

RUNNING HEAD: EU Flag Display

Showing Their True Colors?

How EU Flag Display Affects Perceptions of Party Elites' European Attachment¹

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Abstract

Evidence suggests that incidental national flag exposure activates nationalistic feelings, and that incidental exposure to the EU flag can affect citizen attachments to Europe. However, we know little about what inferences citizens make based on the EU flag when they see it displayed by parties in an electoral context. To test the expectation that this display affects citizens' evaluations of party elites' EU attachment, we conducted a large scale experiment embedded in a Swedish survey in which respondents were exposed to communications from one of the two main Swedish parties, containing or not containing the image of the flag. We find that simple visual display does little to move perceptions. However, if citizens *perceive* that a particular party displayed the flag, then they are more likely to evaluate its party elites as more attached to Europe.

Key words: EU flag; EU attachment; party elites; visual display; perception

Imagined communities, such as states, need their members to develop a sense of common identity to firmly establish their legitimacy (Anderson, 1991). Group identity increases the subjective value of oneself, group members, and the group itself (e.g., Hogg, 2006). Thus, national identities help forge positive bonds among citizens and to the political system, which in turn foster long-term political stability (e.g. Norris, 1999). National identity is often linked to visual symbols such as the national flag. Exposure to this symbol activates patriotic and other positive, group-centric feelings (Butz, Plant, & Doerr, 2007; Kimmelmeier & Winter, 2008; Schatz & Lavine, 2007) and can influence electoral support (Kalmoe & Gross, 2015).

As dramatically illustrated by the recent “Brexit” vote in the U.K., the development of a common identity among European Union (EU)¹ citizens has been difficult, given the EU’s temporal recentness and cultural, historical, and linguistic diversity. Such an identity may, however, be a prerequisite for citizens’ acceptance of the EU’s political power (Carey, 2002). EU elites have therefore attempted to cultivate an EU national identity, in part by promoting a set of nonverbal symbols for the community.

Over the past few decades, symbols like the European flag, European map, and European anthem have become obvious signs of the EU’s physical presence (Manners, 2011, p. 253). Among them, the EU flag has been the most successful in gaining popular recognition and support. Ninety-five percent of EU citizens recognize the flag, over 70 percent believe it stands for something good, and over 80 percent believe it to be a good symbol of Europe (Standard Eurobarometer 77, 2012). Research has shown that “adherence to EU symbols such as the flag” forms an integral part of the positive affective component of European identity (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & de Vreese, 2011, p. 247). Europeans are likely to find themselves exposed to the EU flag (or an image of the flag) in their daily life, as it features on most if not all

European and national official buildings, European-level media communications, car plates across Europe, and European Union coins and notes.

Previous research has provided diverging evidence as to how citizens react to the EU flag when observed in public. On the one hand, incidental exposure to the flag in media coverage enhances feelings of European identity (Bruter, 2009). This result mirrors the effects observed for national flags in general (Butz et al., 2007; Kemmelmeier & Winter, 2008; Schatz & Lavine, 2007). Other studies have found, more specifically, that the EU flag affects community identity only when associated with some EU-related benefits, and this effect is relatively small (Cram, Patrikios, & Mitchell, 2011).

For most EU citizens, considerable exposure to the EU flag takes place during European election campaigns. In these campaigns, many parties from across Europe choose to display the image of the flag in their informational materials, despite not being legally bound to do so. Previous research has shown parties that lean pro-European are more likely to display the EU flag than those who don't, and these parties are more likely to do so if a substantial percentage of the population is favorable towards the EU (Popa & Dumitrescu, 2015). In election campaigns, the flag is overwhelmingly used in a positive manner: only 4 out of 921 parties since 1979 have used it in a negative way (Popa & Dumitrescu, 2015, page 4, fn. 3). However, there has been limited research on the public opinion effects of EU flag display.

Since the flag is widely recognized as a positive symbol of the European community (Manners, 2011), understanding how EU citizens interpret its display by national parties is important for several reasons. On the one hand, it is clear that political parties play a central role in shaping public opinion in general (Zaller, 1992) as well as on European matters (Gabel & Scheve, 2007; Ray, 2003). If national parties display this community symbol, the association to

the EU may help reinforce the legitimacy of the EU community among voters. At the same time, if parties want to use the flag to cater to pro-European voters, then it is important to determine the extent to which this symbol can act as a pro-European signal in a partisan context.

This study therefore explores how citizens interpret the meaning of the EU flag in the context of a national-level campaign. More specifically, we investigate whether displaying the flag in election materials makes citizens attribute stronger EU attachments to party elites. To test this proposition, we use a large-scale survey experiment in which Swedish citizens are exposed to campaign communications featuring the EU flag from one of the two main Swedish parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Moderates (MP). Below we discuss our hypotheses and methodology.

Theoretical background

The EU flag and positive attachment to the European community

European citizens have different reasons to feel attached to Europe. Bruter (2003, 2009) distinguishes between attachment derived from shared culture and experience with other Europeans (the “cultural” side of European identity) and attachment based on shared political values (the “civic” component of identity). European visual symbols, including the EU flag, are closely linked to the “cultural” side of European identity. Boomgaarden et al. (2011) identify two distinct clusters of affective reactions directed at the European community—a positive (e.g., pride of being European) and negative (e.g., fear of the EU) dimension. The European flag is, according to their evidence, closely connected to a diffuse, positive affect felt with regard to the EU. These results are in line with other research on national flags. Schatz and Lavine (2007), for instance, also find that the national flag is strongly related to an affective, symbolic attachment to

the nation. Thus, although people may identify with a community for different reasons, flags, as visual emblems of national identity, are typically associated with positive emotional attachment to a community.

Empirical evidence consistently suggests that exposure to national symbols activates positive, nation-centric feelings (Bruter, 2009; Butz et al., 2007; Kalmoe & Gross, 2015; Kimmelmeier & Winter, 2008; Schatz & Lavine, 2007). Group identities, in turn, influence perceptions of oneself and members of the group (cf. Hogg, 2006; Stets & Burke, 2000). While previous studies have largely focused on the impact of exposure to national symbols on *personal* identity and attitudes, in this paper we are concerned with how exposure to these symbols affects the image of *those who display them*. To clarify this point by analogy, imagine that a New Yorker walking down the street were to display a pink ribbon in 1991. For that individual, the ribbon would be a symbol of group identity as part of those who fight breast cancer. However, apart from the select group of New York City runners who used this symbol in 1991, few people would take it as an identity cue back then. Twenty five years later, this symbol has become so ubiquitous that the display of pink ribbons (or wrist bands, or shoes on athletes) is now a widely recognized indication of support for cancer activism, in particular breast cancer.

Since the EU flag has been forged as a symbol of the European community (Manners, 2011) and has been strongly linked to positive affect about the EU (Boomgaarden et al., 2011), we examine whether *party elites can use its display to signal their EU attachment to voters* (H1: “The direct flag effect”). We focus on party elites rather than other political actors based on evidence of their influence on individual political attitudes, including European integration (Ray, 2003; Steenbergen et al., 2007; Zaller 1992). At the same time, some empirical research has found that the EU flag’s symbolic power may not yet be potent enough to always activate

feelings of positive identity through simple exposure (see Cram et al., 2011). One way to increase the flag's signal strength may be to increase awareness of its appearance by asking individuals to formulate an opinion about whether the flag was displayed in campaign communications or not. Thus, we also investigate whether display of the EU flag *sends a credible signal of party elites' EU attachment if individuals perceive that the flag was displayed* (H2: "The perception-mediated flag effect").

The context of communication

A memorable image from the 2014 European Election campaign was a UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) poster depicting an EU flag emerging from the still-burning ashes of a Union Jack (UK) flag. This negatively charged display, though consistent with UKIP's strong anti-EU position, is also highly unusual (Popa & Dumitrescu, 2015). In fact, the flag is almost always positively portrayed in parties' manifestos, and it is positively associated with pro-EU party positions (Popa & Dumitrescu, 2015). This pattern suggests that such a display is therefore consistent with a party's EU attachment.

Moreover, the more ambivalent on EU matters a party is, the more room there should be for the display of the European flag to affect voter perceptions. Previous research finds that intra-party dissent generates voter uncertainty about a party's stance on European integration (Gabel & Scheve, 2007). Sweden offers a good opportunity to test the moderating role of party position, as the two main parties have different levels of intra-party dissent on EU matters. The Moderate Party (MP) is historically known for favoring European integration (Sitter, 2001), with a low level of intra-party dissent according to the latest Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker et

al., 2015). Thus in the case of the MP, displaying the EU flag should only marginally increase perceptions of MP elite attachment to the EU, which is already perceived as strong.

The Social Democratic Party (SDP), on the other hand, is generally viewed as having an ambivalent position towards the EU due to the fact that the party has been “seriously divided over Europe even since Sweden decided to apply for EC [European Community] membership” in the early ‘90s (Raunio, 2007, p. 198). This ambivalence is confirmed by the latest CHES study, which placed the SDP close to the middle on the pro/anti EU position scale and noted the high level of intra-party dissent—the highest among the eight Swedish parties represented in parliament (Bakker et al., 2015). Thus, in the case of the SPD, the positive display of visual symbols of EU identity should act as a cue that moves the balance toward more EU-favorable perceptions. In short, *the display of the EU flag on party campaign materials should have a stronger effect on the perception of SDP party elites’ affective attachment to the EU than for MP elites* (H3: “The party effect”).

The availability of additional information

Communication research shows across a variety of contexts that individuals infer significant amounts of information from visuals: flag cues can activate political attitudes and feelings of national identity (e.g. Butz et al., 2007; Kimmelmeier & Winter, 2008); in the realm of facial displays, viewers are able to pick winning candidates based on facial appearances alone (Hall, Goren, Chaiken, & Todorov, 2009); and, in the absence of nonverbal facial cues, on their general visual demeanor (Spezio, Loesch, Gosselin, Mattes, & Alvarez, 2012). When citizens have access to both verbal and nonverbal political information, a few studies have found that certain voters rely more on the verbal channel to make decisions (Krauss, Apple, Morency,

Wenzel, & Winton, 1981; Nagel, Maurer, & Reinemann, 2012), while others find increased reliance on the visual channel (Shah et al., 2015; Shah et al., this issue).

Thus, we also test whether *the presence of additional information about the parties' EU positions moderates the impact of displaying the flag on perceptions of elites' attachment to the EU* (H4: "The information availability effect"). Given previous divergent results, we are open about the direction of the effect here. The null hypothesis is that exposure to policy positions does not affect the signal strength of displaying the EU flag. But it is also possible that the effect of the flag gets weaker with the presence of additional information; or, that it is enhanced by pro-EU policy positions and diminished by anti-EU policy positions.

Experimental design and measures

The data for this study comes from a national survey experiment conducted by the Laboratory of Opinion Research at the University of Gothenburg on a panel of Swedish citizens ($N = 1,824$). The average age of respondents in the study was about 53 years old. Sixty percent were men, and 77 percent had completed post-high school education. Technical details about the panel from which this sample was drawn are available in Martinsson, Andreasson, Markstedt, and Riedel (2013). The study was dispatched to respondents several months prior to the campaign for the 2014 European elections, in November and December 2013.

Design

To test the capacity of the European flag to signal party elites' European attachments, we adapted the visual cover of the Swedish MP and SDP's 2009 European Election manifestos (Euromanifestos) and based all the information provided to respondents on the parties' 2009 and 2004 European programs. We pooled policy information from both years because we could not

identify enough quotations in 2009 alone to express both positive and critical positions about the EU for both parties.

The experiment took the form of a fully factorial 2 (flag: present vs. absent) \times 2 (party: MP vs. SDP) \times 4 (added information: none, EU-positive, EU-critical, EU-balanced) design. The first factor was whether or not the campaign materials featured a picture of the EU flag. Specifically, in the flag-present conditions, we added an image of the EU flag to the top left of each party-specific Euromanifesto cover. When present, the flag took only 4% of the cover so as to not overlap with any of the other originally present elements. This visual manipulation is illustrated in Figure 1. The second factor was the party sponsor: respondents saw campaign materials either from the MP or SDP. The third factor was the additional information accompanying the manifesto covers, consisting of a short text displayed on the screen. The text factor had four levels: some saw an EU-positive text (highlighting the EU's contribution to solving collective problems); some saw an EU-critical text (about the EU "democratic deficit"); some saw a balanced text about the EU; and, finally, some groups only saw the visual version of the cover with no text. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the study's 16 conditions.

Screenshots of the full visual manipulation are presented in Figure 1. The full text manipulations are in Appendix 1.

[Figure 1 about here]

Perception of the flag display. After exposure to the experimental treatment and before the outcomes of interest were measured, all respondents were asked whether any symbols had been present on the campaign materials they had just seen. They were provided with a list including the EU flag. The placement of the EU flag on this list was randomized. To avoid repeated (and uncontrolled) exposure to the image of the flag, we restricted respondents' ability to go back and

see the materials again; thus, they had to answer this question based on what they remembered. A total of 88% of the sample answered the question ($N = 1,616$); of these, 70% ($N = 1,126$) answered it correctly. More specifically, of the 848 respondents who were exposed to the flag, 646 (76.1%) reported seeing it. And of the 768 who did not receive the flag treatment, 481 (62.6%) correctly reported not seeing the flag. As visuals are processed largely automatically, the question was intended to make individuals think deeper about the visuals and have them actively express their perceptions about EU flag display.

Dependent variables. All respondents next evaluated the party's "top officials" whose campaign materials they had just seen, as opposed to perceptions of the party overall. Top officials were simply described as "the party's leaders and Members of Parliament." We felt that asking respondents to estimate their feelings toward an entity as abstract and complex as a *party* would be cognitively burdensome, and invite measurement error. Moreover, party elites are in charge of the parties' policies, thus their opinions are likely to influence the party direction. In a very real way, party leaders do personify the parties they represent. To measure perceptions of party leaders' European attachment, we adapted a question format from the ANES 2010-2012 Evaluations of Government and Society Study (Segura, Jackman, Hutchings, & American National Election Studies, 2012), which was used to measure group perceptions. Respondents rated how well the expressions "Feel attached to Europe" and "Feel proud of being part of the EU" described the [SD/Moderate] Party's top officials. These two items were chosen among others used by Boomgaarden and colleagues (2011) and by Bruter (2009) and included two affective terms ("feel attached" and "feel proud") so as to elicit an evaluation of elites' affective identification with the EU. Our main dependent variable is an affective orientation scale

constructed from the "feel attached" and "feel proud" evaluations given to top officials ($\alpha = 0.90$).

Controls. In the early stages of the survey, respondents indicated their level of European identity (with a measure used by Bruter [2009]), their support for the EU and attitudes towards EU integration (with items from the European Elections Survey 2004, and Schmitt et al., 2009), and their party vote intention the 2014 general elections. Demographic information including age and gender were also asked. These variables are described in Appendix 2.

To facilitate interpretation of the results, all variables in our models were rescaled to run from 0 to 1.

Results

To test the effect of the flag on perceptions of party elites' EU attachment, we ran a series of mediation models (Imai, Keele, Tingley, & Yamamoto, 2011), as depicted in Figure 2. These models allow us to test both for a direct effect of the flag visual display (H1) and for an indirect effect through individuals' perception of the display (H2). Furthermore, as we expect differences by party (in line with H3), we run these models separately for the SDP and MP. We also expect these effects to vary with the presence of additional information (in line with H4); therefore, we run them separately for each condition.

[Figure 2 about here]

We start with a simple descriptive table of mean perceptions of elites' European attachments in each experimental condition, as a function of participants' perceptions of whether the EU flag was displayed in the materials they viewed. These simple means, presented in Table 1, offer an initial indication of the magnitude of effects. Larger values indicate that elites are perceived to be more strongly attached to the EU. The table suggests at least two patterns of

results: compared to the actual display of the EU flag, the *perception* that the flag was displayed is associated with larger variations in the evaluations of elites' EU attachment; and, these variations are larger for the SDP than for the MP.

[Table 1 about here]

To test our four hypotheses, analysis was carried out in MPlus 6.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 2011) using a series of path models that control for several pre-treatment covariates, such as voting for the SPD, voting for MP, European identity, EU support, gender, and age (the full results are presented in Appendix 3).² We present the results separately for the SDP (Table 2) and MP models (Table 3).

[Tables 2 & 3 about here]

The results show no statistically significant *direct* effects of flag display on evaluations of elites' EU attachment for either party, irrespective of whether each information valence condition is considered separately, or together. Thus, we did not find any evidence that would corroborate H1, the expectation that simple exposure to the flag would send a credible sign of party elites' EU attachment.

We do however find a statistically significant *indirect* effect, offering support for H2, which assumed that the presence of the flag would have to reach awareness to serve as a relevant signal. However, the effects are almost exclusively confined to the SDP conditions. In the case of SDP we find an indirect effect of exposure to the flag visual across almost all information valence groups. The exception is when respondents were shown an EU-positive text. The indirect effect of the flag on evaluations of SDP elites' attachment holds even if we analyze all the information valence groups together.

These results suggest that, for those participants who believed the flag had been displayed, exposure to this visual symbol of the EU had a positive effect on perceptions of SDP elites' European attachments. At the same time, no such effect is observed for perceptions of MP elites. There is an indication of a statistically significant indirect effect of the flag treatment when we aggregate all groups. But given that for a relatively large N we only detect significance at $p < 0.10$, and the fact that this effect is much smaller than in the case of SPD, we can safely say that the indirect impact of the flag on the perceived EU identity of MP elites is at best minimal. Thus, consistent with H3, we do find some indication that the signal may be more consequential when the party is ambivalent on EU matters, as is the case with the SDP but not the MP, which is strongly pro-EU.

Furthermore, we expected flag effects to vary with the valence of the information provided, whether the text was critical or supportive (H4). But our analysis found that the indirect effect of the flag on perceptions of SDP elites is strongest in the *absence* of information about the party's EU positions. This result may also have to do with the text's valence. None of the positions in the stimulus materials were overly critical of the EU (including the EU critical condition, which was only mildly negative), and the information valence factor has an independent positive effect on perceptions of SDP elites (see Appendix 3).

Finally, the analysis found that the *total* effect of the visual display of the flag never reached statistical significance. Overall, including the flag visual on the party manifesto covers did not significantly move perceptions of party elites' European attachments. This could be due to the relatively limited exposure that each participant received to the stimulus materials, or to the fact that while an indirect effect can be observed, perceptions about whether the parties used

the EU flag on the cover of their manifestos does not provide a strong enough rationale on its own for individuals to update their overall impressions of party elites.

Discussion

The EU flag is a visual embodiment of the European community and exposure to it has been shown to increase citizens' affective attachment to Europe (Bruter, 2009). But there has been limited research on how citizens interpret the meaning of this symbol when they see it strategically displayed by parties. Previous research shows that parties influence public opinion in general (Zaller, 1992)—and attitudes towards the EU in particular (Ray, 2003; Steenbergen et al., 2007). Given the prominent role that national political elites play in the construction of a common European identity, it is important to understand the extent to which voters infer European attachments from the display by parties of the EU flag on their campaign communications. The aim of this paper was to provide a first test of this effect.

Using data from a large N survey experiment in Sweden, we found that displaying the EU flag can influence voter perceptions of party elites' EU attachment for parties with an ambivalent position toward the EU, such as the Swedish SDP. However, the display itself does little to move these perceptions; rather, it needs to be accompanied by the *perception* that the party actually displayed the EU flag. We also find that this indirect effect is strongest in the absence of other information, but further research is needed to establish more precisely how the valence of information affects evaluations of elites' EU attachment.

While we find only indirect effects for flag display, these results may be due to the limited exposure to the flag that respondents received in the study. Due to practical constraints, we could not make the flag larger than about 4% of the cover image overall and we were not able to present repeated exposures to enhance recall accuracy. Admittedly, these conditions are quite

artificial with respect to real campaigns, where symbols are featured more prominently and repeatedly. Thus, our study ends up being a conservative test of the hypothesis. In a real campaign, the effects of EU flag display on perceptions of party elites should be stronger.

Moreover, the national context in which we tested for flag effects adds to the conservative nature of the test. While the level of EU contestation in Sweden has never reached the highs of other countries that have produced anti-EU parties (such as UKIP in the UK), Sweden's main parties have also been split on the benefits of this membership since joining the EU in 1995 (Raunio, 2007). Moreover, in addition to its national identity, Sweden also has a strong regional identity as part of the Scandinavian Peninsula. Thus, Sweden may be a tougher than usual case to test for the signaling power of the EU flag on perceptions of party elites' European attachment. Results may be stronger in the case of founding members of the EU (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands), for example.

The results also provide some guidelines for practitioners involved in the design of European campaign promotional materials. They suggest that playing on EU symbols to signal party leader attachment to the EU may work but only for parties that do not have a clear pro- or anti-EU position to begin with. Moreover, what matters most is whether voters believe the symbol was displayed; thus, to send an effective signal, campaign managers must ensure that voters pay close attention to the visual aspect of their electoral message.

Far from settling what inferences citizens make when exposed to the EU flag in a campaign context, these results point instead to the need for further research. So far, studies of the impact of European symbols have mainly focused on how exposure to these symbols in the media influence the public's sense of European attachment, and what the flag means to *individual citizens* as part of a larger political community. This paper suggests that the EU flag

display in a political electoral context can signal EU attachment on behalf of those who display it. Thus, the EU flag display by groups recognized as opinion leaders, and that individuals identify with, such as national parties, could potentially play an important role in forging a stronger EU attachment. Future studies should further specify the optimal context for this signal.

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Table 1. Average effects of EU flag display on evaluations of party elites' EU attachment

EU flag present	Perception of EU flag display	Evaluation of elites' EU attachment	
		SDP	MP
No	Not displayed	0.643	0.803
No	Displayed	0.701	0.791
No	Did not answer	0.589	0.806
Yes	Not displayed	0.619	0.763
Yes	Displayed	0.696	0.813
Yes	Did not answer	0.659	0.786

Note: The dependent variable measures respondents' evaluations of elites' EU attachment on a 0 to 1 scale. Larger values indicate stronger attachment.

Table 2. Path analysis results, SDP group

Model (N)	Outcome (R ²)	Determinant	Causal effects		
			Direct (SE)	Indirect (SE)	Total (SE)
SDP, no text (N = 216)	Perception of flag display (R ² = 0.301)	Flag display	1.034*** (0.194)	–	1.034*** (0.194)
	EU attachment (R ² = 0.150)	Flag display	-0.017 (0.036)	0.060** (0.022)	0.043 (0.032)
		Perception of flag display	0.058*** (0.019)	–	0.058*** (0.019)
SDP, EU-balanced text (N = 205)	Perception of flag display (R ² = 0.205)	Flag display	0.837 *** (0.197)	–	0.837 *** (0.197)
	EU attachment (R ² = 0.188)	Flag display	-0.023 (0.030)	0.030** (0.015)	0.007 (0.028)
		Perception of flag display	0.036* (0.016)	–	0.036* (0.016)
SDP, EU-critical text (N = 195)	Perception of flag display (R ² = 0.246)	Flag display	1.019*** (0.214)	–	1.019*** (0.214)
	EU attachment (R ² = 0.139)	Flag display	-0.026 (0.035)	0.047** (0.022)	0.020 (0.030)
		Perception of flag display	0.046** (0.019)	–	0.046** (0.019)
SDP, EU-positive text (N = 209)	Perception of flag display (R ² = 0.301)	Flag display	1.330*** (0.205)	–	1.330*** (0.205)
	EU attachment (R ² = 0.150)	Flag display	-0.020 (0.032)	0.027 (0.022)	0.006 (0.028)
		Perception of flag display	0.020 (0.016)	–	0.020 (0.016)
SDP, all text conditions (N = 825)	Perception of flag display (R ² = 0.236)	Flag display	1.023*** (0.097)	–	1.023*** (0.097)
	EU attachment (R ² = 0.169)	Flag display	-0.024 (0.017)	0.041*** (0.010)	0.017 (0.014)
		Perception of flag display	0.040*** (0.009)	–	0.040*** (0.009)

Note: Unstandardized estimates, standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.005$

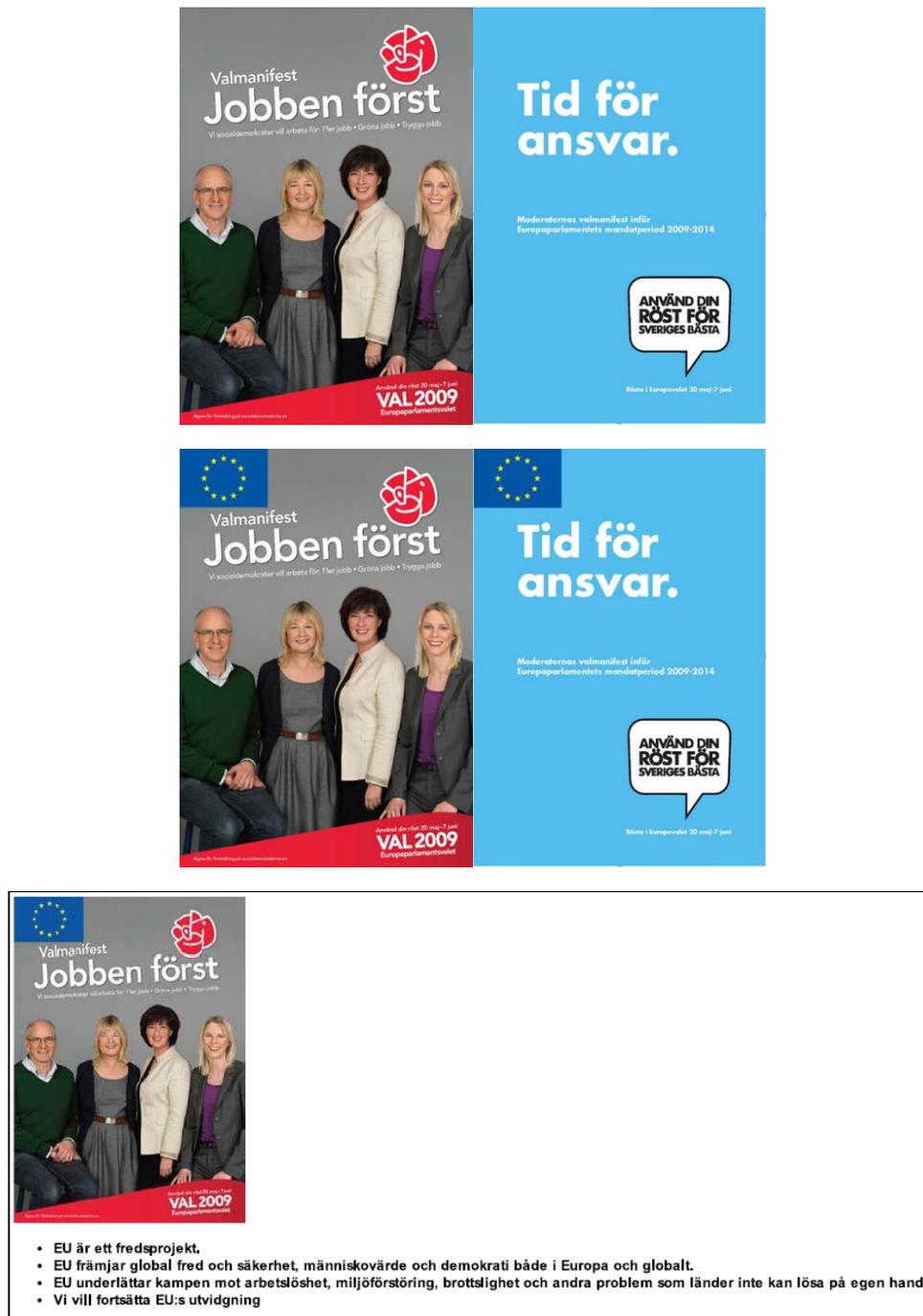
Table 3. Path analysis parameters, MP group

Model (N)	Outcome (R ²)	Determinant	Causal effects		
			Direct (SE)	Indirect (SE)	Total (SE)
MP, no text (N = 189)	Perception of flag display (R ² = 0.334)	Flag display	1.216*** (0.261)	–	1.216*** (0.261)
	EU attachment (R ² = 0.104)	Flag display	0.035 (0.032)	-0.003 (0.007)	0.031 (0.028)
		Perception of flag display	-0.003 (0.014)	–	-0.003 (0.014)
MP, EU-balanced text (N = 190)	Perception of flag display (R ² = 0.247)	Flag display	1.075*** (0.209)	–	1.075*** (0.209)
	EU attachment (R ² = 0.036)	Flag display	-0.037 (0.035)	0.013 (0.020)	-0.023 (0.029)
		Perception of flag display	0.013 (0.018)	–	0.013 (0.018)
MP, EU-critical text (N = 210)	Perception of flag display (R ² = 0.212)	Flag display	0.928*** (0.195)	–	0.928*** (0.195)
	EU attachment (R ² = 0.050)	Flag display	-0.045 (0.035)	0.021 (0.017)	-0.023 (0.021)
		Perception of flag display	0.023 (0.017)	–	0.023 (0.017)
MP, EU-positive text (N = 196)	Perception of flag display (R ² = 0.357)	Flag display	1.318*** (0.221)	–	1.318*** (0.221)
	EU attachment (R ² = 0.134)	Flag display	-0.015 (0.030)	0.024 (0.018)	0.009 (0.024)
		Perception of flag display	0.018 (0.013)	–	0.018 (0.013)
MP, all text conditions (N = 785)	Perception of flag display (R ² = 0.261)	Flag display	1.090*** (0.103)	–	1.090*** (0.103)
	EU attachment (R ² = 0.059)	Flag display	-0.017 (0.017)	0.016* (0.009)	-0.001 (0.014)
		Perception of flag display	0.015* (0.009)	–	0.015* (0.009)

Note: Unstandardized estimates, standard errors in parentheses.

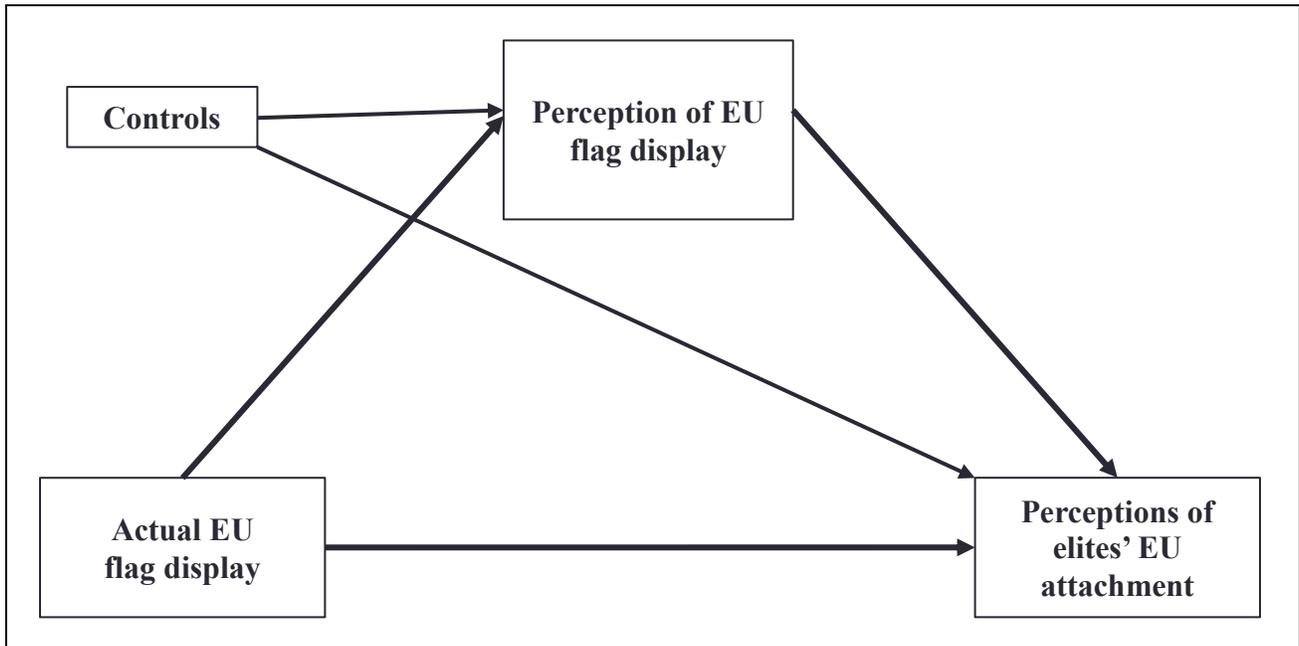
p* < 0.10, *p* < 0.05, ****p* < 0.005

Figure 1. Visual manipulation



Note: The top row presents the original party materials, the middle row presents the party materials with the added EU flag to the left corner, and the bottom row presents a screen shot example of the full manipulation. In this example, the text valence is positive (see complete translation in Appendix 1).

Figure 2. The path analysis model



Appendix 1. Text manipulations

The texts were directly extracted from the 2004 and 2009 Euro-Manifestos of the two parties. They were introduced as “Highlights from the Party’s previous European Election Program/ Manifesto.”

I. SDP

a. EU-positive

i. Swedish

EU är ett fredsprojekt.

EU främjar global fred och säkerhet, för människovärde och demokrati både i Europa och globalt.

EU underlättar kampen mot arbetslöshet, miljöförstöring, och andra saker som ingen nation kan lösa på egen hand.

Vi vill fortsätta EUs utvidgning.

ii. English translation

The EU is a peace project.

The EU promotes global peace, safety, dignity and democracy on our continent and across the world.

EU allows for greater support in the fight against unemployment, environmental degradation, and other things that no nation can solve alone.

We want to continue the EU enlargement.

b. EU-critical

i. Swedish

EU är inte tillräckligt öppen, demokratisk och jämställt.

Europa bör lägga större värde på människor än på det internationella kapitalet.

EU bör göra mer för att bekämpa ungdomsarbetslösheten och bidra till att skapa sysselsättning.

EU bör göra mer för att bekämpa skatteflykt och ekonomisk brottslighet.

ii. English translation

The EU is not sufficiently open, democratic and equal.

Europe should place more value on humans than on international capital.

The EU should do more to fight youth unemployment and help create jobs.

The EU should do more to combat tax evasion and financial crime.

c. EU-balanced

i. Swedish

EU främjar global fred, säkerhet och demokrati på vår kontinent och i hela världen.

Samtidigt bör EU själv bli mer öppen, mer demokratiskt och mer jämställt.

EU ger större stöd i kampen mot arbetslöshet, miljöförstöring, och andra saker som ingen nation kan lösa på egen hand.

Men EU måste också göra mer för att bekämpa ungdomsarbetslösheten och bidra till att skapa sysselsättning.

ii. English translation

The EU promotes global peace, safety and democracy on our continent and across the world.

At the same time, the EU should itself become more open, more democratic and more equal.

EU allows for greater support in the fight against unemployment, environmental degradation, and other things that no nation can solve alone.

However, the EU must also do more to fight youth unemployment and help create jobs.

II. MD

a. EU-positive

i. Swedish

EU har säkrat fred, frihet och demokrati i ett Europa som tidigare slets av återkommande konflikter och krig.

Genom EU, Sveriges värderingar om frihet, fred och demokrati har en större inverkan på världen.

Den ekonomiska krisen och klimatutmaningen visar att många av de frågor som är viktiga för Sverige endast kan lösas genom ett starkt europeiskt samarbete.

ii. English translation

The EU has secured peace, freedom and democracy in a Europe that was previously torn by recurrent conflict and war.

Through the EU, Sweden's values of freedom, peace and democracy have a greater impact in the world.

The economic crisis and the challenge of climate change shows that many of the issues that are important for Sweden can only be addressed through strong European cooperation.

b. EU-critical

i. Swedish

EU måste bli mer jämställt, med positioner lika delat mellan män och kvinnor.

EU har inte gjort tillräckligt för att säkerställa den fria rörligheten för människor och företag.

Vi motsätter oss alla försök av EU att reglera vårt arbetskraft och att har sina egna beskattningsrätt.

EU behöver en bättre strategi för att hjälpa länder att förhindra massarbetslöshet och tillåta fler och nya jobb.

ii. English translation

The EU needs to become more equal, with positions equally shared between men and women.

The EU has not done enough to safeguard the free movement for people and businesses.

We oppose any attempts of the EU to regulate our labor and have their own taxing powers.

The EU needs a better strategy to help countries prevent mass unemployment and allow more and new jobs.

c. EU-balanced

i. Swedish

EU har säkrat fred, frihet och demokrati i ett Europa som tidigare slets av återkommande konflikter och krig.

Samtidigt måste EU bli mer jämställd, med positioner lika delat mellan män och kvinnor.

Den ekonomiska krisen och klimatutmaningen visar att många av de frågor som är viktiga för Sverige endast kan lösas genom ett starkt europeiskt samarbete.

Men EU behöver en bättre strategi för att hjälpa länder att förhindra massarbetslöshet och tillåta fler och nya jobb.

ii. English translation

The EU has secured peace, freedom and democracy in a Europe that was previously torn by recurrent conflict and war.

At the same time, the EU needs to become more equal, with positions equally shared between men and women.

The economic crisis and the challenge of climate change shows that many of the issues that are important for Sweden can only be addressed through strong European cooperation.

However, the EU needs a better strategy to help countries prevent mass unemployment and allow more and new jobs.

Appendix 2. Study variables

Elites' European attachment: original question wording “Next we’ll ask how well some phrases describe [SD/ Moderate] Party’s top officials and party voters. Which group you’ll be asked about first was chosen randomly by the computer.

Think first about [SD/ Moderate] Party’s top officials. By “top officials” we mean the party’s leaders and Members of Parliament. How well does each phrase describe them? Select one answer from each row in the grid (5=Extremely well, 1=Not well at all).”

- “Feel attached to Europe”
- “Feel proud of being part of the EU.”

MP voter: reported vote intention for the Moderates in the 2014 Parliamentary Elections

SDP voter: reported vote intention for the Social Democratic Party in the 2014 Parliamentary Elections

EU identity: original question wording: “Do you see yourself as ...?” response categories:” 1. Swedish only, 2. Swedish and European, 3. European and Swedish, 4. European only”. Recoded into 0 for “1. Swedish only” and 1 otherwise.

EU good: original question wording: “Generally speaking, do you think that Sweden’s membership of the EU has been very positive, somewhat positive, neither positive nor negative, somewhat negative or very negative?”; response categories:” 1. Very positive, 2. Somewhat positive, 3. Neither positive nor negative, 4. Somewhat negative, 5. Very negative”

Age: computed from birth year

Female: self-reported gender of the respondent, 0: Male, 1:Female

Appendix 3. Full model results with controls

Table A1. SDP group

	SDP no text		SDP EU balanced		SDP EU critical		SDP EU positive		SDP full	
	Perception of flag display	EU elite att.	Perception of flag display	EU elite att.	Perception of flag display	EU elite att.	Perception of flag display	EU elite att.	Perception of flag display	EU elite att.
<i>Flag display effects</i>										
Direct		-0.017 (0.036)		-0.023 (0.030)		-0.026 (0.035)		-0.020 (0.032)		-0.024 (0.017)
Indirect		0.060** (0.022)		0.030** (0.015)		0.047** (0.022)		0.027 (0.022)		0.041*** (0.010)
Total		0.043 (0.032)		0.007 (0.028)		0.020 (0.030)		0.006 (0.028)		0.017 (0.014)
<i>Path coefficients</i>										
Perception of flag display		0.058*** (0.019)		0.036* (0.016)		0.046** (0.019)		0.020 (0.016)		0.040*** (0.009)
Flag display	1.034*** (0.194)		0.837*** (0.197)		1.019*** (0.214)		1.330*** (0.205)		1.023*** (0.097)	
<i>Text effects</i>										
Positive text									0.213 (0.139)	0.068** (0.021)
Critical text									-0.166 (0.138)	0.084** (0.019)
Balanced text									-0.059 (0.137)	0.074** (0.020)

Table A1. SDP group (cont.)

	SDP no text		SDP EU balanced		SDP EU critical		SDP EU positive		SDP full	
	Perception of flag display	EU elite att.	Perception of flag display	EU elite att.						
<i>Controls</i>										
SDP voter	-0.058 (0.328)	-0.004 (0.058)	0.146 (0.309)	0.061 (0.053)	0.545 (0.362)	0.030 (0.060)	0.084 (0.332)	0.054) (0.068)	0.182 (0.156)	0.039 (0.029)
MP voter	0.235 (0.254)	0.025 (0.037)	0.573 (0.308)	-0.091 (0.036)	0.085 (0.292)	-0.077 * (0.042)	0.023 (0.269)	-0.029 (0.030)	0.206 (0.139)	-0.041 * (0.017)
EU Citizenship	-0.407 (0.282)	-0.006 (0.051)	0.081 (0.225)	0.005 (0.033)	-0.004 (0.243)	0.014 (0.037)	0.101 (0.303)	-0.051 (0.042)	-0.045 (0.126)	-0.007 (0.020)
EU good	0.209 (0.325)	— 0.187** (0.058)	-0.743* (0.329)	— 0.129** (0.045)	-0.163 (0.328)	— 0.136** (0.048)	-0.453 (0.344)	— 0.142** (0.046)	-0.266* (0.161)	— 0.149** (0.024)
Female	0.199 (0.209)	-0.003 (0.035)	- 0.035 (0.201)	-0.031 (0.028)	-0.357* (0.216)	0.025 (0.034)	-0.133 (0.222)	-0.002 (0.027)	-0.075 (0.104)	-0.006 (0.015)
Age	0.809 (0.832)	— 0.359** (0.148)	0.373 (0.709)	— 0.333** (0.118)	0.241 (0.729)	-0.074 (0.103)	0.134 (0.779)	-0.164 (0.098)	0.476 (0.366)	— 0.231** (0.055)
Intercept		0.861** (0.084)		0.948** (0.072)		0.780** (0.066)		0.895** (0.066)		0.812** (0.036)
R^2	0.301	0.150	0.205	0.188	0.246	0.139	0.301	0.150	0.236	0.169
N	216		205		195		209		825	

Note: Unstandardized estimates, standard errors in parenthesis, * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A1. MP group

	MP no text		MP EU balanced		MP EU critical		MP EU positive		MP full	
	Perception of Flag Display	EU Elite Att.	Perception of Flag Display	EU Elite Att.	Perception of Flag Display	EU Elite Att.	Perception of Flag Display	EU Elite Att.	Perception of Flag Display	EU Elite Att.
<i>Flag display effects</i>										
Direct		0.035 (0.032)		-0.037 (0.035)		-0.045 (0.035)		-0.015 (0.030)		-0.017 (0.017)
Indirect		-0.003 (0.007)		0.013 (0.020)		0.021 (0.017)		0.024 (0.018)		0.016* (0.009)
Total		0.031 (0.028)		-0.023 (0.029)		-0.023 (0.021)		0.009 (0.024)		-0.001 (0.014)
<i>Path coefficients</i>										
Perception of flag display		-0.003 (0.014)		0.013 (0.018)		0.023 (0.017)		0.018 (0.013)		0.015* (0.009)
Flag display	1.216*** (0.261)		1.075*** (0.209)		0.928*** (0.195)		1.318*** (0.221)		1.090*** (0.103)	
<i>Text effects</i>										
Positive text									-0.257* (0.151)	0.011 (0.021)
Critical text									-0.346** (0.144)	-0.033* (0.018)
Balanced text									-0.451** (0.149)	0.016 (0.020)

Table A1. MP group (cont.)

	MP no text		MP EU balanced		MP EU critical		MP EU positive		MP full	
	Perception of Flag Display	EU Elite Att.								
<i>Controls</i>										
SDP voter	0.947*	0.050	-0.044	-0.033	0.028	0.003	-0.044	0.022	0.168	0.000
	(0.489)	(0.046)	(0.348)	(0.051)	(0.275)	(0.037)	(0.327)	(0.033)	(0.157)	(0.019)
MP voter	0.701	0.081	0.333	0.039	0.184	0.013	0.688	0.041	0.417**	0.039
	(0.377)	(0.055)	(0.292)	(0.046)	(0.275)	(0.052)	(0.481)	(0.048)	(0.158)	(0.024)
EU Citizenship	0.197	0.022	-0.236	-0.011	-0.431	0.040	-0.140	0.017	-0.175	0.014
	(0.351)	(0.040)	(0.286)	(0.048)	(0.281)	(0.042)	(0.276)	(0.038)	(0.137)	(0.020)
EU good	-0.336	-0.167**	0.420	-0.067	0.194	-0.129**	-0.535	-0.156**	0.040	-0.123**
	(0.499)	(0.054)	(0.339)	(0.043)	(0.333)	(0.052)	(0.364)	(0.042)	(0.173)	(0.023)
Female	0.222	0.058*	-0.205	0.023	-0.251	0.026	0.405	-0.068**	0.002	0.010
	(0.242)	(0.030)	(0.208)	(0.030)	(0.198)	(0.033)	(0.228)	(0.025)	(0.104)	(0.014)
Age	0.861	0.116	-0.348	0.019	-0.253	0.024	0.134	-0.194**	-0.051	-0.019
	(0.805)	(0.121)	(0.882)	(0.123)	(0.670)	(0.107)	(0.792)	(0.090)	(0.371)	(0.053)
Intercept		0.761**		0.853**		0.804**		1.003**		0.864**
		(0.069)		(0.077)		(0.068)		(0.063)		(0.034)
R^2	0.334	0.104	0.247	0.036	0.212	0.050	0.357	0.134	0.261	0.059
N	189		190		210		196		785	

Note: Unstandardized estimates, standard errors in parenthesis, * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Endnotes

¹ As of July 2016, the European Union comprises the following member countries (in alphabetical order): Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

² Running the same model using the R mediation package yielded substantively similar results.