

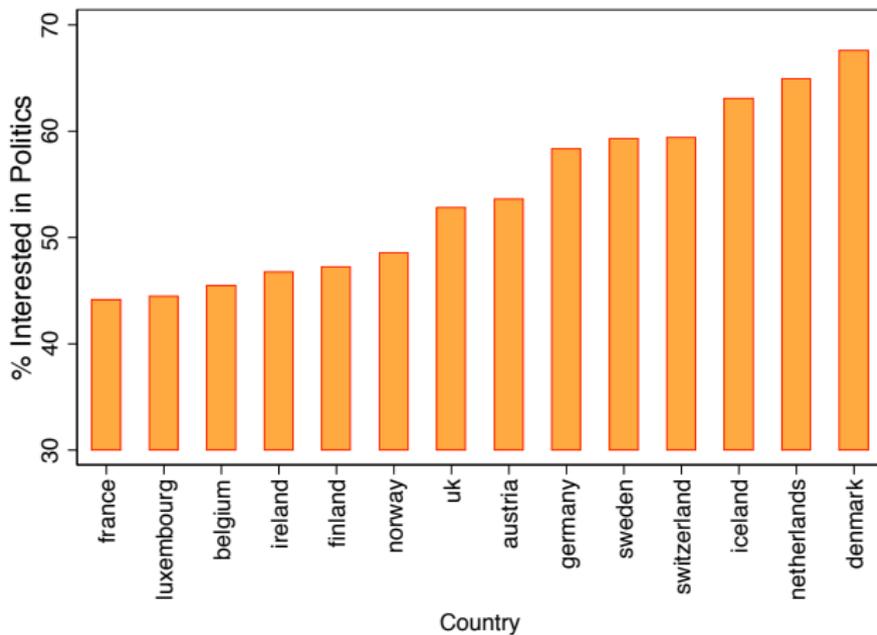
What Makes Politics Interesting?: How Political Context Shapes Political Interest

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EITM 2014

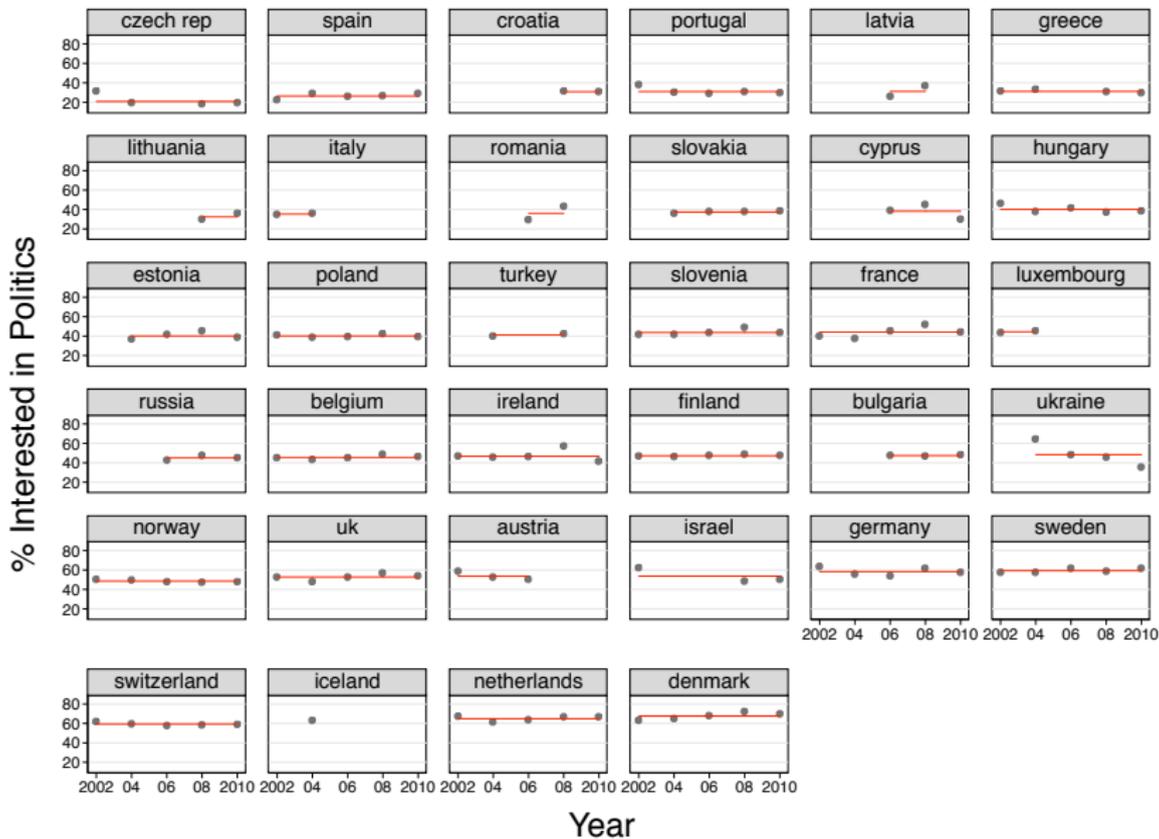
How interested would you say you are in politics?

ESS (country mean from w1-w5)

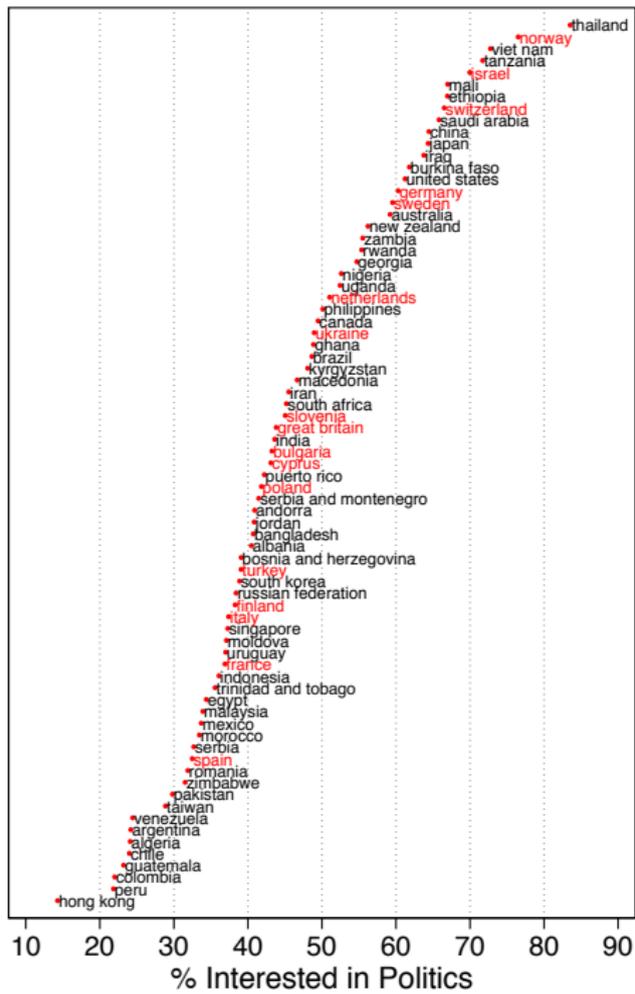


45% in France vs. 68% in Denmark

ESS (country mean from w1-w5)



WVS (wave 4 or 5)



- ▶ **How can we explain the cross-national difference?**
- ▶ Why politics is interesting to some people but not to others?

- ▶ Probably the most important predictor of political sophistication and participation
- ▶ Key aspect to understand political attitudes and political behavior necessary for democratic citizenship, thus the quality of democracy

What do we know about political interest?

“... We do not understand where political interest comes from and could thus not recommend how to increase it. We do not even know if political interest has the stability of a personal trait or the volatility of a regularly updated reflection of the contemporary political situation.” Prior 2010 JOP

“... We know relatively little about individuals' interest in politics beyond the simple correlation between interest and turnout or other forms of participation. ...” Horner 2007

What do we know about political interest?

- ▶ A kind of political engagement: motivational factor of political attention and learning e.g., Luskin 1990
- ▶ A kind of personal characteristics: stable over time Prior 2005, developed in the formative years, influenced by parental socialization e.g., Luskin 1990, Jennings et al 2004, Neundorf et al 2012

What do we know about political interest?

Luskin 1990

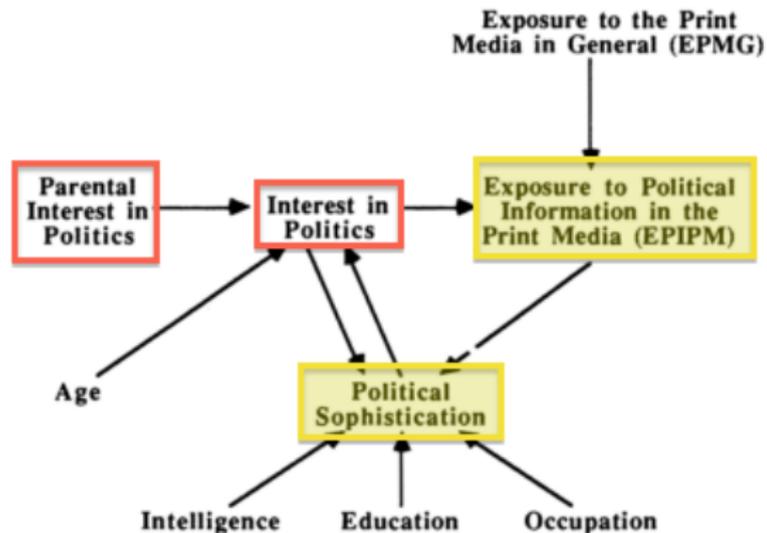


FIG. 1. The model

What do we know about political interest?

- ▶ A kind of political engagement: motivational factor of political attention and learning e.g., Luskin 1990
- ▶ A kind of personal characteristics: stable over time Prior 2005, developed in the formative years, influenced by parental socialization e.g., Luskin 1990, Jennings et al 2004, Neundorf et al 2012
- ▶ Influenced by contexts: political and media environment (e.g., media systems, campaign effects, information costs) influence the level of political interest Political communication literature, Media system studies (e.g., van Aelst et al. 2012)
- ▶ Varies across countries: dramatic difference across countries (but within country variance is much smaller)

What do we know about political interest?

ESS

| Variable | | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max | Obs. |
|------------------|---------|-------|-----------|-------|-------|---------------|
| Political Intest | overall | 2.359 | .235 | 1.877 | 2.898 | N = 130 |
| | between | | .224 | 1.989 | 2.802 | n = 34 |
| | within | | .075 | 2.128 | 2.676 | T-bar = 3.824 |
| Prop. Interested | overall | .452 | .119 | .177 | .718 | N = 130 |
| | between | | .113 | .219 | .675 | n = 34 |
| | within | | .037 | .322 | .613 | T-bar = 3.824 |

How can we explain the cross-national difference?

Possible Explanations for the Cross-national variation

- ▶ Measurement incomparability
- ▶ Socioeconomic differences (Cost-Benefit) e.g., van Deth & Elff 2004
- ▶ Political contexts

How can we explain the cross-national difference?

Possible Explanations for the Cross-national variation

- ▶ Measurement incomparability

Tested the comparability of the survey instrument (DIF), using anchoring vignettes technique in Western European countries

- ▶ Socioeconomic differences (Cost-Benefit) e.g., van Deth & Elff 2004

SES well explains variations at indi. level, but not cross-national

- ▶ Political contexts

A typical individual will be more interested in politics in some contexts, but less in other. What are the contexts and why?

- 1 Theory of interest (micro- & macro level)
- 2 Testing the mechanism of micro-level theory
- 3 A comparative research

What is Interest?

- ▶ The **feeling** of wanting to know or learn about something or someone (Oxford dictionary)
- ▶ A **feeling** of having your attention held by something, or of wanting to be involved with and learn more about something (Cambridge)
- ▶ A **feeling** of intentness, concern, or curiosity about something (Collins)
- ▶ A **feeling** of wanting to investigate, become involved, or extend or expand the self by incorporating new information and having new experiences with the person or object that has simulated interest (Izard 1977)

Interest as an Emotion

A discrete experience of interest as a kind of positive emotions

- ▶ Nicknamed “knowledge emotion” or “curiosity emotion”
- ▶ Involves physiological expressions

Langsdorf et al. 1983, Libby et al. 1974, Banse & Scherer 1996

- ▶ still and tilt the head
- ▶ eyes and muscles in the forehead move (typical attention and concentration gesture)
- ▶ a faster rate of speech, greater range of vocal frequency, dilated pupils

Interest as an Emotion

A discrete experience of interest as a kind of positive emotions

- ▶ Nicknamed “knowledge emotion” or “curiosity emotion”
- ▶ Involves physiological expressions
Langsdorf et al. 1983, Libby et al. 1974, Banse & Scherer 1996
- ▶ Unique appraisal structure
e.g., Arnold 1960, Berlyne 1960, Roseman & Smith 2001, Sherer et al. 2001, Silvia 2006

Appraisal theory

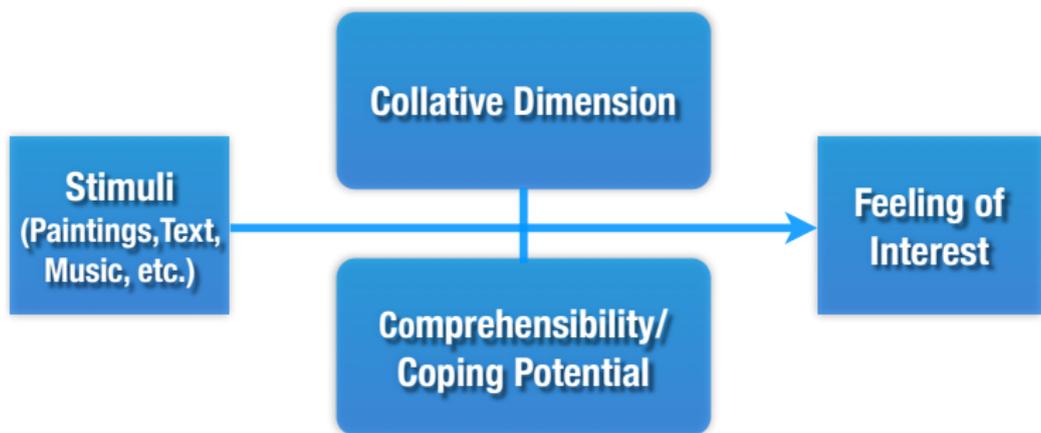
- ▶ Explains why we experience a certain emotion
- ▶ We experience an emotion only after we (consciously or subconsciously) appraise the object as matching a particular abstract structure.
- ▶ Appraisal: an “intuitive” assessment of the “here and now” aspects of situations Arnold 1960; a perceptual and cognitive process, often proceeds effortlessly and generates emotions automatically
- ▶ Appraisal theorists attempt to identify the evaluative dimensions or criteria that predict the emotion

e.g., Anger occurs when: 1) the event is relevant to my goal, 2) the event is incongruent with the goal, 3) the event is a threat to my social or self-esteem, and 4) there is someone I blame for the threat.

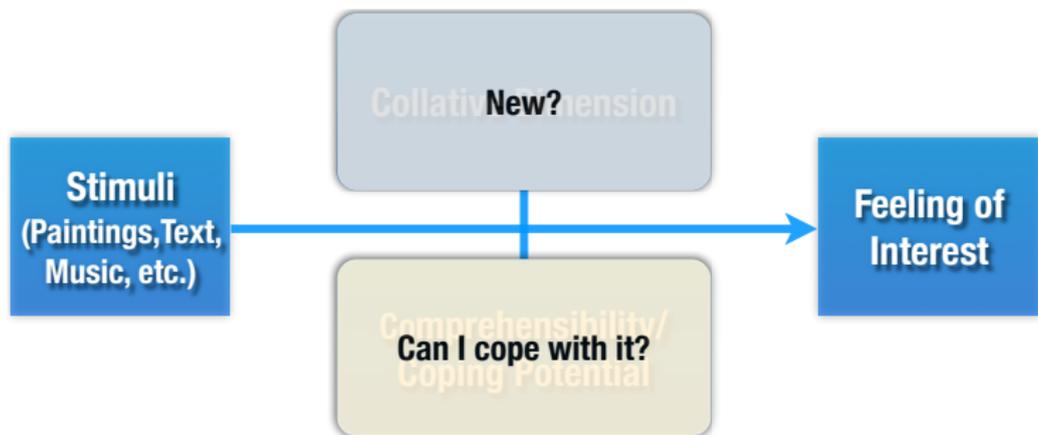
Appraisal Structure of Interest

Two-dimensional Structure (Paul Silvia 2006)

- ▶ Collative dimension: Novelty*, Complexity*, Uncertainty ...
- ▶ Coping potential (or Comprehensibility) dimension



Appraisal Structure of Interest



New?

**Ultracold Reactions Probe the Frontiers of
Quantum Chemistry**

Can I cope with it?

$$\text{Interest} = F(\Theta, \Pi \mid \text{stimulus})$$

Θ : a set of appraisals of collative variables

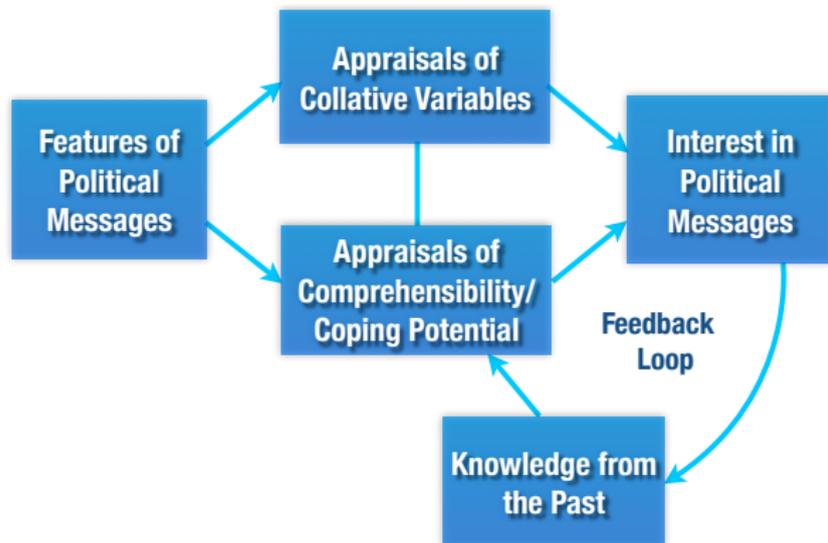
Π : appraisal of comprehensibility

Appraisal Theory of “Political” Interest

Key question: What makes politics “**comprehensible**”? (Π)

- ▶ Conventional thoughts (implied in the previous studies):
Knowledge and previous experiences (e.g., education and age)

Appraisal Theory of “Political” Interest



$$\text{Interest} = \mathbf{F}(\Theta, \Pi \mid \text{stimulus}) \implies \mathbf{F}(\Theta, K \mid \text{stimulus})$$

Π : a function of previous knowledge

Appraisal Theory of “Political” Interest

Key question: What makes politics “**comprehensible**”? (Π)

- ▶ Conventional thoughts (implied in the previous studies):
Knowledge and previous experiences (e.g., education and age)

- ▶ **An alternative path:**

When political heuristics are available and useful, politics (events and messages) can be more likely to be appraised as comprehensible – something I can “cope with”.

Using heuristics, politics is “understandable” even without detailed knowledge (vs. “understood”)

e.g., Chaiken 1980, Gigerenzer 2008, 2011a, 2011b, Tversky and Kahneman 1974

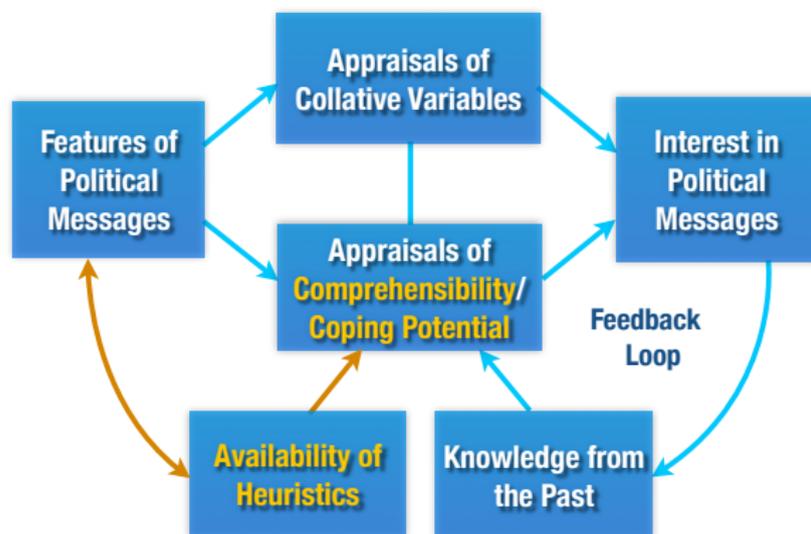
Heuristics

A simple rule that guides people to map an abstract feature and solve (simple or complex) problems

Political Heuristics

- 1 Party label: Mapping candidate's position
- 2 Ideological label: Mapping political parties' position; Policy outcome
- 3 Party size and Ideological proximity: Predicting coalition partner(s)

Heuristics and Comprehensibility

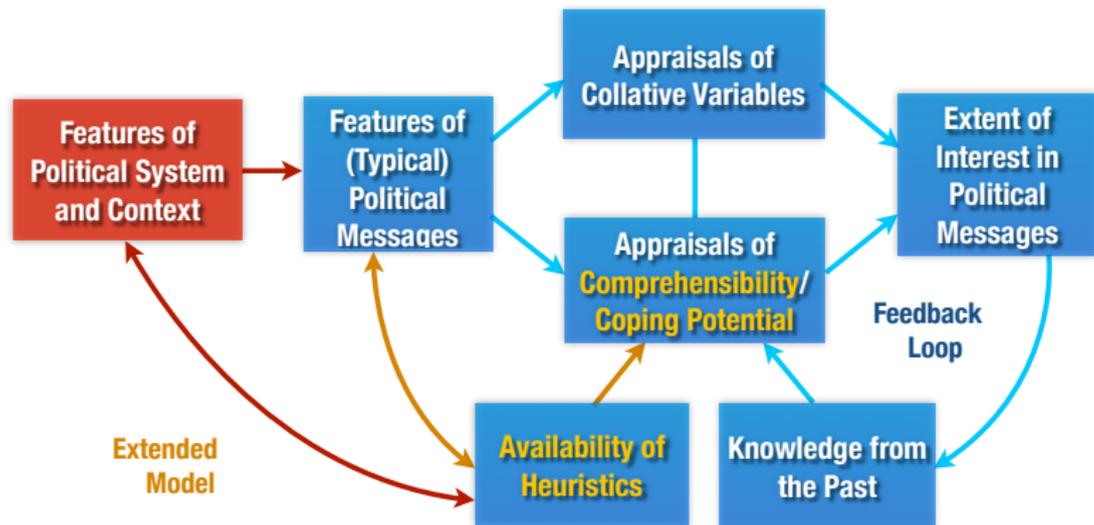


$$\text{Interest} = F(\Theta, \Pi \mid \text{stimulus}) \implies F(\Theta, K, H \mid \text{stimulus})$$

Π : a function of knowledge (K) & the avail. of heuristics (H)

Heuristics and Comprehensibility

Further Extension for Comparative Research



Heuristics, Comprehensibility, and Interest

Hypothesis

When **heuristics** are available, an object (e.g., political event or message) will be more likely to be appraised as **comprehensible**, thus more **interesting**.

$$\text{Interest} = F(\Theta, \Pi \mid \text{stimulus}) \implies F(\Theta, K, H \mid \text{stimulus})$$

Empirical Test

Designed an experiment to test the mechanism

Experimental Design: Guessing Task

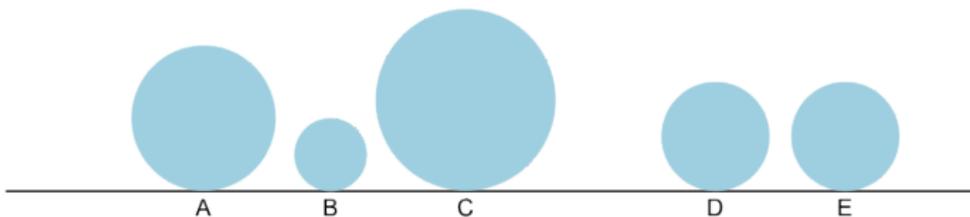
Considerations for Design:

- a No prior knowledge or experience should be useful (ruling out K).
- b Manipulate the usefulness/availability of heuristic (H).
- c Minimize the confounding effects of collative variables (Θ).
- d Ideal if it allows us to detect feedback chain (repeated trials).

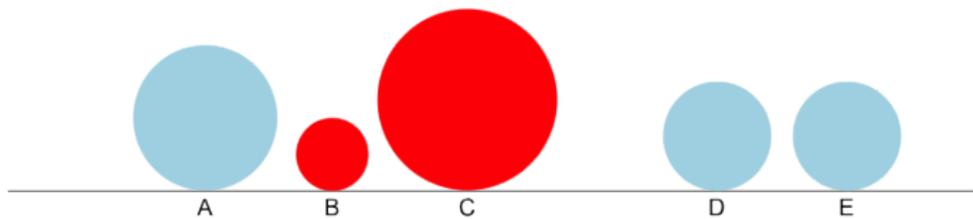
Basic Setting:

- ▶ Task: “guessing” (canceling out K).
- ▶ Repeated trials (perhaps make Θ identical across groups).

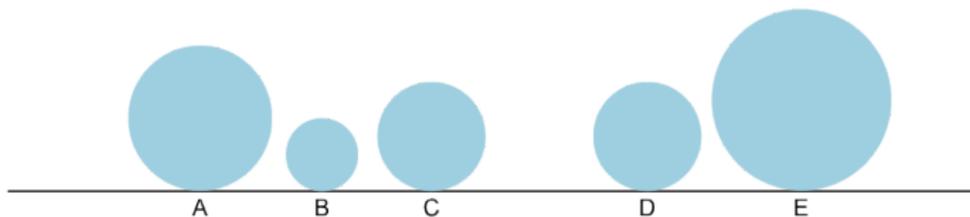
Question 1: Two of the circles will be colored in RED. Guess which TWO?



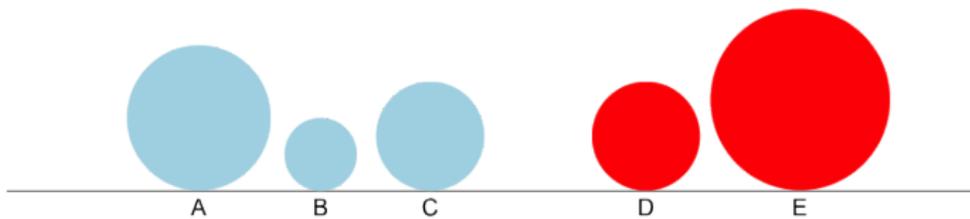
Answer 1



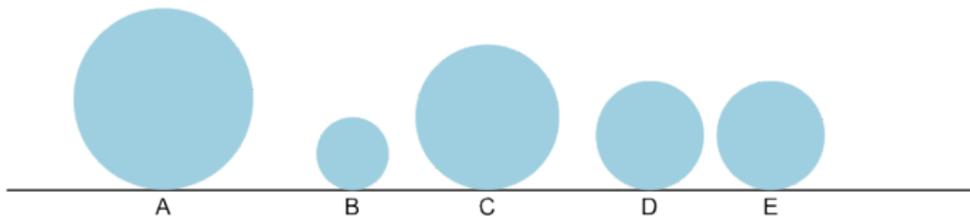
Question 2: Two of the circles will be colored in RED. Guess which TWO?



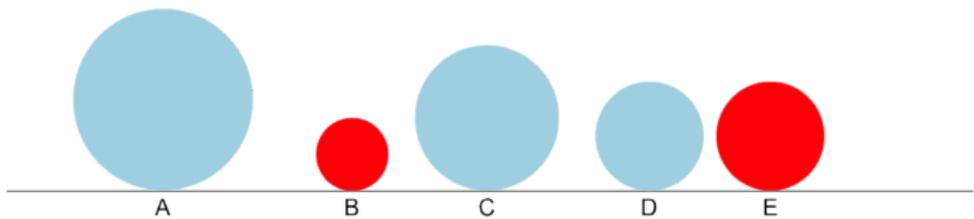
Answer 2



Question 3: Two of the circles will be colored in RED. Guess which TWO?

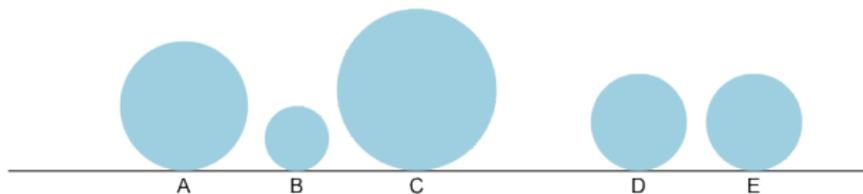


Answer 3



Experimental Design: Guessing Task

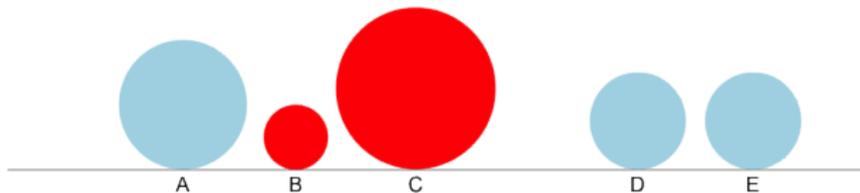
Guess which two circles will be colored in RED. Choose TWO from the below.



- A
- B
- C
- D
- E

Experimental Design: Guessing Task

Check if your guess was correct!



| Circle | A | B | C | D | E |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Your Choice | | | x | x | |
| Correct Answer | | x | x | | |

Did you correctly guess BOTH of the red circles?

- Yes, I got both correct.
- No, I didn't get both correct.

Do this 70 times.

Experimental Design: Treatment

Manipulation: The availability of heuristics

Manipulate the proportion a logical rule applied to the outcome

*Rule (Embedded): the largest circle and the closest to the largest one



| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| High availability-of-heuristics group | 87% |
| | 54% |
| | 24% |
| Low availability-of-heuristics group | 10% (random prob.) |

Thus, in the Low Availability group, there is no cue that helps to get the task easy and comprehensible, whereas in the High Availability group, there is a regularity that makes the task more comprehensible once a subject recognizes it.

Experimental Design

Activity: Guessing task, 70 trials

Subjects: 120 subjects (30 for each group), from Amazon MTurk

Compensation: Flat rate fee (no performance-based bonus)

Measurements

Interestingness (outcome variable): Ratings on Boring–Interesting dimension, 11pt scale, at 13 time points over 70 trials

Comprehensibility (self-reporting): Ratings on Easy–Difficult dimension, 11pt scale, at 13 time points

Comprehensibility (behavioral): Performance – an objective measure from the number of correct guesses

Measurements

You have played 9 trials so far, and made 4 correct guesses and 5 incorrect guesses (44.4% correct guess).

How would you rate this task? Please rate what you feel about the task so far.

| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| Boring | <input type="radio"/> | Interesting |
| Difficult | <input type="radio"/> | Easy |

Shown after trials 9, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, 65, and 70.

Interest = $F(\Theta, K, H \mid \text{stimulus})$

Y_{itg} : individual i 's level of interestingness at time t , i in group g

N_t (Θ component): appraisal of Novelty (collative variable) at time t

H_g : availability/ usefulness of Heuristics in group g ($0.1 \leq H_g \leq 1$)

* C_{itg} : coping potential (appraisal of comprehensibility)

▶ Individual level: $Y_{itg} = \beta H_g + \rho t + \varepsilon_i, (\beta > 0, \rho < 0)$

▶ Group level: $\sum_{t=1}^T Y_{i,g=Hi} > \sum_{t=1}^T Y_{i,g=Lo} (T=13)$

Results: Individual Level

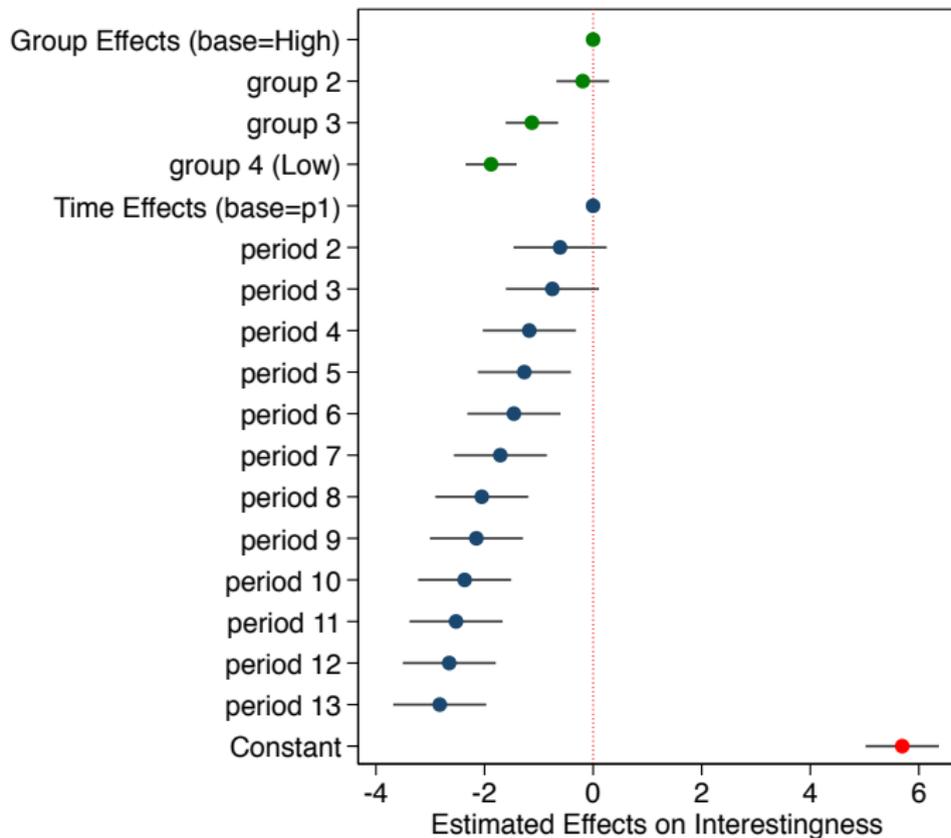
$$Y_{itg} = \beta H_g + \rho t + \varepsilon_i, (\beta > 0, \rho < 0)$$

| Variable | Coefficient | S.E. |
|----------------------------|-------------|---------|
| Availability of Heuristics | 2.422 | (0.288) |
| Time (trial) | -0.044 | (0.005) |
| Intercept | 3.924 | (0.235) |
| N = 1560 | | |

Relaxing the linearity assumption for β (group effect) and ρ (time effect),

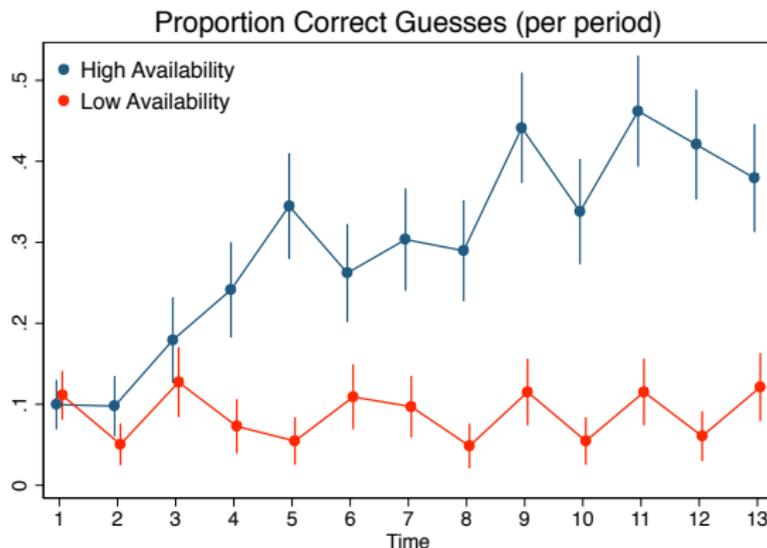
$$Y_{itg} = (\beta_1 H_1 + \dots + \beta_4 H_4) + (\rho_1 t_1 + \rho_2 t_2 + \dots + \rho_{13} t_{13}) + \varepsilon_i$$

Results: Individual Level



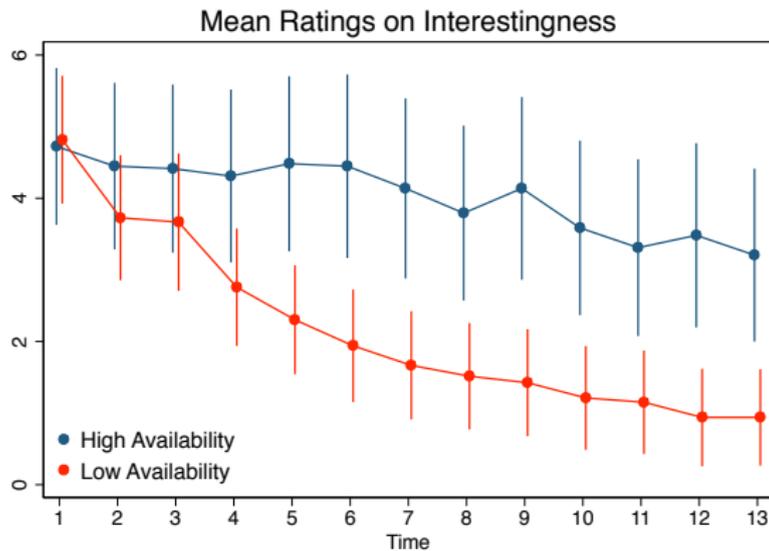
Results: Group Level

When heuristic is available, they perform better.



Results: Group Level

The High Availability group feels more interested in the task than the Low group.



Manipulation Checks

More than half of the subjects in high availability group recognized the presence of the pattern and explicitly described what the pattern was, but none in other group(s) did.

Some written responses from the High Availability Group...

- ▶ **Biggest one** was always red and **the one closest to it** was as well. There was probably a 95% success rate with this and 5% random order if it wasn't.
- ▶ It seemed like **the big one** was always selected, and then **the one that is closest** to that one.
- ▶ For the most part, it seemed to be that the ones in red were **the largest circle** and **the next closest** circle.
- ▶ **The big circle** was almost always colored red. The other circle seemed almost random.

...

One Simple Finding

The availability of heuristics helps to enhance (or maintain) levels of interest, by increasing the appraised coping potential of individuals.

Cross-National Research on Political Interest

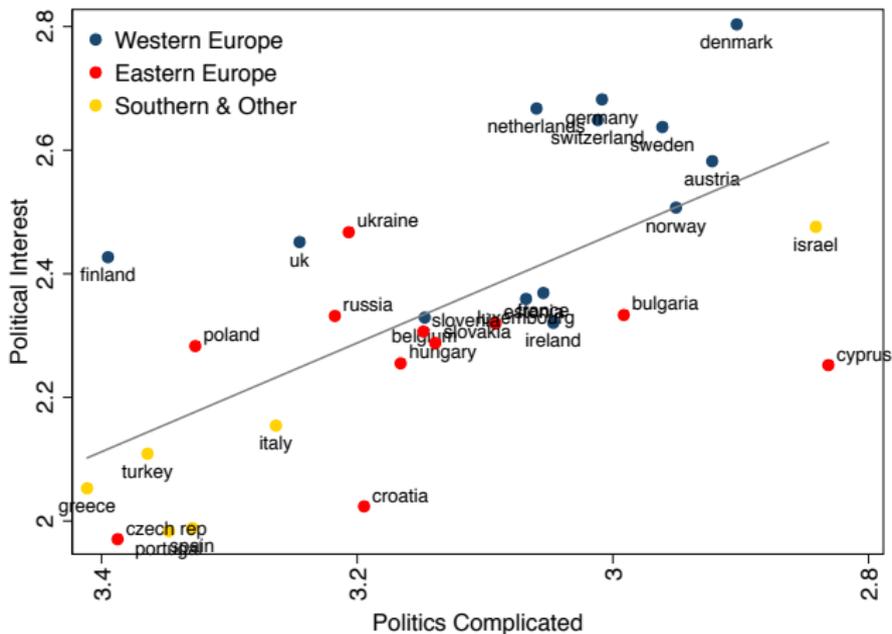
Remember that the core mechanism of the micro-level theory suggests:

- When political heuristics are available and useful (a)
- Politics in general is more comprehensible (b)
- People are more likely to be interested in politics (c)

The link between (b) and (c) can be explored by looking at the relationship between comprehensibility and level of interest, using survey questions “politics complicated” and “political interest.”

Relationship between Comprehensibility and Interest

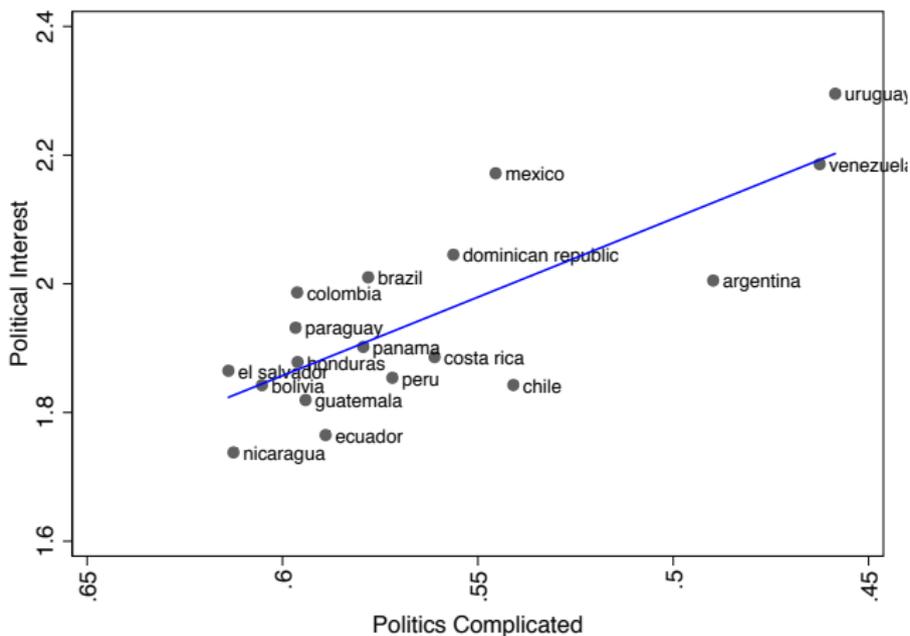
ESS (2002-2010)



Comprehensibility and Interest are positively associated.

Relationship between Comprehensibility and Interest

Latinobarometro (2005-2010)



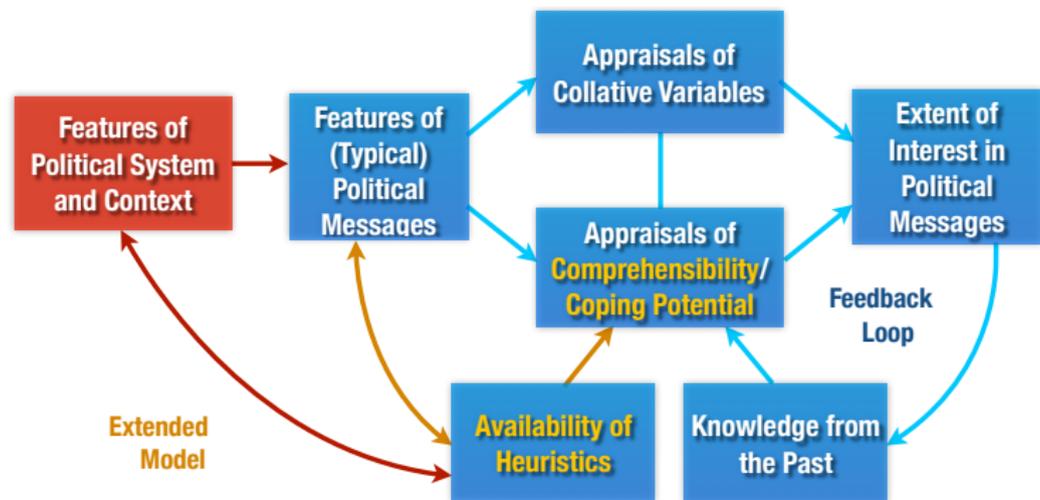
Comprehensibility and Interest are positively associated.

Remaining questions

- ▶ What are the (availability of) heuristics that systematically vary across countries
- ▶ How to measure the availability of heuristics

Political heuristics are contextually generated. That is, a country's political system and its political context make (or do not make) a specific kind of political heuristics available and/or useful.

Theoretical Framework for Comparative Research on Political Interest



To answer the question of “how political heuristics make politics more comprehensible”, we need start to figure out “what heuristics can substitute the kind of detailed knowledge when we deal with political events (which predominantly delivered through media messages).”

- 1 What are the stimuli (types of political news)?
- 2 What should citizens know to understand politics?
- 3 How much effort they need to get the necessary information?
- 4 Are there heuristics available to substitute the kind of information they need?

Political Messages

- ▶ Horse race: parties, leaders, individual candidates...
- ▶ Government formation: the connection between electoral outcomes and government formation (who will take the office?)
- ▶ Policy: issues, process, conflicts, prediction of outcome
- ▶ (Gossip and scandal...)

How Heuristics Makes Politics More Comprehensible?

| Type of Information | Available Heuristics | Measurements |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Individual Politicians' Standpoint | Party Label (when parties are more coherent; parties are more institutionalized; parties play a center role in producing electoral candidates) | Party Unity Score (e.g. Rice Index); Ages of Parties, the Number of New Parties); Proportion of Independents; % Party Switchers |
| Political Parties' Standpoint | Left-Right Heuristics (when party competition centered on LR dimension; LR dimension composed of fewer issues) | Importance of LR dimension; Importance of LR issues; Effective number of LR dimension |
| Prediction of Policy Outcomes | Coalition Formation Heuristics (when it is easy to predict winners from election results; there are regularities (patterns) in coalition formation) | Electoral system; Regularity and predictability of coalition formation |

Summary and Hypothesis

My theory suggests that the availability of heuristics will better explain the cross-national difference (because it is systematically driven by political systems and contexts), whereas the knowledge (and the kind of SES variables) will be a good predictor of levels of interest at the individual level but not at the country level. Controlling for the latter, I expect:

The level of political interest will be higher where contextually generated political heuristics are available and useful.

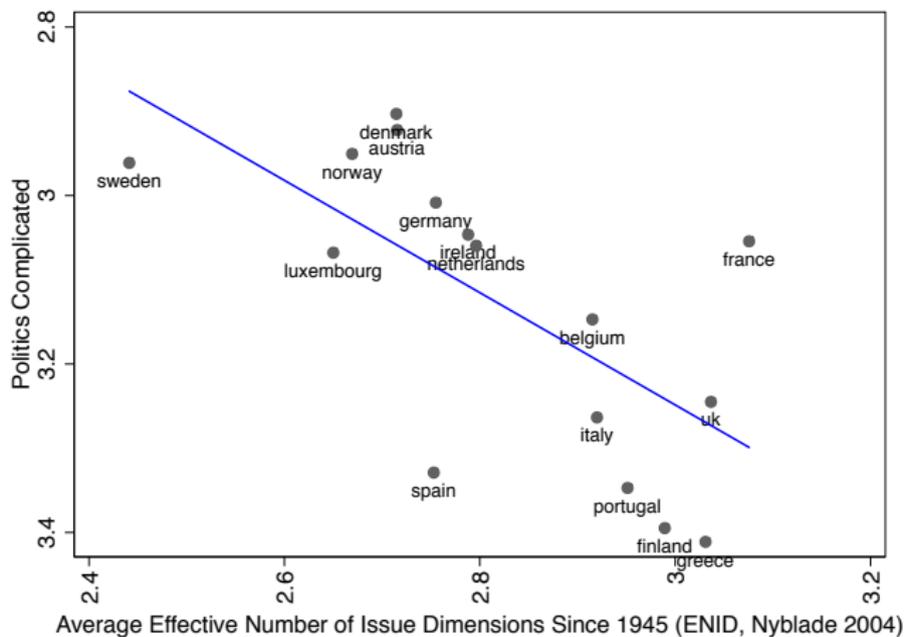
Dependent variable: Political interest (measured on 1 to 4 pt scale), data from various cross-national surveys

Explanatory variables: the political contexts where political heuristics are more likely to be available and useful (listed in the Table), data from various sources

Data and Measurements

A quick glance: relationship between Interest and Contexts

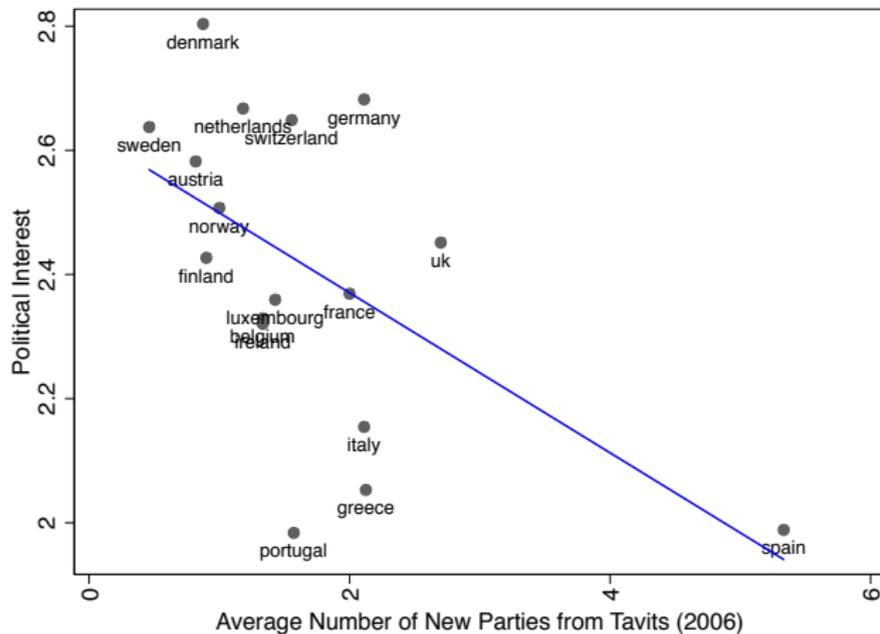
Effective Number of Issue Dimensions (—)



Data and Measurements

A quick glance: relationship between **Interest** and **Contexts**

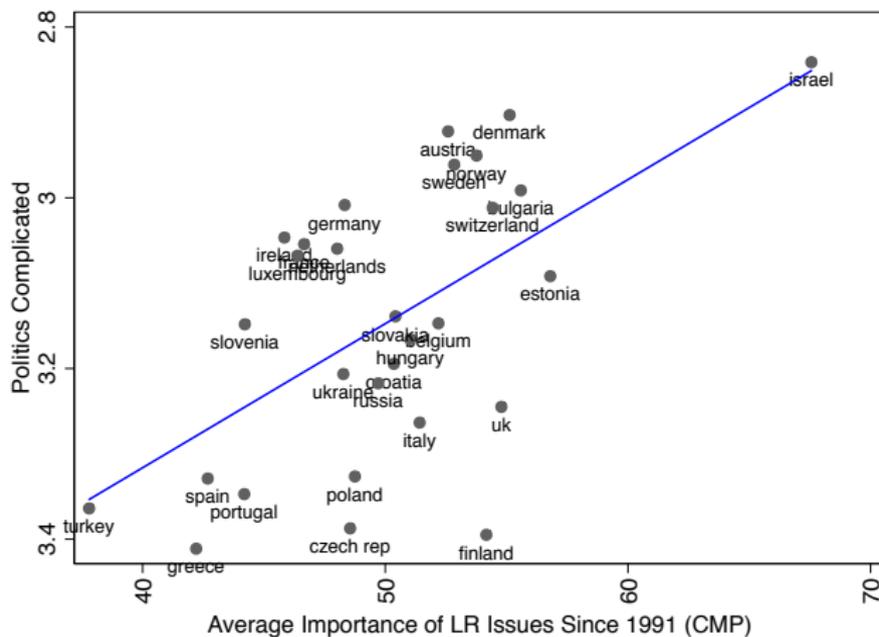
Number of New Parties (—)



Data and Measurements

A quick glance: relationship between **Interest** and **Contexts**

Importance of LR Issues (+)



Dependent variable: Political interest (measured on 1 to 4 pt scale), data from various cross-national surveys

Explanatory variables: the political contexts where political heuristics are more likely to be available and useful (listed in the Table), data from various sources

Control variables

- ▶ Level 1: Demographic and SES variables for individuals
- ▶ Level 2: Socio-econ vars (e.g., GDP, % tertiary education, etc.), Electoral and Political systems (from the literature, e.g., PR vs. SMD, ballot type, ENOP, District Magnitude, etc.)

e.g., Gordon & Segura 1997, van Deth & Elff 2004

Approach 1: a general form

$$Y_{ik} = \beta_{0k} + \beta_{1k}C_k + \beta_{2k}X_{ik}$$

Y_{ik} : level of interest of an individual i in country k

C_k : contexts

X_{ik} : characteristics of individuals

Modeling Strategy

Approach 2: two stage estimation strategy

First stage: Hierarchical random intercept model

For the observed response y_i ,

$$y_i = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } y_i^* \leq \kappa_1 \\ 2 & \text{if } \kappa_1 < y_i^* \leq \kappa_2 \\ 3 & \text{if } \kappa_2 < y_i^* \leq \kappa_3 \\ 4 & \text{if } \kappa_3 < y_i^* \end{cases}, \text{ where } y_i^* \text{ is latent response.}$$

Random intercept model for subject i nested in survey (year) j nested in country k , including random intercepts μ_j and μ_{jk} ,

$$y_{ijk}^* = \beta' \mathbf{X}_{ij} + \mu_j + \mu_{jk} + \epsilon_{ijk},$$

where $\mu_j \sim N(0, \tau^2)$, and $\mu_j, \mu_{jk} \perp \epsilon_{ijk}$.

Modeling Strategy

From the random intercept model, the residual (not explained by a set of individual level covariates X) are obtained with uncertainty measure. The country (and survey) level random intercept is the outcome variable in the second stage estimation.

Second stage model

$$CE_k = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 C_k + \alpha_2 Z_k$$

CE_k : context-specific random effects (random intercept) obtained from the first stage model

C_k : contexts relevant to heuristics use

Z_k : other contexts

Next Step

- More on comparative theory/ hypotheses
- Estimation strategy, variable selection

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