

The *Spitzenkandidaten* campaigns in 2014: assessing the importance of information and news exposure for preference formation of citizens

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Abstract

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections were characterised by a novel element in European Union (EU) politics. For the first time, the major European party families put forward top candidates for President of the European Commission, the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten*. This paper seeks to enquire whether this innovation in European election campaigns had the potential to – at least partially – alleviate the alleged accountability deficit. We rely on original survey data to assess citizens' preferences for each of the main *Spitzenkandidaten* Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz, and Guy Verhofstadt. Our research is guided by three questions: What explains whether citizens are able to formulate a preference towards a certain *Spitzenkandidat*? Which factors are responsible for variations in such preferences? And are these explanations moderated by citizens' political awareness? We show that three factors enable citizens to formulate a preference towards the *Spitzenkandidaten*: exposure to quality news as well as the acquisition of general EU political and campaign-specific information about the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Furthermore, we demonstrate that only the most knowledgeable citizens are able to use cues of party identification or ideological orientations in their evaluations of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. The implications of our findings are discussed with reference to the EU's democratic deficit debate.

Keywords:

European Parliament elections, European Union politics, personalization of politics, political behaviour, Spitzenkandidaten

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Introduction

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections brought about a novelty: The major European party families nominated top candidates for President of the European Commission, the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten*. Up until then, the European Council nominated candidates for Commission President. By making the Presidency dependent on the outcome of the elections, executive power was – indirectly - at stake. We explore fundamental questions relating to this novelty: first, what explains whether citizens are able to formulate a preference towards a certain *Spitzenkandidat*? Second, which factors are responsible for variations in such preferences? And third, are these explanations moderated by citizens' political awareness?

We situate our study in extant research on EP elections. This literature has traditionally characterised these elections by their second-order nature compared to national general elections. Turnout is generally lower and has been decreasing over the preceding EP elections. Furthermore, EP elections tend to be dominated by domestic politics, but because no government power has been at stake thus far, strategic considerations play a less important role. Therefore, compared to national elections, EP elections display more signs of sincere voting and provide more opportunity to express discontent. Consequently, smaller and opposition parties tend to gain votes at the expense of government and larger parties; and radical, often Eurosceptic parties at the left and right ends of the spectrum do relatively well (e.g., Reif and Schmitt 1980; Van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh 1996; Hix and Marsh 2011). In an attempt to change the 'second-order nature' of EP elections, the novel *Spitzenkandidat* element was introduced in 2014.

These changes resonate with the debates about the EU's democratic deficit which has thus far, among other things, been reflected in the lack of opportunities for citizens to determine the composition of the EU executive through their votes in European elections (Føllesdal and Hix 2006). Hobolt and Tilley (2014) argue further that the EU would suffer from an accountability deficit because citizens are not provided with sufficient information and opportunity to hold responsible EU politicians accountable in EP elections. This is problematic from a normative point of view, because citizens are expected to be informed in order to participate in a meaningful way in democratic politics.¹ The *Spitzenkandidaten*

¹ Since we do not intend to contribute to normative democratic theory, we will not elaborate on this. However, the following quotes suggest that the notion that citizens need to be well informed is widely shared. In their seminal work on the behaviour of American voters Berelson et al. (1954: 308)

campaigns had the potential to change this lack of information available to EU citizens. In its November 2012 resolution the Parliament stated that the *Spitzenkandidaten* were expected to ‘play a leading role in the parliamentary electoral campaign, in particular by personally presenting their programme in all Member States of the Union’.² This implies that by nominating top candidates, the EP political groups sought to raise the awareness of and interest in the elections among European citizens.

Most of the embryonic research on the role of *Spitzenkandidaten* has focused on the question whether and how their campaigns have influenced citizens’ interest in the EU elections (e.g., Hobolt 2014) and whether it motivated people to participate in those elections (Schmitt, Hobolt and Popa, 2015). Our study contributes to this field by focusing on the relationship between political information and attitudes towards *Spitzenkandidaten*. Our study differs fundamentally from the other studies, in the sense that attitudes towards these *Spitzenkandidaten* represent the explanandum; in particular we enquire voting preferences towards the *Spitzenkandidaten*. To do so, we rely on original survey data as part of a four-wave panel study in the context of the EP elections (AUTHORS, 2014). In the third wave of the panel survey, which was conducted in April 2014, i.e. one month prior to Election Day, we asked respondents to indicate their probability to vote for either of the main *Spitzenkandidaten* Guy Verhofstadt, Martin Schulz and Jean-Claude Juncker. Former Belgian Prime Minister Verhofstadt was put forward by the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) on 1 February 2014; the incumbent EP President and German politician Schulz was chosen by the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) as their main contender on 1 March 2014; and Juncker, former Prime Minister of Luxembourg and former President of the Eurogroup, was nominated by the European People’s Party (EPP) on 7 March 2014.

Our research is guided by three questions: first, what explains whether citizens are able to formulate a preference towards a certain *Spitzenkandidat*? Second, which factors are responsible for variations in such preferences? And, third, to what extent are the effects of these different factors moderated by political awareness, which Zaller (1992: 21) defines as

underline their political responsibility by stating that ‘[t]he democratic citizen is expected to be well informed about political affairs’, which Dahl (1992: 46) reiterates: ‘The good citizen is highly concerned about public affairs and political life; well-informed about issues, candidates, and parties [...]’.

² European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2012 on the elections to the European Parliament in 2014 (2012/2829(RSP))

‘the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics *and* understands what he or she has encountered’ (emphasis in the original). Our results show that exposure to quality news as well as the acquisition of general EU political information and of campaign-specific information about the *Spitzenkandidaten* are important pre-conditions for citizens to be able to formulate a preference towards each of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Knowledgeable citizens are able to use left/right and national party preferences as ‘cues’ to form their attitudes towards the specific candidates. These findings are important from a political as well as a theoretical point of view.

Theoretically, the findings are important because they contribute to our understanding of the way knowledgeable citizens can use ‘cues’ to form their opinions about candidates. Politically the findings are relevant because they show that the *Spitzenkandidaten* campaigns resonated well with those citizens who had general and campaign-specific information at hand and those who were regularly exposed to quality news. Yet, this concerns only few citizens. It thus remains to be seen whether personalization of the campaigns contributes to political awareness and preference formation and can thereby contribute to alleviating the accountability deficit in the long run.

Expressing preferences for *Spitzenkandidaten*

Political awareness is likely to represent a crucial pre-condition enabling citizens to express their preferences towards the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Zaller (1992: 21) argues that news exposure is important, but not sufficient for voters to formulate opinions. Citizens also need to have factual information at hand in order to make an informed choice at the polls. In the following, we thus distinguish between news exposure and the extent to which citizens have acquired political information about the EU, and the *Spitzenkandidaten* in particular.

Existing research has shown that information about the EU, its institutions and politicians is widely available to citizens. News coverage during EP election campaigns has become more comprehensive in recent years (De Vreese et al. 2006; Schuck et al. 2011; Boomgaarden and de Vreese 2016) and the EP as well as individual members (MEPs) receive regular broadsheet coverage during non-election times (Gattermann 2013; Gattermann and Vasilopoulou 2015). Furthermore, research on the personalization of politics suggests that individual politicians (e.g., Langer 2007; Rahat and Sheafer 2007) and leaders in particular

(e.g., Boumans et al. 2013) receive increasingly more news attention at the expense of political parties and institutions. Even though we still know little about such trends in EU politics (Gattermann 2015), we may expect that the personalization of the EP election campaign would generate more media attention.

The *Spitzenkandidaten* had ‘substantial presence on the ground’ by their direct campaigns across Europe (Schmitt et al. 2015: 5) and participated in several pan-European televised debates, of which the first major debate took place in Maastricht on 28 April 2014 and was broadcasted and web-streamed by the pan-European channel Euronews. A recent study shows that the *Spitzenkandidaten* received more news attention during the ten weeks prior to Election Day than MEPs during 25 months of the 7th legislative term in France, the Netherlands and Germany (Gattermann 2015). This implies that the contestation for leadership in the EU was indeed picked up by the media during the 2014 EP elections.

Survey research has shown that news exposure can have positive effects on the intentions to turn out to vote (e.g., Aarts and Semetko 2003; De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006; De Vreese and Tobiasen 2007; Schmitt-Beck and Mackenrodt 2010; Schuck et al. 2014). We consider two interrelated ways in which news exposure affect turnout. First, media attention would increase citizens’ perceptions that there is something important at stake, and secondly, news exposure informs people about what’s at stake. To the extent that this second mechanism applies, we would expect that those citizens who are regularly exposed to news coverage in general will be better able to provide a voting preference for a certain *Spitzenkandidat*. However, we also expect these effects to be conditional upon the type of content. Aarts and Semetko (2003), for instance, show that exposure to public television had a positive effect on an individual’s decision to participate in general elections, while private television caused negative effects. Similarly, De Vreese and Tobiasen (2007) find that newspaper reading and watching news on public television programmes increased the likelihood of voters to turnout to vote in the 2004 EP elections. Moreover, research has shown that during EP elections European affairs are more visible in public broadcasting and in the quality press compared to private broadcasting and tabloids, respectively (e.g., De Vreese et al. 2006). We thus expect that only news exposure to public television and broadsheets has a significant, positive effect on the probability to indicate a voting preference for a *Spitzenkandidat*, while exposure to private and popular formats should not make a difference.

H1a: The higher their news exposure to quality news outlets, the more likely citizens are to formulate a preference for the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

However, exposure to information does not necessarily infer that citizens are fully aware of that information. Following Zaller (1992: 21), they also have to process the information that is available to them (e.g., Bartels 1996: 197; In the EU-context De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006). We apply the definition of political awareness by Zaller (1992: 21) and consider knowledge as an indicator of having acquired factual information. In line with much of the extant literature, we distinguish between *general* political information and *campaign-specific* information (e.g., Converse 1962; Chaffee et al. 1994; Nadeau et al. 2008). General political information can be understood as information that has been available prior to the election campaigns, such as general differences between political parties, whereas campaign-specific information relates to the candidates themselves and their different policy positions (Chaffee et al. 1994: 306).³

The acquisition of general political information is relevant for voting behaviour: Nadeau et al (2008: 240) show that it has a negative effect on volatility, meaning that those with high levels of general information are less likely to change their vote choice over the course of the campaigns. It does, however, have a positive effect through the information gains voters acquire during the course of the campaigns. Acquisition of campaign-specific information can increase the likelihood of volatility. In the EU context, information is also key to opinion formation and vote choice. Elenbaas et al. (2012) show that utilitarian performance judgements are positively influenced by acquisition of performance-specific information, while general political knowledge does not play a direct role. Yet, the effect of performance-relevant information is moderated by general political knowledge. Those with medium levels of general knowledge are most likely to be influenced by specific information, As regards voter behaviour in EU elections, De Vries et al. (2011) find that differing levels of general political knowledge have a positive effect on varying degrees of EU issue voting, that is the extent to which vote choice is being influenced by attitudes towards EU integration (De Vries 2007). Similarly, Hobolt (2007) finds an interaction effect of factual information about the EU and political preferences, which together determine vote choice in the Norwegian EU accession referendum of 1994. EU politics are quite complex and do not necessarily resemble

³ These two types of information correlate highly; those who have high levels of general political information available are also more likely to have more campaign-specific information at hand (Converse 1962: 586; see also Price and Zaller 1993; Nadeau et al. 2008).

political processes in the domestic political system with which citizens are more familiar. This complexity is also apparent in the *Spitzenkandidaten* nomination: it was not clear during the campaigns if and how the election outcome would translate into executive office. The Lisbon Treaty has provided sufficient room for interpretation, which the EP has used to its advantage. This led to institutional confrontations with the Council, which held the prerogatives to nominate the next President of the Commission. General information about EU politics is thus likely to be imperative for the ability of citizens to formulate preferences towards the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

H1b: The more comprehensive their acquired general political information about the EU, the more likely citizens are able to formulate preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

As argued above, general political information is not the only determinant of electoral preferences. Gelman and King (1993) as well as Arcenaux (2006) argue that campaigns enable voters, through learning, to form ‘enlightened preferences’ for parties or candidates. Evidence suggests that this is also case for EU elections and referendums. Even though De Vries et al. (2011) do not specifically test the effects of campaign-specific information at the individual level, they find that the context of higher media attention to the EU and more party contestation during the elections increases the extent of EU issue voting. Furthermore, Hobolt and Wittrock (2011) show that voters with additional information about the EU positions of parties are more likely to base their vote choice on their preferences towards EU integration (see also Hobolt 2007).

With particular view to the *Spitzenkandidaten* nomination, the difficulty for voters lay in linking the candidates with those national parties that indirectly supported the lead candidate. Traditionally, voters are unable to vote for a European party group directly, but elect representatives of national parties. In other words, Dutch voters were required to understand that a vote for the Christian Democrats (CDA) means an indirect support for the EPP and therewith also their lead candidate Jean-Claude Juncker. Due to this requirement of a sufficient amount of political awareness (Zaller 1992), we may also expect that campaign-specific information qualifies citizens to formulate a preference for a *Spitzenkandidat*. Conversely, those who only have very little or no information are unlikely to be able to formulate a preference since they are unlikely to have made the connection between their vote for a national party and the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

H1c: Citizens are more able to formulate a preference for the *Spitzenkandidaten*, the more campaign-specific information they have acquired about them.

Explaining variations in preferences for *Spitzenkandidaten*

Having discussed our hypotheses regarding the first main question -- what explains whether people can formulate preferences for *Spitzenkandidaten* – we now turn to the question what explains variations in such perceptions? Why would someone have a high preference for Schultz and dislike Verhofstadt? To answer this question, it is important to realize that at the start of the campaign the *Spitzenkandidaten* were hardly known outside their own countries. When they were nominated by the European party groups to lead the Europe-wide campaigns, they were prominent politicians in their own countries and well known among the EU in-crowd, but not among the wider public in other countries. This raises the question on what basis citizens can form their judgments of candidates of whom they know very little.

The relevant literature on voting behaviour shows that voters who lack ‘encyclopaedic’ information about parties or candidates can often make use of ‘cues’, or ‘information shortcuts’, which help them form their political preferences (e.g., Lupia 1994; Toka 2008). Electoral research since the 1950s has repeatedly demonstrated that most voters have limited political knowledge (e.g., Campbell 1960; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Hobolt 2007). Yet, even those with limited knowledge are often able to make a reasoned choice if they use the little information that they have in a smart way (e.g., Popkin, 1991; Sniderman 2000; Van der Brug, 1999), albeit that choices derived from these cues may often be suboptimal (e.g., Lau and Redlawsk 2001). So, in the absence of concrete knowledge about the issue positions of parties, citizens often rely on more general information they have about these parties, such as their left-right positions (e.g., Downs 1957; Van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). Other important heuristics that have been identified are partisan information (e.g., Squire and Smith 1988; Hobolt 2007), campaign events (Lodge et al. 1995) and perceptions of corruption (Toka 2008).

In the context of EP elections it has been well established that voters, lacking information about European affairs, often take cues from national politics (Anderson 1998). This is so frequent that European elections have even been labelled second-order national elections (e.g., Reif and Schmitt 1980; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; Van der Brug and Van der Eijk

2007). There are various cues that voters can take from national politics, such as their satisfaction with the incumbent parties, scandals, economic developments, evaluations of party leaders and long term attachments to national parties through party identification or ideological similarities. In this paper we focus only on these later two aspects: national party preferences and ideological distance.

If voters have little information about the *Spitzenkandidaten*, we believe it makes sense for them to rely on these long terms factors as cues. So, a Dutch person with a strong preference for the national CDA could use this as a cue to evaluate Junker of the EPP. If she dislikes the Dutch Social Democrats (PvdA), she could equally use this as a cue to derive a less positive evaluation of the *Spitzenkandidat* of the Social democratic party group Schulz. Another cue that voters can use to evaluate the *Spitzenkandidaten* would be through the lens of ideology. If someone is left-leaning and thus perceives himself to be ideologically close to the PvdA and far from the VVD (liberals), he might use this as a heuristic to evaluate Schulz more positively than Verhofstadt. So, we derive the following two hypotheses:

H2a: National party preferences will positively affect the preferences of the *Spitzenkandidat* of the affiliated party group.

H3a: Ideological distances to the affiliated national party will have a negative effect on preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

However, the extent to which voters are able to use these national party preferences as a heuristic from which to derive information about the candidates will depend crucially on their pre-existing knowledge. It has been well established in the literature that the extent of issue voting increases with the knowledge about party positions (e.g., Alvarez 1997; Steenbergen et. al., 2007; Hobolt, 2009; De Vries et al. 2011). In the case of this particular study, the moderating role of political information seems particularly relevant. If one does not know that Schulz is the *Spitzenkandidat* of the social democratic party group, ideological orientations as well as national party affiliations are not very useful devices to evaluate him. General political knowledge might be important for using national party orientations as a cue. One with hardly any knowledge of the national parties or their ideological positions will not be able to use this information. However, even a more crucial piece of information is the party political information of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Without such campaign specific

information, it would be very difficult to use national party affiliations or left-right orientations as cues. From this we derive the following hypotheses:

H2b: The effect of national party affiliations (specified under H2a) will increase with the level of general political knowledge.

H2c: The effect of national party affiliations (specified under H2a) will increase with the level of campaign specific information.

H3b: The effect of left-right distances (specified under H3a) will increase with the level of general political knowledge.

H3c: The effect of left-right distances (specified under H3a) will increase with the level of campaign specific information.

Data and Methods

Sample and data

Our analysis rests on original survey data collected within a four-wave panel study in the Netherlands between December 2013 and June 2014 in the context of the EP elections on 22 May 2014. It is part of the ‘2014 European Election Campaign Study’ (AUTHORS, 2014). The survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI), and the fieldwork was carried out by TNS NIPO Netherlands, which is a research organisation that complies with the ESOMAR guidelines for survey research approved under ISO. We employ survey questions up until wave three, which contains the relevant information for our dependent variables. The fieldwork for the third wave was conducted between 17 and 28 April 2014; the first wave was fielded between 13 December 2013 and 19 January 2014 and data for the second wave was collected between 20 and 30 March 2014. The N comprises 2189 in the first wave (response rate: 78.1%), 1819 in the second wave two (re-contact rate: 83.1%) and 1537 in the third wave (re-contact rate: 84.5%). More information about the samples can be found in the documentation by AUTHORS (2014), who consider the data representative in terms of age, gender and education compared to census data.

The Netherlands represent an ideal political context for studying electoral support for the *Spitzenkandidaten* during the 2014 European election campaigns: the three prominent *Spitzenkandidaten*, who are subject to this study (Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz and Guy Verhofstadt), come from three neighbouring countries, Luxembourg, Germany and Belgium, respectively. All three politicians were not well known in the Netherlands before the campaign and none of them was from the Netherlands, so that nationality is unlikely to play an important role in the evaluations.

At the start of the campaign the party groups in the European Parliament agreed that the Spitzenkandidat of the largest party group would be nominated to become President of the Commission. This is how the debates of the Spitzenkandidaten were presented to the European public, even though the heads of state in the European Council remained largely silent during the campaigns and seemingly left their options open (see also Hobolt 2014). These developments thus represent an ideal setting for our study which seeks to investigate whether citizens are able to formulate a preference for an individual candidate, and what explains their preferences.

Dependent variables and design issues

Our dependent variables are electoral preferences for Spitzenkandidaten. These preferences were measured by means of survey questions which are intended to be as closely related as possible to electoral preferences without being contaminated by personality characteristics such as charm, friendliness, etcetera. These kinds of personality characteristics could themselves influence electoral preferences, but we were looking for a measure that taps into such preferences themselves. We operationalized the dependent variable by means of a short battery of questions, which were included in the third wave: ‘The three European Party Families (the Social Democrats, the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Democrats) have each presented a European candidate to be elected as President of the European Commission by the new Parliament. If you were able to vote for a candidate directly, how probable are you to vote for the following politicians? Please specify your views on a 10-point scale where 1 means “not at all probable” and 10 means “very probable”.’ Respondents were asked to indicate their probability to vote for Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz and Guy

Verhofstadt.⁴ The order of the candidates was randomized. None of the respondents received information about the national or European party family affiliation of the candidates. All respondents were given a ‘don’t know’ option. Furthermore, the sample of the third wave was split in two sub-samples to which respondents were randomly assigned: under the first condition respondents were given the question as presented above (n=789), respondents in the second condition (n=748) were additionally provided with the country of origin for each candidate (e.g., ‘Jean-Claude Juncker from Luxembourg’). We merge both sub-samples, but control for the country cue for each *Spitzenkandidat* with a dummy variable in the following analysis.

To answer our first research question, we rely on a set of binary variables which indicate whether or not respondents expressed a vote preference for each *Spitzenkandidat*, which is coded as 1 if they did. The majority of respondents opted for ‘don’t know’ (coded as 0) on each candidate, although fewer respondents chose this option for Verhofstadt ($M=0.42$, $SD=0.49$) than for Juncker ($M=0.39$, $SD=0.49$) and Schulz ($M=0.39$, $SD=0.49$). To explain variation in these variables we rely on logistic regression.

To answer our second and third research questions, which focus on an explanation of differences in the evaluations of the three Spitzenkandidaten, we exclude the ‘don’t knows’ on each candidate and created a data set in a ‘stacked’ format. In this data set, the respondent*candidate is the unit of analysis, so that each respondent appears as many times as there are candidates for whom s/he expressed a preference (maximally three times). We are primarily interested in the within-voter variation in their preferences towards the three candidates (thus explaining why someone prefers candidate A over B), rather than the between-voter variation (why do some people express higher preferences than others to all candidates). We therefore analyse this data set by means of multi-level analyses with fixed effects at the level of individual respondents. Consequently, individual level controls which do not vary within individuals are not included in these analyses. As robustness checks, we also present random effects analyses with individual level controls in the appendix. The results are substantively very similar.

⁴ In addition, the answer options included a control, Jeroen Dijsselbloem, who was Dutch Finance Minister and President of the Eurogroup at the time. Since, he was not actually standing and he was always kept last in the answer options in both sub-samples, we exclude him from our analysis.

Independent variables

Throughout the analyses we use the same independent variables to test our hypotheses in the different regression models. Our main independent variables correspond to the hypotheses outlined above and are subject to both explanatory analyses. We operationalize news exposure (*H1a*) by four items surveyed in the third wave. *Public TV exposure* ($M=3.31$, $SD=2.69$) and *private TV exposure* ($M=2.19$, $SD=2.42$) each consist of the mean number of days per week a respondent watches either a public (NOS) or private (RTL) news programme on television and range from 0 to 7. For the newspaper items we aggregated the daily exposure to four broadsheets (NRC Handelsblad, NRC Next, Trouw, De Volkskrant) and four tabloids (Algemeen Dagblad, De Telegraaf, Metro and Spits), respectively to form the variables *broadsheet exposure* ($M=0.99$, $SD=2.56$) and *tabloid exposure* ($M=2.67$, $SD=3.96$), respectively.

Acquisition of political information is measured by three variables, which we operationalized in a similar manner as Nadeau et al. (2008: 235) and Elenbaas et al. (2012: 737), but with fewer and different items. The first variable, *general EU information* (*H1b, H2b, H3b*), comprises three questions of the third wave. These enquire about the number of Dutch MEPs after the 2014 elections, the current number of EU member states, and current EP President. Each question comprised five answer categories to choose from, plus a ‘don’t know’ option. We recoded all three variables into binary variables which are 1 if the correct answers were provided, and 0 if not. We then added them up to form a scale, ranging from 0 to 3 ($M=0.55$, $SD=0.84$). The Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20), which is an equivalent to Cronbach’s α as a measure of internal consistency for dichotomous variables (see also Elenbaas et al. (2012: 750)), is 0.562.

We measure campaign-specific information (*H1c, H2c, H3c*) by an additive scale of right answers to three questions concerning the party family of the three *Spitzenkandidaten* under study. In the third wave respondents were asked the following: ‘Several European political parties, in which Dutch political parties cooperate with other parties in Europe, have nominated a candidate for the presidency of the European Commission, should they become the largest political group in the European Parliament after the elections. Please indicate for each of the following politicians by which party they were nominated for presidency of the European Commission.’ The answering options comprised six major European party groups and the respective affiliated Dutch parties, in addition to a ‘don’t know’ and a ‘none of the

above' answer category. As before, correct answers were added up to form a scale that ranges from 0 to 3. The resulting variable *Campaign information* ($M=0.28$, $SD=0.71$, $KR-20=0.775$) correlates with the former variable, *general EU information* ($r=0.372$, $p<.001$).

National party preferences (needed for testing *H2a*, *H2b* and *H2c*) were measured by asking respondents to indicate on a 10-point scale "how likely is it that you will ever vote for this party". In the stacked data matrix these scores were matched to the preferences for each *Spitzenkandidat* of the related party group: preferences for the Dutch Christian Democrats (CDA) which are part of the EPP ($M=3.27$, $SD=2.73$) were matched with preferences for Juncker, the Labour party (PvDA) which belong to the S&D ($M=3.27$, $SD=2.70$) was matched to Schultz, and two liberal parties, VVD ($M=3.54$, $SD=2.94$) and D66 ($M=4.25$, $SD=2.99$), which both form part of the ALDE group were linked to Verhoffstadt.⁵

Finally, we measure ideological distance on the left-right scale (*Left-right distance*) by the absolute distance of respondents' self-placement and the respective party placements from the first wave. It ranges from 0 to 10 ($M=2.94$, $SD=2.37$). Left-right distances to these national parties were also linked to preferences for Spitzenkandidaten in the way we just described.

To control for EU attitudes we use five factors, which are averaged from a total of 17 survey questions of the third wave, which range from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'). The five factors, identified by confirmatory factor analysis, correspond to those identified by Boomgaarden et al. (2011) and De Vreese et al. (2015): *Negative affection* ($M=3.01$, $SD=1.55$, Cronbach's $\alpha=0.905$), *Utilitarianism and Idealism* ($M=3.76$, $SD=1.29$, $\alpha=0.856$), *Performance* ($M=3.06$, $SD=1.19$, $\alpha=0.870$), *Identity* ($M=2.73$, $SD=1.35$, $\alpha=0.863$) and *Strengthening* ($M=2.81$, $SD=1.26$, $\alpha=0.723$).

We add the control variable *national political information* which comprises two questions about national politics in the third wave: one asked about the name of the current Minister of Foreign Affairs; the other one asked about the usual length of the legislative term of the Dutch lower house. It was calculated in a similar way as the other information variables. The final variable ranges from 0 to 2 ($M=1.56$, $SD=0.65$, $KR-20=0.472$). Its correlations with the campaign-specific information variable is .205 ($p<.001$); its correlation with the general EU

⁵ Nb.: We took the means of the party identifications with the VVD and D66, respectively, in order to match them to the probability to vote for Verhoffstadt.

information variable is .237 ($p < .001$). The remaining control variables comprise *age*, gender (dummy *female*), *left-right self-placement* of the respondent (in the first set of models), and education (dummy variables *higher* and *lower education*, reference category: medium-level education) which were asked in the first wave. *Government satisfaction* is measured by the question ‘The current national government is doing a good job’ in the third wave with answer categories ranging from 1 (‘strongly disagree’) to 7 (‘strongly agree’). The descriptive statistics can be found in the appendix.

Findings

We begin our analysis by answering our first research question which asks what explains whether citizens are able to formulate a preference towards a certain *Spitzenkandidat*. Table 1 provides the logistic regression models for each of the *Spitzenkandidaten* Juncker, Schulz and Verhofstadt, respectively. We report b coefficients and robust standard errors of our main effects on the dependent variable, which assesses whether citizens are able to formulate an opinion towards each of the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

[Table 1 about here]

Our first set of hypotheses stipulates that information acquisition and news exposure can explain why some citizens are able to provide their preference for the *Spitzenkandidaten*. We expected that news exposure to quality outlets (*H1a*), i.e. public broadcasting television programmes and broadsheets have a positive effect on the probability of citizens to express their opinion towards the candidates. Indeed, the models show that exposure to public television and broadsheets is significant for all three candidates. Figure 1 depicts these effects; the predicted probabilities can be found in Appendix Table A3. It shows that those with full exposure are between 18 and 20 per cent more likely to be able to formulate a preference towards the *Spitzenkandidaten* compared to those with no exposure. Similarly, higher exposure to broadsheets also has a positive effect on the probability of citizens to provide a preference towards each of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. However, the confidence intervals become larger with rising levels of broadsheet exposure as shown in Figure 1. These findings provide support for our first hypothesis H1a, although exposure to tabloids also significantly increases the ability to express a preference for Juncker and Verhofstadt.

Furthermore, political information is a strong predictor of citizens' ability to provide a preference for each of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Table 1 shows that general information about the EU as well as campaign-specific information have a positive effect for all candidates. The predicted probabilities shown in Figure 1 demonstrate that maximum levels of EU information are responsible for about 24 per cent increase in the probability of citizens to be able to indicate their preference for Schulz and Juncker, and a 23 per cent increase to do so for Verhofstadt compared to low levels of general information about the EU. The figure also shows that those with little information already have a higher probability to indicate their preference towards the latter, presumably because citizens are better able to recognise the Flemish Verhofstadt compared to the other two candidates. We find similar effects of campaign-specific information on the probability of citizens to express a preference for all candidates. Here, the difference between minimum and maximum levels of campaign-specific information shows that comprehensive information about the *Spitzenkandidaten* can increase the probability to indicate a preference by more than 50%.. In sum, this effect is stronger than that of quality news exposure and general EU information.

[Figure 1 about here]

Our results therefore lend support to hypotheses H1b and H1c. They underline our argument that citizens are better able to formulate an opinion towards the *Spitzenkandidaten* if they have general information about EU politics as well as campaign-specific information of the *Spitzenkandidaten* given the complexity of the institutional relations in the EU and the abstract relationship between national parties and the nominations of the European party groups. The large effects of campaign-specific information underline that preference formation during European election campaigns is highly conditional upon the information available to citizens and voters. However, information about national politics also matters. Our control variable shows that it has a significant, positive effect for all candidates.

The effects of our control variables education and age have positive effects, although these are not consistent for all candidates. The effect of gender is significant and negative implying that men are more likely to indicate a preference for each of the *Spitzenkandidaten* compared to women. Furthermore, we find for all candidates that respondents who received a country cue less often opted for the 'don't know' response than respondents of the first group of our study. Interestingly, one of our factors that measures EU attitudes in terms of negative affection has a statistically significant effect on the probability to express an opinion towards

Schulz and Verhofstadt. The effect is positive, but given that the variable is coded in such a way that higher values indicate more negative affection, the results imply that those who have more negative feelings about the EU (e.g., anger, fear, disgust) are more likely to express an opinion towards these two *Spitzenkandidaten*. However, for Juncker we find a positive effect of the extent to which citizens are satisfied with the performance of the EU on the likelihood to express an opinion towards him. Left-right self-placement has no effect, but government satisfaction has negative effects in the case of Juncker and Schulz, suggesting that those who are more satisfied with the current government are less likely to formulate a preference towards these two candidates.

Our next analysis seeks to answer our second and third research questions concerning the factors responsible for variation in distribution of voter preferences towards the *Spitzenkandidaten*, and the moderating role of political awareness in particular. Table 2 shows the results of the fixed effects regression explaining variation in voter preferences for all candidates.

[Table 2 about here]

We are interested in whether citizens base their preferences to the *Spitzenkandidaten* on their party identification (H2a) or their ideological proximity to the candidate's party on the left-right dimension (H3a). The results lend support to our assumptions. Model 1 shows that an increase in the probability to vote for the respective national party also means an increase by 0.15 in the probability to vote for the *Spitzenkandidat* who is supported by that party, controlling for everything else. In line with our expectations, left-right distance generates a negative effect on the dependent variable: the further away an individual voter from the respective party stances, the less likely she is to support the *Spitzenkandidat* ($b=-0.06$, Model 4). Taken together, both results suggest that citizens indeed use cues in their evaluations of the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

We expected further that information becomes imperative for citizens to align their preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten* with their party identifications and ideological orientations. The results reported in Model 2 and 3 show that the relevance of party identification as a cue for the preference formation towards the candidates increases with higher levels of general political information about the EU ($b=0.06$) as well as campaign-specific information ($b=0.17$), lending support to hypotheses H2b and H2c, respectively.

Figure 2 visualizes these effects and highlights the crucial importance of information: for those who have no such information at hand, party identification does not matter for the preference formation towards the *Spitzenkandidaten*. However, those who are better informed positively align their party preferences with their preferences for the European lead candidates. In comparison, the interaction effects are even stronger for campaign-specific information than for general EU information. Similarly, as Table 3 ($b=0.05$; Model 5) and Figure 2 demonstrate, the interaction effect between general EU information and left-right distance is weaker than that of campaign-specific information, which suggests that general knowledge about EU politics does not matter much for the extent to which citizens rely on cues in terms of ideological preferences in their preference formation towards the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Yet again, campaign-specific information plays a crucial role: the negative effect of the left-right distance is indeed moderated by voter knowledge about the *Spitzenkandidaten* ($b=-0.15$, Model 6). The visualization of this moderating effect in Figure 2 shows that again citizens with no campaign-specific information do not use their ideological preferences as cues in providing their preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Instead, their use of this cue increases with higher levels of campaign-specific information. These results thus lend support to H3c.

[Figure 2 about here]

Conclusions

This study set out to examine the preference formation of Dutch citizens towards the *Spitzenkandidaten* during the 2014 EP election campaign. Our aim was two-fold: firstly we were interested in those factors that determine whether citizens are able to formulate a preference towards a certain *Spitzenkandidat*. Secondly, we sought to explain the variation in their distribution of preferences. Based on the literature on citizens' preference formation, we put forward three main explanatory factors for answering the first question: exposure to quality news as well as acquisition of EU political information and of campaign-specific information about the *Spitzenkandidaten* which can be summoned under what Zaller (1992) calls political awareness. Furthermore, we argued that information also moderates the effects of national party affiliations or left-right orientations, which citizens are expected to use as cues in their evaluations of the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

Our results show that exposure to public television news programmes and broadsheet reading explains the probability of citizens to indicate a preference for the *Spitzenkandidaten*. These findings are in line with research that finds that exposure to quality news content or hard news has a positive effect on political participation (e.g., Aarts and Semetko 2003; Schmitt-Beck and Mackenrodt 2010). However, we also find a positive effect of tabloid exposure. The literature would expect no or a negative effect of such news outlets (e.g., Aarts and Semetko 2003; De Vreese and Tobiasen 2007), but De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) also find that attention to tabloid newspapers has a positive effect on the intention of Dutch voters to participate in a hypothetical EU referendum. We are unable to assess whether this is due to content features of this news coverage in tabloids.

Furthermore, both general information about the EU and campaign-specific information represent important pre-conditions for citizens to be able to formulate a preference towards each of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. This resonates with research on voting behaviour and opinion formation in the EU context which underlines the importance of knowledge about European affairs (e.g., Hobolt 2007; De Vries et al. 2011) and specific information either about party positions (Hobolt and Wittrock 2011) or EU performances (Elenbaas et al. 2012). We believe that in the context of the 2014 elections acquiring general political information is crucial because of the complexity of the investiture procedure; and knowledge of the *Spitzenkandidaten* becomes imperative since citizens elect national parties at the polls and hence need to have information about which candidate these parties support. These findings lend support to the argument of Gelman and King (1993) and Arcenaux (2006) as citizens are supposedly able to formulate ‘enlightened preferences’ on all candidates.

Our results also confirm earlier research showing how citizens can use cues to arrive at meaningful electoral decisions (e.g., Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1991; Sniderman 2000; Van der Brug, 1999; Hobolt 2008; Toka 2008). Even though we did not strictly study electoral decisions, our study shows that citizens can form meaningful preferences for candidates that are relatively unknown, by relying upon relevant party cues. However, most of the literature studies electoral contexts in which people with little knowledge can use cues to arrive at a reasoned choice. In the current context, we found that only the most knowledgeable are able to use these cues, while those citizens who have no or only little EU political and campaign-specific information do not use any cues of party identification or ideological orientations in their evaluations of the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

Given the importance of news exposure and information, only few citizens were actually able to provide their probability to vote for each *Spitzenkandidat*. While this has rather negative implications for democratic participation of EU citizens in EU elections, we should be careful not to dismiss the *Spitzenkandidaten* campaigns right away. Druckman (2014: 478) argues that we should be persuaded of ‘the *need to be realistic* about what to expect of citizens and avoid setting impossible bars such as “full information”’ (emphasis in the original). European elections are still second-order and as such it is no surprise that many citizens are not sufficiently informed to express their opinion. This phenomenon can also be observed elsewhere: Converse (1962: 586), for instance, argues that voters in the US political context are likely to have more comprehensive information about candidates in US presidential elections than about candidates in Congress elections. Moreover, it is widely accepted that ‘few citizens in democratic countries actually measure up to this idealized portrait, and most appear to fall far short of it’ (Dahl 1992: 46; see also Berelson et al. 1954: 308). It was the first time that European election campaigns were influenced by the *Spitzenkandidaten*; and the consequences of their nomination were still unknown during the campaign. Our finding that campaign-specific information is of crucial importance for citizens’ ability to formulate a political preference in EU elections thus also represents a recommendation for the 2019 elections to foster the campaign environment at the European level.

Our results, which show that those citizens who are politically aware are also able to align their preferences for each *Spitzenkandidat* with their national party preferences as well as with their ideological orientation, underline our recommendation. To say it with the words of Hobolt and Tilley (2014) these citizens ‘get it right’. Our analysis was based on a hypothetical question but the findings nevertheless imply that informed citizens and those who are regularly exposed to news might actually be able to hold their EU representatives accountable, provided they are given the opportunity to do so. Thus, depending on their intensity, the *Spitzenkandidaten* campaigns may be able to contribute to alleviating the EU’s alleged accountability deficit.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Logistic regression, predicting the ability to express a voting preference for the *Spitzenkandidaten*

	Juncker		Schulz		Verhofstadt	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
General EU information	0.333***	0.083	0.324***	0.081	0.311***	0.085
Campaign information	0.956***	0.148	0.872***	0.141	1.031***	0.177
Public TV news exposure	0.128***	0.029	0.112***	0.028	0.107***	0.028
Private TV news exposure	0.014	0.029	0.022	0.028	-0.011	0.029
Broadsheet exposure	0.053*	0.028	0.063**	0.028	0.093***	0.03
Tabloid exposure	0.032*	0.018	0.027	0.018	0.032*	0.018
Negative affection	0.080	0.053	0.096*	0.053	0.090*	0.054
Performance	0.166**	0.082	0.132	0.083	0.068	0.081
Identity	-0.012	0.068	0.001	0.069	-0.005	0.07
Utilitarianism/idealism	0.005	0.083	0.013	0.082	0.062	0.081
Strengthening	-0.008	0.068	0.003	0.067	0.002	0.068
PTV CDA EU14	0.002	0.026	0.001	0.026	0.001	0.026
PTV PvdA EU14	0.018	0.03	0.013	0.029	0.006	0.03
PTV VVD EU14	0.027	0.028	0.024	0.028	0.029	0.029
PTV D66 EU14	-0.024	0.026	-0.021	0.026	-0.005	0.026
Nat. political information	0.207*	0.125	0.204*	0.122	0.286**	0.124
Left-right self-placement	0.027	0.036	0.011	0.035	0.013	0.036
Government satisfaction	-0.124**	0.057	-0.099*	0.057	-0.075	0.056
Age	0.007	0.005	0.008*	0.005	0.015***	0.005
Lower education	0.146	0.192	0.131	0.19	0.070	0.191
Higher education	0.264*	0.154	0.116	0.155	0.342**	0.155
Female	-0.534***	0.131	-0.523***	0.13	-0.504***	0.132
Country cue	0.312**	0.132	0.381***	0.131	0.378***	0.132
Constant	-2.630***	0.496	-2.584***	0.492	-3.052***	0.507
N	1246		1246		1246	
-2 log likelihood	-702.592		-714.408		-696.225	
Pseudo R Squared	0.173		0.160		0.191	

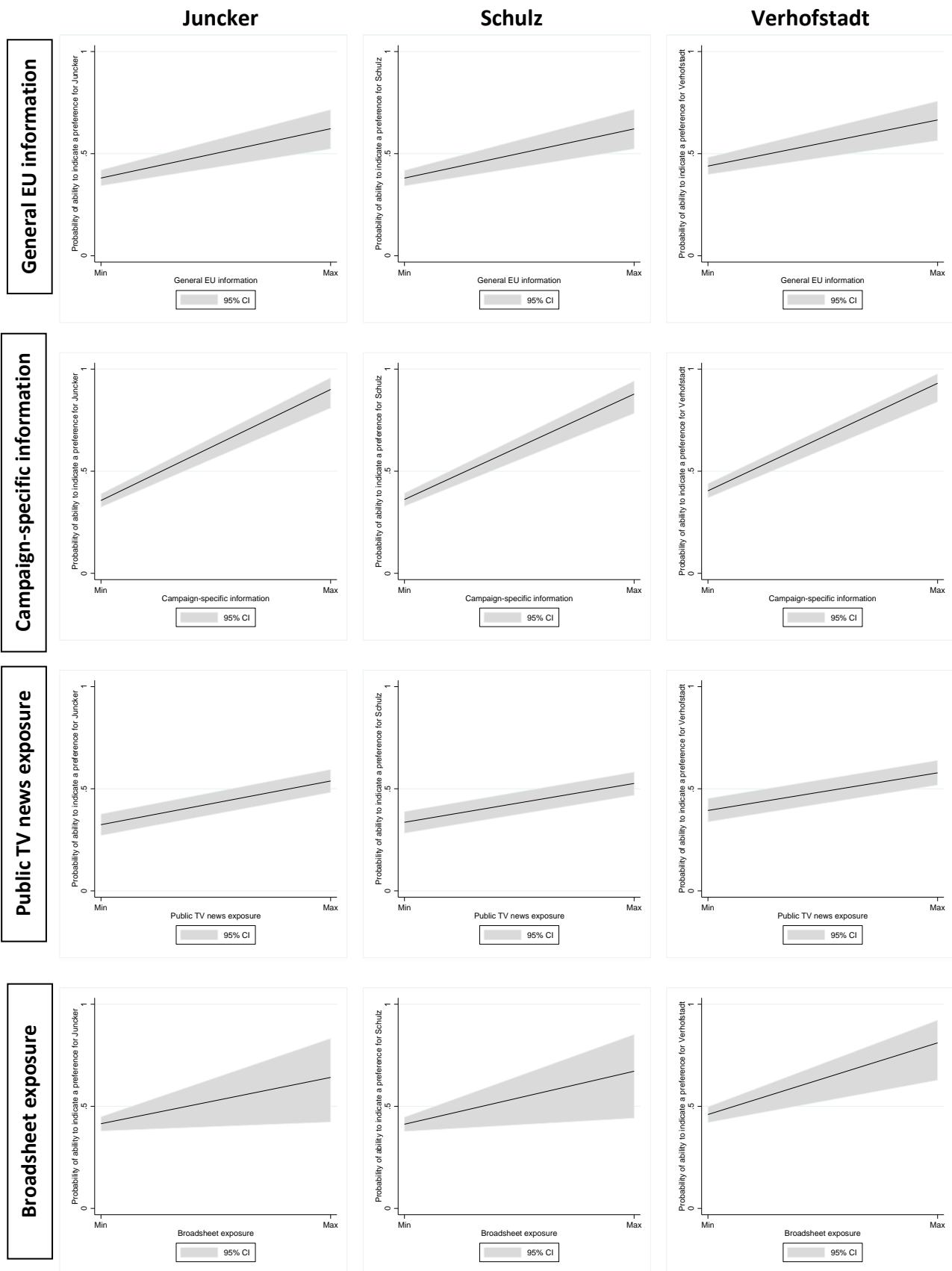
Notes: * p<.1; ** p<.05; *** p<.01; dependent variable: don't know (0) vs. expressing voting preference towards *Spitzenkandidat* (1), robust standard errors

Table 2. Fixed-effects regression, explaining variation in voting preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
PTV national party EU14	0.152*** (0.025)	0.097*** (0.030)	0.010 (0.024)			
General EU information* PTV national party EU14		0.063** (0.026)				
Campaign information* PTV national party EU14			0.173*** (0.023)			
Left-right distance				-0.055** (0.025)	-0.016 (0.029)	0.050** (0.025)
General EU information* Left-right distance					-0.047* (0.027)	
Campaign information* Left-right distance						-0.152*** (0.027)
Constant	3.370*** (0.095)	3.373*** (0.094)	3.489*** (0.081)	4.279*** (0.073)	4.277*** (0.072)	4.253*** (0.067)
N	1822	1822	1822	1600	1600	1600
N groups	666	666	666	586	586	586
R Squared within	0.052	0.060	0.126	0.005	0.009	0.044
R Squared between	0.103	0.097	0.028	0.020	0.001	0.002
R Squared overall	0.089	0.098	0.060	0.015	0.000	0.000

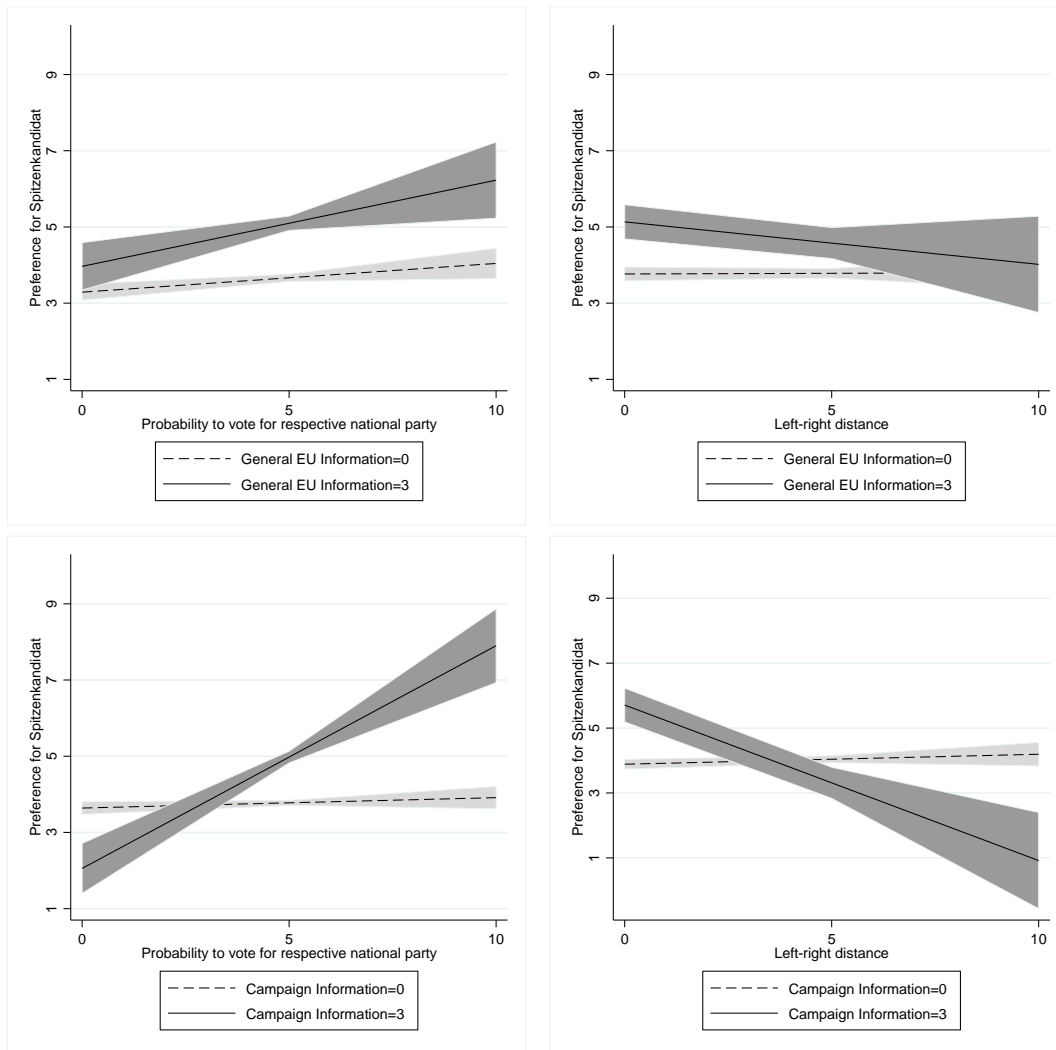
Notes: * p<.1; ** p<.05; *** p<.01; dependent variable: voting preference for a *Spitzenkandidat* (1-10), robust standard errors in parentheses

Figure 1. Probability of ability to express a preference for each *Spitzenkandidat*



Note: calculations are based on Table A3.

Figure 2. The effects of party identification and left-right distance on preference for a Spitzenkandidat at different levels of information



Note: lines represent expected values and shadowed areas 95% confidence intervals. The calculations are based on individual regression models testing the main effect on the dependent variable for different samples of general EU and campaign-specific information, respectively.

Appendix

Table A1. Descriptive statistics for full sample of the third wave (corresponding to the analysis reported in Table 1)

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
General EU information	1537	.00	3.00	.5504	.83866
Campaign information	1537	.00	3.00	.2785	.71024
Public TV news exposure	1537	.00	7.00	3.3071	2.68860
Private TV news exposure	1537	.00	7.00	2.1932	2.42432
Broadsheet exposure	1537	.00	18.00	.9948	2.56351
Tabloid exposure	1537	.00	28.00	2.6701	3.96237
Negative affection	1537	1.00	7.00	3.0073	1.55186
Performance	1537	1.00	7.00	3.0568	1.19464
Identity	1537	1.00	7.00	3.0525	1.18542
Utilitarianism/idealism	1537	1.00	7.00	2.7274	1.35066
Strengthening	1537	1.00	7.00	2.8124	1.25601
PTV CDA EU14	1447	1	10	3.27	2.726
PTV PvdA EU14	1441	1	10	3.27	2.701
PTV VVD EU14	1441	1	10	3.54	2.938
PTV D66 EU14	1441	1	10	4.25	2.993
Nat. political information	1537	.00	2.00	1.5615	.65274
Left-right self-placement	1617	0	10	5.25	2.281
Government satisfaction	1537	1	7	3.22	1.457
Age	1907	18	94	48.68	17.148
Lower education	1907	.00	1.00	.1736	.37884
Higher education	1907	.00	1.00	.3141	.46428
Female	1907	.00	1.00	.5039	.50012
Country cue	1537	.00	1.00	.4867	.49998

Table A2. Descriptive statistics for those who did not express an opinion on all three Spitzenkandidaten

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
General EU information	968	.00	3.00	.3926	.69926
Campaign information	968	.00	3.00	.0857	.37761
Public TV news exposure	968	.00	7.00	2.8295	2.58243
Private TV news exposure	968	.00	7.00	2.1643	2.38117
Broadsheet exposure	968	.00	18.00	.6209	1.96922
Tabloid exposure	968	.00	28.00	2.3647	3.82263
Negative affection	968	1.00	7.00	3.0222	1.48520
Performance	968	1.00	6.75	3.0488	1.16559
Identity	968	1.00	7.00	2.6921	1.28096
Utilitarianism/idealism	968	1.00	7.00	3.6803	1.20567
Strengthening	968	1.00	7.00	2.7758	1.16190
PTV CDA EU14	888	1	10	3.18	2.697
PTV PvdA EU14	884	1	10	3.25	2.661
PTV VVD EU14	884	1	10	3.44	2.881
PTV D66 EU14	883	1	10	4.21	2.990
Nat. political information	968	.00	2.00	1.4669	.68591
Left-right self-placement	788	0	10	5.19	2.263
Government satisfaction	968	1	7	3.21	1.405
Age	968	18	92	46.37	16.913
Lower education	968	.00	1.00	.1756	.38069
Higher education	968	.00	1.00	.2810	.44972
Female	968	.00	1.00	.5599	.49665
Country cue	968	.00	1.00	.4680	.49923

Table A3. Predicted probabilities

	Juncker		Schulz		Verhofstadt	
	Prob.	95% CI	Prob.	95% CI	Prob.	95% CI
General EU information						
Minimum	0.381	0.343-0.420	0.380	0.342-0.418	0.439	0.398-0.482
Mean	0.429	0.399-0.464	0.429	0.398-0.462	0.487	0.451-0.520
Maximum	0.622	0.523-0.715	0.621	0.524-0.716	0.665	0.564-0.757
Campaign information						
Minimum	0.357	0.324-0.389	0.362	0.329-0.393	0.404	0.370-0.439
Mean	0.430	0.397-0.463	0.429	0.394-0.461	0.486	0.452-0.522
Maximum	0.900	0.810-0.958	0.878	0.783-0.942	0.930	0.839-0.977
Public TV news exposure						
Minimum	0.324	0.271-0.376	0.336	0.282-0.388	0.394	0.338-0.452
Mean	0.430	0.398-0.464	0.430	0.399-0.460	0.487	0.452-0.526
Maximum	0.531	0.482-0.594	0.526	0.468-0.582	0.578	0.518-0.639
Broadsheet exposure						
Minimum	0.415	0.379-0.449	0.412	0.377-0.447	0.460	0.421-0.498
Mean	0.430	0.399-0.463	0.430	0.399-0.463	0.487	0.451-0.520
Maximum	0.642	0.423-0.832	0.672	0.442-0.852	0.811	0.628-0.922

Notes: predicted probabilities of ability to express an opinion towards one of the *Spitzenkandidaten* (versus ‘don’t know’) based on main effects in Table 1; calculations estimated in Stata using CLARIFY software (King et al. 2000; Tomz et al. 2003), all other variables are kept at their mean

Table A4. Random-effects regression, explaining variation in voting preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
General EU information	0.242***	0.090	0.053	0.132	0.252***	0.091	0.224**	0.094	0.335***	0.109	0.207**	0.094
Campaign information	-0.075	0.090	-0.074	0.090	-0.657***	0.132	-0.056	0.092	-0.059	0.092	0.341***	0.111
Public TV news exposure	0.101***	0.035	0.102***	0.035	0.095***	0.035	0.102***	0.038	0.099***	0.038	0.099***	0.038
Private TV news exposure	0.011	0.034	0.014	0.034	0.009	0.034	0.01	0.036	0.011	0.036	0.011	0.036
Broadsheet exposure	0.013	0.023	0.014	0.023	0.010	0.023	0.003	0.023	0.001	0.023	0.001	0.023
Tabloid exposure	0.032	0.020	0.030	0.02	0.034*	0.020	0.028	0.021	0.029	0.021	0.030	0.021
PTV national party EU14	0.160***	0.023	0.118***	0.027	0.047**	0.022						
General EU information*			0.049**	0.023								
PTV national party EU14												
Campaign information*					0.147***	0.022						
PTV national party EU14												
Left-right distance							-0.060***	0.023	-0.028	0.027	0.031	0.024
General EU information*									-0.040	0.025		
Left-right distance												
Campaign information*											-0.136***	0.025
Left-right distance												
Negative affection	0.031	0.060	0.034	0.060	0.041	0.061	0.072	0.070	0.073	0.070	0.077	0.070
Performance	0.163	0.101	0.170*	0.100	0.182*	0.102	0.197*	0.108	0.201*	0.109	0.227**	0.109
Identity	0.289***	0.081	0.290***	0.081	0.281***	0.081	0.270***	0.091	0.270***	0.091	0.271***	0.091
Utilitarianism/idealism	0.137	0.095	0.133	0.095	0.145	0.096	0.228**	0.105	0.228**	0.106	0.214**	0.106
Strengthening	0.018	0.078	0.017	0.078	0.021	0.078	0.023	0.085	0.026	0.085	0.028	0.084
Nat. political information	0.109	0.160	0.122	0.161	0.136	0.164	-0.146	0.204	-0.145	0.204	-0.127	0.204
Government satisfaction	0.08	0.067	0.082	0.067	0.092	0.068	0.11	0.072	0.110	0.072	0.113	0.072
Age	0.007	0.005	0.007	0.005	0.008	0.005	0.004	0.072	0.005	0.006	0.004	0.006
Lower education	-0.068	0.233	-0.09	0.234	-0.100	0.234	-0.086	0.259	-0.102	0.260	-0.127	0.260
Higher education	0.373**	0.181	0.361**	0.183	0.423**	0.184	0.448**	0.197	0.448**	0.197	0.437**	0.197
Female	0.100	0.161	0.114	0.161	0.140	0.164	0.217	0.175	0.221	0.176	0.228	0.176
Country cue	0.266*	0.156	0.276*	0.157	0.283*	0.158	0.263	0.170	0.265	0.170	0.260	0.171
Constant	-0.460	0.576	-0.369	0.583	-0.283	0.588	0.271	0.730	0.156	0.730	-0.065	0.726
N	1822		1822		1822		1600		1600		1600	
N groups	666		666		666		586		586		586	
R Squared within	0.052		0.060		0.124		0.005		0.008		0.044	
R Squared between	0.255		0.252		0.239		0.215		0.214		0.211	
R Squared overall	0.214		0.214		0.220		0.164		0.165		0.171	

Notes: * p<.1; ** p<.05; *** p<.01; dependent variable: voting preference for a *Spitzenkandidat* (1-10), robust standard error

Table A5. Descriptive statistics corresponding to the analysis reported in Table A4

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
PTV for Spitzenkandidat (DV)	1837	1.00	10.00	3.9358	2.61848
General EU information	1837	.00	3.00	.8029	.96244
Campaign information	1837	.00	3.00	.5890	.95734
Public TV news exposure	1837	.00	7.00	4.1306	2.65096
Private TV news exposure	1837	.00	7.00	2.2444	2.49763
Broadsheet exposure	1837	.00	18.00	1.6298	3.23720
Tabloid exposure	1837	.00	21.00	3.1840	4.11476
Negative affection	1837	1.00	7.00	2.9477	1.64205
Performance	1837	1.00	7.00	3.0912	1.23614
Identity	1837	1.00	7.00	2.8173	1.46452
Utilitarianism/idealism	1837	1.00	7.00	3.9469	1.39354
Strengthening	1837	1.00	7.00	2.8848	1.39242
PTV national party EU14	1800	1.00	10.00	3.64	2.688
Nat. political information	1837	.00	2.00	1.7349	.54428
Left-right distance	1600	.00	10.00	2.9384	2.37030
Government satisfaction	1837	1.00	7.00	3.26	1.533
Age	1837	18	87	53.60	16.722
Lower education	1837	.00	1.00	.1590	.36573
Higher education	1837	.00	1.00	.3941	.48879
Female	1837	.00	1.00	.4241	.49433
Country cue	1837	.00	1.00	.5161	.49988