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Vote as you Think: Determinants of Consistent Decision Making in Direct Democracy*

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Abstract: *This study investigates the conditions under which Swiss citizens take consistent decisions, that is, decisions that reflect their argument-based opinions, during direct-democratic ballots. In line with recent work on cognitive political behavior, we expect the drivers of consistent voting to be found at the individual and contextual level. At the individual level, we argue that political knowledge positively affects consistent decisions. At the contextual level, we anticipate a positive effect for campaign intensity, complexity and negativism. We estimate hierarchical logistic models based on VOX survey data (1999-2005) and original data that captures the nature of political campaigns. Our results support our expectations for the situational level and (partially) for the individual factors.*

Keywords: Consistent decisions, Direct democracy, Political knowledge, Campaigning, Initiatives, Referendums, Hierarchical models, Switzerland

Introduction

In a direct democratic context citizens have to decide whether or not they support a given policy reform (legislative or constitutional change). Usually they do so by weighing options across a span of conflicting arguments that they are confronted with during the political campaign or that they have stored in memory. Sometimes, voters' opinions about those arguments are in line with their decisions. For instance, they support all arguments for a given project and cast a vote in favor of said reform. However, sometimes their opinions on campaign arguments are not in line with their final decision. This article asks under which circumstances the opinions citizens have predict their decision at the ballot box.

Political opinions have been shown to act as key determinant of electoral behavior since the early socio-psychological models of voting behavior. Opinions about candidates and issues are located at the very end of the "funnel of causality" (Campbell et al. 1964). Describing the voting processes according to such models indicates a high impact of opinions on the final decision. Political opinions on issues or candidates "represent the dynamic aspect of electoral politics. The distribution of partisanship may define the broad

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parameters of electoral competition. Nevertheless, specific campaigns are fought over the policies the contenders advocate, the images of the candidates, or the government's policy performance. The mix of these factors almost always varies across elections, and thus issue beliefs and candidate images explain the ebbs and flows of voting outcomes" (Dalton 1988: 220). Issue opinions and beliefs clearly help to shape voting choices, as scholars of electoral behavior have since demonstrated (e.g. Carmines and Stimson 1980; Aldrich et al. 1989; Franklin et al. 1992).

Hit by the "cognitive revolution" (Lau and Redlawsk 2001), recent literature has extensively dealt with political opinions. The focus was threefold: (i) the acquisition of opinions, (ii) their stability over time, and (iii) their internal consistency.

Firstly, drawing heavily from the "dual models" in cognitive psychology (Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Chaiken and Trope 1999), some authors have highlighted that political opinions and decisions come from a delicate equilibrium between simplifying strategies, activated to cope with lacks in political sophistication (such as the partisan heuristic) and more comprehensive and demanding cognitive processes (such as the systematic treatment of political information). Scholars contributing to this literature have provided more sophisticated models on how political information is accessed, acquired, and transformed into political opinions (e.g. Sniderman et al. 1991; Zaller 1992; Kriesi 2005). These models have proven successful in going a step further inside the black box of cognitive processes at work during political decisions.

Secondly, political opinions have been studied in terms of their relative stability when facing persuasive information. Theoretical models such as McGuire's (1969) Reception-Yielding Model, Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration-Likelihood Model, Zaller's (1992) Receive-Accept-Sample Model, or Marquis' (2006) Persuasion-Memorization-Rememorization Model have thus shown how opinions are forged, starting from the premise that each individual opinion emanates from a delicate equilibrium between predispositions, acquired information, exposition to persuasive messages, and resistance to opinion change.

Thirdly, literature on electoral behavior has highlighted that political opinions are sometimes ambivalent. Thus, a non-negligible share of citizens "appear not to have 'just one attitude' toward political issues" (Zaller 1992: 54). Following the literature on cognitive psychology, this comes from the fact that "sometimes people simultaneously hold evaluative inconsistent beliefs, that is, some beliefs that express positive evaluation and other beliefs that express negative evaluation" (Eagly and Chaiken 1993: 123). The unidimensional view of opinions and attitudes assumes "a tradeoff between the polar opposite ends of evaluative scales. (...) [T]he more positive a person feels about a candidate, the less negative he must be about that candidate. Or, to use another example, the more conservative an individual is on a policy position, the less liberal she must be" (Meffert et al. 2004: 63) However, recent literature collides with this argument by showing the existence of ambivalent opinions: "rather than endorsing one side of a political debate and refuting the other, individuals often embrace central elements of both sides" (Lavine 2001: 915; see also Zaller and Feldman 1992; Alvarez and Brehm 1997; McGraw et al. 2003; Meffert et al. 2004; Nai 2014b).

All in all, political opinions are acquired through complicated cognitive processes, are sometimes unstable, and might even be conflicting. The key question of the consistency between opinions and the final choice has somehow faded from the scholarly radars. Our contribution aims at reassessing such fundamental questioning. Granted, political opinions are built through a tradeoff between heuristic and systematic reasoning, and might be

unstable and/or ambivalent. But are they predictive of citizens' decisions? If so, under which circumstances are they predictive?

This contribution assesses the conditions under which opinions held by citizens on issue-related arguments are predictive of their final decision during Swiss direct-democratic ballots. In line with recent work on the cognitive basis of electoral behavior (e.g. Kriesi 2005; Mondak et al. 2010; Lachat 2011; Nai 2014a) we expect those conditions to be found both at the individual and information environment level. At the individual level, we argue that political knowledge positively affects consistent decisions. At the information environment level, we anticipate a positive effect for campaign intensity and a negative effect for campaign complexity and negativism.

Our empirical analyses rely on two datasets. The first merges all post-ballot surveys (VOX) for the 1999-2005 period. The second assesses the nature and content of political campaigns on the projects voted at the federal level during the same period (Nai 2014a).

Consistent decisions?

We define a decision as consistent if it is in line with the voter's position on the issue at stake and hence reflects her opinion on the principal issue-related arguments. For instance, strongly supporting pro-arguments while rejecting contra-arguments yields to a consistent decision if the voter ultimately supports the ballot in the polls.

The definition and measure of consistent voting bear resemblance with the definition and measure of correct voting (Lau and Redlawsk 1997; 2006; Lau et al. 2014). However, our approach is narrower, which justifies the use of a different term. Correct voting is defined as "the likelihood that citizens, under conditions of incomplete information, nonetheless vote for the candidate or party they would have voted for had they had full information about those same candidates and/or parties" (Lau et al. 2008: 396). Following this general definition, two rather divergent measures exist in the literature (although both are empirically related). The first approach measures correct voting through experimental simulations where the quantity of information provided during voting decisions is manipulated (e.g. Lau and Redlawsk 2006). The correctness of a decision is measured through a before-after comparison. The second, more easily replicable approach measures correct voting through survey data by objectively assessing the best decision any given respondent should take given its self-reported values and interests. Lau and Redlawsk (1997; 2006) call this second measure normative-naïve, "naïve in that it is based on the voter's own preferences [...] and normative because [...] it's based on experts' judgements of which party of candidate is closes to the voter's expressed preferences" (Lau et al. 2014: 241).

Our definition of consistent votes agrees with the idea that the correctness of a decision should reflect the voters' own preferences. Consistent decisions are those that mirror the structure of underlying opinions about the issue at stake. Our approach however diverges from Lau and Redlawsk's on two points: First, we only look at opinions on the project, and do not draw a specific profile for each voter in terms of attitudes, values and interest. This is why we disagree with Milic's (2012) attempt to measure correct voting by comparing argument-based opinions and vote decisions. Milic does a good job in showing the necessity to include argument positions in models of decision-making in direct democracies, and we aim to continue this enterprise, but his measure (2012: 404) does not take into consideration the voters' profile (her values and preferences), and should thus not be labeled as correct voting. Second, unlike Lau and Redlawsk, we do not pretend to

objectively (or normatively) assess which decision is correct for each voter based on her preferences, values and opinions. We only imply that a decision that goes in the same direction as the underlying opinions on the main arguments might be qualified as consistent. In this sense, our definition should be seen as more narrow and conservative, a subset – both theoretical and empirical – of correct decisions.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

This paper examines the conditions under which citizens vote according to their opinions about arguments related to the issue at stake. Such conditions should be found on two different levels: individual predispositions and profiles (individual factors), and the nature of the environment they evolve in (situational factors).

On the individual level we focus on political knowledge, widely acknowledged as a key determinant for political behavior (Zaller 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1993; 1996; Goren 2004; Kriesi 2005; Marquis 2006). The sophistication-interaction model of public opinion postulates that "the greater the store of information, the more often citizens will be able to connect their values with concrete matters of politics" (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996: 229). This means that voters can only convert their values and preferences into policy preferences if they have a good knowledge of public affairs. Those who lack this awareness will not be able to base issue positions on abstract principles, such as reliance on partisan and ideological identifications (Goren 2004: 462). To be sure, although the influence of political knowledge is rarely contested, there is no clear definition and by far no unanimous operationalization of the concept (Luskin 1987). Political knowledge is often referred to as "awareness" (Zaller 1992; Kriesi 2005), "sophistication" (Luskin 1990), "expertise" (McGraw and Pinney 1990), or even "competence" (Kuklinski et al. 2001). Furthermore, the literature makes a distinction between general and background knowledge of politics. General, or chronic, knowledge represents a global understanding of the political word, and covers "how informed the individual is about politics in general" (Alvarez and Brehm 2002: 35). This form of knowledge helps voters to draw a map of the political realm in which they can clearly position themselves, their values and preferences, but might suffer from its broader scope. Gilens (2001) argues that studies of political information based on general knowledge may offer useful insights but are nevertheless incomplete. He notes that many people who are fully informed on a general level can still be ignorant of policy specific information. Studies based on general awareness thus fade out an influencing factor on political competence. Gilens even postulates that policy-specific ignorance may have a greater impact than the lack of general knowledge (Gilens 2001: 380). Along the same vein, Goren (2004) posits that citizens can easily grasp the core principles of politics by following public debates; these principles play such an important role in the political and social arena that they do not require general political sophistication to be recognized and understood (Goren 2004: 463). Thus, general political sophistication seems not to be a necessary condition for the use of abstract principles (in the case of core beliefs and values) as a guideline. For this reason he pleads for a domain-specific approach of mass policy reasoning. Such domain-specific (or background) knowledge thus represents higher understanding on the issues at stake during the decisional process: following this logic, general political knowledge is not necessary to take a decision in accordance with one's own values and may be compensated by acquiring domain-specific knowledge. Given the particular nature of decisions analyzed in this contribution (i.e., votes on policy propositions in a direct-democratic setting), issue-

evaluations should indeed matter more than general political considerations, which is why we focus on this specific form of knowledge. Consider, for instance, a Swiss farmer. While he might not know the number of representatives in his canton, nor read the news or watch political debates in television, he may be very well informed about agriculture law. Hence, compared to a political science professor, who is chronically well informed about politics, the farmer has no lower chances to vote consistently on an agricultural proposition. We thus hypothesize:

H1: High levels of background political knowledge increase the likelihood of consistent decision-making.

On the situational level we focus on three campaign-related factors: intensity, complexity and negativism of political campaigns.

The intensity of political campaigns measures the quantitative occupation of the discursive space during a political event (an election, a referendum). Intense political campaigns activate the interest of citizens on the topics, motivate their participation, and enhance their attention (Bowler and Donovan 1998; Norris 2002; Valentino et al. 2001; Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Wolak 2009; Nai 2014a). Furthermore, intense campaigns create more favorable conditions for individuals to be confronted with political arguments (Keele and Wolak 2008: 656) and simply translate into greater availability of political information (Lau, Andersen and Redlawsk 2008: 398). Intense campaigns encourage citizens to take into account a wider range of arguments and issues: "intense campaigns can stimulate personal interest, attentiveness, a sense of accountability, and a sense of uncertainty. They can make citizens feel something personal is at stake [...]. Intense campaigns should encourage citizens to weight pros and cons, to think open-mindedly" (Kam 2006: 933). Consistent voting should therefore increase.

H2: More intense political campaigns increase the likelihood of consistent decision-making.

If the quantitative dimension of political campaigns should yield positive effects on vote consistency, we anticipate an inverse effect for the two dimensions measuring their content (complexity and negativism). First, a more complex campaign – i.e., a campaign that carries a more complex discourse though a higher number of different arguments supporting or opposing the reform – should not simplify the task for those citizens who rely on arguments to build up their decision. More arguments means more issues to think about, and more conflicting information to sort out. We thus anticipate that consistent decision-making is less likely when political campaigns are complex.

H3: More complex political campaigns decrease the likelihood of consistent decision-making.

Next, the study tackles the campaign's tone and more specifically its level of negativism, that is, the relative part of ads attacking political adversaries (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Ansolabehere et al. 1994; Finkel and Geer 1998; Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Ansolabehere et al. 1999; Lemert et al. 1999; Lau and Pomper 2002, 2004; Martin 2004; Jackson and Sides 2006; Stevens 2009; Nai 2013). No clear consensus emerges from this literature on the effects of negativism on turnout (Lau et al. 1999; Lau and Pomper 2002, 2004; Lau et al. 2007; Stevens 2009). Some stress a demobilization effect (e.g. Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Ansolabehere et al. 1994; 1999; Lemert et al. 1999), whereas others highlight stimulation effects (e.g. Finkel and Geer 1998; Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Geer 2006; Crigler et al. 2006). At least one claim seems more widely accepted: negativism may certainly discourage some citizens to participate, but increases

the saliency of the issue for those who decide to turn out. In such a situation, negativism shows that issues at stake are worthwhile, which is another way to say that negative campaigns strongly signal high contentiousness of the vote. Contentious votes are, in turn, more likely to polarize the electorate and reinforce the reliance on predispositions, which means that the relationship between argument-based opinions and vote choices is less straightforward. Even more, contentious campaigns might switch citizens' attention form the argumentative content of political information to the confrontational side of the discourse, thus yielding to less consistent decisions.

H4: More negative political campaigns decrease the likelihood of consistent decision-making.

Finally, we focus on a major situational factor: the institutional type of the project being voted upon.[1] Popular initiatives are usually more contested than referenda, and often feature a higher issue saliency. Structurally, popular initiatives have a weaker chance to receive support in the ballots (Nai 2014a: 85), but they deploy indirect effects, in that they are often able to put controversial and contentious issues on the agenda for which the legislative body was not able or willing to tackle (Kriesi 1994). It is then not a surprise that popular initiatives often play the role of "thrust project" (Joye et Papadopoulos 1994), that is, those projects that really motivate citizens to cast their vote, when multiple projects are voted simultaneously. Given their centrality to the political game, we anticipate popular initiatives to increase the effects of both individual and situational factors.

H5: For popular initiatives, the effects of individual and situational factors are stronger.

Research strategy

The goal of this paper is to get a better grip on the determinants of consistent voting in a direct democracy. We argue that the effect of position taking is driven by both individual and situational factors. The key variable at the individual level is the political sophistication. Voters with high levels of background knowledge more likely align their stands on arguments with their decision. At the information environment level, we believe that intensive campaigns fuel consistent voting, whereas complex campaigns (i.e., campaigns that carry a wider range of different arguments) and negatively charged campaigns lead to less consistent voting.

The empirical analysis covers votes on 51 projects that took place in Switzerland between 1999 and 2005.[2] Individual-level variables are based on representative surveys conducted after each vote. The merged dataset we use contains 52'534 citizens.

The dependent variable is the *project support*. It is binary and takes the values 0 (rejection) and 1 (acceptance). Since non-voters are excluded from the analysis the dataset

[1] *Popular initiatives* ask for a total or partial revision of the federal constitution. They require a total of 100'000 signatures. To pass, popular initiatives have to be accepted by both, a majority of the voters and a majority of the 26 Swiss cantons. If the government and the parliament seek to change the constitution, a *compulsory referendum* is required. This is also the case for the entry into international organizations and some urgent laws. In order to be adopted, compulsory referenda have to fulfill the same requirements as popular initiatives. *Optional referenda* can be launched against federal laws, urgent statuses exceeding one year of validity, and some international treaties. 50'000 citizens or eighth cantons can launch an optional referendum. To pass, they require a majority of the votes. Note that being in favor of a referenda means rejecting the status quo.

[2] 24 additional projects took place in that period. We had to exclude them because the surveys did not include all necessary items.

is reduced by more than one third of the respondents (21'603). The average support of all projects amounts to 44 percent (see appendix, table A1). This reflects the fact that more projects are rejected than accepted (32 out of 51). Note that, approval rates vary strongly between the different types of projects. The average support for popular initiatives is only 34 percent. 54 percent of the respondents support optional referenda and almost two out of three voters are in favor of compulsory referenda.

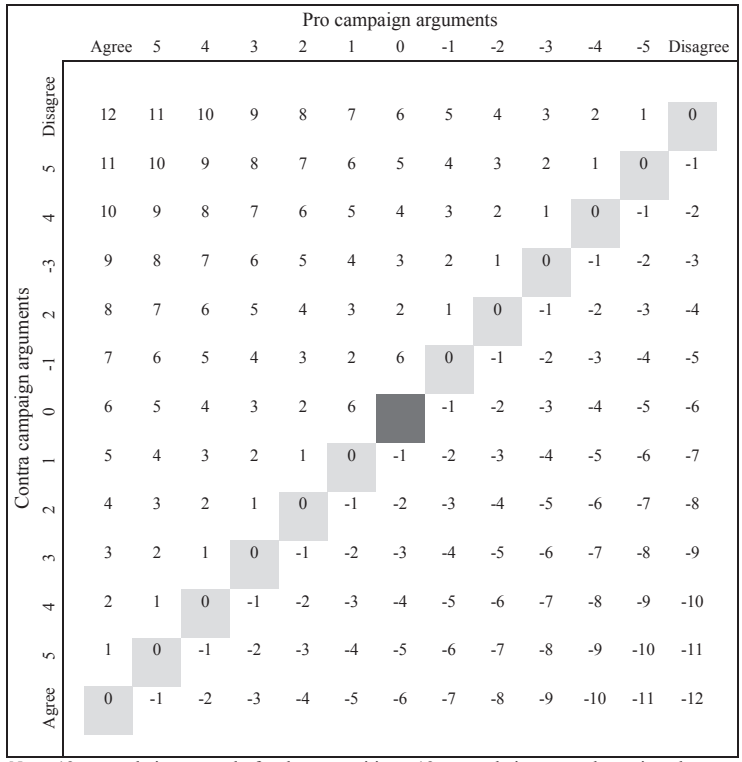
The independent variable is the voters' *position on campaign arguments*. VOX-surveys usually contain three arguments in favor of the project (reason to accept) and three arguments against the project (reason to reject).[3] For each argument, voters have to indicate their position on a scale ranging from strong disagreement (-2) to strong agreement (2).[4] The variable we use in the empirical tests is calculated in two steps. First, we measure the general level of agreement with the pro-arguments and the contra-arguments. Both dimensions range from -6 (disagree strongly) to 6 (agree strongly). The space that spreads between these dimensions is depicted in figure 1. Voters in the top left area agree with the pro-arguments and disagree with the contra-arguments. With regard to the project, they have a contra-position. Voters with a pro-position on the other fall into the bottom right area. Those positioned on the diagonal "embrace central elements of both sides" (Lavine 2001: 915) with the same strength and have thus an ambivalent position. In a second step we generate an additive scale by adding both dimensions up, as Milic (2012) does for his measure of argument-based decisions. Every argument position gets the value displayed in figure 1. This new variable ranges from -12 (strong contra-position) to 12 (strong pro-position). The variable argument positions echoes Kriesi's (2005: 178-179) "argument-based opinions". Although Kriesi extracts it through factor analyses, the two variables basically measure the same thing, that is, how citizens position themselves on the main campaign arguments. Our measure, however, has the advantage to discriminate between citizens supporting pro arguments and those supporting contra arguments, and allows us to grasp the additional category of ambivalent citizens. The distinction between those three categories is rather crucial theoretically and empirically. In a final step, and after a first empirical analysis, we will collapse the continuous variable into three categories (pro-position, contra-position, ambivalent). 42 percent of the voter agree with the pro-arguments and disagree with the contra-arguments. Slightly more (49 percent) take the contra-position. One in ten voters has an ambivalent position.

Background knowledge describes how familiar a voter is with the project. Our measurement contains two items. First, voters have to correctly retrieve the exact title of the project. Second, they have to explain the content of the proposition. 65 percent were able to do both and are considered politically sophisticated. One third of the voters had

[3] In some cases, less than three arguments per camp are tested in the VOX survey. Those projects are dropped from pour analysis. For some projects on the other hand, more than three arguments per camp are proposed in the survey. In these cases we only rely on the first three arguments per camp in order to build up our measure.

[4] Some scholars have reservations about the question used to measure campaign arguments (Sciarini 2007: 848). Arguments are tested after the vote decision. Consequently, voters might justify their decision a posteriori – by agreeing to arguments because they fit their decision. Some arguments can be easily associated with the pro camp or the contra camp, which facilitates this rationalization process. Other arguments are more neutral and hence harder to bring in line with the vote choice. While this critique affects our hypothesis on the individual level (rationalization could be linked to knowledge), it should not endanger our information environment hypotheses. Empirically, we cannot exclude rationalization. However, we try to alleviate the problem by including as many arguments as possible. This reduces the bias of arguments that can easily be associated with a specific camp.

Figure 1: Argument position (IV)



Note: 12 means being strongly for the proposition. -12 means being strongly against the project. 0 signifies an ambivalent position.

problems recalling either the title or the content of the project and is thus classified as low knowledgeable.[5]

The analysis includes three variables at the information environment level. *Intensity* assesses the quantitative dimension of the political campaign. In accordance with recent work (Kriesi 2005; Marquis 2006; Nai 2013, 2014a) campaign intensity is measured with the cumulative size of ads (in square centimeters) found in the press. *Negative campaigning* indicates the relative presence of negative political ads throughout a political campaign. In a first step, we attributed one point to each ad containing one or more explicit and personal attack toward political adversaries. Note that attacks on political positions of the opposing camp are not considered as negative ads. Following Nai (2013), it is precisely the goal of political discourse to challenge opponents' issue positions. In a second step we calculated the percentage of attack ads in a campaign. The variable *number of arguments* is an indicator for the complexity of the political discourse. From this perspective, a large variety of arguments should lead to voter confusion. The measurement of this variable is straightforward. It simply indicates the number of different arguments brought forward in newspaper ads. In our coding of political ads, an argument is any sentence that provides information on why the proposed vote cue should be followed (see Petty and Priester 1994; Marquis 2006; Nai 2014a).

[5] Kriesi (2005) also includes a respondent's capacity to position himself on campaign arguments. Since we use this variable to measure argument positions we cannot operationalize knowledge accordingly.

Table A2 in the appendix provides descriptive statistics for the information environment variables. Campaign intensity ranges between 0.01 m^2 and 5.79 m^2 of political ads. The median value of negativity indicates that only few campaigns go dirty. However, the referendum on the maternity insurance law exemplifies that not all campaigns are fought nicely. In the course of this campaign, 32 percent of all ads were negative. The number of arguments spreads between 1 and 58. The maximum value is an outlier though; the second highest score on the variable number of arguments is 32 arguments.[6] Maybe the most striking result of this descriptive analysis is the high standard deviation on all information environment variables. This shows that there is no prototypical vote. Some campaigns are fought intensively, some projects hardly see a political campaign.

As in other recent research on the Swiss case (e.g., Kriesi 2005; Nai 2013, 2014b; Bauer and Fatke 2014), we make use in this contribution of hierarchical estimations. Due to the binary nature of our dependent variable we conduct multilevel mixed-effects logistic regressions. Effects of the independent variables are fixed and estimated directly. The intercept varies across the different projects. All models control for age, gender, and the perceived impact of the project. Moreover we control for the direction of the campaign. For example, the size of the contra-ads is deducted from the size of the pro-ads. Positive values on this variable indicate that the pro-campaign was more intensive than the contra-campaign. We use the same procedure for all information environment variables. Lastly, we control for the number of projects proposed to the citizens on one day.

Results

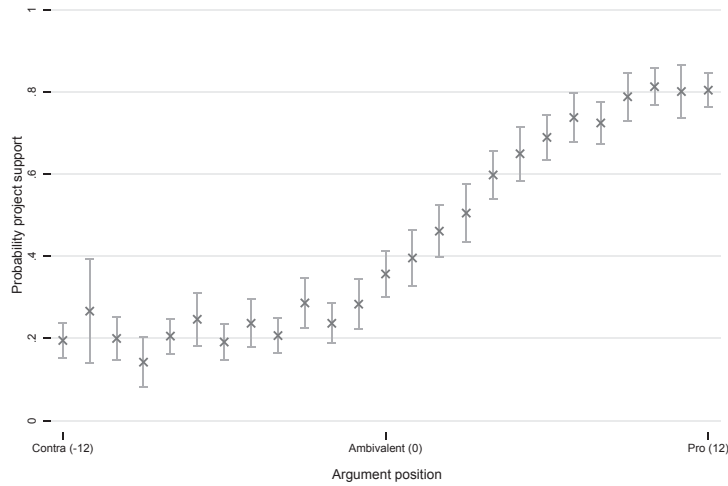
First we estimate a model where the 25 argument positions are introduced as dummies. The unstandardized regression coefficients are presented in the appendix (table A3).

Based on this regression we calculate predicted probabilities for a median voter with different argument positions.[7] If consistent voting takes place, those with contra-stands should be unlikely to accept the project and voters with pro positions should have high probabilities to vote yes. Figure 2 shows that the probability of project support is indeed strongly influenced by a respondent's position. The probability of voting yes is small for those taking contra stands. The strength of the contra-position barely influences the level of acceptance. This indicates that the slightest doubt with regard to a project suffices to reject it. In other words, a skeptical voter has very high chances to vote consistently. Ambivalent voters have lower probabilities to reject the project than any other contra-group. However, with a probability of 35 percent project support, they are still tending toward the status quo. The same is true for people taking slight pro-positions. In general, the group of voters with pro-positions is less homogenous in their voting behavior and less likely to vote consistently for that matter. Half-hearted approval of a project does not suffice for a yes at the ballot box. However, holding strong pro-positions makes support very likely. Respondents with such opinions are almost as likely to support the project as voters with clear contra-stands.

[6] We run all empirical models with and without this outlier project. Both estimations yield the same results. Based on this, the model presented in this paper include the outlier project; the charts, however, do not depict results for this extreme case.

[7] This voter is male, and knowledgeable. He is 36-45 years old and considers the project to have a mean impact. On the information environment level the campaign is balanced between pro and contra camps. The number of projects is fixed at four.

Figure 2: Argument positions and project support



In a next step we collapse the 25 positions into 3 categories. This step means losing information about the strength of a position. Given the diversity of the pro-position takers this is not ideal. However, it facilitates the interpretation of the results and, more importantly, guarantees having enough observations over a variety of campaign environments.[8]

Table 1 displays unstandardized regression coefficients of four models. The first model (M_1) is a basic regression including all individual-level variables without interaction terms. Except for the recoded position variable it is the same as the regression in appendix A3. Its primary function is to define a baseline of consistent voting and set the stage for a more complex analysis. The positive value in the first row shows that ambivalent voters are more likely to support a project than voters with a contra-position (reference category). The same is true for voters with pro-positions. The probability of project support is 23 percent for respondents with a contra-position and 68 percent for voters with pro-position. Hence, voters with pro-stands are more likely to vote consistent than voters with pro-stands (77 percent vs. 68 percent). This confirms the impression we gained from figure 2. Finally, in line with our expectations ambivalent voters are unlikely to vote against the status quo (38 percent).

These findings are bad news for pro camps. First, people agreeing with their positions are the minority (appendix A1). Second, those with supportive positions have low levels of consistent voting. Third, the 10 percent ambivalent voters often favor the status quo over policy innovation.

The first model additionally shows that high knowledge and considering a vote important increase the chances of voting yes. Senior citizens tend to reject projects. Lastly, the more projects are proposed to the people the higher the likelihood of favoring the status quo.

[8] All models were also estimated with position variables containing 9, 7, and 5 categories (not depicted in this paper). The results remain largely the same. Voters with extreme positions always vote more consistently than voters with moderate positions. Ambivalent voters usually take an intermediary position (more likely to accept than those with contra-positions, less likely to accept than those with pro-positions). The finding hence remain robust for different operationalizations of our independent variable.

Table 1: Random-intercept logistic regressions (DV: Project support)

	M_1 Coef. (S_e)	M_2 Coef. (S_e)	M_3 Coef. (S_e)	M_4 Coef. (S_e)
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL				
Ambivalent *(argument contra)*	0.73 (0.05) ***	0.70 (0.08) ***	0.73 (0.05) ***	1.57 (0.10) ***
Argument pro	1.96 (0.03) ***	1.61 (0.06) ***	1.96 (0.03) ***	3.27 (0.07) ***
Knowledge	0.13 (0.03) ***	-0.16 (0.05) ***	0.13 (0.03) ***	0.12 (0.04) ***
Age 18-25 *(age 36-45)*	-0.03 (0.07)	0.97 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.07)
Age 26-35	0.01 (0.05)	1.01 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)
Age 46-55	0.00 (0.05)	1.00 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.05)
Age 56-65	-0.09 (0.05) **	0.91 (0.04) *	-0.09 (0.05) **	-0.09 (0.05) *
Age 66 and older	-0.26 (0.05) ***	0.77 (0.04) ***	-0.26 (0.05) ***	-0.26 (0.05) ***
Female *(male)*	0.00 (0.03)	1.00 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.03)
Impact of the project	1.11 (0.06) ***	3.03 (0.18) ***	1.11 (0.06) ***	1.12 (0.06) ***
Constant	-1.43 (0.36) ***	-1.23 (0.37) ***	0.41 (0.19) **	-1.60 (0.47) ***
PROJECT LEVEL				
Number of projects	-0.17 (0.10) *	-0.18 (0.10) *	-0.21 (0.10) **	-0.24 (0.10) **
Size direction	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Negativity direction	-0.91 (0.66)	-0.93 (0.66)	-1.04 (0.63) *	-0.88 (0.64)
Complexity direction	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02) *	0.03 (0.02)
Ads size	.	.	-0.62 (0.52)	.
Ads negative	.	.	-0.38 (0.39)	.
Complexity	.	.	-0.42 (0.79)	.
INTERACTIONS				
Arg. amb * b. know.	.	-0.01 (0.11)	.	.
Arg. pro * b. know.	.	0.53 (0.07) ***	.	.
Arg. amb. * Ads size	.	.	.	2.33 (0.25) ***
Arg. pro * Ads size	.	.	.	2.70 (0.16) ***
Arg. amb * Ads neg.	.	.	.	-0.83 (0.19) ***
Arg. pro * Adds neg.	.	.	.	-1.22 (0.13) ***
Arg. amb * Comp.	.	.	.	-4.49 (0.37) ***
Arg. pro * Comp.	.	.	.	-6.06 (0.25) ***
RANDOM EFFECTS PARAMETERS				
Constant	-0.25 (0.10) **	-0.25 (0.10) **	-0.32 (0.10) ***	-0.30 (0.10) ***
AIC	26790.18	26724.05	26789.24	25826.87
Interclass correlation	$\rho = 0.15$	$\rho = 0.16$	$\rho = 0.14$	$\rho = 0.14$
N (level-1)	25'112	25'112	25'112	25'112
N (level-2)	51	51	51	51

Note: The dependent variable takes the value 0 when the project is rejected and the value 1 when the project is supported. Base categories in brackets. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

Going one step further, we test how political knowledge shapes consistent voting. The second and the third column in table 2 depict the probability of project support for low and high sophisticates. The last column shows the change between the two groups. If consistent voting increases with knowledge this value should be negative for voters with contra-stands and positive for voters with pro-stands.

The findings are consistent with our expectations. Note that knowledge is more important for consistent pro-voting than for consistent contra-voting. Moreover, knowledgeable ambivalent voters are more drawn to the status quo than unsophisticated

Table 2: Knowledge and project support

Variable	Low knowledge	High knowledge	Difference
Contra position	24 (20 / 29)	21 (18 / 26)	-3
Ambivalent position	39 (33 / 46)	35 (29 / 41)	-4
Pro position	62 (56 / 67)	70 (65 / 75)	+8

Note: Probabilities based on M_2, table 2. 95% confidence intervals in parentheses.

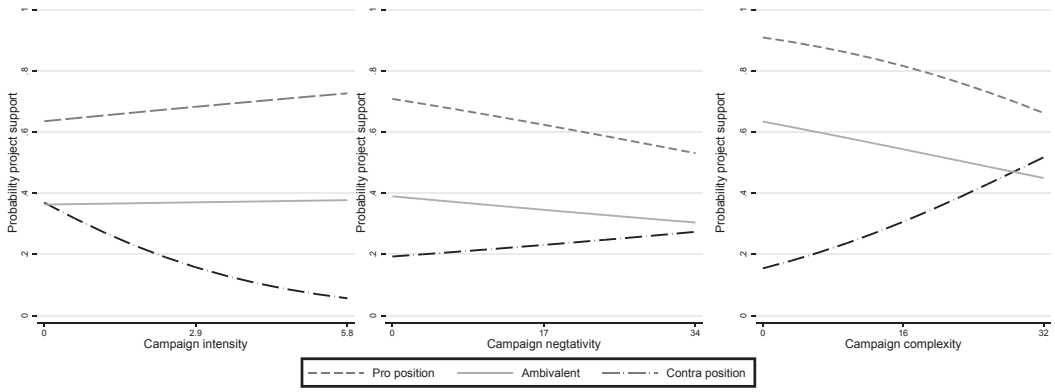
ambivalent voters. However, the confidence intervals indicate that these findings are not statistically significant. In this sense we have to reject our second hypothesis. One reason for this could be the relatively crude measure of knowledge. Furthermore, the ability to take a position on different campaign arguments might itself be a sign of political knowledge (Kriesi 2005: 90). If this is true the least sophisticated voter might be excluded from the analysis ex ante.

Compared to our basic model (M_1) the third model in table 1 includes the three information environment variables (intensity, negativism and complexity). These variables yield no direct effects on project support. Moreover, the effects of argument positions do not change (neither their strength, nor their level of significance) compared to the basic model.

The fourth model lets the argument positions interact with the information environment variables. The three panels in figure 3 display the probability of accepting a given project for the three positions and varying levels of campaign intensity (left panel), negativity (center panel) and complexity (right panel).

In the second hypothesis we argued that *intensive campaigns* facilitate matching argument positions with the decision. This assumption is supported by the results. The probability of a consistent decision increases with high levels of intensity for those taking either a pro or a contra position. However, only in the latter case is this increase significant. The decision of ambivalent voters is not moderated by campaign intensity. *Negative campaigns* decrease the level of consistent voting in both camps, which supports the fourth hypothesis. Ambivalent voters on the other hand, tend to support the status quo in negative campaigns. This change in probability, however, is not significant. Finally, consistent voting is moderated by *campaign complexity* (figure 2, right panel). As expected, argument complexity decreases consistent voting. It yields confusion and decreases the chances of a citizen voting in line with her position. The highest level of consistent voting (for pro- and contra-positions) is

Figure 3: Consistent voting information environment



observed in simple, straightforward campaigns. Complex settings, where a great number of arguments are discussed in public endanger a consistent vote.

Thus far, we do not distinguish between the different types of projects. This however, might be too simplistic. As already evidenced by the average acceptance rate, initiatives are often more contested than referenda. Also their prototypical campaigns differ from each other.

To test how consistent voting varies based on the project type, we estimate M_4 for initiatives and facultative referenda separately.[9] The results are presented in table 3. M_{5a} is based on the surveys conducted after the 24 popular initiatives. 5_{5b} includes the 15 facultative referenda. We do not show the results for the eighth compulsory referenda. These projects rarely see strong campaigns and the variation of information environment variables is small.

Figure 4 summarizes the results of both regressions in 6 panels. The top three panels show how the information environment influences consistent voting in initiatives. The bottom three panels depict results for facultative referenda.

In the case of initiatives, intensive campaigning increases consistent decision making dramatically. If, in turn, intensity is at its lowest, consistent voting is less probable for both camps. In such a scenario the position of a respondent on the main arguments does not influence the vote at all. The top left panel shows how important publicity is, especially for the pro-camp. Negativity only significantly affects voters with a contra-position. In line with our hypothesis, it decreases consistent voting for this group. Finally, consistent decisions become less probable when the debate is complex (figure 4, top right panel). This affects mostly voters with pro-stands. In very complex settings where many arguments are brought forward these voters get confused and tend to reject the project in spite of their argumentative preferences. We also observe such a confusion effect for voters with contra-stands. The effect however is much weaker.

The effects of the information environment are quite different when it comes to facultative referenda. First of all we observe a higher overall level of consistent voting (between 80 and 90 percent). This is especially true for those with pro-positions. Considering the bottom panel in figure 4 it is fair to say that these voters are quite unimpressed by any kind of information environment setting. If a voter agrees with a referenda, she will most likely accept it at the ballot box, regardless how the campaign looked like. This is also evidenced by the fact that none of these changes in acceptance probability are statistically significant. When it comes to facultative referenda, the most interesting group are respondents with contra-positions. The more intensive a campaign, the lower their probability to vote consistently (reject the project). This is contrary to the effects observed for initiatives. Negativity, on the other hand, vastly increases their chances to vote consistently. Finally, argument complexity does not yield any effects for facultative referenda.

Conclusion

Opinions on issue arguments are central determinants of vote choices, especially when citizens are asked to vote for (or against) policy reforms, not candidates. In this paper we investigated the conditions under which Swiss citizens make consistent decisions, that is, decisions that reflect their opinion structure with regard to a given direct democratic

[9] Further tests showed that the moderating effect of political knowledge does not vary between the types of project. We thus refrain from presenting these results.

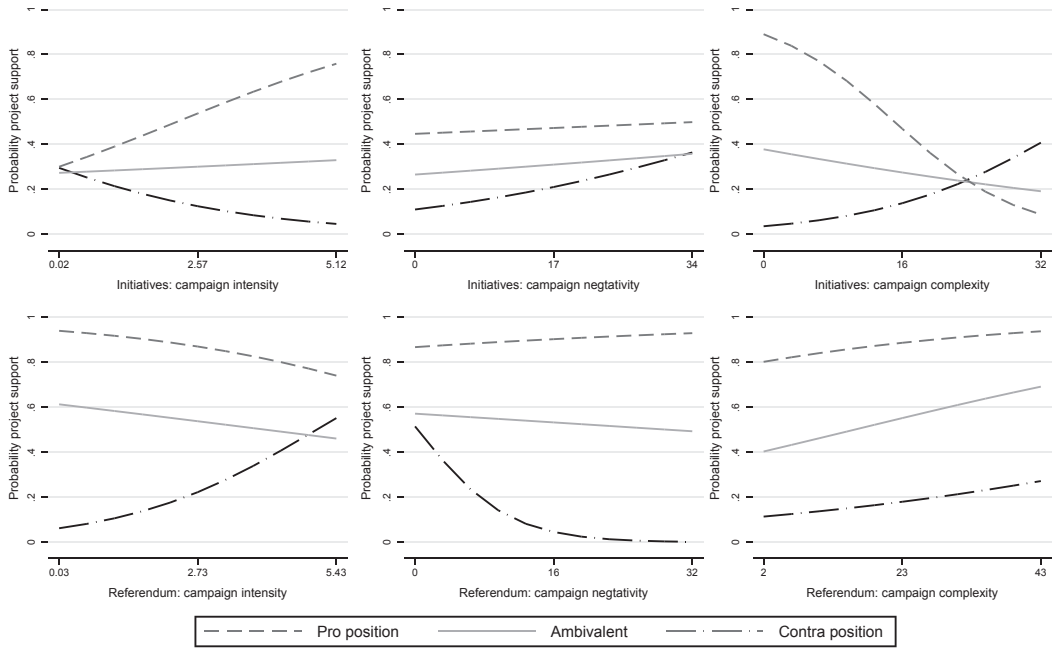
Table 3: By type of project: random-intercept logistic regressions (DV: Project support)

	$M_{5a\ (initiative)}$ Coef. (S_e)	$M_{5b\ (fac.\ ref.)}$ Coef. (S_e)
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL		
Ambivalent *(argument contra)*	2.15 (0.19) ***	1.62 (0.20) ***
Argument pro	4.09 (0.14) ***	3.60 (0.15) ***
Knowledge	0.04 (0.05)	0.02 (0.07)
Age 18-25 *(age 36-45)*	-0.22 (0.10) **	0.11 (0.15)
Age 26-35	-0.09 (0.08)	0.07 (0.11)
Age 46-55	-0.07 (0.07)	0.10 (0.10)
Age 56-65	-0.18 (0.07) **	0.15 (0.10)
Age 66 and older	-0.36 (0.07) ***	-0.13 (0.10)
Female *(male)*	0.10 (0.05) **	-0.18 (0.06) ***
Impact of the project	1.78 (0.09) ***	0.35 (0.12) ***
Constant	-4.15 (0.54) ***	-1.46 (0.89)
PROJECT LEVEL		
Number of projects	0.05 (0.10)	-0.16 (0.19)
Size direction	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00) ***
Negativity direction	-1.05 (0.43) **	4.43 (2.35) *
Complexity direction	-0.01 (0.02)	0.13 (0.05) **
Ads size	-2.44 (0.58) ***	3.13 (0.72) ***
Ads negative	1.53 (0.45) ***	-6.57 (1.09) ***
Complexity	5.18 (1.35) ***	1.48 (1.32)
INTERACTIONS		
Arg. amb. * Ads size	2.74 (0.42) ***	-3.79 (0.55) ***
Arg. pro * Ads size	4.70 (0.28) ***	-4.96 (0.39) ***
Arg. amb * Ads neg.	-1.10 (0.26) ***	6.24 (0.56) ***
Arg. pro * Adds neg.	-1.32 (0.18) ***	7.32 (0.48) ***
Arg. amb * Comp.	-6.86 (0.81) ***	0.19 (0.61)
Arg. pro * Comp.	-13.07 (0.57) ***	0.36 (0.46)
RANDOM EFFECTS PARAMETERS		
Constant	-0.91 (0.16) ***	-0.64 (0.19) ***
AIC	12031.23	6467.338
Interclass correlation	$\rho = 0.04$	$\rho = 0.08$
N (level-1)	11'664	7'572
N (level-2)	24	15

Note: The dependent variable takes the value 0 when the project is rejected and the value 1 when the project is supported. Base categories in brackets. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

project. We expected such conditions to exist both at the individual and situational level, and our empirical models yielded fairly coherent results. In accordance with our first hypothesis, background knowledge increases consistent voting. However, this effect is limited to citizens holding pro positions. Voters with contra positions have high levels of consistent voting regardless of their background knowledge. On the situational level our results show the importance of the campaign for consistent decision making. We find that intensive campaigns increase consistent voting, whereas negative campaigns and complex campaigns decrease the effect of argument positions on choice, as expected. However, campaign characteristics produce distinct results for initiatives and referenda. In other words, similar campaigns with regard to negativity, intensity and complexity have different

Figure 4: Consistent voting information environment – initiative and referendum



effects on consistent voting depending on the type of project. In order to increase support for their camp, authors of initiatives should try to run intensive, negative campaigns. The complexity of the discourse should be as low as possible. Contra-camps should also prefer intensive campaigns, but their aim must be a multilayered debate with little negativity.

Turning to facultative referenda campaigns, voters are less susceptible to information environment factors. This might be due to the fact that these are all government projects. Hence the tone is set by the debates in the pre-parliamentary phase, which decreases populist demands. Nevertheless the highest levels of consistent voting are observed in campaigns with small but negative campaigns, whereas complexity does not influence consistent voting.

Our paper opens up new avenues for the study of a classical questioning. Indeed, if issue opinions are at the heart of several contemporary approaches (from literature on opinion change to studies of causes and consequences of ambivalent opinions), the key question on the consistency between opinions and the final choice has somehow been left behind. Our contribution draws from the contemporary research on political opinions, and shows that some meat still exists on the bone. All in all, our results show that situational factors (both related to the nature and content of political campaigns and the institutional setting of the vote) are in fact more crucial for consistent voting than individual factors. This points in the same direction as recent research showing substantial effects of contextual determinants (availability and actual use of direct democratic instruments) on individual attitudes such as political trust (Bauer and Fatke 2014). If existing literature deals extensively with how political campaigns shape opinion formation and vote choices, we contribute here by showing that such effects play also a major role in shaping *consistent* decisions. Further research, able to disentangle even further the relationship between individual and situational determinants, is needed.

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Appendix

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics (individual variables)

Variable	Percent	Observations
Support Project		
~ Yes	44%	11'111
~ No	56%	14'002
Total	*100%*	*25'113*
Argument		
~ Pro	42%	12'200
~ Ambivalent	9%	2'277
~ Contra	49%	10'636
Total	*100%*	*25'113*

Table A1: Continued

Variable	Percent	Observations
Knowledge		
~ Low	35%	8'801
~ High	65%	16'312
Total	*100%*	*25'113*
Age		
~ 18-25	6%	1'454
~ 26-35	14%	3'452
~ 36-45	21%	5'199
~ 46-55	18%	4'517
~ 56-65	19%	4.829
~ 65 and older	22%	5'661
Total	*100%*	*25'113*
Impact of the project		
~ Low	8%	2'082
~ Medium low	31%	7'627
~ Medium high	19%	4'815
~ High	42%	10'589
Total	*100%*	*25'113*
Sex		
~ Male	51%	12'791
˜ Female	49%	12'322
Total	*100%*	*25'113*

Note: Impact of the project are continuous variables. For this table we recoded the variable (0-0.25 = 1; 0.251-0.5=2; 0.51-0.75 =3; 0.751-1=4).

Table A2: Descriptive Statistics (information environment variables)

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	Std. dev.	Median	Mean
Campaign intensity	51	0.01	5.79	1.75	1.27	1.99
Negative campaigning	51	0	0.34	0.1	0.05	0.08
Campaign complexity	51	1	58	12.28	17	18.7

Note: Campaign intensity measured in m^2. Negativity is in the percentage of negative newspaper ads. Complexity is the number of arguments brought forward by both camps.

Table A3: Fine argument position: random-intercept logistic regressions (DV: Project support)

	M_1 Coef. (S_e)
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL	
Argument -11 *(-12: contra)*	0.41 (0.33)
Argument -10	0.03 (0.13)
Argument -9	-0.39 (0.24)

Table A3: Continued

	$\mathbf{M_1}$ Coef. (S_e)
Argument -8	0.07 (0.09)
Argument -7	0.31 (0.16) **
Argument -6	-0.03 (0.11)
Argument -5	0.25 (0.14) **
Argument -4	0.08 (0.09)
Argument -3	0.52 (0.12) ***
Argument -2	0.25 (0.10) **
Argument -1	0.50 (0.13) ***
Argument 0 – ambivalent	0.85 (0.09) ***
Argument 1	1.02 (0.12) ***
Argument 2	1.30 (0.10) ***
Argument 3	1.48 (0.12) ***
Argument 4	1.87 (0.09) ***
Argument 5	2.10 (0.12) ***
Argument 6	2.28 (0.10) ***
Argument 7	2.53 (0.13) ***
Argument 8	2.46 (0.09) ***
Argument 9	2.81 (0.16) ***
Argument 10	2.97 (0.12) ***
Argument 11	2.89 (0.19) ***
Argument 12 – pro	2.91 (0.10) ***
Knowledge	0.08 (0.03) **
Age 18-25 *(age 36-45)*	-0.02 (0.07)
Age 26-35	0.01 (0.05)
Age 46-55	0.01 (0.05)
Age 56-65	-0.07 (0.05)
Age 66 and older	-0.22 (0.05) ***
Female *(male)*	0.03 (0.03)
Impact of the project	1.03 (0.06) ***
Constant	-1.51 (0.39) ***
PROJECT LEVEL	
Number of projects	-0.19 (0.10) *
Size direction	-0.00 (0.00)
Negativity direction	-1.06 (0.70)
Complexity direction	0.02 (0.02)
RANDOM EFFECTS PARAMETERS	
Constant	-0.20 (0.10) *
AIC	26054.62
Interclass correlation	$\rho = 0.17$
N (level-1)	25,112
N (level-2)	51

Note: The dependent variable takes the value 0 when the project is rejected and the value 1 when the project is supported. Base categories in brackets. *** p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

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