Same same but different?
Asymmetric perceptions of party issue strategies.

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Keywords: Political parties, issue strategies, voter perceptions

Abstract

Despite growing research into party issue strategies and campaign sentiment, we know little about the consequences of positive and negative party communication on different types of issues. To narrow this gap, we use a crowdsourced survey experiment with German participants to analyse how issue characteristics and sentiment strength influence perceptions of party campaign messages. We theorize that voters perceive party messages on valence issues more positively than those addressing position issues. We also expect that perceptions are conditional on a party's government status. Our analysis shows that respondents evaluate campaign messages on valence issues more positively, especially those from government parties. Statements from opposition parties are evaluated more positively on positional issues. These perceptual asymmetries point at limits and opportunities of issue-based campaigns and indicate how parties may improve public perceptions of their campaign communication by combining campaign sentiment and types of issues.

Introduction

Issue competition is of increasing importance to political parties (Dalton 2013; Green-Pedersen 2007). Parties may emphasize valence issues on which voters share the same preferences, such as lowering the crime rate or fighting corruption or stress their ideological positions on controversial issues, where voters strongly disagree, to appeal to their core constituency, for example to cut welfare benefits in order to reduce the national debt (Stokes 1963). Parties may also choose to focus on their own strengths or to criticize their opponents' record or proposals. Combining these observations, parties can highlight own achievements and policy proposals or attempt to discredit their opponents on valence or positional issues. Despite growing research into party campaigns across these dimensions (Crabtree et al 2020; Kosmidis et al. 2019), we know little about the consequences of these various party strategies. In order to fill this gap, this paper studies how voters perceive variation in the substantive focus (position or valence) and sentiment (positive, neutral, negative) of party communication.

Using a crowdsourced survey experiment with German respondents, we show that voters perceive campaign communication on valence issues more positively than messages on position issues. This effect is further conditioned by government status: voters evaluate valence messages from government parties more positively and perceive opposition parties more positively on position issues. These findings contribute to our understanding of party competition. It provides a direct test of the effects of campaign sentiment on different types of issues at the individual level. Moreover, it reveals that opportunities and limits of party issue strategies are contingent on a party's status in or out of office. Our findings thereby indicate that parties may improve public perceptions of their campaign communication by combining campaign sentiment and types of issues.

Theory

Most research focuses on either of the two established dimensions of election campaigns: content or focus (Crabtree et al. 2020). Content relates to competition over policy or valence, the latter reflecting some outcome or condition that reaches unanimous support or reject among voters (Stokes 1992: 143). This may tackle character attributes like competence or integrity (see e.g. Clark 2014), yet our focus is on issues where parties and voters converge, such as a low crime rate or fighting corruption. This contrasts with position issues on which voters and parties disagree about the outcomes, such as more or less immigration. Focus distinguishes communication on a party's own plans or achievements from that addressing its opponents. It includes positive or negative messages of varying sentiment strength (Haselmayer 2019). Despite numerous studies on issue-based campaign strategies (e.g. Kaplan et al. 2006; Sigelman and Buell 2004; Petrocik 1996; Budge & Farlie 1983), we know surprisingly little on positive and negative campaigning on issues or how voters perceive these strategies (but see: Haselmayer et al. 2020)[1]. This is even more important as recent studies indicate the electoral potential of issue-based negative campaigning, for example by attacking issue ownership (Lefevere et al. 2020; Seeberg 2020).

Perceptions of valence and position issues

Valence issues link "(…)parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the entire electorate" (Stokes 1963: 373). Voters unanimously endorse policies for lowering unemployment or fighting corruption (Stokes 1963, 1992) and parties cannot compete on these issues by shifting their positions (Enelow & Hinich 1982; MacDonald & Rabinowitz 1998). Instead, voters will evaluate the ability and commitment of parties to deliver the desired policy outcome, such as low unemployment. One way to attest of their commitment is to rely on

[1] Some studies focus on the effects of positive *or* negative messages (e.g. Seeberg 2020). Yet, we lack evidence for perceptual differences between them.

positive sentiment on these issues, as "as voters should consider the additional weight as a credible signal that this policy will be eventually implemented" (Kosmidis et al. 2019: 815). If positive messages are more credible, we should expect variation in their perception for different types of issues. If everyone agrees that corruption is undesirable, everyone should perceive messages lauding an initiative to fight corruption positively, simply because there is unanimous support for this policy goal. Conversely, support for European Integration is rather contested. Evaluations of a positive statement on this topic will more strongly depend on individual support (or reject) of the policy. Therefore, on average, voters should perceive positive messages on valence issues more positively than those on position issues. We could expect the reverse pattern for negative messages, yet, psychological and cognitive research shows that negative information cancels out other message attributes (e.g. Rozin and Royzmann 2001). This applies to personal characteristics or even partisan preferences (Haselmayer et al. 2020; Soroka 2014). This bias should also eliminate differences in perceptions of negative messages on position and valence issues. Therefore we expect a direct effect of the topical focus on message perception stemming from positive messages on valence issues[2]:

H1: Respondents evaluate campaign messages on valence issues more positively than messages on position issues.

Electoral effects of valence issues are not uniform for all parties. Competence evaluations are important predictors of vote choice for government parties, yet their impact is limited for opposition parties as voters rely on government competence as a benchmark (Green & Jennings 2012). Voters can easily assess the ability of government parties to handle policies but will find it difficult to predict whether opposition parties will deliver on these topics if they should obtain

[2] We provide a test for differences in perceptions of positive and negative messages and the issue type in Appendix C.

power (Stokes 1963, Clarke et al 2009, Green & Jennings 2012). This asymmetry points at a possible advantage of government parties positively addressing valence issues, which should affect voter perceptions of party messages. Government parties are in charge, they can implement policies and determine outcomes. Therefore, promising own initiatives or signalling consent over others' proposals on a valence issue should resonate more positively among voters. A government party announcing plans to fight corruption or lauding an initiative to do so provides a more credible signal of actual policy change than similar proposals made by an opposition party. Therefore, voters should evaluate these messages more positively simply because they are more reliable to actually produce the desired policy outcomes.

On position issues, individual policy preferences will vary by and large and guide the evaluation of party messages on issues, such as migration policies, European integration or welfare (e.g. Stokes 1963, 1992). On these issues, the surplus in credibility of government party communication could work in the opposite direction. As preferences vary, a government party announcing welfare cuts for deficit reduction should be a greater 'threat' to voters opposing such measures than similar proposals from an opposition party. The same applies to messages lauding initiatives for restrictive immigration policies, or to promote European Integration: those rejecting these measures should perceive these messages less positively if the undesired content is more likely to bear the (undesired) consequences. Therefore, respondents will perceive positive messages from opposition parties on position issues more positively than messages from government parties. For both types of issues, negativity bias should cancel out perceptual differences among respondents in negative communication (Soroka 2014). Accordingly, we expect perceptions of valence and position issues to be conditional on a parties government status:

H2a: Respondents evaluate messages on valence issues from government parties more positively than messages on valence issues from opposition parties.

H2b: Respondents evaluate messages on position issues from opposition parties more positively than messages on position issues from government parties.

Data & Methods

The analysis uses a crowdsourced survey experiment to study partisan biases in the perception of campaign messages about German parties in a sample of German users of the CrowdFlower platform. Negative campaigning is a rather common feature in German election campaigns (Maier & Jansen 2017). Comparative research (Walter 2014) suggests commonalities in negative campaigning in Germany with similar Western European multi-party systems such as the Netherlands. It also does not stand out with regard to a trend of declining partisanship (Dalton & Wattenberg 2000, Berglund et al. 2005) which leads us to expect that findings from the German context should also extend to countries with similar party systems.

To study whether issue focus and sentiment of campaign messages influence voters' perceptions of campaign communication we ran a factorial survey experiment. This allows to experimentally vary multiple conditions simultaneously and to design statistically efficient subsamples of the complete universe of combinations given by the varied conditions.

We present respondents with realistic party statements and ask them to determine their sentiment. Each respondent had to rate ten statements including a sponsor and a target party from the set of all relevant German parties: Social Democrats (SPD), Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU), Free Democratic Party (FDP), Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Left (Die Linke) and the Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen)[3]. We experimentally manipulated and randomized the predetermined sentiment (neutral, weakly or strongly positive/negative), sender

[3] These parties were either represented in the national parliament (Bundestag) during the survey or figured above the five-percent-threshold in voter surveys at that time (ARD- Wahlbarometer Sonntagsfrage, n=1,006, February 2017).

and target parties as well as the political topic (economy, welfare, corruption, immigration, crime, and European Integration) for each sentence. We present sample vignettes, on position and valence issues below. Underlined parts varied in our experiment, randomized words used to avoid redundancy are in italics.

(1) The SPD completely failed *with* its restrictive immigration policy, the CDU *declared on its web site*.

(2) The SPD welcomes CDU *proposals on* the reduction of corruption.

The set of all possible combinations of our variables amounts to 5390 combinations. We take a random sample of 3000 combinations and package them into random subsets of ten vignettes presented to our respondents. We also randomized vignette order in these decks and present each vignette to ten respondents. This avoids confusion between vignette characteristics with respondent attributes (Auspurg and Hinz 2015).

Figure 1: Experimental design

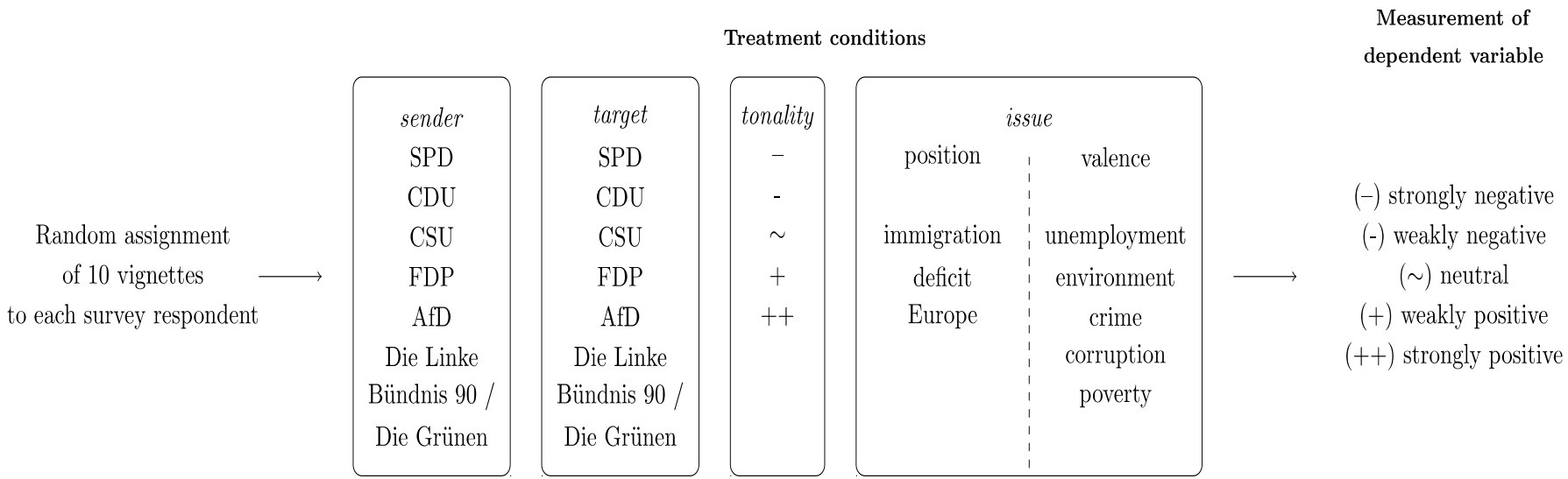


Figure 1 shows the experimental design and the manipulation of the treatment conditions. The issue variables contain a list of positional and valence issue (Appendix A provides examples). Data was collected over a span of four weeks in February 2017. We rely on CrowdFlower to recruit our respondents to a survey implemented in Qualtrics and restricted the survey to users eligible to vote in German national elections. In total, 300 respondents took the survey, yet only 294 respondents submitted responses to all questions, translating to 2937 judgements[4]. We started with assessing their political knowledge based on four questions (see below). We than presented respondents with a list of all relevant German political parties and asked them "how likely they would ever vote for party X" on an eleven-point scale. Respondents had a "don't know" option. The subsequent experimental block consisted of ten vignettes. Respondents had to rate the sentiment of each vignette. Finally, we collected demographic information (gender, age, level of education, region of birth – Eastern/Western Germany).

Operationalization

The dependent variable is the *perceived sentiment strength* of a vignette, a variable with a 5 point Likert scale (0 - "strongly negative", 1 – "weakly negative", 2 – "neutral", 3 – "weakly positive", 4 – "strongly positive"). Respondents could choose a "don't know" answer.

Our main independent variable denotes whether a sentence addresses a positional or a valence issue. We thereby follow similar studies (e.g. Clarke et al 2011) and predetermine a set of uncontroversial valence issues, which typically reach more unanimous support in Western European countries: unemployment, environment, crime, corruption, and poverty. Positional issues deal with immigration, welfare state retrenchment/deficit spending, and support for European integration. Respondents don't have to discount preferences – e.g. raise taxes to fight unemployment or lower economic growth to protect the environment – thus, consent is

[4] For three respondents only nine judgements were collected.

free and costless. The second independent variable is the *predetermined sentiment strength* of a vignette coded by the authors and extensively validated in pre-tests. It takes the same values as our dependent variable (0 – "strongly negative" to 4 "strongly positive").

We further control for partisan preferences based on propensity to vote (PTV) scores, for which respondents had to indicate how likely they were to vote for a given party on an 11-point scale ranging from "very unlikely" (0) to "very likely" (10). Our indicator sums up PTV scores for sender and target party of a vignette (0-20). Another control is political *knowledge* - an additive index of the number of correct answers to four multiple-choice questions (year of next election, parties in government, current cabinet members, CETA contract partners). Demographic controls include *gender* (male/female), *age* (continuous), *region (*Eastern/Western Germany*), urbanity* (urban/rural based on the population of a respondent's residence) and *education (*measured on a 6-point scale from 1 (no formal graduation) to 6 (completed tertiary education). To check for ordering effects and grammatical variations in our vignettes, we also use fixed effects for vignette order (0-10) and two grammatical batteries to avoid redundancy. Descriptive information on all variables is available in Appendix B.

Results

From the full sample of 2937 completed vignettes, we exclude cases with 'don't know' answers (n = 64) and those with a missing a PTV score for a party (n = 201). The remaining data consists of 2672 vignette ratings from 284 respondents. The mean sentiment of their ratings is 3.12 (Sd 1.32), which reflects the distribution in the randomized vignettes (36% negative, 21 % neutral, 43% positive). To test our expectations, we run two OLS multiple regression models. As observations are not independent of each other, we cluster standard errors at the level of respondents. Robustness checks in Appendix C present results from models using respondent-fixed-effects, jackknife standard errors (to account for the effect of

particular issues) and excluding respondents with conspicuous response patterns. Additional plots further show the effects of individual issues (see Appendix C). These analyses confirm the results presented below. The first model tests a direct effect of issue type on perceptions of message sentiment. The second model interacts issue type and the government status of the emitter party to test whether perceptions of campaign tone vary between government and opposition parties. Both models include the control variables introduced above.

Table 1 presents the regressions coefficients, Figure 2 plots the marginal effect for the interaction of issue type and government status based on model 2. Based on Model 1, we can confirm our first hypothesis: respondents perceive messages on valence issues on average 0.20 units more positively than a message on a position issue.

Turning to our second hypothesis on the conditional effect of government status on the perception of issue-based party messages, Model 2 and Figure 2 show that government parties are perceived more positively on valence issues than opposition parties (+0.34). Figure 2 shows that this effect is composed of two contrary patterns: respondents perceive government parties more positively on valence issues (+0.20) and opposition parties more positively on position issues (+0.15). In line with our theoretical expectations, additional analyses (Appendix C) reveal that effects are limited to positive messages, confirming that negativity bias cancels out other factors (Soroka 2014).

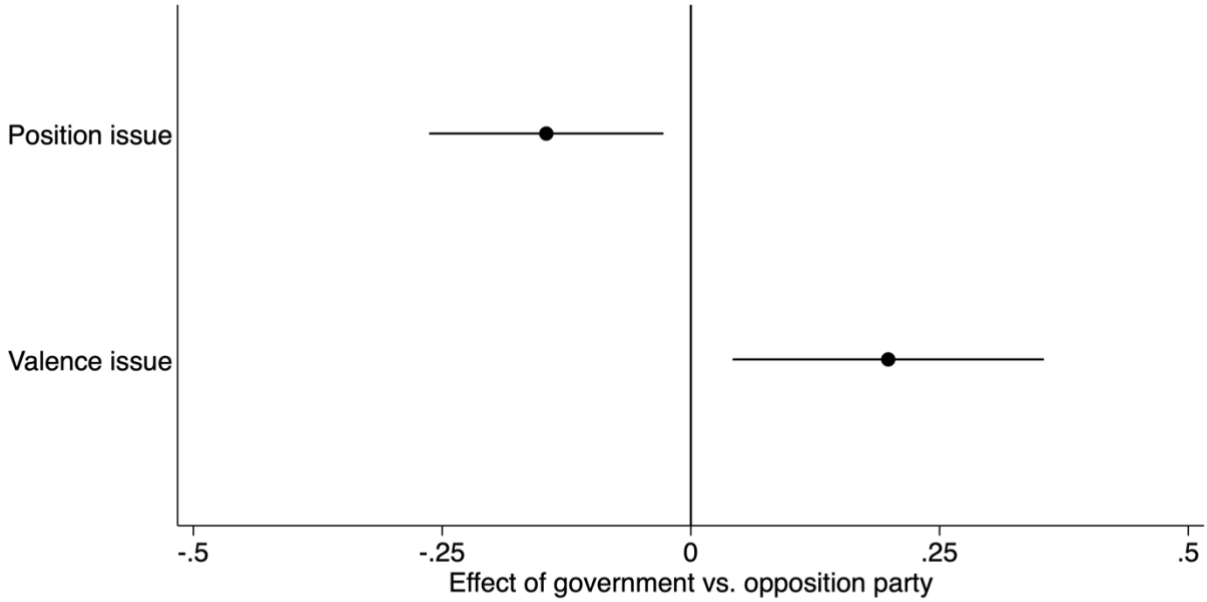
Table 1: Explaining perceptions of campaign sentiment

	Model 1	Model 2
Valence	0.20***	0.06
	(0.05)	(0.07)
Valence # Sender: Gov	-	0.34**
		(0.11)
Vignette sentiment	0.40***	0.41***
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Sender: Gov	0.01	-0.15*
	(0.05)	(0.06)
Sum of PTV	0.02***	0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Self-reference	0.02	0.03
	(0.06)	(0.06)
Vignette order	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Political knowledge	-0.08***	-0.08***
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Constant	2.02***	2.08***
	(0.14)	(0.15)
Demographic controls	*Yes*	*Yes*
Battery fixed effects	*Yes*	*Yes*
BIC	8535.62	8529.85
N	2672.00	2672.00

Standard errors clustered at respondents in parentheses, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Turning to the control variables, we observe a strong positive effect of the predetermined vignette sentiment confirming that respondents largely follow our initial coding. A positive effect for the PTV scores of sender and target parties shows that respondents evaluate messages featuring parties they favour more positively. This confirms that voters discount information running against their partisan preferences (Haselmayer et al. 2020). At the individual level, respondents with higher knowledge about politics, younger respondents and those living in an urban environment evaluate messages more negatively (results provided in the appendix). The remaining variables have no effect on evaluation of message sentiment. This includes vignette order and self-references.

Figure 2: Marginal effect of issue types conditional on sender government status



Notes: The X-axis shows the perceived sentiment of a party message of government and opposition parties conditional on type of issue along with 95% confidence intervals. Estimates based on Model 2 in Table 1. All remaining variables are held constant at their observed values.

Conclusions

Using a crowdsourced online survey experiment, we have investigated the effects of issue focus and government status on perceptions of party communication of varying sentiment. In line with H1 we find that people perceive party messages on valence issues more positively than those on position issues. We also find that the effect of issue types is further contingent on a party's government status. Respondents perceive a message on valence issues from a government party more positively than a similar message from an opposition party, which supports H2a. Vice versa, messages by opposition parties are perceived more positively when addressing position issues. Additional analyses reveal that these perceptual differences only apply to positive messages, which supports cognitive and psychological research showing that negative information may cancel out other message attributes (e.g. Rozin & Roymann 2001).

Our findings add to recent work on the role of sentiment in campaigns (Crabtree et al. 2020, Kosmidis et al. 2019) and the effects of issue-based negative campaigning (Haselmayer et al.

2020, Lefevere et al. 2020, Seeberg 2020). Results indicate different opportunities for issue-based campaigning according to a party's status, which is of relevance for political parties and campaign advisors. Government and opposition parties could benefit from focusing their positive campaign messages on different types of issues. For negative messages, the prevalence of negative information over a message's topical focus cancels out perceptual differences among respondents. As voters perceive issue-based negative campaigning similarly for all parties, our findings suggest that opposition parties could benefit most from attacking the performance of government parties on valence issues whilst (positively) emphasizing their own strengths on more controversial issues. Conversely, government parties should emphasize their achievements on valence issues. When campaigning on position issues, our results suggest that they could use them for negative campaigning – i.e. to try to shift the position of a serious challenger party away from the median voter's preferences (Harrington and Hess 1996).

Overall, these findings add further nuance to recent studies showing that issue attacks may provide effective electoral strategies – i.e. to gain public and media attention (Haselmayer et al. 2019) or for undermining a party's competence evaluations (e.g. Lefevere et al. 2020, Seeberg 2020). Parties seem to profit most from adapting both the topical focus and the sentiment of their campaigns according to their party status and electoral goals. As both dimensions contribute to voter's evaluations of campaign messages in our study, accounting for them should enhance our understanding of party communication and its effects.

Of course, our findings are based on a non-representative online survey and a single country, which reduces the potential of generalization and may raise doubts on its external validity. Yet, given the robustness of our results including rather hard tests – controlling for propensity-to-vote scores and a set of individual level characteristics – we are confident, that our findings should speak to real campaign settings. Future studies should examine whether the patterns presented in this paper apply to countries with similar party systems. Beyond

comparative research, future studies could explore how party status, issue focus and campaign sentiment affect the ability of parties to build or undermine competence evaluations. Finally, we observe differences at the level of respondents, which could resort from the composition of our sample. Future research should investigate how individual attributes, such as age, political knowledge, or gender affect perceptions of campaign tone. This is particularly relevant with regard to the finding that younger respondents perceive messages more negatively. It seems important to examine a possible relationship between campaign negativity and turnout among young voters.

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Appendix A: Examples of vignettes with varying sentiment and issue focus

Vignettes of varying sentiment for a fixed positional issue (predetermined score in parentheses):

The SPD *condemns* CDU proposals for a (*restrictive / permissive*) immigration policy. **(--)**

The SPD *criticizes* CDU proposals for a (*restrictive / permissive*) immigration policy. **(-)**

The SPD *discusses* CDU proposals for a (*restrictive / permissive*) immigration policy. **(~)**

The SPD *welcomes* CDU proposals for a (*restrictive / permissive*) immigration policy. **(+)**

The SPD *lauds* CDU proposals for a (*restrictive / permissive*) immigration policy. **(++)**

Vignettes of varying valence issues for a fixed sentiment level (predetermined score in parentheses):

The SPD *discusses* CDU proposals for *fighting unemployment*. **(~)**

The SPD *discusses* CDU proposals for *protecting the environment*. **(~)**

The SPD *discusses* CDU proposals for *fighting crime*. **(~)**

The SPD *discusses* CDU proposals for *fighting poverty.* **(~)**

Appendix B: Descriptive characteristics (n=2,672)

Variable	Mean	Std.Dev	Min	Max
Perceived vignette sentiment	3.12	1.32	1	5
Valence issue	0.45	0.50	0	1
Sender: government party	0.41	0.49	0	1
Predetermined sentiment	3.11	1.41	1	5
Sum of PTV scores	7.54	5.42	0	20
% Female	0.27	0.44	0	1
Mean Age	37.70	13.28	18	81
Mean Education (0-6) (Std. Dev.)	4.46	1.39	1	6
Mean Knowledge (0-4) (Std. Dev.)	1.54	1.09	0	4
% Eastern German	0.19	0.39	0	1
% Urban	0.73	0.44	0	1
Self-reference	0.15	0.36	0	1
Grammatical battery dummy	1.51	0.50	1	2
Vignette order	5.50	2.87	1	10

Appendix C: Robustness tests

Table C1: Explaining message sentiment using respondent-fixed effects

	Model 1 (CL)	Model 1 (Resp. FE.)	Model 2 (CL)	Model 2 (Resp. FE.)
Valence	0.20***	0.16***	0.06	-0.02
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Valence # Sender: Gov	-	-	0.34**	0.43***
			(0.11)	(0.10)
Vignette sentiment	0.38***	0.41***	0.39***	0.41***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Sender: Gov	0.01	0.03	-0.15*	-0.17*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Sum of PTV	0.02***	0.01*	0.02***	0.01*
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Self-reference	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.05
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Vignette order	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	2.02***		2.08***	
	(0.14)		(0.15)	
Individual-level controls	*Yes*	*No*	*Yes*	*No*
Battery fixed effects	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*
BIC	8535.62	10338.33	8529.85	10324.59
N	2672	2672	2672	2672

Standard errors in parentheses; # $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C2: Explaining message sentiment using jackknife estimation based on eight replications excluding one issue at times

	Model 1 (CL)	Model 1 (JN)	Model 2 (CL)	Model 2 (JN)
Valence	0.20***	0.20**	0.06	0.06
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Valence # Sender: Gov	-	-	0.34**	0.34*
			(0.11)	(0.14)
Vignette sentiment	0.38***	0.38***	0.39***	0.39***
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Sender: Gov	0.01	0.01	-0.15*	-0.15
	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.06)	(0.08)
Sum of PTV	0.02***	0.02**	0.02***	0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Self-reference	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.03
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Vignette order	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	2.02***	2.02***	2.08***	2.08***
	(0.14)	(0.20)	(0.15)	(0.21)
Individual-level controls	*Yes*	*No*	*Yes*	*No*
Battery fixed effects	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*
BIC	8535.62	8480.39	8529.85	8466.73
N	2672	2672	2672	2672

Standard errors in parentheses; # $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Excluding potential cheaters

We examine coder performance and flag respondents showing a lack of variation in their response patterns as well as too much variation to identify and eliminate spammers or cheaters (e.g. Berinsky et al 2012). We use the following indicators: standard deviation of judgments per respondent, the skewness of the distribution of judgements per respondent and the number of given judgements falling into the same category. Thereby, we identify 41 individuals whose response patterns could indicate potential cheating or spamming. Table C2 compares results for this reduced sample with analyses of the full sample of vignettes.

Table C3: Explaining message sentiment excluding potential spammers/cheaters

	Model 1 (CL) Full sample	Model 1 (CL) Red. sample	Model 2 (CL) Full sample	Model 2 (CL) Red. sample
Valence	0.20***	0.20***	0.04	0.06
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Valence # Sender: Gov	-	-	0.39***	0.34**
			(0.11)	(0.11)
Vignette sentiment	0.38***	0.40***	0.41***	0.39***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Sender: Gov	0.01	0.02	-0.15*	-0.15*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Sum of PTV	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Self-reference	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.03
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Vignette order	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	2.02***	1.95***	2.02***	2.08***
	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Individual-level controls	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*
Battery fixed effects	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*
BIC	8535.62	7668.52	7661.40	8529.85
N	2672	2370	2672	2370

Notes: Standard errors clustered at respondents in parentheses $^{\#}$ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Reference:

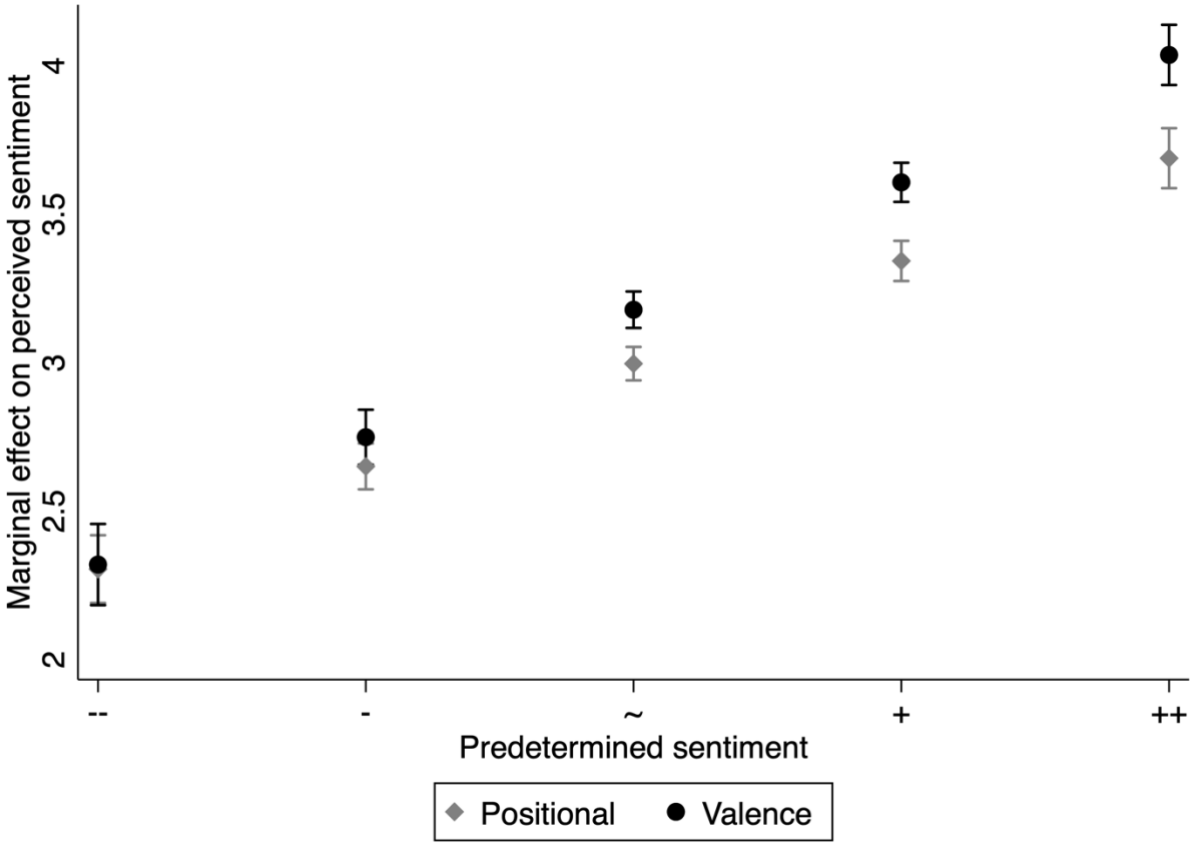
Berinsky, A., Huber, G., & Lenz, G. . (2012). Evaluating Online Labor Markets for Experimental Research: Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. *Political Analysis*, *20*(3), 351-368. doi:doi:10.1093/pan/mpr057

Table C4: Explaining message sentiment: Conditional effects of sentiment *and issue focus (Model 1) and of sentiment, sender government status and issue focus (Model 2)*

	Model 1	Model 2
Valence	-0.06	-0.06
	(0.13)	(0.17)
Valence # Vignette sentiment	0.08*	0.04
	(0.04)	(0.05)
Sender: Gov # Vignette sentiment	-	-0.07
		(0.05)
Sender: Gov # Valence	-	-0.05
		(0.25)
Sender: Gov # Valence # Vignette sentiment	-	0.13#
		(0.07)
Vignette sentiment	0.35***	0.37***
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Sender: Gov	0.01	0.06
	(0.05)	(0.15)
Sum of PTV	0.02***	0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	2.21***	2.04***
	(0.18)	(0.17)
Controls	*Yes*	*Yes*
Battery fixed effects	*Yes*	*Yes*
BIC	8537.01	8542.52
N	2672	2672

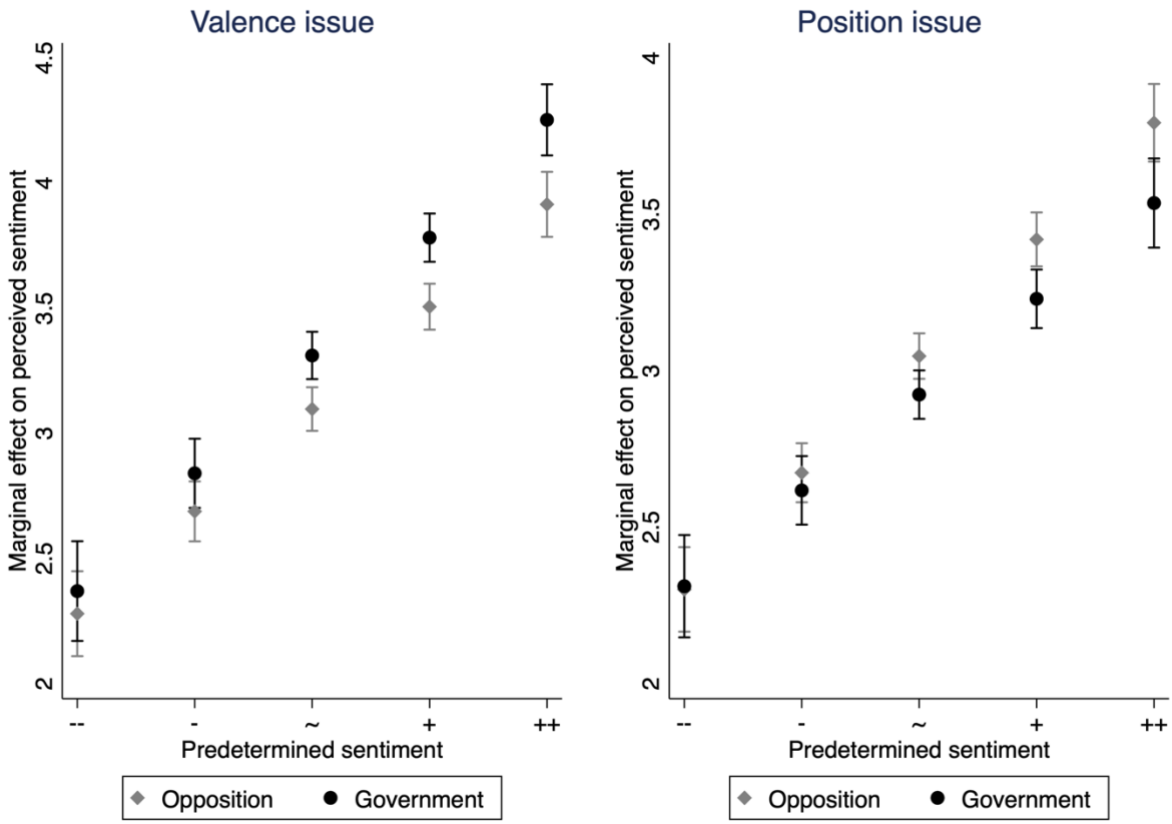
Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; # $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure C1: Marginal effect of issue types conditional on predetermined sentiment



Notes: The Y-axis shows the perceived sentiment of a party message conditional on type of issue and predetermined sentiment strength along with 90% confidence intervals. Estimates based on Model 1 in Table C4. All remaining variables are held constant at their observed values.

Figure C2: Marginal effect of issue types conditional on predetermined sentiment and party status



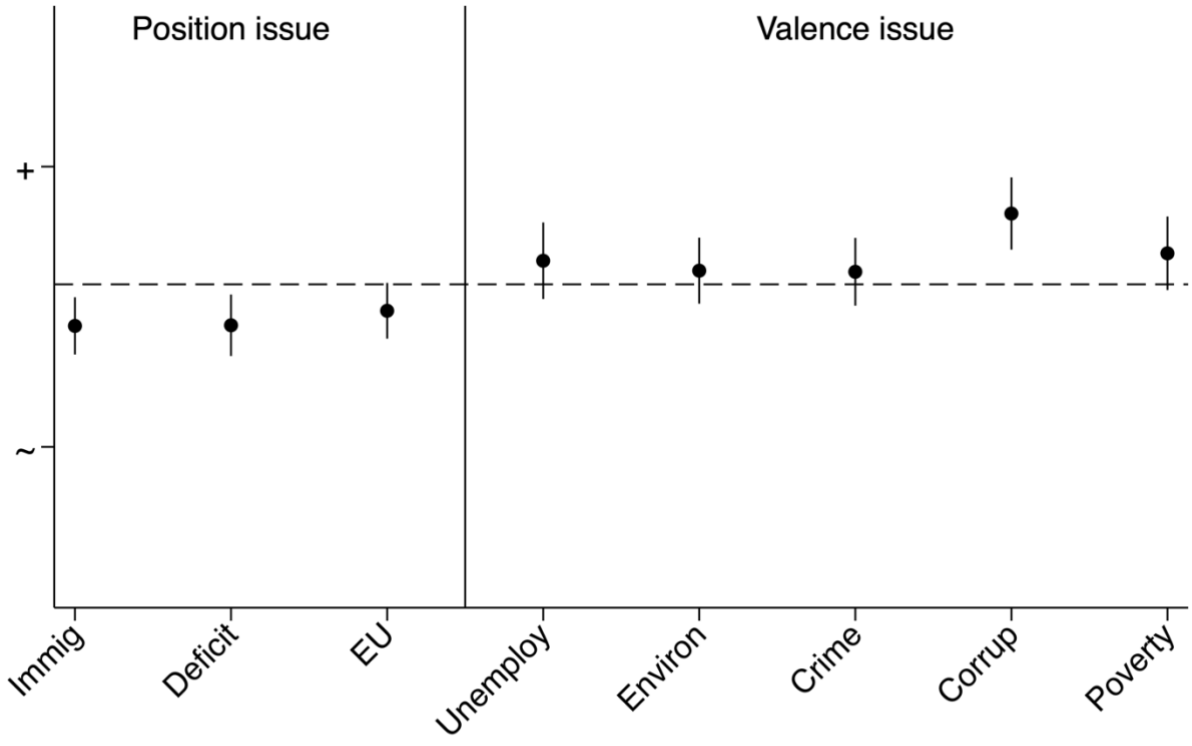
Notes: The Y-axis shows the perceived sentiment of a party message conditional on type of issue, government status and predetermined sentiment strength along with 90% confidence intervals. Estimates based on Model 2 in Table C4. All remaining variables are held constant at their observed values.

Table C5: Explaining perceptions of campaign sentiment: issue effects

	Model 1	Model 2
Valence issues:		
Unemployment	0.27**	-0.02
	(0.09)	(0.13)
Sender: Gov # Unemployment	-	0.14
		(0.20)
Environment	0.13#	0.00
	(0.08)	(0.18)
Sender: Gov # Environment	-	-0.25
		(0.19)
Crime	0.22**	0.08
	(0.08)	(0.12)
Sender: Gov # Crime	-	-0.25
		(0.19)
Corruption	0.41***	0.12
	(0.10)	(0.14)
Sender: Gov # Corruption	-	0.16
		(0.21)
Poverty	0.23*	0.00
	(0.09)	(.)
Sender: Gov # Poverty	-	0.16
		(0.21)
Position issues:	-	
Deficit	-0.01	-0.13
	(0.07)	(0.12)
Sender: Gov # Deficit	-	-0.31
		(0.20)
EU	0.04	0.01
	(0.07)	(0.11)
Sender: Gov # EU	-	-0.48**
		(0.17)
Immigration	-	-0.02
		(0.12)
Sender: Gov # Immigration	-	0.56**
		(0.21)
Sender: Gov	-0.02	0.23
	(0.04)	(0.15)
Controls	*Yes*	*Yes*
Battery fixed effects	*Yes*	*Yes*
BIC	8373.16	8395.41
N	2672	2672

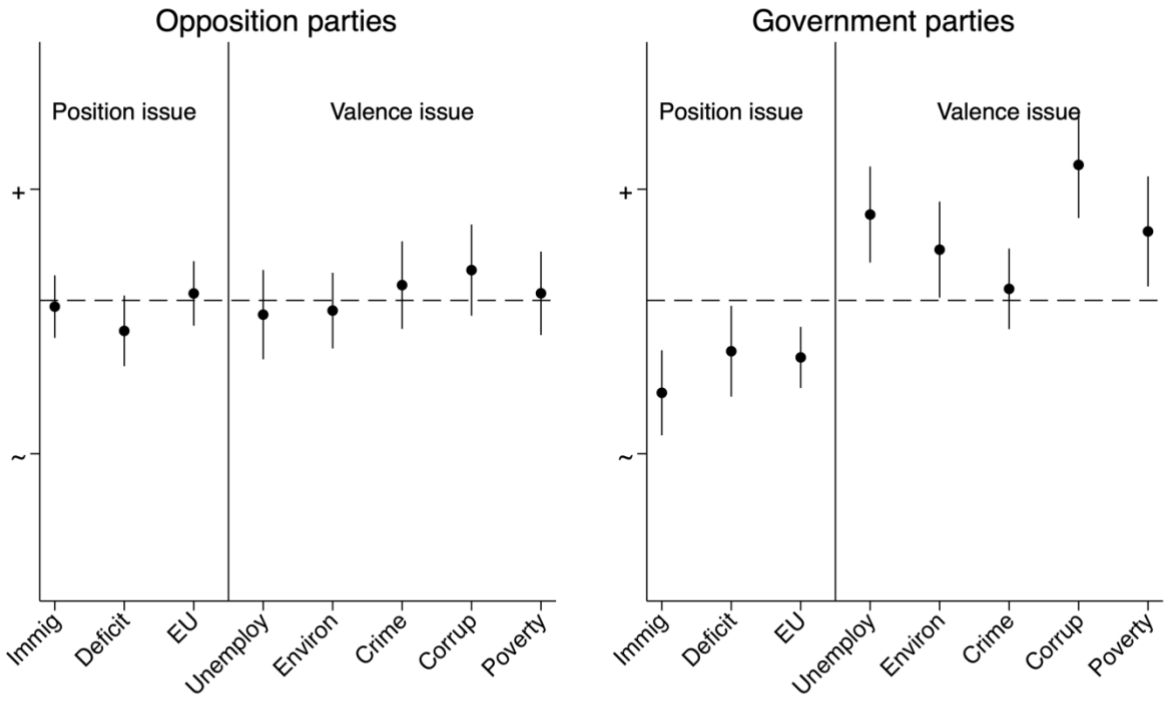
Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; # $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure C3: Average predicted values of issue types



Notes: Y-axis shows the average predicted values of perceived campaign sentiment for each issue. Whiskers indicate 90-percent confidence intervals. The dashed line indicates the average perceived sentiment of positive messages. Estimates based on Model 1 in Table C5. Predetermined tone is held positive, all other variables are at their observed values.

Figure C4: Average predicted values of issues conditional on sender government status



Notes: Y-axis shows the average predicted values of perceived campaign sentiment for each issue conditional on a party's government status. Whiskers indicate 90-percent confidence intervals. The dashed line indicates the average perceived sentiment of positive messages. Estimates based on Model 2 in Table C5. Predetermined tor held positive, all other variables are at their observed values.