What Helps Citizens to Have Consistent Attitudes? A Cross Country Analysis of the Individual and Contextual Determinants of Attitude Constraint.

Sebastian Adrian Popa[1]

Abstract:
The inconsistency of the beliefs citizens have about political issues is neither a new nor a surprising finding for political scientists (Converse 1964). Still at least from a normative point of view attitude constraint is a desideratum that is important for the quality of electoral decisions and ultimately for the quality of democracy (Friedman 2006). Under these circumstances it is not surprising that several studies examined the constraint between the attitudes of the citizens (Converse 1964; Converse and Pierce 1986; Peffley and Hurwitz 1985; Zaller 1990; 1992 Sturgis, Roberts and Allum 2005; Granberg and Holmberg 2006). One factor that is especially important is the level of political knowledge, more informed voters should have higher levels of attitude constraint as they are better able to identify their preferences (Althaus 1998; Carmines and Stimson 1980; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Lau and Redlawsk 1997; 2006; Downs 1957; Dahl 1989; Converse 1964). But at the same time as most voters are politically ignorant, a simple heuristic such as having a party ID might help them have consistent political attitudes, compensating for lower levels of political knowledge (Lupia 1994; Popkin 1994; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Zaller 2004). This paper will further investigate the determinants of attitude/issue constraint with an emphasis on political knowledge and party ID, as a simple heuristic. Its major contribution is that it will go further than the single country environment in which this was studied before. Using the 2009 European Election study, will also allow me to bring context into the picture by analyzing how the level of attitude constraint varies across the institution rich environment provided by the 27 member states of the EU. Two contextual factors are chosen to explain the variation of the consistency between citizens' attitudes is the attitude constrain of the political elite: elite constraint and ideological polarization. By employing multilevel modeling the paper tests these hypotheses using 2 items regarding pros state vs. pro market attitudes present in the 2009 European Election study. The findings suggest that indeed political knowledge and partisanship have an overall positive role on attitude/issues constraint. But what is even more interesting is that not only low levels of polarization and high levels of elite constraint have a direct positive effect on attitude/issue constraint, but also that they moderate the relation between political knowledge and attitude/issue constraint

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[1] PhD Candidate. Department of Political Science, Central European University. Researcher at MZES, University of Mannheim. email: popa_sebastian@ceu-budapest.edu

Introduction

One of the most disturbing findings presented by Converse in his essay "Belief Systems in Mass Publics" is that most citizens manifest high inconsistencies when it comes to their attitudes (1964). The normative implications of this finding are worrying for at least two reasons. First, from a macro perspective, the inconsistency of attitudes has profound implications for the democratic theory (as it impacts the quality of electoral decisions) and, ultimately, for the quality of democracy (Peffley and Hurwitz 1985; Friedman 2006). Second, from a micro perspective, it casts doubt on the sophistication of citizens and their capacity to make rational decisions (Key 1966; Downs 1957; Peffley and Hurwitz 1985).

Still even if most citizens have inconsistent attitudes, we cannot expect that this is equally true for everybody. Indeed previous research showed that the level of attitude consistency is higher among the most knowledgeable/sophisticated part of the population (Converse 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Feldman 1989; Jacoby 1995; Zaller 1992; Sturgis 2003; Luskin 1987; Rosenberg 1988; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Carmines and Stimsons 1982). Also, we can expect people who use cognitive heuristics can act as though they were well informed (Popkin 1994; Lupia 1994; Page and Shapiro 1992), and using this sort of mechanism would lead to a higher level of attitude constraint.

Therefore the research question to be tested in this paper builds on this previous research by further testing if a higher level of political knowledge or relying on a simple heuristic, such as partisanship, can lead to a higher level of attitude constraint. It might seem that the answer to this question is trivial as previous studies mostly showed this to be true. But to my knowledge all previous research focused on single country analysis (mostly the

US) or at best engaged in two country comparisons (Granberg and Holemberg 1988). Hence building on the previously observed difference between Sweden and USA (Granberg and Holemberg 1988), I expect that this relation is not uniform across all countries. More exactly, contextual factors might directly influence attitude constraint and also moderate the relation between political knowledge/heuristics and attitude constraint. For this reason I chose to test the relation between political knowledge and partisanship (as a simple heuristic) on the one hand, and attitude constraint on the other hand, using the institutional diversity and the different informational environments of the European Union.

Attitude constraint and its determinants

Attitude constraint is a phenomenon that received attention since the early studies of voting behavior (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964) and it refers to the level of consistency between attitudes within an individual belief system that is based on a combination of logical, social and psychological factors (Converse 1964). Its general conceptualization requires consistency between concrete issue positions (Converse 1964). Although an alternative conceptualization is based on the consistency between abstract principles and concrete issue positions (Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985), this paper relies on the initial conceptualization of Converse which was also used in several other studies (see e.g. Sturgis et al. 2005; Granberg and Holemberg 1988; 1996; Feldman 1989; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Carmines and Stimsons 1982; Nie and Anderson 1974).

Despite the fact that the initial findings of Converse regarding low levels of consistency of the average citizen are still seen as controversial since researchers are offering

mix evidence about the overall level of consistency of the general population (Converse 1964; . Sturgis et al. 2005; Granberg and Holemberg 1988; 1996; Feldman 1989; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Carmines and Stimsons 1982; Nie and Anderson 1974; Nie Verba and Petrocik 1974; Strugis et al. 2005; Sulivan et al, 1978 ; Feldman 1989). This previous research is especially relevant for this paper because it shows that there is substantial variance in the level of attitude constraint depending on the selected issues and most importantly across different contexts.

Less controversial is the positive impact that political knowledge should have on issue constraint. As people with higher level of political knowledge are better able to identify their preferences and own interests (Althaus 1998; Bartels 1996: Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 223; Dahl 1989; Downs 1956, 79-80; Moore 1987, Sturgis 2003; Somin 2006; Kroh 2009) we can expect them to have higher levels of issue constraint. Thus, it is not surprising that the political behavior literature identified political knowledge/sophistication as the primary reason for the variance in issues constraint. Initially Converse was the one who pointed out that the more sophisticated voter manifests higher level of consistency between issue positioning (Converse 1964). This finding has been successfully replicated across time and, more importantly, across different countries (Converse 1964; Converse and Pierce 1986; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Feldman 1989; Jacoby 1995; Zaller 1992; Sturgis 2003; Luskin 1987; Rosenberg 1988; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Carmines and Stimsons 1982; Sturigs et al. 2005). Still, not all the evidence points in the same direction. The results from deliberative poll experiment carried out by Sturgis et al. (2005), hat should theoretically bring an increase in the level of political sophistication (Fishkin 1996; Fishkin 2003; Fishkin and

Luskin 2005; Brady et. al 2003), presented mixed evidence. Hence, not only under most circumstances the deliberation process did not contribute to increasing the level of issue consistency, but in the case of some issues and for some participants (especially the lower informed) the deliberation process lead to a decrease in consistency (Sturgis et al. 2005).

Even if we ignore this last piece of evidence and accept that a higher level of political knowledge could increase the level of issue constraint, the normative implication of holding inconsistent attitude is still a matter of concern. And this is the case when we consider that most citizens are widely ignorant about politics and have low levels of political knowledge (Converse 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), thus are also expected to have less consistent attitudes. If the problems concerning the quality of democracy could be solved by aggregation, i.e. the society as a whole could function according to democratic principles irrespective of the quality of the people its made up of (Page and Shapiro 1992), the (in)capacity of these least knowledgeable citizens (who represent the majority) to hold consistent issue positioning remains problematic. This is especially true if we take into account the fact that issue positioning is one of the factors which influences vote choice, hence the quality of representation among lower informed voters, who were shown to manifest lower levels of issue constraint, remains problematic.

Consider this last point, the fact that heuristics can compensate for the lack of information that most voters face in making political decisions and make them act as though they were well informed (Popkin 1994; Lupia 1994; Page and Shapiro 1992) comes as a relief. It was shown that mechanisms such as party affiliation, ideology, endorsements, poll results, candidate appearance, representativeness, framing, are indeed employed effectively

by voters when making political decisions (Brady and Sniderman 1985; Hamill, Lodge, and Blake 1985; Iyengar 1990; Jervis 1986; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Lupia 1994; Popkin 1994; Ottai 1994; Scholz 1998; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991) and contribute to the proper functioning of democracy even if most voters work with limited information (Fiske and Taylor 1991; Simon 1985). So we can expect that by employing the same type of cognitions individuals could have high levels of issue constraint even in they have lower levels of political knowledge.

If until now only individual level determinants of issue constraint where taken into account, in the next part I will bring up the possible role that context might have in explaining the variance in issue constraint. Even though it was argued that there is substantial variance in the level of issue constraint both across time (Carmines and Stimsons 1982; Nie and Anderson 1974; Nie Verba and Petrocik 1974) and across countries (Converse and Pierce 1986; Granberg and Holmberg 1988) a systematic analysis of the causes of this variance was not carried out until now. Granberg and Holmberg (1988) point to the fact that cross country difference in issue constraint and stability could be a function of the "strength" of the party system, yet this assumption is only supported by a rather simplistic comparison between USA and Sweden. Consequently, one of the main goals of this paper is to provide a more detailed analysis of how the context (specific country characteristics) could impact the level of attitude constraint. Furthermore, across different studies we can see the impact of knowledge on issues constraint varies, and could expect that this variance be explained by contextual factors. Thus, besides taking into account the direct impact of context on issue constraint (which was at least suggested by previous literature) this paper

will also investigate the moderating role that context might have on the impact of political knowledge and partisanship on issue consistency.

The impact of two specific contextual variables will be analyzed in this paper. The first is the overall level of political polarization. Since it was shown that a highly polarized party system would make options and issues clearer for voters (Alavarez and Nagler 2004; Carmines and Stimson 1986; Pomper 1972), I also expect that this clarity would lead to higher levels of issue consistency. This was shown to be true using an experimental design (Levendusky 2008) or in the US context (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008), but not in cross country analysis.

Second it has been acknowledged that the attitudes of citizens are influenced by the ones of the elites (Carmines and Stimson 1986; Zaller 1992), hence, we can expect that in countries where elites have higher levels of attitude constraint, those of the citizens will also be higher. The principle through which elite constraint should influence the constraint of citizens is similar to the case of polarization, higher elite constraint would mean higher clarity (Carmines and Stimson 1986) which would make it easier for citizens to have consistent issue positions.

As mentioned above, besides a direct impact of these two factors I also expect them to have a moderating role. To some extent Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) showed that the positive effect of high level of polarization can be found only among partisans and the more political sophisticated. Therefore, I expect that both polarization and elite consistency would be more likely to influence the individuals who are prone to follow politics and to pay

attention to political elites, in other words, the partisans and the more knowledgeable part of the electorate.

Methodology, Measurements and Case Selection

The data used for the statistical analysis comes from the European Election Survey 2009, a cross national survey that comprises the 27 member countries of the EU. Although this survey happens to be carried out in the context of the EU elections, none of the variables used for the analysis is specific to these elections. On the contrary, all the variables focus on national issues and national parties, with the European Parliament elections only providing an opportunity to collect comparable data about national politics (see Appendix 1, 2, and 3). Hence, possible criticism related to second order election influencing the behavior of voters (Hix & Lord, 1997; Schmitt 2005; Heath, McLean, Taylor, & Curtice, 1999; Weber, 2011), is not applicable. Much more, we can expect that in these elections citizens express beliefs that are closer to their everyday beliefs, since they are less influenced by the campaign flow - lower than in first order elections, mainly due to the failure of parties to campaign (Cayrol 1991; Norris & Reif, 1997; Vreese, 2003).

Using this data set allows for testing the way in which political knowledge and party ID influence issue constraint across different institutional settings. Consequently, any future findings could be generalized to a large array of electoral democracies because of the large diversity of the cases selected.

The operationalization of issues/attitude constraint used in this pare will build on the approach that evaluates attitude/issue constraint by using the correlation between policy

attitude/policy issues (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960, Converse 1964, Nie and Andersen 1964, Carmine and Stokes 1982; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; 1996; Sturigs et al. 2005). Thus, among the 12 issue dimensions present in the EES 2009 voter study one pair, one evaluating market attitudes, is considered appropriate to evaluate issue constraint (see Appendix 1 for detailed description).Still, this approach differs from the traditional one by using a multivariate analysis. Thus, one of the issues in the pairs will be set as a dependent while the other will be set as independent variable (IV). Thus the coefficient of the issue set as IV will show the level of constraint. What is more important, in this way the relevant predictors of issue constraint described above (i.e. political knowledge, partisanship, polarization and issue constraint) can be included in the analysis and their effect can be evaluated through the interaction terms with the issue set as IV.

The items present in the data set allow me to develop an adequate measure for issue/attitude constraint in the way described below. The knowledge questions in this survey also provide a reliable measure of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Also, the effect of party ID/party closeness is considered a simple heuristics that acts as a proxy for both "cues" and "sources" of information (Lau, Andersen and Redlawsk 2008). The level of ideological polarization will be measured using the coders' evaluation of the parties from the Manifesto Project. Last but not least, the elite constraint will be operationalized as the country correlation between the same pair of issues measured in the Candidate Survey of EES 2009. (See Appendix 2 for details).

Furthermore, a number of controls will be included in the model: media consumption, political discussion, interest in politics, age, education, female, part of

national/ethnic minority, marital status, church attendance, urban-rural residence (see Appendix 3 for a complete description).

The models will be run using the lme4 package in R with restricted maximum likelihood (REML). All first level variables are group mean centered and the second level predictors are grand mean centered, which is recommended in case the effect of second level variables and cross level interactions are the focus of the analysis (Enders and Tofighi 2004).[2]

Empirical analysis

The first thing to be noted is that (after inverting the scale so in both cases low values reflect leftist attitudes) the overall correlation across all countries between the two issues is rather low (0.09 sig at $p<0.05$[3]), ranging from a high of around .25 in countries such as UK, Austria, Sweden and Bulgaria to the point that it is actually negative and statistically significant in Lithuania (see Figure 1 for correlation across the 28 countries). This is rather surprising since both questions should, at least theoretically, reflect the degree to which respondents favor private enterprise vs. state control. The major difference between the two items is that they are on a reverse scale. What is even more interesting is that, even given this low correlation 30% of the sample has the same position on both issues, while another 30% are only 1 point apart.

2 It needs to be mentioned that in the case of this specific analysis Belgium was considered as being two separate political entities, Wallonia and Flanders, and is analyzed as such.

[3] Spearman correlation was used due to the distribution of the variables

Starting from this point analyzing what determines individuals to have higher levels of issue constraint and why this is so different across countries becomes even more interesting. As mentioned above, the analysis will consist of a series of multilevel models which incorporate both individual and country level predictors of issue constraint. But before, this more complex analysis, some preliminary findings will be presented.

Comparing the attitude constraint (strength of the correlation between the two issues) of individuals having different levels of political knowledge, see Table 1, clearly shows that the highest level of attitude constraint is reached by the most knowledgeable respondents. On the other hand, for the lowest informed individuals, this correlation is negative and statistically significant pointing to a clear lack of constraint. This supports the initial expectations predicting that although the average level of constraint is rather low, higher levels could be expected among the better informed voters.

A similar situation can be observed in the case of party ID (see Table 2). Hence those who can rely on a simple heuristic such as having a party ID, generally have a higher level of attitude constraint when compare to both the non-partisans and the entire sample. Still in this case the differences between groups are less strong than in the case of political knowledge, suggesting that political knowledge is more important for attitude constraint than partisanship.

When investigating how contextual factors can explain the important cross county difference in attitude congruence (Figure 1), only polarization seems to have an impact . Using as a dependent the average cross country correlation the result presented in Model 1, Table 3, suggests that we can expect higher level attitude constraint in countries with higher

levels of elite constraint and lower levels of polarization. If the effect of elite constraint, although not significant, goes in the expected direction, polarization has a different effect than that initially expected. Higher levels of attitude constrain are to be expected in a context characterized by lower levels of polarization. Consequently, higher levels of attitude constraint are rather favored by a less political scene present in less polarized systems, than by the clear distinctions between options, which is characteristic to a system with a higher level of polarization.

Rather than a direct effect, the elite constraint has more of a moderating impact on the relation between knowledge and attitude constraint, as the difference in constraint between the least and most knowledgeable individuals is positively linked to it. In other words, we can expect that the positive effect of knowledge is amplified by elite constraint. It needs to be pointed out that these are only preliminary findings; therefore a more in-depth discussion will be presented after the multi-level analysis in the following section.

The results of the multilevel analysis are presented in Table 4; I would like to point out that "Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership" (issue 2) was set as the dependent variable and "Private enterprise is the best way to solve country's economic problems" was set as the IV (issue 1). The main effects of all predictors are not of specific importance for this paper, their role is mainly to control for the variance in issue 2. The main focus should be placed on the interaction terms, more exactly the 2-way and 3-way interactions between issue 1 and the theorized predictors of attitude constraint enumerate above.

As Model 1 in Table 1 is just used as a baseline model, the first findings are revealed in Model 2. Confirming the results of the preliminary analysis, both political knowledge and having a party ID increase the consistency of individuals by increasing the probability to have the same position on the two issues. For a better interpretation of the results one needs to examine the predicted probabilities with bootstrapped confidence intervals presented in Figure 1. Thus, Figure 2.1 shows that indeed more knowledgeable individuals have higher chances to have higher attitude constraint to matter their position on issue 1 (low values reflect pro state and high values reflect pro market attitudes). When they have lower values (pro state) on issue 1 their probability to have lower values on issue 2 is higher than the least knowledgeable individuals. The same is true for centrist values and for pro market attitudes where the most knowledgeable citizens always have higher level of issue constraint. Furthermore, the difference between the two groups is quite substantial, 0.8 on a 5 point scale at the extremes of the scale.

Figure 2.2 also shows the positive effect of having a party ID on attitude constraint but in this case the effect is less strong and is statistically significant only for those having pro state attitudes. Also partisanship leads to higher attitude constraint only for those having pro state attitudes.

All in all, the results presented in Model 2 confirm the results of the preliminary analysis. Both higher level of political knowledge and having a party ID are associated with higher levels of attitude constraint. Still, results presented in Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2 also show that the effect of political knowledge is much stronger than the effect of party ID.

Hence, although party ID can be a useful heuristic when it comes to attitude constraint, it cannot compensate for the lack of political knowledge.

Model 3 incorporates the effect of the two contextual variables role described above: ideological polarization and elite constraint. I would like to once again point out that I expect both of them to have a positive effect on attitude constraint due to their role in clarifying the political arena. Still, the results presented in the preliminary analysis show that lower values of polarization are associated with higher country means for issue constraint. Model 3 shows that indeed both contextual variables have a statistically significant effect but looking at Figure 2 offers mixed evidence with regards to the initial expectations.

Figure 2.2 shows the effect of elite constraint on the issue constraint of individuals. Hence, at least for those having pro market (high values) and centrist view (mid values) a higher level of elite constraint leads to more similar values on the two scales. In other words, a higher level of elite consistency leads to a higher level of issue constraint, at least for those having pro market (high values) and centrist view (mid values), with the difference between the maximum and minimum levels of elite constraint being statistically significant and substantial. The rather surprising fact is that for individuals having pro state attitudes on issue 1, what helps, are lower levels of elite constraint.

In case of ideological polarization, my initial expectations are contradicted by both the results presented in Model 3 and the ones presented in Figure 3.1. Thus, contrary to the initial hypothesis it is a lower level of polarization which favors a higher level of attitude constraint. This is again true only for having pro market (high values) and centrist view (mid values); for those having pro state attitudes, the difference between individuals living in

countries with different levels of polarization does not have a statistical significant impact on attitude constraint. This comes to support the views of those who actually claim that high levels of polarization are damaging for the countries' political debate (Sartori 1976; Eilperin 2006; Brownstein 2007). And of most relevant importance is that in high polarization contexts citizens perceive their views, hence also their attitudes, to be diametrically opposed to the one's of their "opponents", making it difficult to understand the reasons that lead them to adopt certain view/attitudes (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Hetherington 2009). Given this blurring effect that high polarization could have, it is rather normal to find higher level of attitude constraint in countries with lower levels of polarization,

Model 4 shows how contextual characteristics moderate the effect of knowledge on attitude constraint. This effect being shown through the 3-way interaction between knowledgeXpolarizationXissue 1 and knowledgeXelite_constraintXissue 1. Before looking at the results one thing needs to be mentioned, the moderating effect of the macro variables on partisanship was discarded since the model including the 3-way interactions with partisanship resulted in a model having a lower fit than Model 4. When looking at the results presented in Model 4 is that we can notice that only the first of 3 way interactions has a statistically significant effect. Hence, only polarization has, but in order to disentangle this effect one needs to analyze figure 4.

When analyzing Figure 4 we can see that indeed polarization has a strong moderating effect on the relation between political knowledge and issue constraint. This is shown by the fact that the differences between low and high informed voters only reach statistical significance in low polarization contexts. Much more, when comparing the difference

between the most knowledgeable and the uninformed in the low polarization context (Figure 4) with the overall difference between the two groups (Figure 2.1), not only can we see that, in general, people have higher level of attitude constraint (which is also shown by Figure 3.1), but also that the difference between the two groups is stronger is stronger in the low polarization context. For the higher informed voter, polarization leads to higher levels of attitude constrain even if they have pro state views, which is not the case for all citizens (see Figure 2).

Conclusions

The overall level of attitude constraint in the population has been raising controversy since the early day of voting behavior literature. Rather than to test if indeed the low levels of attitude constraint are the reality citizens are faced with and if this impacts the quality of their decisions and ultimately the quality of democracy, this paper is more concerned about what are the factors that influence attitude constraint. Four factors were considered relevant predictors for the variance in the level of attitude/issue constraint.

Two of them are individual level factors, as such, based on previous findings in the literature, I expected that a higher level of political knowledge and having a party ID will lead to a higher level of attitude constraint. Unsurprisingly, the present analysis confirms previous findings and shows this to be true. But, the analysis also shows that political knowledge has a stronger effect than a simple heuristics such as party ID, indicating that even if heuristic mechanism do help they cannot compensate for the lack of political knowledge. Still, what is more important and needs to be noted is that this is the first paper that shows all to be true

in cross country comparison involving more than two counties. Taking this into account the cross country analysis of the attitude/issue constraint presented in this paper becomes even more interesting.

Starting from the observation that the correlation between the two economic issues varies across countries from 0.25 to -0.1 and with the fact that the the next step was to investigate what the contextual factors that favor higher level of attitude constraint were. Although there was the claim that contextual factors matter (Granberg and Holmberg, 1988), this was not yet empirically tested. Due to their impact on the clarity of the political scene two factors were considered to have a positive impact, high political polarization and high elite constraint. The empirical analysis showed that indeed the two have a substantial and statistically significant effect on attitude constraint. As expected, in countries where the message related to the two issues coming from the elite was clear (high elite constraint) we can expect a higher level of attitude constraint. Contrary to my initial expectations and supporting the claims of those who argue that polarization has a damaging effect, it is in lower polarized countries where we can expect a higher level of attitude constraint, as this makes it easier for citizens to understand the reason which that lead them to adopt certain views/attitudes (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Hetherington 2009). Much more, as expected, polarization factors has a moderating role on the relation between political knowledge and attitude constraint, as low polarization is mostly beneficial for the higher informed voter living in these countries. Also, it is important to notice that although it does not generally harm the uniformed in terms of attitude constraint, low polarization amplifies the difference between them and the most informed voters.

Table 1: Level of attitude constraint depending on the level of political knowledge.

	Low informed voters (answered correctly to maximum 1 out of 7 question)	Entire samples	Highly informed voters (answered correctly to minimum 7 out 0f 7 question)
Strengths of correlation	**-0.04**	**.09**	**0.19**
N	2190	24463	1981

[1] Results from spearman correlations, nolded coefficients are statically significant p<0.05.

Table 2: Level of attitude constraint depending on partisanship

	Non partisans	Entire samples	Party identifiers
Strengths of correlation	**.07**	**.09**	**0.11**
N	8885	24463	13206

[1] Results from spearman correlations, nolded coefficients are statically significant p<0.05.

Table 3: Contextual determinants of attitude constraint

	Model 1: Average country constraint	Model 2:[4] Difference in constraint between highest and lowest informed groups
Elite constraint	.106 (.088)	.227 (.129)*
Polarization	-.068 (.038)*	-.016 (.012)
Intercept	.119 (.062)*	.204 (.080)*
Adjusted R^2	.09	.08
N	27	26

Unstandardized coefficient reported, standard errors in parenthesis, * p<0.1

[4]Flanders was excluded as it is an outlier, it's value for the DV is more than 3 standard deviation from the mean

Table 4: Multilevel model explaining economic issue constraint.[5]

	Model 1 Empty model	Model 2 Individual level predictors	Model 3 Contextual predictors	Model 4 3 way interactions
Fixed effects:				
Issue 1	.	**.086 (.022)**	**.085 (.021)**	**.084 (.021)**
Knowledge		**.029 (.011)**	**.028 (.010)**	**.028 (.011)**
PID		**-.070 (.026)**	**-.068 (. 026)**	**-.065 (. 026)**
Union		**-.123 (.022)**	**-.123 (.021)**	**-.123 (.021)**
TV		**-.032 (.014)**	**-.032 (.014)**	**-.031 (.014)**
Paper		**.026 (.013)**	**.026 (.013)**	**.025 (.013)**
Discussion		-.012 (.014)	-.012 (.014)	-.012 (.014)
Web		.015 (.017)	.015 (.016)	.016 (.016)
Interest		**-.032 (.012)**	**-.033 (.012)**	**-.033 (.012)**
Education		**.018 (.002)**	**.018 (.002)**	**.018 (.002)**
Urban		.021 (.019)	.020 (.019)	.020 (.019)
Religiosity		.008 (.006)	.008 (.006)	.008 (.006)
Female		-.014 (.018)	-.014 (.018)	-.014 (.018)
Minority		.002 (.027)	.001 (.027)	.001 (.027)
Age		**-.010 (.003)**	**-.010 (.003)**	**-.010 (.003)**
Age Square		.001 (.001)	.001 (.003)	.001 (.003)
Polarization			-.050 (.040)	-.016 (.014)
Elite Constraint			**1.50 (.373)**	**1.16(.415)**
Knowledge*Issue2		**.041 (.004)**	**.041 (.004)**	**.040 (.004)**
PID*Issue2		**.041 (.016)**	**.041 (.016)**	**.042 (.016)**
Polarization*Issue2			**-.022 (.008)**	**-.021 (.008)**
Elite Cons*Issue2			**.171 (.081)**	**.168 (.079)**
Polarization*Issue2*Know				**-.008 (.002)**
Elite Cons*Issue2*Know				.024 (.019)
Polar*Knowledge				-.006 (.004)
Elite Cons*Knowledge				**-.085 (.042)**
Intercept	**1.77 (0.099)**	**2.07 (.122)**	**2.12 (.117)**	**2.12 (.117)**
Random effects:				
Intercept	0.269	.267	.226	.221
Information		.002	.002	.002
PID		.008	.009	.007
Issue		.009	.008	.008
Residual	1.470	1.39	1.39	1.39
N of regions	27	27	27	27
N of individuals	19474	19474	19474	19474
AIC	62900	62078	62071	62059

[5] Bolded coefficients are statically significant p<0.05.

Figure 1, Results of Spearman correlation across the 28 political regions, larger points for significant results.

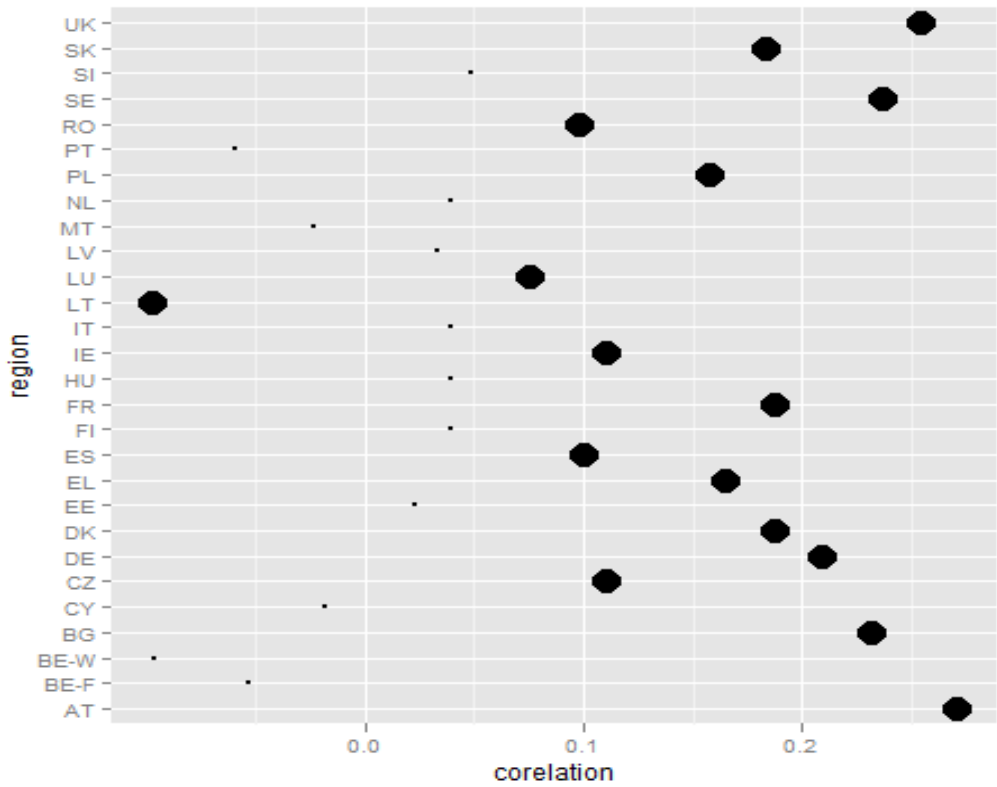


Figure 2, The impact on issue constraint of individual level variables[6]

Figure 2.1, The impact on issue constraint of knowledge

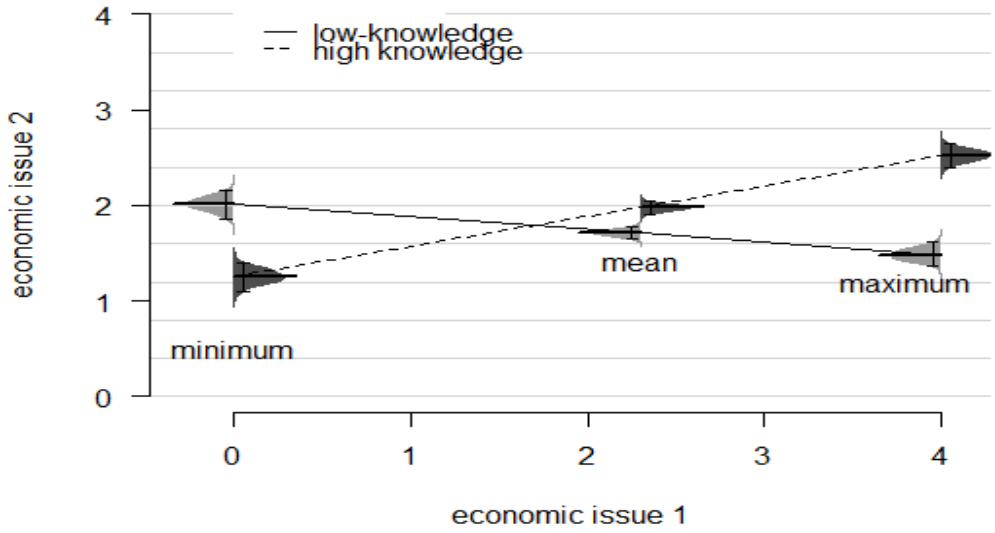
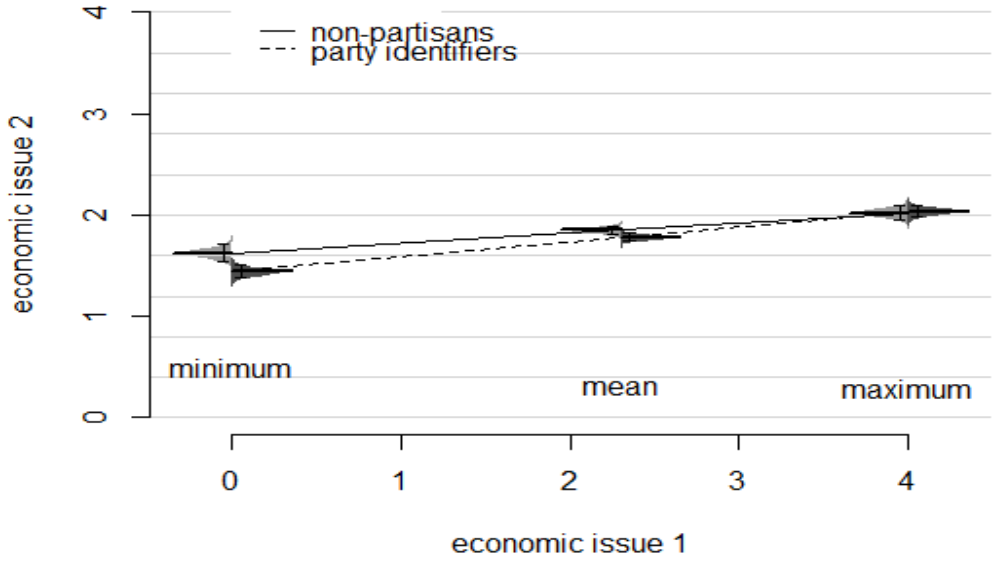


Figure 2.2 The impact on issue constraint of PID



[6] Figures present bootstrapped predicted values of issue 1 or minimum, mean and maximum values of issue 2 for knowledgeable vs. not knowledgeable individuals and partisans vs. non-party identifiers. The 95% confidence intervals are presented to show where the difference between groups is statistically significant.

Figure 3, the impact on issue constraint of contextual level variables

Figure 3.1, Cross level interaction between issue1 and polarization

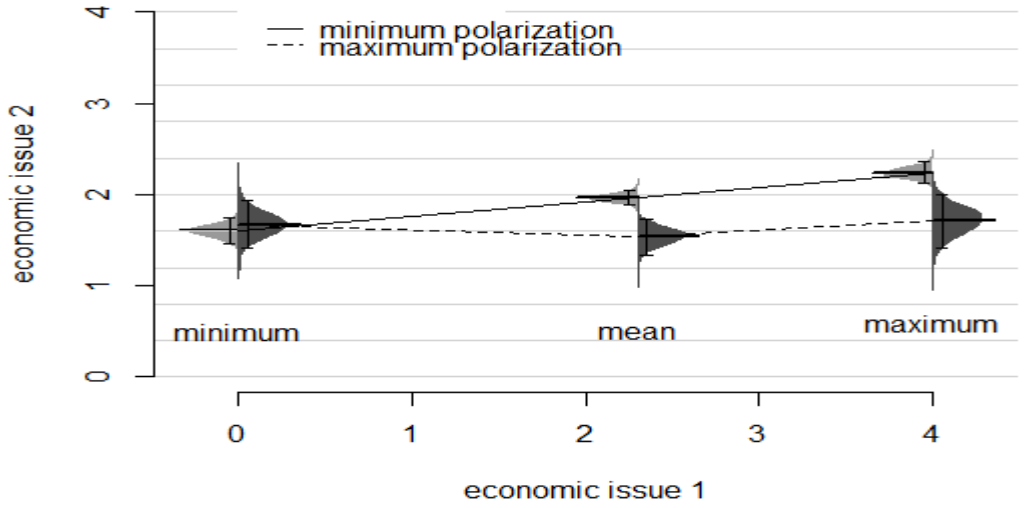


Figure 3.2, Cross level interaction between issue1 and elite constraint

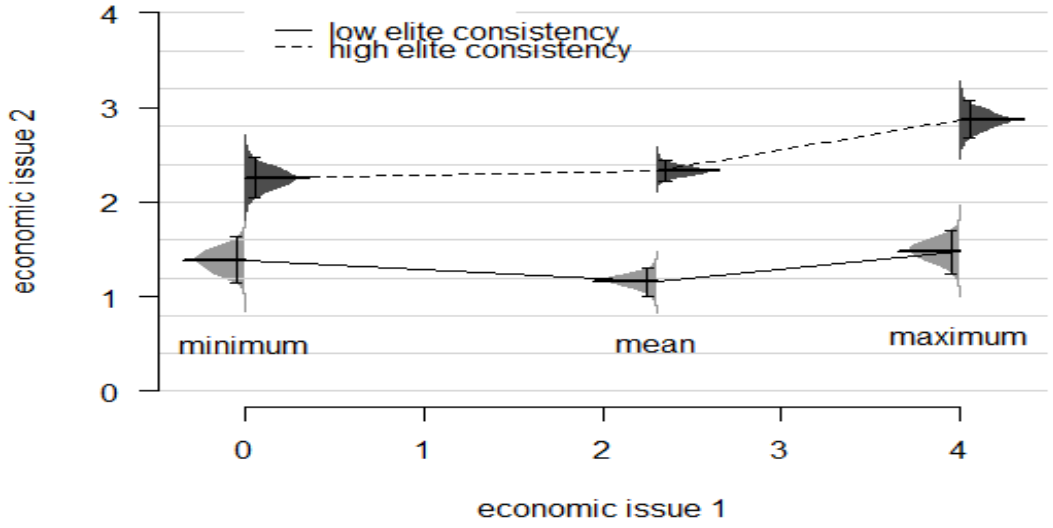
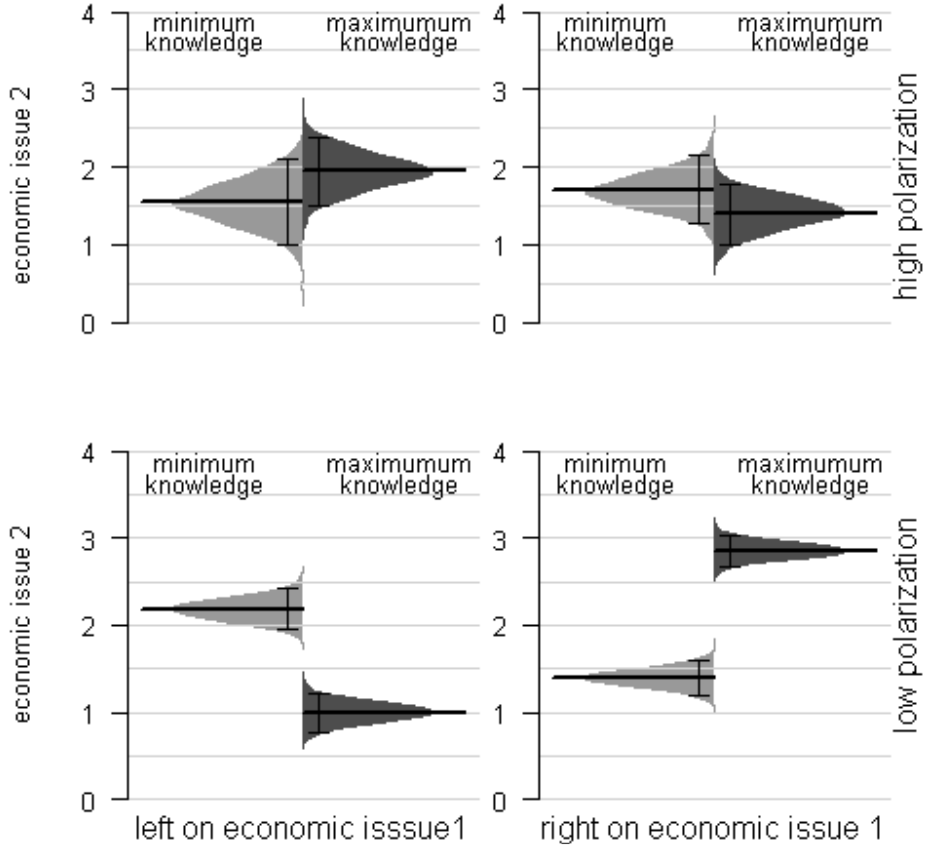


Figure 4, moderating impact of polarization on issue constraint



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Appendix 1, Issue Constraint

Issue 1(IV):Q57: "Private enterprise best to solve [country's] economic problem", originally coded from: 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree", recoded to take values from: 0 "strongly disagree" to 4 "strongly agree";

Issue 2(DV): Q61: "Politics should abstain from intervening in the economy", originally coded from: 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree", recoded to take values from: 0 "strongly disagree" to 4 "strongly agree";

Appendix 2, Independent variables

Individual Level Variables

Political knowledge: measure of political knowledge that ranges from 0 to 7, reflecting the correct True/False answers given by each respondent (Cronbach's alpha = 0.618, 7 items). "Don't Know" answers were coded as incorrect answers as we consider that they reflect a degree of ignorance similar to the one reflected by incorrect answers (see Luskin and Bullock 2006; Sturgis *et al.* 2008; Hansen 2009a. Original statements:

Q92. Switzerland is a member of the EU: True/False

Q93. The European Union has 25 member states: True/False

Q94. Every country in the EU elects the same number of representatives to the European Parliament. True/False

Q95. Every six months, a different Member State becomes president of the Council of the European Union. True/False

Q96. The [Specific Minister] is [Correct name]. True/False

Q97. Individuals must be 25 or older to stand as candidates in [COUNTRY] elections. True/False

Q98. There are [150% of real number] members of the [COUNTRY Parliament]. True/False

PID: wording of question "Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party? If so, which party do you feel close to?" initial coding" . Recoded in 1 yes if R is feeling close to any party and 0 if the response is no

Contextual Level Variables

POLARIZATION: ideological polarization computed using the formula: $f = \sum_{i=1}^{N} p_i (x_i - \bar{x})^2$ where *f*-is the polarization index, p_i -is the vote share of the party, x_i -is the placement on the left right axis as given by the voters' placement on the party in the European Parliament Election Study 2009, Voter Study, $\bar{x}$ - is the mean placement on the left-right axis of the parties in a certain country based on the coders placement.

ELITE CONSTRAINT: the overall country correlation among elitest between two items reflecting pro market vs. pro state attitudes as given by the Candidate Survey of EES 2009. The two items are Q57: "Private enterprise best to solve [country's] economic problem", originally coded from: 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree", recoded to take values from: 0 "strongly disagree" to 4 "strongly agree"; and Q61: "Politics should abstain from intervening in the economy", originally coded from: 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree", recoded to take values from: 0 "strongly disagree" to 4 "strongly agree";

Appendix 3, Controls

FEMALE: coded 1 for female and 0 otherwise.

AGE: the age of the respondent in years.

RELIGIOSITY: a measure of church of religiosity wording of questions:" Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services nowadays?" Inversed the original coding, thus 1 is for Never, 6 is for Several times a week. This variable was mean centered – the 0 value in the regression represents the sample average "At least once a month."

EDUCATION: wording of question "What is the highest level of education you have completed?" For this variable we used the recoded EES 2009 ISCED education level variable (17 categories classified into a variable ranging from 0 to 6).

MINORITY- wording of question: "Many people in this country consider themselves to be ... while others don't. How about you? Do you consider yourself ... or do you feel you belong to another group? Or do you perhaps see yourself as ... as well as belonging to this other group?"; initial coding: "1 - I see myself just as [country nation]" "2 - I belong to another group, namely"; "3 - I am , but I also belong to another group, namely". Dichotomous variable where 0 is for those who answered 1, and for any minorities it takes the value 1.

UNION: wording of question " Are you yourself a member of a trade union or is anyone else in your household a member of a trade union?", initial response categories: "1 - Yes, I am", "2 - Yes, someone else is", "3 - Yes I am and someone else in the household is" and "4 – No" recoded in 1-intial categories from 1to 3 and 0-4

INTEREST: original wording "To what extent would you say you are interested in politics? Very, somewhat, a little, or not at all?" Answers order was reversed in the analysis, 4 reflecting "very", 1 reflecting "not at all".

TV: "How often did you do any of the following during the four weeks before the European election? How often did you: Watch a program about the election on television" 1 Never, 2 Sometimes, 3 Often.

PAPER: "How often did you do any of the following during the four weeks before the European election? How often did you: Read about the election in a newspaper?". 1Never, 2 Sometimes, 3 Often.

WEB: "How often did you do any of the following during the four weeks before the European election? How often did you: Look into a website concerned with the election?" 1 Never, 2 Sometimes, 3 Often.

DISCUSSION: "How often did you do any of the following during the four weeks before the European election? How often did you: Talk to friends or family about the election?" 1 Never, 2 Sometimes, 3 Often.