Ideological Consistency, Political Information and Elite–Mass Congruence*

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Objective. The literature considers the importance of political sophistication for controlling political elites, although it disregards the role of ideological consistency. The objective of this article is to gain insight into the role of citizens’ ideological consistency as either an impairment to citizens’ ability or an effective tool in bringing about elite–mass congruence. Methods. Combining data from the European Social Survey (ESS) and the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) for 29 European countries, I implement an empirical strategy to disentangle the top-down and bottom-up processes of mutual influence between elites and citizens. Results. Consistent with the enabling (as opposed to the impairing) conception of ideological consistency, ideological consistency closes, rather than increases, the gap between the elites and the masses. Also, bottom-up models dominate top-down models regardless of electorates’ ideological consistency and information. Conclusion. Empirical findings challenge the literature about the causal effect of political ignorance on the autonomy of political elites, and they urge for the inclusion of ideological consistency as a crucial factor for a better understanding of the positional gaps between the elites and the masses.

A common assumption in the pluralist political science up to the 1960s was that policy outcomes were the result of the interaction among equals. The theory was society-centered. In this, the political system transferred citizens and actors’ preferences directly into political outcomes as an automatic mechanism with no margin for the state’s autonomy. Citizens were thought to have full capacity to make political elites accountable for the political outcomes they were responsible for, and this connection was believed to be the key for democratic equilibrium. Consistent with the democratic ideal narration of the pluralists, the responsible party model describes an analogue scenario where citizens are able to monitor elite activities and elites must follow citizens’ instructions in order to achieve their reelection (Cox and McCubbins, 2005; Downs, 1957; Mayhew, 2004; Miller and Stokes, 1963).

However, two parallel theoretical advancements put into question both the pluralist idea of the world and the responsible party model. First, some scholarly literature points out that policies tend to be rooted in organizations themselves, in internal needs, which are often the result of officials pursuing their own goals (Skocpol, 1985). And, second, scholarly research on public opinion suggests that the level of political information of citizens is so limited and rudimentary that most people are totally unaware of political affairs, posing a critical challenge for the classic democratic equilibrium (Bennett, 2006; Converse, 2006a; Fishkin, 2006; Hardin, 2006; Somin, 1998, 2006).

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From these two parallel strands of literature emerge a theory that puts public ignorance and state autonomy in a causal order. These authors argue that the public unawareness of what the vast modern state is actually doing provides a generous leeway for elites to pursue their own objectives regardless of the general will (Somin, 1998, 2006). Up to now, the relationship between ignorant masses and elites’ autonomy has been provided from either a theoretical perspective (DeCanio, 2000a, 2000b, 2007; Edelman, 1964) or a qualitative analysis of the American case (DeCanio, 2005, 2006). Yet it has never been examined through quantitative evidence.

Furthermore, the relevance of ideology in this research agenda has been largely dismissed in favor of an exclusive attention to voters’ information. But does ideology have an effect on the autonomy of political elites? Certainly, it brings not only sophistication to voters, but also distortion and oversimplification of the reality. Once the common binomial in the literature, sophistication and ideological consistency, is broken down, sophistication and ideological consistency can play a separate role in the capacity of citizens for political accountability and exert distinct influences over the mechanisms of control over political elites.

This article adds to the theoretical background on elite–mass linkage by revealing the relationship between ideological consistency and voters’ sophistication, and its implications on the elites’ autonomy. Moreover, I present, for the first time, empirical evidence on the relationship between citizens’ sophistication, ideological consistency and the ideological congruence between the elites and the masses in a cross-national large-N analysis. Additionally, a new measurement for the autonomy of the political elite is incorporated in the analysis. Finally, the driving factor between the elites’ and the masses’ positions is disentangled in order to extricate who moves who in the positional game. To do so, this article uses data from the European Social Survey (individual-level variables) and data from the Comparative Manifesto Project as the best proxy for the elites’ position (party-level variables).

Results suggest that the congruence between the position of the elites and the masses, which reflects the degree to which elites are allowed to differ from the median position of their voters, is affected by their own voters’ sophistication and their levels of ideological consistency. Even though previous theoretical accounts focus on the impact of information on the elites’ autonomy, findings reveal that the ideological consistency of the electorate should also be taken into account for future analyses. However, rather than a negative effect, ideological consistency positively affects the elite–mass congruence, especially for voters with higher levels of political information. This lends further credence to the instrumental nature of ideology for controlling political elites. At the same time, inconsistent with the hypotheses derived from the theoretical background, empirical evidence supports the thesis that citizens drive the political dynamics and are able to exert more influence on elites, as opposed to the elites on citizens.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section briefly characterizes the relevant literature on the relationship between political sophistication and elite–mass congruence as well as previous theoretical contributions on the role of ideological consistency. The second explains the data, the independent and dependent variables, and the empirical strategy. The third section presents the empirical results. Finally, the fourth section discusses the main findings, the theoretical contributions, empirical limitations, and lines for future research.

Theoretical Background

States, through their political elites, are autonomous to the extent that the formulations and goals they pursue do not simply reflect the demands or interests of social groups, classes, or society, of the territories or people they claim to control (Skocpol, 1985). The
traditional view of the pluralist democracy and the responsible party model describes, in its ideal form, that citizens can monitor, control, and so influence elite decisions, which are electorally accountable and legislatively responsible in order to seek reelection (Cox and McCubbins, 2005; Downs, 1957; Mayhew, 2004; Miller and Stokes, 1963). Democracy is normatively believed to be a system of mass formal monitorization of elites through both periodical and spontaneous political participation, yet the cognitive abilities of the citizens to meet the great responsibilities that democratic regimes attribute to them are believed to be limited (Bennett, 2006; Converse, 2006a; Fishkin, 2006; Hardin, 2006; Somin, 1998, 2006). In this line, some scholars establish a causal connection between public ignorance and state autonomy, where the unawareness of the general public on political matters leaves room for the elites to pursue self-regarding interests (DeCanio, 2000a, 2000b, 2005, 2007; Edelman, 1964; Somin, 1998, 2006). Thus, the extent to which citizens have the capability to exert control determines the autonomy from social preferences that political elites enjoy. Informed citizens can threaten political elites with their participation and, thus, force them to move toward their preferences. Alternatively, if elites are aware that citizens are politically uninformed, the pursuit of their own interests will not jeopardize their chances of reelection and, therefore, either elites can force their electorate to move to the positions they wish or the gap between elites and voters’ preferences increases without electoral consequences.

While these accounts center on the main effect of public ignorance on state autonomy, they have mainly dismissed the potential influence of ideological consistency on citizens’ information. Perhaps it is because most of the literature takes for granted the end-of-ideology era announced some time ago by which ideological consistency and voters’ sophistication were two inextricable sides of the same coin (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 2006a). However, some authors have recently contributed to demystify such a relationship and disentangle the two concepts as different conceptual realities (Kerlinger, 1984; Jost, 2006). They are distinct in nature and their inextricable connection must not be assumed. Both may have an independent and/or joint effect on the political accountability that masses exert on elites, which, as a consequence, can influence their autonomy with regard to social preferences. Therefore, people’s level of ideological consistency should be taken into account as an independent and moderator effect in the relationship between public ignorance and state autonomy. Here, I define ideology or a belief system interchangeably to refer to “any configuration of ideas and attitudes which elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence” (Converse, 2006b:207). The degree to which positions along conflictive political issues are interrelated characterizes the level of ideological constraint that an individual possesses.

Ideology-based consistency, however, has two distinct sides: an instrumental or a dominance, depending on the origins and functions of the consistency. On the one hand, ideologies may serve to organize and structure the complexity of politics by sorting ideas and aligning issues along multiple lines of potential conflict, which might ease the way to effectively control political elites (instrumental side). On the other hand, ideology can also be understood to be social, instead of logical or psychological, and, therefore, the result of a top-down inducement process in which masses absorb the socially diffused “packages” of ideas that are presented to them as natural by the elites (Converse, 2006b; Marx and Engels, 1970). In this, elites possess the means of connecting issues as though they were naturally connected, constituting an invaluable tool to activate citizens’ congenial bias to dampen their political accountability (domination side).\footnote{Formal hypotheses are derived from the dominance side of ideology. When hypotheses’ validity is subject to the nature of ideology (instrumental versus dominant) it will be noted for the reader.} In sum, the two sides reflect the
fact that ideology breeds as much information and sophistication as distortion, oversimplification, selective exposition to confirmatory existing information, and processing filters (Congleton, 1991; Hart, 2009; Galdi et al., 2012; Garrett, 2009; Glaser, 2005; Lavine, Lodge, and Freitas, 2005; Smith, Fabrigar, and Norris, 2008).

As a result of the combination of both processes, electorates characterized by high levels of political knowledge may see their critical judgment and potential of effective control over elites impaired by their severe ideological consistency due to its dominance side. I call them the militant voters for their high sophistication and ideology. They are weakly positioned at the mercy of their elites, increasing elites’ political autonomy and allowing elites more capability to move the electorate to their ideal position.  

H1a: When a given electorate has high political knowledge combined with high ideological consistency, then the elite–mass issue distance is low (meeting at the elites’ ideal point).

H1b: When a given electorate has high political knowledge combined with high ideological consistency, then there is a top-down control where elites lead the movement of their electorate.

Following previous theoretical argumentations, not only can ideology be useful to avoid a tight control by high-information voters, but also elites have the chance to attract low-information citizens through offering an ideological package as a way to save the heavy informational investment that supposes the knowledge of the political complexity (Downs, 1957) and giving symbolic rather than cognitive cues to voters (Conover and Feldman, 1981). As advanced by Downs (1957), ideological poles provide an informational shortcut useful to make low-cost political judgments (Grofman, 1993; Popkin, 1994). Some scholarly literature believes that the lack of issue consistency may impose excessive informational demands on voters (Federico, 2007), which could put them apart from politics, and ideologies may help them to simplify the complexity of politics by reducing the dimensions of conflict from many to few (Jost, Federico, and Napier, 2009). I call low-sophisticated citizens with high ideological levels passive ideological voters. These individuals can be easily dominated by their elites by changing the connection among issues with no electoral consequences, which increases their political autonomy and makes the electorate move to the elites’ ideal position.

H2a: When a given electorate has low political knowledge combined with low ideological consistency, then the elite–mass issue distance is low (meeting at the elites’ ideal point).

H2b: When a given electorate has low political knowledge combined with low ideological consistency, then there is a top-down control where elites lead the movement of their electorate.

In contrast to the last two ideal voters, electorates can effectively judge elites’ action when they are liberated from the ideological cues received by elites, freed from the congenial bias, and have the political knowledge to judge every issue in order to supervise the political tasks of their representatives. As Downs poses it, “when voters can expertly judge every detail of every stand taken and relate it directly to their own views of a great society, they are interested only in issues, not philosophies” (1957:98). This Downsian or rational citizen has the political knowledge to effectively control the political process needless of the

If ideology constitutes an instrument used by citizens, hypotheses will result to be null since militant voters would not act as such but, instead, as issue-oriented voters (high information, low ideology).
information provided by ideologies. In this case, electorates have high political knowledge to control their elites and low ideological consistency, which obscures their informational resources. They are issue-oriented voters. As a consequence, electorates might be capable of monitoring elites’ actions, limiting elites’ political autonomy and making them move to the voters’ ideal position.  

H3a: When a given electorate has high political knowledge combined with low ideological consistency, then the elite–mass issue distance is low (meeting at the voters’ ideal point).

H3b: When a given electorate has high political knowledge combined with low ideological consistency, then there is a bottom-up control where voters lead the movement of their elites.

Finally, voters may have neither knowledge nor ideology. According to some scholarly literature, a substantial proportion of the citizens and voters should fall in this category (Bennett, 2006; Dimock and Popkin, 1999; Hardin, 2006; Martinelli, 2006; Zaller, 1992). As pointed out above, many authors suggested a natural positive relationship between ideological consistency and political knowledge as those who possess more information also have an internally more consistent and structured network of ideas (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 2006a; Lauderdale, 2013). Although their political participation rates are lower than the average citizen, they do participate in politics. However, the orientation of their political behavior is uncertain and likely to be distributed randomly over time and across space. Symbolic issues rather than cognitive issues are likely to drive these voters more often than their more sophisticated counterparts (Conover and Feldman, 1981). Therefore, electorates characterized by low political knowledge and low ideological consistency, labeled as ignorant voters, neither receive the top-down ideological cues nor exert any control over elites. As a consequence, elites have cleared the way to move to their ideal position without constrictions.

H4a: When a given electorate has low political knowledge combined with low ideological consistency, then the elite–mass issue distance is high.

H4b: When a given electorate has low political knowledge combined with low ideological consistency, then there is no control and neither voters nor elites lead movement.

Table 1 summarizes the four types of voters included in the analysis and the empirical expectations attached to the elite–mass linkage as collected from the theoretical background on the matter.

Data and Methods

Data

The data presented here come from two sources. First, I use the European Social Survey (ESS) to capture ideological consistency and levels of information at the mass level for 29 countries at five time points (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010). Second, I take the

3By contrast, if ideology is an instrument, rather than a burden, information without ideology can deactivate the capability of the individuals to understand reality and make effective judgments. As a consequence, this electorate would be without the necessary tools to control their elites and elites would be as unleashed from the citizens’ correction as though they were militant voters.

4Notice that in a scenario with an instrumental ideology issue-oriented voters and militant voters would exchange their predictions.
### TABLE 1
Ideal Types of Electorates and Their Implications for the Elite–Mass Linkage According to the Dominant Side of Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voter Information</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
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</table>

### TABLE 2
Matching of Variables of the Mass and Elite Positions on Seven Issue Policies and Ideological Self-Placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables in Mass Survey (ESS)</th>
<th>Variables in Party Manifestos (CMP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preferred decision level of social welfare policies</td>
<td>Centralization (per302)–decentralization (per301)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The less government intervenes in economy, the better for country</td>
<td>Markeco–Planeco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government should reduce differences in income levels</td>
<td>Social justice (per503)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees need strong trade unions to protect work conditions/wages</td>
<td>Labor groups positive (per701)–Labor groups negative (per702)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gays and lesbians free to live life as they wish</td>
<td>Traditional morality positive (per603)–Traditional morality negative (604)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The law should always be obeyed</td>
<td>Law and order (per605)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic growth always ends up harming environment</td>
<td>Environmental protection (per501)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left–right self-placement</td>
<td>Left–right score based on CMP data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** ESS Rounds 1–5 and the Comparative Manifesto Project.

Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Klingemann et al., 2006; Volkens et al. 2011) to measure party positions in several policy issues. This data set contains a rich time series that covers over 50 years for many democracies and, therefore, captures party positions in many policy areas in a time before the first ESS mass survey. Furthermore, the CMP also enables me to approach what “the parties state as their position” (Budge and Pennings, 2007:125) and it has the advantage that there has been an extensive examination of its validity and reliability (Benoit and Laver, 2007; Budge and Pennings, 2007). Furthermore, this database is a common source used in studies of elite–mass relationship in the comparative literature (e.g., Carrubba, 2001; Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu, 2011).

Another point of paramount importance is that there are a number of variables included in the CMP for party positions that can easily be matched to the ESS battery of questions regarding individual’s issue positions, which reflect their ideological orientation. Table 2
illustrates the matching process carried out and the seven issues selected to be included in the analysis. As a matter of illustration on the mapping made between ideas of parties and ideas of voters, the ESS, on the one hand, includes a question in which respondents have to express their degree of agreement with the following sentence: “gays and lesbians free to live life as they wish” (ESS question code: freehms) on a five-point Likert scale. On the other hand, the party positions on this same issue are proxied from the CMP by the difference between favorable and unfavorable mentions of “traditional moral values, censorship and suppression of immorality and unseemly behavior, maintenance and stability of family, and religion” in each political party electoral manifestos (CMP code: per604 and per603).

Unfortunately, not all the questions are available for every ESS round and so their use for the analysis depends on their availability in every round. Another shortcoming in the analysis is that the ESS positions and the CMP data are not directly comparable as they are not measured on the same scale. Although the former uses agree–disagree scales for the first seven questions and self-placement in the left–right scale, the later uses frequency with which each aspect has been referred to in the manifestos of each party and, therefore, it does not capture position but presence, yet this can be deduced by the number of times a certain issue is referred positively or negatively. To make the scales comparable, their standardized values have been taken for the analysis instead of the raw data.

Independent Variables: Political Information and Ideological Consistency

In the ESS questionnaires of rounds 1–5 (N = 237,253), respondents were asked to indicate the total time spent watching news, politics, or current affairs on TV, listening to the radio, and reading newspapers on an average weekday. This value was scaled in eight categories from no time to more than three hours. Moreover, respondents also reported whether they are not at all/hardly/quite/very interested in politics. Although one of the advantages of using the ESS is that the same survey is delivered for a number of countries in a systematic and comparable manner over a period of time, it has the shortcoming of not including proper indicators about the factual knowledge of the respondent. The assumption is that these four variables provide us sufficient information to construct a single indicator of political information. Refusal to respond to the questions and “do not know” answers are recoded as no time spent on gathering political information (<1 percent) or not interested in politics (<1 percent). An exploratory factor analysis confirms that there is a single factor underlying the four variables with an eigenvalue higher than 1 and loading over 0.59, suggesting that I can create an index of political information through a confirmatory factor analysis by the regression method.\(^5\)

Consistent with the previous theoretical discussion, the best single indicator of the level of ideology or ideological consistency in a given society or group of people is found by looking at the extent to which the ideas citizenry hold are related to each other in a predictable way (Nie and Andersen, 1974). For this purpose, the value of the Cronbach’s alpha is taken as the way to calculate the internal consistency of the policy items shown in Table 2 for each party electorate across the issue positions available. Since its inception, important criticisms of Cronbach’s alpha have emerged (see Tarkkonen and Vehkalahti, 2005; Vehkalahti et al., 2006; Sijtsma, 2009, for some examples). Perhaps the most important of them is its

\(^5\)The correlation of each indicator with the political information variable is 0.65 for watching TV, 0.59 for listening to the radio, 0.71 for reading newspapers, and 0.72 for being interested in politics.
condition of unidimensionality. In short, this means Cronbach’s alpha could only be used in the process of construction and test of scales if there is only one factor behind the construct. Obviously, its misuse can lead to improperly discarding multidimensional, yet valid, scales. To solve this issue, some alternative estimators have appeared in the literature. The most salient of them is the general estimator of reliability, Tarkkonen’s rho for multidimensional scales, from which the Cronbach’s alpha is a special case under a one-dimensional measurement model (Tarkkonen and Vehkalahti, 2005; Vehkalahti et al., 2006). Nevertheless, for the specific purpose of measuring ideological consistency (consistent alignment of ideas along a single dimension), and taking into account that the number of items is constant across all subsamples, Cronbach’s alpha is superior to its alternatives because it fixes the number of dimensions to one, it is comparable across subgroups in this particular context, and allows me to efficiently measure the level of interitem correlations in a comparable manner across party electorates.

**Dependent Variable: Autonomy of Political Elites**

In this analysis, the dependent variable is the autonomy of political elites, which is conceptualized as the capacity of the political elites to pursue their own objectives regardless of social preferences. The empirical strategy of this article seeks to understand elite autonomy through two sources of information: the analysis of the issue congruence, and so the distance between citizens’ and elites’ positions on certain issues, and to look at the top-down/bottom-up movement of the preferences. The two components of the analysis make up the two sections of the four hypotheses previously discussed. This analysis is designed to compare the position of a subgroup of the population (voters of the party \( x_i \)) vis-à-vis the position of its representative (party \( R_i \)); therefore, this is a many-to-one relationship, as shown in Figure 1, where \( R \) is the position of the representative position and \( X^* \) the median position of the electorate (see Golder and Strasmki, 2010).

Following the theoretical argumentation developed by Golder and Strasmky (2010), there are three ways to measure ideological or issue congruence in a many-to-one sort relationship. The *absolute median citizen congruence* will be used as it is the most common operationalization in the literature and measures the extent to which the policy positions
FIGURE 2

Empirical Strategy A to Assess the Dual Process

TOP-DOWN MODEL

\[
\text{Diff. Elite (t1) - Mass (t0) Position}
\]

\[
\text{Mass Position (t0)} \rightarrow \text{Diff Mass Position (t2 - t0)}
\]

\[
\text{Diff. Mass position (t2 - t0)ij = } \alpha_1 + \beta_1(\text{Diff. Elite (t1)} - \text{Mass (t0)}) + \epsilon_{ij}
\]

BOTTOM-UP MODEL

\[
\text{Diff. Mass (t1) - Elite (t0) Position}
\]

\[
\text{Elite Position (t0)} \rightarrow \text{Diff. Elite Position (t2 - t0)}
\]

\[
\text{Diff. Elite position (t2 - t0)ij = } \alpha_1 + \beta_1(\text{Diff. Mass (t1)} - \text{Elite (t0)}) + \epsilon_{ij}
\]

of the representative/party \(j\) (\(R_j\)) or (\(P_j\)) approximate the position that minimizes the sum of absolute distance among its electorate, that is, the median voter of the party \(j\) (\(X_{ij}^*\)).

\[
\text{Absolute median citizen congruence} = \left| X_{ij}^* - P_j \right|
\]  

(1)

In this measurement of congruence, a lower score indicates a better congruence between citizens and its party. Notwithstanding this, elite–mass congruence only refers to the first section of the analysis. The distance between voters and representatives can vary regardless of the autonomy of the elites. Thus, the congruence analysis has to be part of an empirical strategy to disentangle the dual process that characterizes the mutual and simultaneous influence exerted by the elite over the mass and the mass over the elite.

**Statistical Approach: Disentangling the Dual Process**

When the distance between the elite and the masses is relatively high, I can safely argue that the autonomy of the political elite is high. Yet, the contrary is not necessarily true. Low congruence does not mean low autonomy as it depends on who is moving whom, and so whether this close distance is the result of a top-down unilateral influence process or a bottom-up effective control over the elites. Therefore, disentangling both processes is crucial for an assessment of the problem of representation.

First, a major point of the empirical strategy is to decide the treatment of the data as a cross-sectional or panel data. Following Carrubba (2001), panel-corrected standard errors are not used because the data have large holes of missing data as elections are sparsely distributed over time and election timing is different for each country. As a consequence, data are treated as cross-sectional. Notwithstanding this, it is important to take into account that in the structure of the data issues are embedded into parties and parties into countries and, thus, parties of the same country are not fully independent observations as assumed by ordinary models. To solve this, clustered standard errors by country are computed in the models.

Second, the strategy to differentiate the endogeneity caused by simultaneous influence is solved in two different ways. On the first hand, two parallel regressions are run: a top-down and a bottom-up model (see Figure 2). In the former, the masses’ issue position at time 0 is taken as the baseline, the independent variable of the model is the difference between the
elite position at time 1 and the masses position at time 0. Therefore, if the masses move to the elites’ ideal position, then the masses are expected to adjust to the elites’ position from time 0 to time 2. The same applies for the bottom-up model. This strategy enables us to assert the relative impact size from the masses to the elites and from the elites to the masses at the same time.

On the other hand, a parallel approach has been taken as a robust check to ensure that results are consistent across different model specifications. In this, I measure the impact of the masses over the elite by testing whether the position of the masses at time \( t+1 \) predicts the position of the elite at time \( t+2 \) while controlling for the lagged dependent variable, that is, the position of the elite at time \( t \). In other words, I test for a similar method as in “Granger” causation (Granger, 1969). Figure 3 depicts this strategy.

Given this statistical approach, the number of countries and years used is limited to the availability of data for three points in time in a sequence of mass–elite–mass for the top-down model and elite–mass–elite for the bottom-up model. Appendix 1 in the Supporting Information shows the list of countries and years included in the analysis.

Results

**Does Ideological Consistency Go Hand-in-Hand with Political Information?**

Before examining the effect of ideology and political information on the autonomy of political elites, I first examine whether the relationship between the two variables is as strong as expected by previous theoretical accounts mentioned above or if they can be not only theoretically but also empirically disentangled. Appendix 2 in the Supporting Information presents the relationship between political sophistication and ideological consistency at the party level. The aggregate analysis shows a positive, yet weak, relationship between ideology and information \( (r = 0.09; p\text{-value} < 0.05) \), but far from the expected nearly deterministic association. Although this might be strong at the individual level, data at the electorate level yield elements that invite to differentiate effects between groups regarding high–low ideological consistency and high–low political information. The median value of each variable (dashed lines) separates the four groups of party electorates.
Ideology and Information on Elite–Mass Congruence

Table 3 estimates the relationship between ideological consistency and political information and the elite–mass congruence. The sample is split by the variable/s of interest. In a nutshell, results suggest that ideological consistency decreases the gap between the elite and the masses after adjusting for political information (t-value = −1.70), while information increases it (t-value = 2.37). A similar argument follows when analyzing the sample divided into the four subgroups of electorates. Political information matters only for those with high levels of information but not for those with low levels, although it does so by increasing the gap between elites and mass. At the same time, ideological consistency seems not to have any effect on elite–mass congruence, except for a positive, yet statistically insignificant (t-value = 1.13), effect for those with low ideology and low information.

In conjunction with the results presented in Table 3, the heterogeneous effects of ideology conditional on information and information on ideology are estimated in Figure 4. In this, models are estimated for the two subsamples without controlling for the variable by which the sample is divided. Even though significant tests do not allow to make strong claims about the results, the tendency of the effects shows a negative effect of ideological consistency and elite–mass difference, which takes a steeper negative slope for those with high levels of political information in relation to those with low levels of information. Thus, ideology has more effect on those with information than those without information but, for both groups, it closes the gap between elite and mass position. By contrast, political information increases that gap for those with low and high levels of ideological consistency equally and, given the same level of information, electorates with high levels of ideology close their gap in relation to their elites to a greater extent than those with low levels of ideology.

In sum, results do not support the first section of hypotheses regarding ideological consistency and political information on elite–mass congruence. Surprisingly, it seems that information tends to increase the gap between voters and their party leaders. At the same time, ideology rather than a source of bias seems to be an instrument for the understanding of the reality, which enables voters to close the gap between them and their party elites, especially for those with high levels of information.

A Dynamic Model to Disentangle the Exertion of Mutual Influence Between Elite and Mass

Endogeneity prevents us to say anything about who dominates whom in the political arena, whether the masses or elites. Cross-sectional analysis, as the one carried out above, where the position of the elites and mass are taken at the same point in time, cannot examine who takes the lead and, therefore, who is the autonomous and the dependent party and to what extent. If they are far from or close to each other might be so because the elite is (un)able to move the mass or the mass to move the elite. However, it is impossible to infer any causality or directionality from the previous results. The two empirical strategies pursued here (A and B, detailed in the previous section) will enable us to grasp something about the dynamics of the model.

Table 4 presents the results of the empirical strategy A for the top-down and the bottom-up models. The former (later) is built as the effect of the difference between the position of the elite (the masses) at time \( t + 1 \) and the masses (elite) at \( t \) as a predictor of the difference between the position of the elite (the masses) at \( t + 2 \) and the masses (elite) at time \( t \) by each subgroup of the population based on the median of ideological consistency and
TABLE 3
Ideological Consistency and Political Information on Elite–Mass Congruence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High Ideology</th>
<th>Low Ideology</th>
<th>High Information</th>
<th>Low Information</th>
<th>High Ideological Consistency</th>
<th>High Ideological Low Consistency</th>
<th>Low Ideological Consistency</th>
<th>Low Ideological Low Consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideological consistency</td>
<td>−1.48</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>−2.50</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>−0.86</td>
<td>−0.88</td>
<td>−2.3</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.80)</td>
<td>(0.79)</td>
<td>(−1.70)</td>
<td>(0.61)</td>
<td>(−0.41)</td>
<td>(−0.26)</td>
<td>(−0.53)</td>
<td>(1.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. of political information</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
<td>(0.21)</td>
<td>(2.31)</td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
<td>(1.59)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(2.51)</td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.30)</td>
<td>(6.21)</td>
<td>(2.69)</td>
<td>(7.96)</td>
<td>(1.56)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.76)</td>
<td>(5.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent variable: Absolute Elite–Mass Congruence. Regression coefficients with t-values in parentheses. OLS with clustered standard errors by country.
FIGURE 4
Ideological Consistency and Political Information of the Electorate on Elite–Mass Congruence
**TABLE 4**
Disentangling the Dual Process: Empirical Strategy A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Top-Down Model</th>
<th>Bottom-Up Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta_1$ (p)</td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High ideology/high info.</td>
<td>0.03 (0.16)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High ideology/low info.</td>
<td>0.05 (0.30)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High info./low ideology</td>
<td>0.07 (0.34)</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low info./low ideology</td>
<td>0.07 (0.49)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent variable: Movement of the Mass (Elite) between $t_0$ and $t_2$.
Independent Variable: Gap between the position of the Elite (Mass) at $t_1$ and Mass (Elite) at $t_0$.
Regression coefficients with $p$-values in parentheses. OLS with clustered standard errors by country.

**TABLE 5**
Disentangling the Dual Process: Empirical Strategy B (Granger Causation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Top-Down Model</th>
<th>Bottom-Up Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta_1$ (p)</td>
<td>$\beta_2$ (p)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High ideology/high info.</td>
<td>0.04 (0.08)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High ideology/low info.</td>
<td>0.03 (0.30)</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High info./low ideology</td>
<td>0.04 (0.70)</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low info./low ideology</td>
<td>0.10 (0.33)</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent variable: Position of the Mass (Elite) at $t_2$.
Independent Variable ($\beta_1$): Position of the Elite (Mass) at $t_1$.
Control Variable ($\beta_2$): Position of the Mass (Elite) at $t_0$.
Regression coefficients with $p$-values in parentheses. OLS with clustered standard errors by country.

Political information. Position of elites and the masses are standardized values and, thus, make possible direct comparison between columns. In this, coefficients of the bottom-up model have larger effect sizes than the top-down models. Furthermore, bottom-up models also present higher $R$-squared and lower $p$-values in the four subgroups. The only subgroup that reaches a level of doubtful significance is that of high ideology and information, yet it does not reach standard significance levels. All in all, using this empirical strategy a conclusion is simple: elites are driven by the masses’ position regardless of their levels of political information and ideology.

Additionally, Table 5 presents the results of the empirical strategy B. In the top-down model, elite position at time $t+1$ ($\beta_1$) predicts mass position at time $t+2$ after controlling for mass position at time $t$. In the bottom-up model, mass position at time $t+1$ ($\beta_1$) predicts elite position at time $t+2$ after controlling for elite position at time $t$. Again, the bottom-up model has a substantially larger magnitude of effects than its top-down counterpart. However, there are two different aspects worthy to highlight. First, even though the top-down process is statistically significant, the bottom-up models have larger
effects with narrower standard errors. Second, bottom-up models in empirical strategy B capture more variance of the dependent variable than their counterparts in the top-down models, with larger values of $R^2$-squared. In a nutshell, empirical evidence lends further credence to the robustness of the bottom-up models and shows how the masses seems to be largely responsible for the shifts of elite positions and immune to the influence of elites in determining their issue position.

Discussion and Conclusions

A growing body of literature from a theoretical and qualitative background has sought to explain when and why political elites are autonomous from their electorate. Public ignorance, extremely limited political information, and a citizen’s general unawareness of the political reality have been common arguments to causally explain the autonomy of political leaders regarding social preferences (Bennett, 2006; Converse, 2006a; Fishkin, 2006; Hardin, 2006; Somin, 1998, 2006). However, none of them have actually looked at explanatory factors beyond information. This article contributes to the current empirical literature by quantitatively examining the potential heterogeneous effects of sophistication on the autonomy of the elites by levels of ideological consistency.

None of the hypotheses extracted from literature that builds upon the public ignorance and state autonomy model are supported by the empirical evidence analyzed here. Political information increases, rather than decreases, the positional gap between the elites and masses. In contrast, the level of ideological consistency of the electorate increases the elite–mass congruence by reducing the gap, especially for those with high levels of political information. Thus, evidence seems to indicate that informed citizens are able to use ideology in such a way that enables them to better control their political elites, while those informed without ideology do not have the tools to do so. Further research should put more efforts on understanding whether it is information or other related variables such as education that enable voters to effectively use ideology in order to control their political leaders.

Results support the instrumental role of ideology, which increases the elite–mass congruence. However, these first results do not shed light on whether this relationship is caused by the elites moving their electorates to their own positions (top-down model) or the masses driving their elites to their preferred location (bottom-up model). The two empirical strategies used here focus on disentangling the endogeneity of the mutual effects between masses and elites in order to establish causality in the movement. Results from the dynamic models highlight the predominance of the bottom-up models over the top-down model for each of the electorate groups. The size of the effects may be larger or smaller and statistical significance may vary, but the two empirical strategies yielded eight models and all of them pointed out that the driving force of the movements are rooted in the electorate. The unique exception where a top-down process seems to be at work is for those with high ideology and information. This was expected since this is the group most exposed to the inputs of the political arena of the elites and, therefore, higher effect from the elites could be expected.

Some weaknesses of the empirical analysis might be solved by extending the current research. A natural extension of this study would be to replicate a similar research design in other areas of the world beyond Europe with more variation in terms of political information and level of ideological consistency. For instance, newly democratized countries with less partisan experience may have lower levels of ideological consistency or citizens from developing countries may have lower political information and interest in politics. Thus,
the extension to a larger number of cases would improve the study of the heterogeneous
effects explored here. Additionally, the matching process could have been eased if the same
questions for the surveys were also found for political parties in the same wording and scale.
Also, a feasible replication could be done by using elite surveys instead of party manifestos,
since they provide more comparable scales to those of the mass surveys. An ideal example
would be to use the survey data of Latin American legislators at the University of Salamanca
and the 1998 Latinobarómetro survey that contains identical questions perfect for a direct
comparison. In this, however, the number of countries is also small and lack of variation
becomes a potential shortcoming.

All in all, findings are indicative of a potential trend, shed some light toward a new path
to explore in future research, and highlight the need to incorporate ideological consistency
in future elite–mass congruence analyses. Up to now, I had some theoretical support
that citizens’ information mattered. Now, there is evidence pointing at the importance
of ideology for a full understanding of the relationship between elites and the masses.
At the same time, results remark the need to take seriously bottom-up models where the
changing force comes from the people and not from the elites. Even though literature on
the autonomy of the state takes for granted the existence of large discretionary bags out
of citizens’ reach, models presented show their little effect in the policy positions of the
main parties. In any case, the test of these arguments through quantitative analysis should
strengthen those already present through theoretical and qualitative methods. All in all,
pursuit of an empirical examination based on a mixture of approaches, I contend, offers
the most fruitful path forward in explaining variation in effective control of the political
elites and for future studies of representation in contemporary politics.

REFERENCES

of Representatives. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


**Supporting Information**

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher’s website:

**Appendix 1:** Countries and Time Points Used in the Analysis

**Appendix 2:** Political Information and Ideological Consistency at the Electorate Level