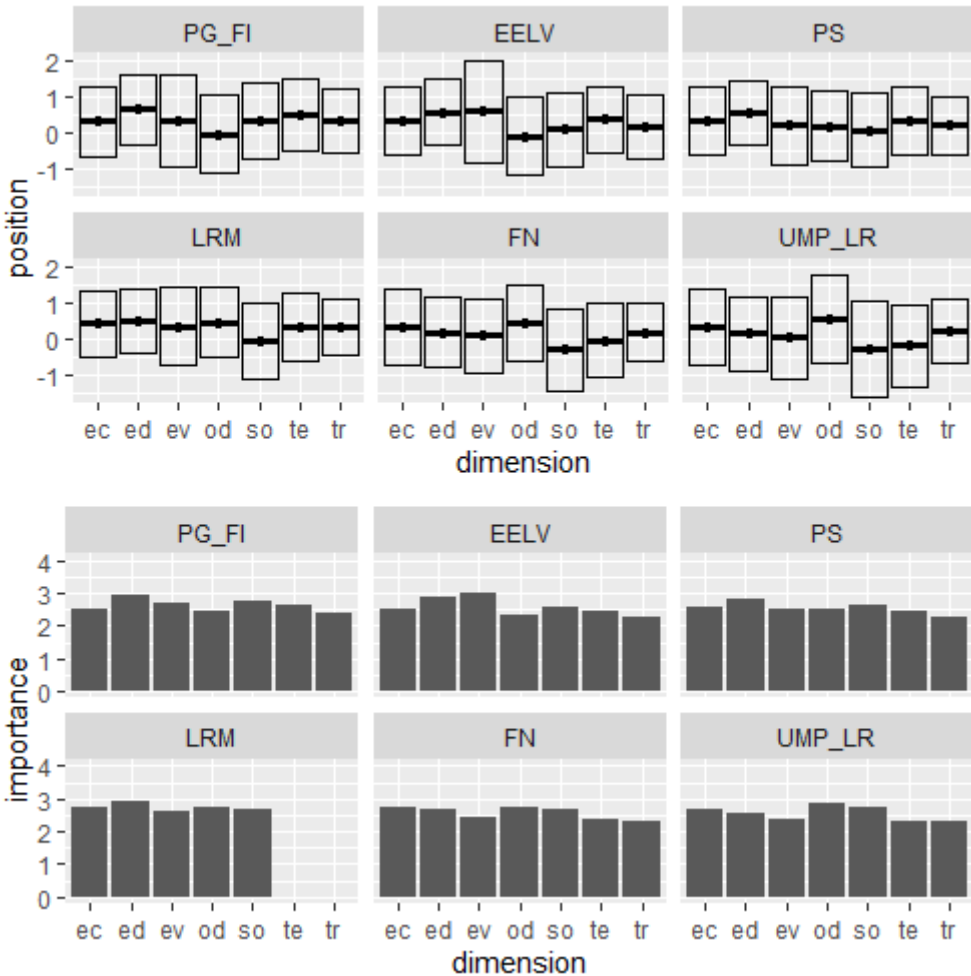
By contrast, French citizens who feel close to the DLF have a strong preference for a decrease in spending which is near to the score of FN-identifiers. Moreover, voters with conservative orientations who feel close to the UMP/LR prefer a decrease in government spending. And those who feel close to other parties and those who did not respond to the

question about partisanship also prefer a decrease in government spending, which shows that their orientations are tendentially more similar to the preferences of right-wing voters.

### 4.3 Public policy: preferences by area and parties

Let’s look at preferences by policy area. To do this, we have grouped policies respectively into seven (spending) and eight (“do more”) policy dimensions. Each area thus includes between three and five different policy questions (see appendix 1.4 for the questions that we grouped). Figure 6 presents average voters’ preferences by policy area and partisan proximity, limited here to the six major parties. The boxplots, moreover, allow to observe the relative dispersion of party followers on given issues and the relative perceived importance of issues. Generally, most citizens demand changes in government spending in most of the policies under investigation. However, preferences for change vary – depending on the policy field and depending on partisanship. As to the extent of dispersion within parties, this also varies rather strongly.

Figure 6 - Preferences for changes in spending, by partisan proximity



Scale “more spending”: -2 = should strongly decrease, -1 should decrease, 0 = status quo, 1 = should increase, 2 = should strongly increase, average scores. Scale “importance”: 0 = no important at all, 1 = not very important, 2 = neither/nor, 3 = important, 4 = very important.



The results reveal interesting patterns: voters of leftist parties as the PG/FI and the PS or voters of LRM and the EELV have similar patterns with regard to their preferences for change. The analysis shows that citizens who identify with the EELV have the single strongest demand for a change in public policies. It concerns, unsurprisingly, environmental policies. Voters who feel close to the PG/FI, the PS or LRM also state that this is the policy field in which they prefer the strongest changes. Furthermore, citizens who identify with these parties would like to have changes in the policy fields of social security, the economy, order and territory. Transport and education are policy fields that should be reformed, according to these parts of the electorate, but the mean scores show that these fields do not rank as high as the others.

The most significant difference between the attitudes of these voters and voters who identify with the UMP/LR or the FN concerns education. Citizens who feel close to the parties on the right do not attach great importance to reforms in this policy field. Changes that concern social security, order and the economy appear to be much more important to right-wing voters. Generally, the results reveal that, indeed, citizens who identify with the UMP/LR or the FN have similar orientations towards public policies and these patterns differ clearly from other parts of the electorate.

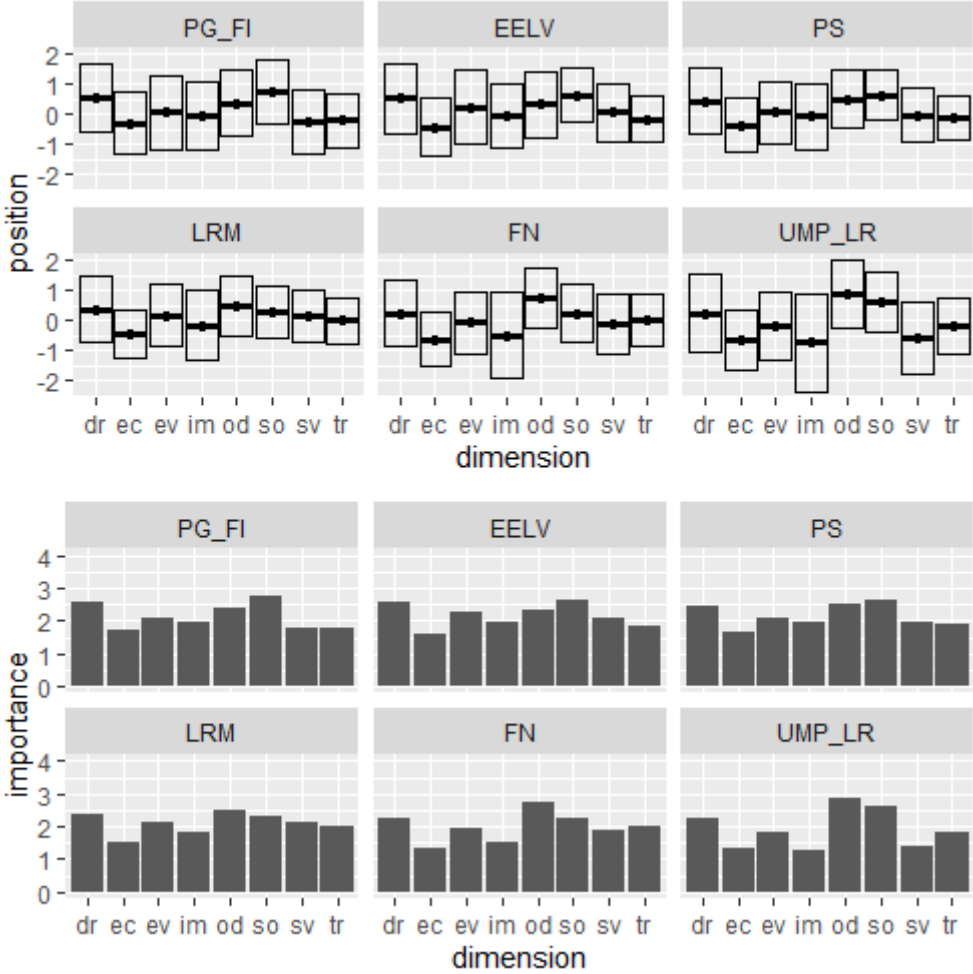
The analysis of preferences for more or less spending gives deeper insight into the structure of attitudes of the French electorate. Again, the findings reveal close resemblance of preferences of FN- and UMP/LR-voters on the one hand and similarities between voters of traditional leftist parties and the LRM on the other hand. Citizens who feel close either to the FN or to the UMP/LR prefer on average a decrease in spending on social security. Also, they prefer to cut spending on territorial matters. The policy fields in which these voters would like to have a substantial increase in spending concerns safety and order. Furthermore, they opt for an increase in spending for the economy. Unlike FN- or UMP/LR-voters, those who identify with the EELV or the PR/FI prefer a decrease in spending on policies that concern security and order.

Voters who identify with EELV, LRM, PS or PG/FI prefer a meaningful increase in government spending on education. But interestingly none of these groups demands a large increase in spending on social security. Instead, those who feel near to the LRM prefer on average a slight decrease in spending. In this regard, the preferences of LRM-voters are most similar to the voters with conservative orientations. Further, citizens who feel close to LRM demand an increase in spending for policies that concern the economy.

Finally, the upper panel of figure 6 also reveals the degree of dispersion of party preferences on the different issues. Somewhat surprisingly, the greatest dispersion can be found among the most salient issues. For example, both the Greens and FI campaigned on the environment, but the length of the boxes show that this is also the issue on which the party members least agree on. A similar phenomenon can be observed for the issue of order (“od”) for the conservative UMP/LR. In the latter case, it probably has to do with the contradiction between being the anti-spending/tax party on the one hand and wanting to devote more money to security issues on the other.

In sum, the findings reveal that particularly voters of the FN and the UMP/LR have a similar structure of preferences. Generally, PS-voters are those who seem to be most satisfied with the allocation of resources, as they demand fewer changes than other voters. This speaks in favor of the straightforward thesis of “winners” consent (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; André Blais & Gélinau, 2007). It may thus be seen as incumbency effect, even though it has to be remembered that the outgoing PS government reached historical levels of unpopularity.

Figure 7 - Preferences for changes in government activity, by partisan proximity



Scale “more should be done”: -2 = should do a lot less, -1 should do less, 0 = status quo, 1 = should do more, 2 = should do a lot more, average scores. Scale “importance”: 0 = no important at all, 1 = not very important, 2 = neither/nor, 3 = important, 4 = very important.

Figure 7 illustrates citizens’ preferences for a general change in government activity and gives insight into the preferred direction of change – should government do more or less in diverse policy fields? Again, the results reveal similarities between voters who identify with the UMP/LR and the FN. Furthermore, preferences of those who identify with the PG/FI, the PS and the EELV are quite similar. The preferences of LRM-voters differ from both groups but are more similar to the preferences of voters of leftist parties.

The most remarkable difference concerns citizens who identify with the UMP/LR and the FN: Both prefer significant changes in government activity with regard to immigration whereas the mean-score of FN-voters is higher than the score reached by UMP/LR-voters. Citizens who identify with the PG/FI attach great importance to changes in social security, rights and policies that concern the environment, which is similar to EELV-voters and PS-voters. However, the PS-voters reach generally lower average scores. Those who identify with LRM care most about changes in the policy fields of immigration or rights. Again, the structure of preferences of PG/FI-voters and those who identify with the EELV and the PS are similar.

But what is the direction of change that voters prefer? The highest demand for a change concerns social security – and this preference is particularly pronounced by those who identify with the PG/FI, the EELV, the OS and the FN. Unlike, voters who feel near to the LRM and the UMP/LR do not have a strong preference for an increase in government activity. Another field in which most of the voters want government to do more is rights and this preference is strongest among voters of the leftist parties.

There are two fields in which all parts of the electorate want government to do less, even if the strength of these preferences varies: policies that concern the economy and migration. A decrease in government activity with regard to economic policies is mainly preferred among those who identify with the FN, the UMP/LR or the LRM. Those who feel close to the other parties are also in favor of a decrease, but this trend is less marked. Again, voters who are in favor of the FN and the UMP/LR hold similar attitudes with regard to immigration policies: Both prefer a comparatively strong decrease in government activity. Voters who feel close to one of the other parties do not have strong preferences for a change.

Beyond, there are two policy fields in which most parts of the electorate do not have a clear tendency about how they want government activity to change: The scores for environmental policies and policies that concern transportation are around zero. Hence, even if voters prefer generally changes in these fields, the direction of a preferred change is not consistent.

Finally, regarding the dispersion of positions on parties, it is important to note that it is often on the most important issues that voters disagree most. On figure 6 we had seen important dispersion among green voters on the environment. Similarly, we find some dispersion here on immigration for the two parties which have most campaigned on this issue recently, i.e. the conservative UMP/LR and the far-right FN. Even in this second series of questions, the environment is the area where the greens disagree most.

Generally, the results confirm our hypothesis: partisanship does structure citizens' attitudes towards public policies. On average, large parts of the electorate prefer that government intervenes stronger in many of the policy fields that we integrated into our study. To a minor extent, voters would like government to spend more and many voters would even prefer a decrease in government spending for public policies. These are mainly voters of conservative parties or the FN.

The more detailed analysis allowed identifying some patterns: Voters who identify with the UMP/LR and the FN have similar preferences for changes in government spending. Both groups prefer an increase in spending for security, order and the economy but a decrease in spending for social policies. On the other hand, voters who identify with leftist parties would like an increase in expenditure in most of the policy fields, and particularly in policies that concern education. The attitudes of LRM-voters are similar to voters of leftist parties and differ from those who identify with parties on the right.

Citizens' preferences for changes in government activity reveal a different pattern: Leftist voters and FN-voters have some similar attitudes. These parts of the electorate would like government to do particularly more with reference to social policies. In this regard, attitudes of LRM-voters and those who identify with the UMP/LR are mostly alike – even if they would like an increase in government activity for social policies, this demand is not strongly pronounced. By contrast, UMP/LR-voters and citizens who identify with the FN want a strong decrease in government activity with regard to immigration. Beyond, large parts of the electorate prefer that government regulates the economy less and these attitudes are particularly pronounced if citizens identify with the FN, the UMP/LR or LRM.

These results point to two potentially different interpretations of  $H_1$ . On the one hand, it appears to be clear that policy preferences are correlated to left-right placement. Generally speaking, those identifying with leftwing prefer “bigger” government, in line with historical arguments on the behavior of left and right in office (Blais et al., 1993; Cameron, 1978; Garrett, 1998). While it is too early to develop causal arguments, here, there clearly is a correlation between identifying with left-wing governments and favoring more spending and government action. On the other hand,  $H_1$  could be about incumbency. If party polarization is strong, then the appreciation of incumbents' measures should be appreciated by those who voted for them and rejected by those who voted against them. Our data does not allow to answer this question as the vast majority of the waves used here concern only one government. Moreover, the government change that intervenes briefly before the last wave is supported by an important fraction of those who had voted for the previous government. This makes a test of this second interpretation of  $H_1$  obviously a lot more difficult. We may safely assume, however, that the confirmation of  $H_1$  is due to partisanship as well as due to an incumbency effect.

We will now turn to situation where partisan proximity may be counteracted by personal concerns. We have developed the assumption above that this type of contradiction may lead to a decrease of the partisan effect on policy preferences.

## 5 Issue publics and preferences for changes in public policy

For the purpose of our analysis, the criterion of ego involvement becomes the crucial aspect for the identification of “issue publics”. We identify demographically defined groups (as e.g. Gilboa 1986, Organski 1990, Page and Shapiro 1992) in order to test our hypotheses. Even if this approach might not fully identify all the relevant groups of an issue public (Krosnick and Telhami 1995), we assume that this approach allows to identify publics with remarkable differences concerning (1) preferences for changes in public policies and (2) the importance that voters attribute to the policy. Based on socio-demographic criteria we differentiated groups of voters with distinct self-interests that might determine the importance that they attribute to certain public policies or that might impact on their preferences for changes in public policies. For this purpose, we select policy questions for which we can develop straightforward assumptions regarding the effects of demographic variation. In particular we look at concern for government expenditure for pensions, unemployment benefits, and financial support for rural areas. On the other hand, we analyze preferences for policy change concerning gender equality and the minimum wage. Table 1 provides an overview of the policies that we will explore and the issue publics that we identified. While all of those groups are little precise, they allow for a straightforward test of the issue-public assumption presented above.

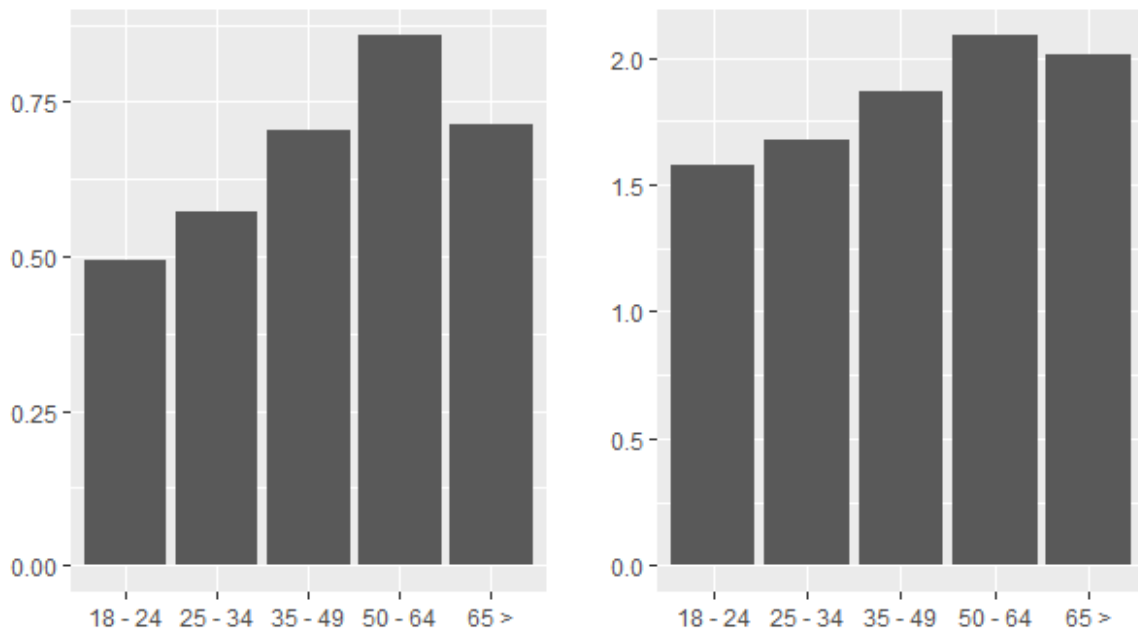
**Table 1: Overview of the issue public and public policies under investigation**

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Identification of issue public (criterion)</b>
<i>Changes in government expenditure (“spend more”)</i>	
Pensions	Age
Unemployment benefit	Professional situation
Spending for rural areas	Agglomeration
<i>Changes in government activity (“do more”)</i>	
Gender equality	Gender
Minimum wage	Professional situation

### 5.1 Preferences for changes in government expenditure (“spend more”)

We will now explore differences in importance and differences in preferences for public policy for diverse sectors of society. The first part concerns their preferences for government expenditure. The second part concerns their preferences for government activity.

**Figure 8 - Preferences for changes in government spending for pensions, by age groups**



Scale (left): -2 = should strongly decrease, -1 should decrease, 0 = status quo, 1 = should increase, 2 = should strongly increase. Scale (right): = not at all important, -1 not important, 0 = indifferent, 1 = important, 2 = very important.

*Pensions.* Citizens' preferences for government spending on pensions are similar across the board: as figure 8 shows, all age groups prefer an increase in spending. Nevertheless, the extent of the preferred increase varies. Voters who are aged 50-64 are those who demand this increase in spending most extensively, followed by those who are 65 and older and those who are between 35 and 49 years old. The mean scores for younger voters are lower and hence their preferences for an increase in spending is less pronounced.

The results thus show that those who are the next in line for pensions are those most concerned with pensions spending. The age group that consists entirely of pensioners appears to be less demanding. But both scores are higher than those for all younger generations. Hence, our results confirm our hypothesis at least partially.

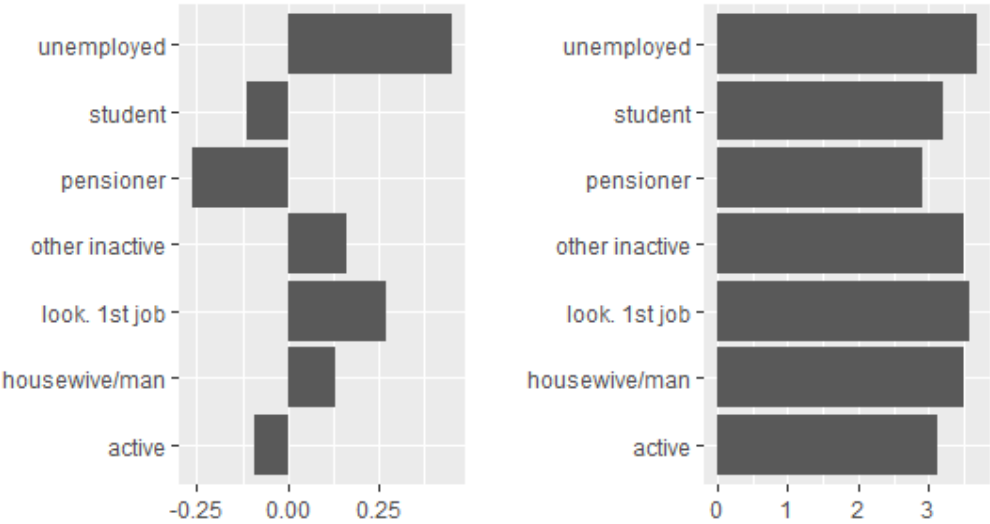
The importance that citizens attribute to changes in government spending does also vary between the age groups, as illustrated on the right-hand panel of figure 8. Indeed, those who are mainly affected by pensions are those who care most about government spending in this policy field. Voters who are 65 and those who will soon become pensioners do attribute greatest importance (see also: Converse 2003). Again, as before, voters between 18 and 34 are the ones who care the least.

Our findings demonstrate that preferences for change in government spending and the importance that age groups attribute to government spending follow similar patterns. Pensioners and those who will soon become pensioners care most and they have the strongest preferences for an increase in spending.

*Unemployment benefits.* Citizens’ preferences for change in unemployment benefits vary much more across different sectors of society, mostly depending on their current employment status, as shown on figure 9. Particularly those who are dependent on unemployment benefits tend to demand higher levels of spending, followed by those who are looking for a job. Furthermore, housewives and househusbands as well as other non-actives prefer an increase in government spending on unemployment benefits.

This is in stark contrast with citizens who are employed or otherwise active – those who fall into this professional group prefer a decrease of unemployment benefits. The same trend is detected for pensioners, who also prefer a decrease in government spending and this trend is even more pronounced than in the case of employees. Again, our assumption is confirmed.

**Figure 9 - Preferences for change in government spending for unemployment benefits, by employment status**



Scale (left): -2 = should strongly decrease, -1 should decrease, 0 = status quo, 1 = should increase, 2 = should strongly increase. Scale (right): = not at all important, -1 not important, 0 = indifferent, 1 = important, 2 = very important.

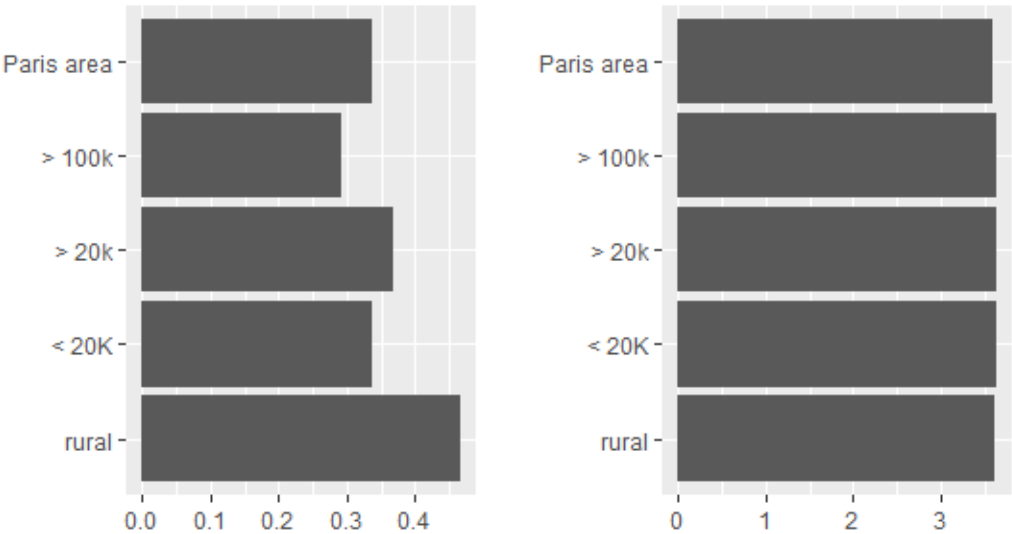
We see on the right-hand panel of figure 9 that all groups of voters attribute importance to government spending for unemployment benefits. But again, those who mostly depend on unemployment state that this policy field is more important than the other groups of voters. Whereas the unemployed have an average score of almost 0.8 (on scale ranging from -2 to 2), most other groups feature a score of around 0.6 and the variation between employees, pensioners, those who are looking for a job, housewife and –husband or others who are not professionally active is minimal. For students, however, unemployment benefits are less important.

*Rural development.* Another policy field in which government spending is contested concerns policies towards rural areas and rural development. Preferences for change in government spending vary across social groups, even though to a lesser extent than in the case of unemployment benefits. Figure 10 shows that the dwellers of all types of agglomeration favor

an increase in government spending for rural areas and all consider this to be important. But this demand is particularly pronounced among those actually living in those areas.

On the whole, these results confirm the underlying assumption – citizens who live in a rural area have indeed stronger preferences for government spending on rural concerns than other parts of the electorate. However, other parts of the electorate also wish an increase in spending and even if they demand an increase to a lesser extent, the differences are not heavily marked.

**Figure 10 - Preferences for change in government spending for rural areas, by type of agglomeration**



Scale (left): -2 = should strongly decrease, -1 should decrease, 0 = status quo, 1 = should increase, 2 = should strongly increase. Scale (right): = not at all important, -1 not important, 0 = indifferent, 1 = important, 2 = very important.

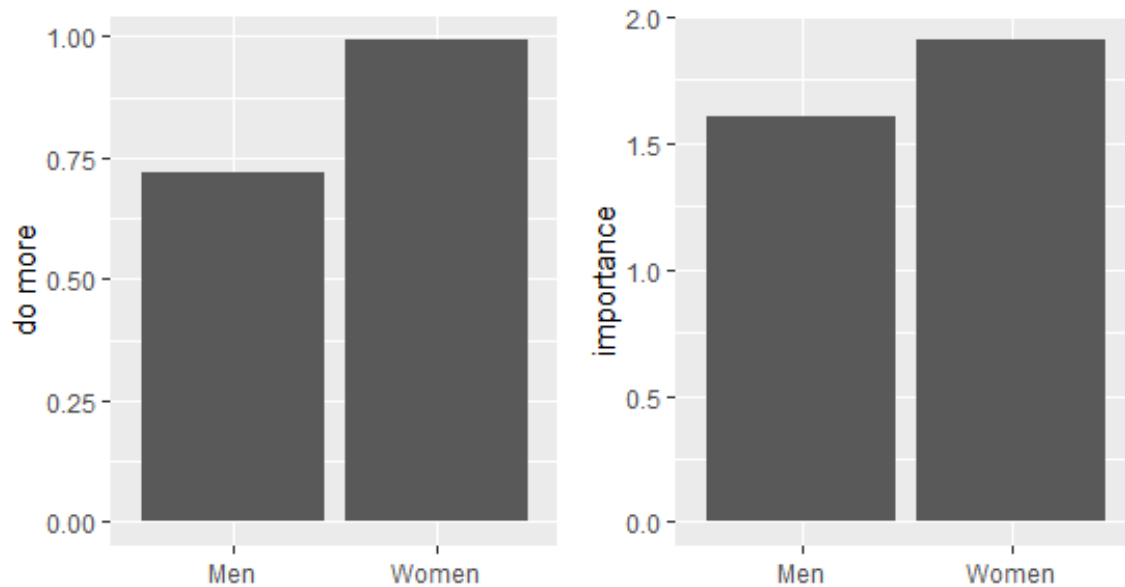
These patterns are replicated if citizens were asked about the importance that they attribute to government spending for rural areas. Those who find government spending in this sector most important are indeed those who live on the country side and in a region which is categorized as being rural.

**5.2 Preferences for changes in government activity (“do more”)**

We will now look at preferences for change in government activity with regard to two different policies. We will examine gender equality and minimum wage. Again, we identify issue publics for each of these fields and explore similarities and differences across the electorate. As before, we assume that those most directly concerned by the issue will feature stronger preferences and favor more government action.

**Figure 11 - Importance and preferences for an increase in government activity with regard to gender equality, by gender**



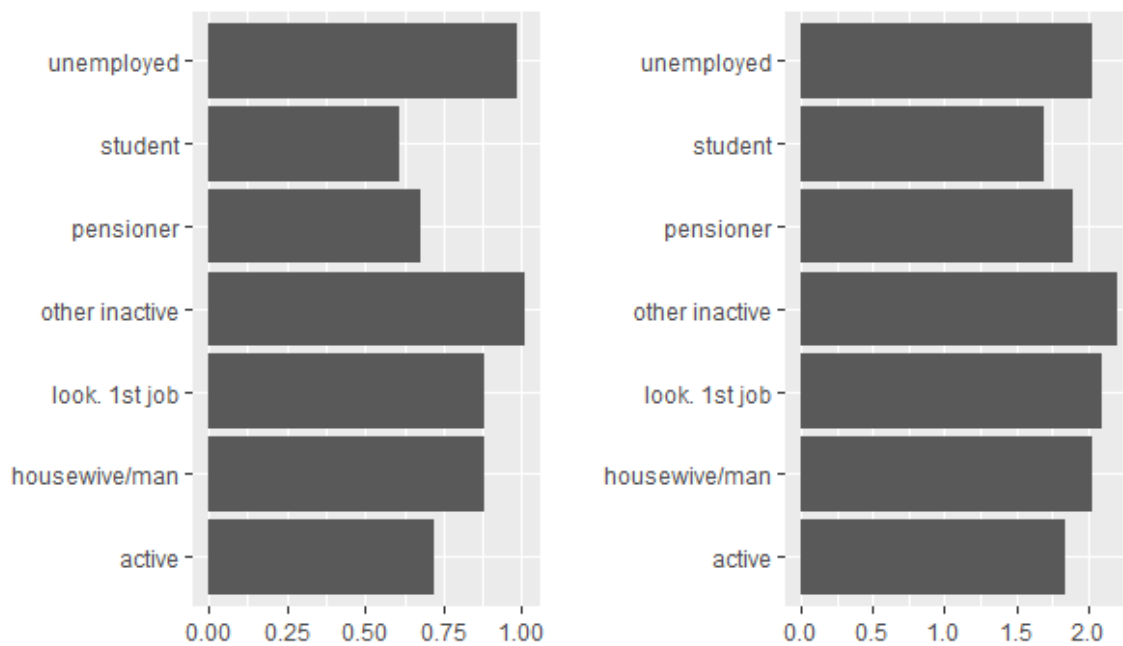


Scale (left): -2 = should strongly decrease, -1 should decrease, 0 = status quo, 1 = should increase, 2 = should strongly increase. Scale (right): Scale: -2 = not at all important, -1 not important, 0 = indifferent, 1 = important, 2 = very important.

*Gender equality.* Men and Women have different preferences for government activity with regard to gender equality. As figure 11 shows, unsurprisingly, demands for change are much more pronounced among women. On average, men state as well that government should do more in order to improve gender equality. Our results show furthermore that women attribute more importance to policies that concern equality than men.

*Minimum wage.* Preferences for change in government activity with regard to the minimum wage are straightforward. Irrespective of the profession, the French demand an increase in government activity in this area. This will usually mean an increase in the legal minimum wage. However, the strength of these preferences varies. Those who would like to have the most drastic changes are voters who are not active or who are unemployed, followed by housewife/househusband and those who are looking for a job. These parts of society have also the highest demand for an increase in unemployment benefits (see figure 9). Apparently, these groups rely mostly on unemployment benefits but are also those who have the strongest preferences concerning the regulation of the minimum wage. Those exercising an occupational activity, pensioners and students would also like government to do more, but these demands are less marked.

Figure 12 - Preferences for an increase in government activity with regard to minimum wage, by employment status



Scale: -2 = should strongly decrease, -1 should decrease, 0 = status quo, 1 = should increase, 2 = should strongly increase. Scale: -2 = not at all important, -1 not important, 0 = indifferent, 1 = important, 2 = very important.

Out of all the policies that we investigate, responses concerning the minimum wage reach the highest values. On a scale from -2 to 2, most average scores are around 1. As before, the patterns for preferences regarding government activity match closely those in terms of the importance attributed to those changes. More generally, patterns are very close to those showed with regard to change in unemployment benefits (cf. figure 9). Apparently, those with the most fragile employment status are the ones that attach great importance to unemployment benefits but even more to a minimum wage. As before, students care least, followed by pensioners and actives.

### 5.3 Personal determinants beyond party identity?

To sum up, our results show that demands for change and the importance that individuals attribute to public policies do vary rather strongly across the electorate. And this variation does not only concern citizens who identify with different parties, but also varies depending on the personal situation of the respondent.

First, we examined preferences for changes in government spending and the importance that voters attribute to diverse policies. We analyzed attitudes that concern government spending for (1) pensions, (2) unemployment benefits, (3) and rural areas. For all these policies, citizens who are directly concerned feature a strong preference for increased government spending. Furthermore, these groups invariably attribute more importance to the policy in question.

In a second step, our analysis focused preferences for changes in government activity and we explored how much different sectors of the electorate care about a number of policies. In doing so, we referred to (1) gender equality and (2) the minimum wage. Again, our findings demonstrate that individual concern matters. Our analyses confirm strong variation in preferences for change between men and women (gender equality) and different employment status (minimum wage). Moreover, the importance that voters attribute to policies does vary, but not as systematically. On the whole, our results widely confirm our assumptions.

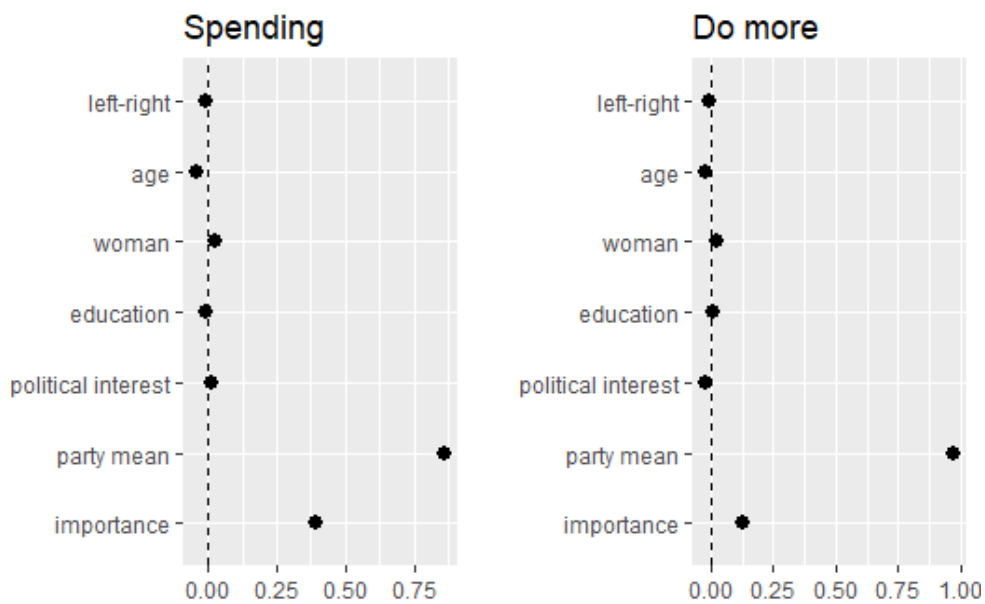
## 6 Media effects, partisanship and policy preferences

This chapter aims at bringing together the analyses of the last sections, while, at the same time, adding a new series of determinants of policy preferences, i.e. media attention. The first question that we will try to answer concerns the consequences of conflict between different incentives. What happens when partisan identity and importance lead to conflicting positions? Does one of the two prevail?

### 6.1 Partisanship versus interest

We have seen that both party proximity and the importance attributed to a given issue matters. In the previous section we have relied on visual illustrations of bivariate relations. To take this a step further, we resorted to multivariate models. This enabled us to compare the role of parties and more personal motivations. To measure personal motivations, we move away here from the issue-public argument developed in the previous section and use the individual measure of “importance” attributed to a given issue used in the previous sections. To compare this to the role of parties, we simply picked the party mean on every given issue and looked at the extent to which it determined individual preferences. The latter are measured as before, using the 5-point Likert scales on “spending more” or “doing more”, used in previous sections. We used linear models, using a couple of standard control variables, as well as those discussed above: left-right placement, age, gender, education and self-reported political interest. We further added fixed effects for each of the nine survey waves and each of the respectively seven (spending) and eight (doing more) policy dimensions. As we stacked all policy questions, individuals can be repeated up to 33 times. To account for that, we clustered standard errors at the level of the individual. For the sake of simplicity, figure 13 simply projects coefficients aggregate models and the corresponding standard errors.

Figure 13 - Determinants of policy preferences concerned

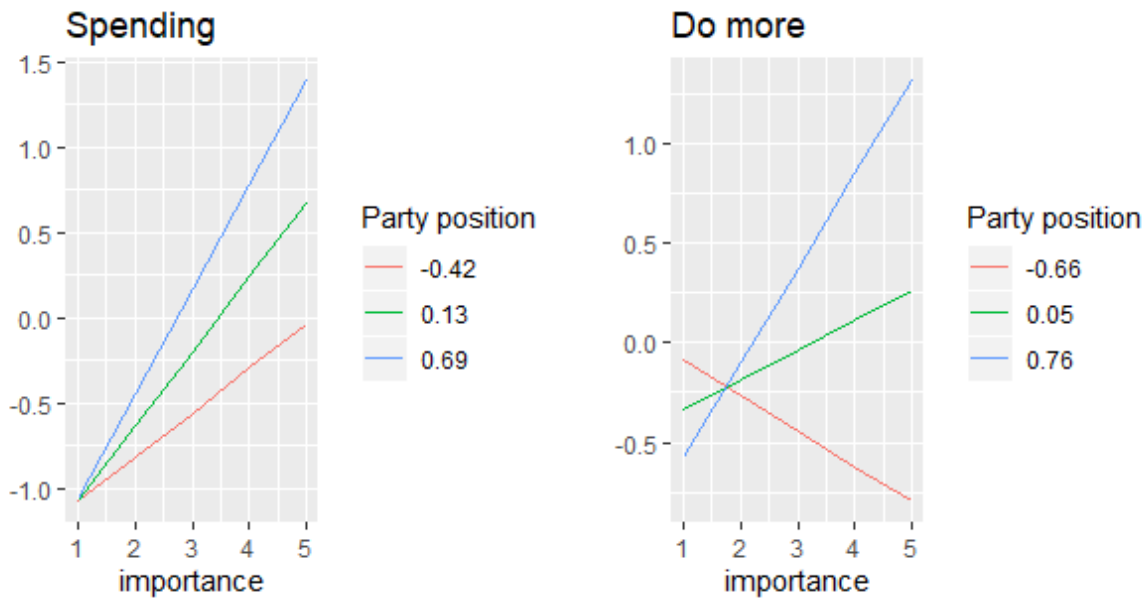


All coefficients are statistically significant at 95 per cent level or above. More importantly, however, the effects of party mean and perceived importance are incomparably stronger than those of all the other control variables that we added. One move towards more spending of the party that the respondent claims to be close to correspondents to a .86 movement in favor of more spending on behalf of the respondent. The effect is even stronger for the “doing more” question, where the movement is virtually equivalent: one step in favor of spending by the party corresponds to almost one step (.97) by the respondent.

Perceived importance of the dimension does matter, too, albeit a lot less than party positions. Respondents have to state how important an issue is on a 5-point Likert scale. One step up on the scale corresponds to a .39 movement in favor of spending and a .13 movement in favor doing more on a given issue.

To take this a little further we have looked at the interactive effects. Interactions are significant in both models (models are identical to those in figure 13, plus the interactions), but take different proportions. The left panel of figure 14 shows the effect for spending. As we have seen, the importance an individual attributes to a given issue will influence her policy preferences. The more important she considers an issue, the more she will be in favor of more spending, as we have seen on figure 13. However, party positions do affect this relationship. Depending on the party positions, more or less favorable to spending, this individually determined importance will be more or less determinant. The more the party is in favor of spending the more individual factors will *reinforce* this collective factor. The less the party is in favor of increased spending, the less importance will matter, even if the autonomous effect never quite disappears.

Figure 14 - Interaction effects: importance and party position



This is somewhat different for the do-more model on the right-hand panel. The reinforcing effect for pro-action party positions is comparable, but the reinforcing effect also exists for negative party positions. This probably tells us something about the difference about spending and non-spending policies. In a nutshell, there may be a reinforcing or a counteracting effect of individual interest for an issue, but the counteracting effect is only observable for the spending model, while the reinforcing effect prevails for the “doing more” model.

## 6.2 Media salience and policy preferences

To complicate things further, we added media data. To do this we made media searches for each of the 33 spending and the 34 do-more questions. We looked for monthly occurrences of the issue in three major journals, i.e. the center-left *Le Monde*, the center-right *Le Figaro* and the more popular *Aujourd’hui/Le Parisien*. We normalized figures by outlet and averaged the three indicators for every month. We reran the above models including the media variable at t-1. Generally speaking, the importance of media salience is weak, though positive and significant, compared to both the party and the importance measures (see appendix 1.1 for results). Put differently, media attention has an independent effect on preferences.

This tends to confirm classical agenda-setting theses (McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). These were mostly related to elections and the consequences of media attention to specific candidates. But they appear to work quite well for policy attention, too: increased media attention to particular issues appears to increase attention to those issues and, thereby, increase demand for spending and action in these areas.

Figure 15 looks into these mechanisms in detail. For each policy dimension we ran separate models to account for the role of media attention, first, for the importance attributed by every

respondent to each issue and, second, for policy preferences. Figure 15 only presents the media coefficients for each of these multiple models.

**Figure 15 - Media effects on preferences and importance**



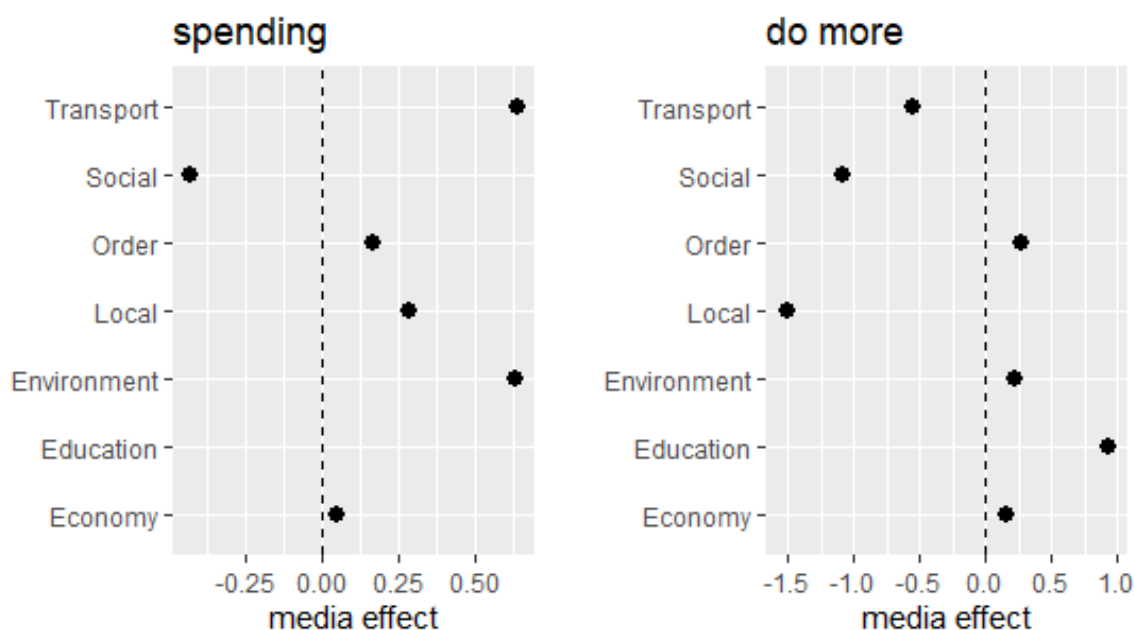
The result is rather interesting. Media attention does not appear to have a direct effect on policy preferences. Coefficients on both panels are mostly insignificant, except for spending on transport on the left panel. The story is different, however, for the importance variable. Increased media attention does affect the perceived importance of issues. And as we have seen, the perceived importance is the second best predictor of policy preference.

The effect, however, is – rather surprisingly – not always positive. For the spending issues, media attention to transport, social policy, local policies and the economy increases perceived importance, but decreases the perceived importance of the environment and order. Similarly, for the “doing more” models, attention decreases the perceived importance of social policies and local policies, while leaving that of economic policies unaffected.

We can conclude that media attention has an indirect effect on policy preferences at best. This effect essentially acts through the perceived importance of issues which tends to influence policy preferences “positively”, i.e. in favor of more spending and more action.

This leaves one central aspect unexamined, however: how does media attention affect party positions? Since we do not have precise data on party position on our topics, let alone positions over time, we resort again to the “party mean” measure that we have used in the previous subsection. Figure 16 presents the effect of media attention on the mean party positions on different dimensions.

**Figure 16 - Media effect on mean party positions**



We see that the effects here are very important, a lot more than on figure 15. Again, media attention does not univocally increase support for spending or action. It does so on spending, except for social policies. The latter is drawn by two questions that ask about respondents' preferences regarding immigrants' entitlement to social rights and public health. Opposition to this kind of entitlements is high, thereby pulling the entire dimension towards negative values. Beyond social policies, we see that some issues are more sensitive to media attention than others. Transport and environmental policies are particularly sensitive, while the effect is weaker for local policies and security-related issues, and weak for economic policies. Regarding "doing more", reactions are more widely spread with a strong media effect only for education policies, weak effects for the economy, the environment and order, and negative effects for local, social and transport policies.

In a nutshell, media has a very substantive effect on policy preferences, as it effects the two most important determinants, i.e. mean party positions and perceived importance of issues. Media attention does thus not have a direct effect on individual preferences.

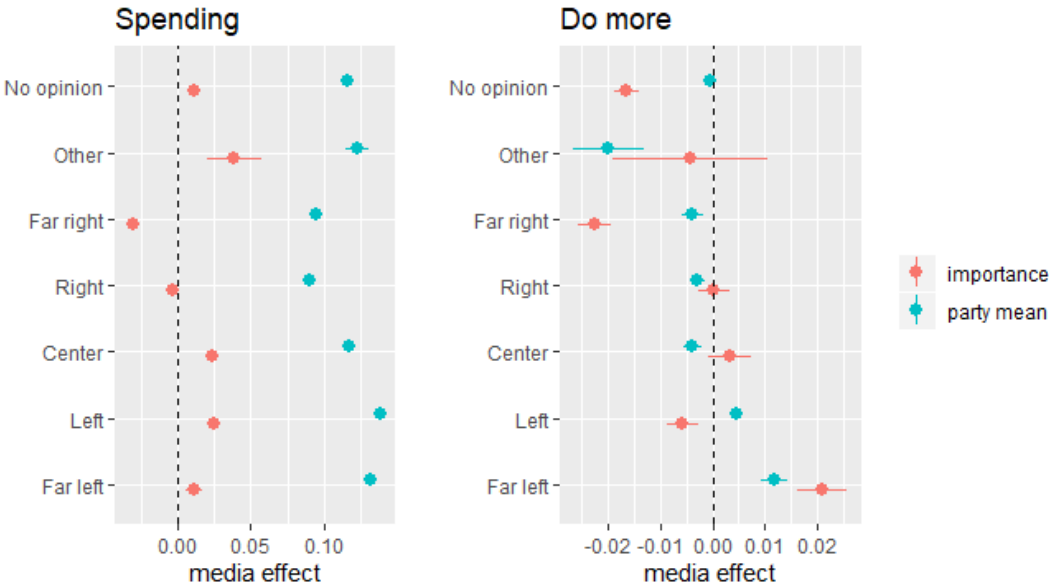
### 6.3 Parties, media and policy preferences

In this last subsection, we will break preferences further down, looking at the media effect by party proximity, in order to control for the strong media effect on party means that we identified in the previous subsection.

Figure 17 shows the effect of media attention on preferences in public policies. In doing so, it differentiates between diverse groups of partisans. For the sake of simplicity and given the number of French parties, we have grouped those into party families. As we have seen above in section 4, attitudes are similar among ideologically close parties in France. This should thus not

substantially alter results. As before, the underlying figures are drawn from a regression model in which we control for political interest, age, gender and education. And, again, we use fixed effects by wave and dimension and clustered standard errors by individual. Figure 17 presents the media effect coefficient for spending and do-more across issues, as well as for perceived importance, split down by party family.

Figure 17 - Media effect by party family



Generally speaking, as before, we see that media attention influences party positions more than importance, though this is less true for the do-more models than for the spending models. Regarding party family differences, we did not have any particular expectation, but it is worth noting that left-wing partisans appear to be more sensitive to media attention than more conservative ones. As far as spending is concerned, the positive effect is true all across the electorate, though: the more media attention the more people will favor spending in a given area. For doing more, the positive effect remains important only for left-wing voters.

To go a little further, we are going to break down the media effect by party family and policy area. We use the same fixed-effects models as before, simply subsetting the data for each policy dimension. Put differently, figure 18 presents the coefficient for the effect of media attention from 42 different regressions. Some coefficients are absent as some of the subgroups for our models to converge.

The results show that assumed issue ownership plays a role here and how different party families react to attention to “their” issues or attention to other party families’ issues. The idea of issue ownership was developed in particular by John Petrocik (1996) and picked up quite regularly in the context of research of “priming” campaign issues by communication scholars (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). The underlying idea is rather simple: people do care about issues – something we have question here – and as issues become more visible, they will judge politicians on the basis of their perceived or expected performance on those particular stakes.



As people have limited knowledge of the specific skills of politicians, however, they will tend to resort to shortcuts. People may not be able to get a precise idea of a particular politician, but parties work as a powerful simplification device. People “associate” candidates with the parties they belong to (Walgrave et al., 2012), thereby extending party characteristics to individuals. Against this backdrop, we can expect individuals to be more sensitive to media attention on certain issues, based on their self-reported party proximity. Conservative parties are more commonly associated with fighting inflation or budget deficits or crime. We should thus expect voters to be more sensitive to increased attention to economy or security issues (“order”). Conversely, left-wing voters are more interested in social policy or education (not included here). They should thus be more sensitive to those issues.

Figure 18 - Media effect by party family and policy dimension (spending)

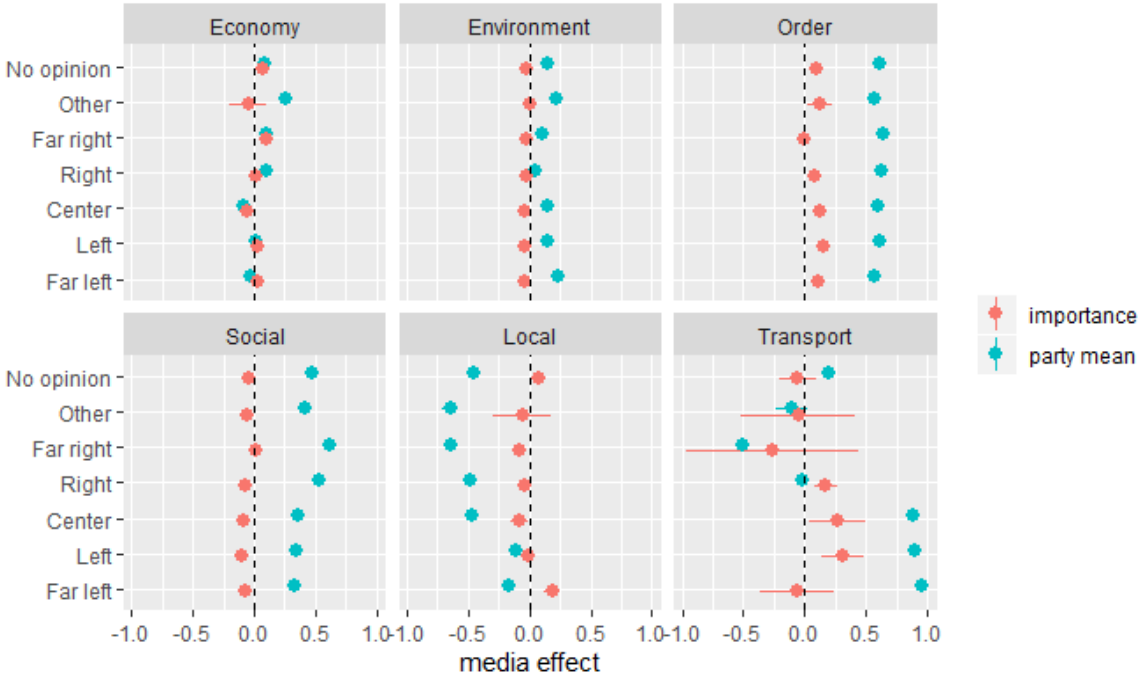


Figure 18 partially confirms elements from the aggregate figures on figure 17, but also presents some rather counterintuitive results. Generally speaking, partisan differences regarding media effect are not really noteworthy for the majority of the policy dimensions. The force of the media effect appears to vary across policy dimensions, rather than across party families. Security issues (“Order”) is strongly related to party positions. For economic and environmental policies, effects are smaller and differences across party families not very important. Differences exist for the policy dimensions on the lower row. Conservative parties appear to be more sensitives to media effect in the area of social policy. Progressive and centrist voters appear to be more sensitive concerning transport policies. Finally, media attention to local policy appears to have a negative effect on spending preferences. This may be due to negative framing of local policy issues and the more systematic association of those issues with issues like corruption, pork barrel or other forms of abuses. Confirming possible biases of the kind goes beyond the scope of the current work, however.

We did similar models for the “do more” questions, but results (see appendix 1.3) are somewhat inconclusive. As in the aggregate model, results are weaker. When breaking the models down by dimension *and* party family, they become more difficult to read with mostly very weak effects. Generally speaking, the do-more models appear to provide less clear information than the spending models.

This section has amply demonstrated that the media moves entire groups of voters, mostly in favor of *more* spending irrespective of political color. The effect is less clear for the perceived importance of issues which does not appear to be moved as strongly by media, even if the effect is significantly different from zero on most accounts. Party family appears to be less important than issue dimensions, as we have seen. Media attention on some issues affects preferences across the board, irrespective of party families. This would go against pure party-driven policy preferences and would probably confirm the existence of some degree of individual leeway.

## 7 Conclusion

This study analyzed citizens’ attitudes towards public policies. It emphasized the relevance of public policies for representative democracies and identified a large research gap. We showed that literature paid little attention to the structure and determinants of policy preferences of citizens. Hence, we put forward the three distinct factors that might influence citizens’ attitudes: partisanship, personal concerns or media attention. With reference to the literature on partisanship, we assumed that policy preferences of voters will differ, depending to which party they feel close to. Second, we emphasized the relevance of personal concerns and issue publics. We argued that issue publics attribute more importance to policies that directly concern them and that their preferences for policy changes will differ from other voters. Third, we focused the role of the media and hypothesized that media attention will impact on policy preferences of voters and compensate the effect of party identification.

For our empirical analysis we combined nine waves of the Policy Priorities Survey and integrated data from 2014 until 2017. Hence, we were able to identify dynamics in partisanship, especially in the context of the French presidential and parliamentary elections in 2017. Furthermore, this large database enabled us to explore mechanisms based on an exceptionally large number of cases – our data on citizens’ attitudes encompassed 13.570 respondents. The analysis of the structure and the determinants of public policy preferences is based on attitudes towards 33 policy items which measure whether voters want government to spend more on certain policies, and on 34 policy items which measure whether voters want government to do more with regard to particular policies. Likewise, respondents were asked how important each policy is to them. In a next step, we computed policy dimensions that guided our analysis (see appendix 1.4 for details). In addition to the survey data, our analysis referred to the impact of the media on policy preferences. For this purpose, we made media searches for each of the 33 spending and the 34 do-more questions. We conducted a media analysis by searching for monthly occurrences of the 33 spending and the 34 do-more items. The sources used are three main journals in France: *Le Monde* (center-left), *Le Figaro* (center-right) and the more popular *Aujourd’hui/Le Parisien*.

Our results amply confirm our main expectations. We show that partisanship systematically and strongly determines policy preferences. The findings indicate that, on average, large parts of the electorate would like government to intervene stronger in most of the policy fields that we integrated into our study. However, preferences for an increase in spending are generally less pronounced. The detailed analysis which distinguished groups of partisans and policy fields revealed several patterns. Generally, voters who identify with parties on the right have similar preferences for government spending, as our results for those who feel close to the UMP/LR and the FN show. Both groups prefer an increase in spending for security, order and the economy but a decrease in spending for social policies. Voters who feel close to leftist parties, to the contrary, prefer an increase in expenditure in most of the policy fields. Moreover, we show that the spending preferences of voters who are near to the centrist party LRM are more similar to voters of leftist parties and differ from those who identify with parties on the right.

Patterns differ concerning preferences for changes in government activity. With regard to social policies, our results indicate that voters who feel close to leftist parties want government to do more. Likewise, LRM-voters and those who are near to the UMP/LR have moderate preferences for an increase in government activity. Yet, UMP/LR-and FN-voters demand a strong decrease in government activity with regard to immigration. These findings have two different implications. On the one hand, preferences seem to be influenced by left-right orientations. Indeed, proximity to a party on the left correlates with demands for an increase in government spending. Likewise, leftist voters prefer an increase in government activity more strongly than others. On the other hand, we point to the relevance of incumbency effects. In a context of strong polarization, those who voted for the government parties should appreciate policies, but government measures should be rejected by those who voted against the governing parties.

Our analysis revealed that policy preferences are also influenced by personal concerns of voters. Here, the general assumption was that policy preferences of issue publics (those who are personally concerned) differ from the general public. Our analysis referred to *government spending* on (1) pensions, (2) unemployment benefits and (3) rural areas. The results show that indeed, (i) citizens who are directly concerned have a stronger preference for an increase in government spending than others and (ii) these voters attribute more importance to the policy in question. In a next step, we explored *preferences for changes in government activity* and the importance that citizens attribute to a number of policies. Here, we referred to (1) gender equality and (2) the minimum wage. As before, our findings demonstrate that individual concern for issues matters. Preferences for change vary between men and women (gender equality) and professional groups (minimum wage). Moreover, there is variance with regard to the importance that voters attribute to policies. On the whole, our results widely confirm our hypothesis. Indeed, citizens who are directly concerned prefer a stronger increase in government spending or government activity and these groups attribute more importance to the policy in question than other parts of the electorate.

Finally, we explored the relevance of (i) partisanship and (ii) the importance that voters attribute to a policy by comparing their effects on policy preferences. Our multivariate analysis

confirmed that both influence policy preferences, but we reveal that the strength of the effect differs. Generally, partisanship is a stronger predictor for policy preferences than the importance that individual attributes to the policy in question. In a next step, we studied the impact of media attention and find that it matters, but to different degrees: media attention does influence party positions and – to a lesser extent – the importance that voters attribute to a policy. These effects are, however, stronger with regard to preferences towards spending than with regard to preferences concerning government activity. Moreover, we show that voters' sensitivity towards media coverage differs: left-wing voters are more influenced by the media than conservative voters.

What are the implications of our study? We think that our analysis makes several meaningful contributions which go far beyond the French case and which may inspire future research in diverse ways. This policy book is an attempt to give insight into the multiple facets of policy preferences. Our analysis showed that even if citizens cannot be informed about every policy in question, their preferences are quite structured and systematically dependent on factors such as partisanship or importance – and that they can (implicitly) influenced by media attention.

With our study, we hope to inspire future research by taking policy preferences more seriously and underline, that – different than assumed in some parts of the literature – they are worth being the object of analysis for its own sake, and not only as a by-product or implicitly mentioned. These preferences are also normatively relevant, as democratic representation implies that policy preferences need to be reflected (equally) in the process of political decision making.

In formal policy research, a policy is considered a success if it reaches policy goals which are formulated from other actors than citizens or if it reaches socially desirable goals. Against the backdrop of this study, we think that policy research may consider policy preferences of the electorate more seriously; new approaches may integrate policy appreciation to address a failure or success – as we now know that indeed, policy preferences are not random but quite structured and systematically influenced.

Our findings may inspire scholars who work on public opinion: if citizens policy preferences are quite structured and coherent, students may pay more attention to preference formation and other factors which influence preferences than those addressed in this policy book. Future research may address whether the factors that structure or influence policy preferences are similar across countries. Does the influence of partisanship depend on the party system? How do contextual factors such as crises influence preferences, or the interplay of partisanship, personal concerns or the role of the media when forming preferences?

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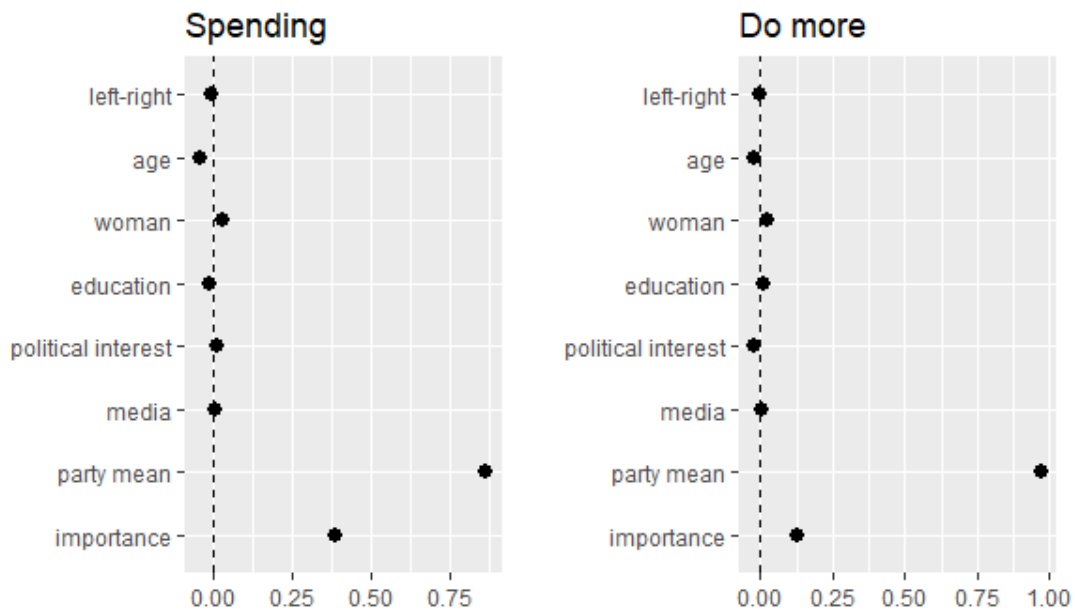
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## APPENDIX

### 1.1 Party names and families

"SO"	No opinion
"PG"	Left-wing party, <i>far left</i>
"LO_NPA"	Workers' struggle and New Anticapitalist Party (two independent parties), <i>far left</i>
"FI"	Unbending France, <i>far left</i>
"PC"	Communist Party, <i>far left</i>
"ND"	
"EELV"	Greens, <i>left</i>
"PS"	Socialist Party, <i>left</i>
"LRM"	Marching Republic, <i>centrist</i>
"UDI"	Independents' Union, <i>center right</i>
"MoDem"	Democratic mouvement, <i>center-right</i>
"UMP"	Union pour mouvement populaire, <i>conservative</i>
"DLF"	Stand up, France, <i>far right</i>
"FN"	Front national (now Rassemblement nationale), <i>far right</i>
"Autre"	other

**1.2 Determinants of policy preferences, including media attention.**



**1.3 Media effect by party family and policy dimension ("doing more")**



## 1.4 Policy Dimensions – Item Wording

### Spend more

In your opinion, should public spending in France decrease, remain stable or increase

[ITEMS]

- spending should decrease a lot
- spending should decrease
- same level of spending
- spending should increase
- spending should increase a lot

And in your opinion, how important is this budgetary stance?

[ITEMS]

- not at all important
- somewhat important
- important
- very important
- extremely important

### Economy

- for supporting companies in France
- for funding the development of innovative companies
- for protecting companies in financial difficulty
- for agriculture

### Education

- for the education system
- for teaching science and digital technologies at school
- for culture and sport

### Environment

- for the protection of the environment
- for renewable energies and energy efficiency
- for fighting global warming
- for building new nuclear power stations

## Order

- for controls at the borders between France and other EU member states
- for the police and for maintaining public order
- for the prevention of delinquency
- for the army and defense
- for the missions of the French army abroad
- for building new prisons

## Social Spending

- for public hospitals
- for the reimbursement of medical consultations and care by the health insurance
- for the coverage of medical expenses for people without social security and foreigners
- for pensions
- for unemployment insurance
- for social benefits for foreigners who are residents in France
- for social benefits or housing benefits made available to modest-income households
- for social benefits (family allowances etc.) independent from individual income

## Sovereignty

- for financing the policies of the EU

## Territory

- for underprivileged neighborhoods (rehabilitation, schools, etc.)
- for the social housing sector
- for rural territories (revitalization, public services, etc.)
- for financing the policies of local and regional authorities

## Transport

- for public transport
- for facilitating automobile traffic
- for the maintenance and construction of roads
- for transport, housing and energy savings

## Do more

In your opinion, in France, should we increase, maintain at the same level or decrease

[ITEMS]

- strongly decrease
- rather decrease
- maintain at the same level
- rather increase
- strongly increase

And in your opinion, how important is this policy orientation to you?

[ITEMS]

- not at all important
- somewhat important
- important
- very important
- extremely important

## Economy

- the state budget deficit
- state's participation in the capital of large French companies
- corporate income taxes
- turnover tax
- income tax

## Rights

- direct participation of citizens in public decisions
- efforts to promote equality of men and women in society
- rights of homosexuals
- possibilities of wearing signs of religious affiliation in the public space
- possibilities for a woman to have an abortion
- possibilities for citizens with incurable diseases to resort to euthanasia

## Environment

- taxes on activities that cause pollution
- the proportion of nuclear-generated electricity
- fuel tax

## Immigration

- possibilities for foreigners who are residents to participate in elections
- the number of foreigners authorized to reside in France
- the number of expulsions of illegal immigrants
- the number of refugees and asylum seekers in France

## Order

- the severity of punishments for offenders
- the rights of defendants in legal proceedings
- penalties for the use or possession of cannabis
- state controls of the banks' activities
- the means of surveillance available to intelligence services

## Social Security

- the amount of the minimum wage
- the wealth tax
- the share of medical care paid by patients
- the legal working time of employees
- the social contributions paid by employees which cover social security
- the social contributions paid by companies which cover social security
- the possibilities for a company to sign off

## Sovereignty

- the power of the EU
- the participation of France in the EU
- barriers to import products from outside of Europe into France

## Territory

- the power of local authorities