The Will for Reason: Voter Demand for Experts in Office

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Abstract

Populism and technocracy constitute the main challenges to party government. While significant research has been devoted to support for populism, less is known about voters' demand for experts. In this study, a conjoint experiment in Spain to examine whether citizens prefer experts in executive positions is presented. It focuses on the most common form of expert participation in office: individuals who combine technical expertise and a party affiliation, the *technopols*. The conjoint experiment is complemented with a priming manipulation to examine to what extent the demand for experts depends on whether the crisis of representation is presented as a crisis of responsiveness or a crisis of responsibility. The results show that voters value expertise above any other candidate trait, including partisanship. Exposure to neither framing of the crisis substantially alters the strong demand for *technopols*. These findings contribute to the literature on voter attitudes towards the crisis of party government.

Introduction

Social, economic and political changes are reducing the capacity of democratic governments to fulfil some basic tasks they performed in the past, thereby weakening their legitimacy, their standing as key elements of democratic governance, and fostering a crisis of the party government model (Mair 2013; Pastorella 2016; Caramani 2017; Sánchez-Cuenca 2017). Parties and national governments struggle to represent citizens' preferences while handling the increasingly complex problems posed to them by economic globalization, supranational institutions and multilevel government. Parties find difficulties to be responsive while trying to govern responsibly, and this challenge contributes to a crisis of representation (Mair 2008, 2013).

Experts' increased role in political decision-making processes is very often mentioned as a symptom or cause of the party government and representation crises (Valbruzzi 2020). Experts' involvement has boosted public and academic debate on the issue of expertise among office holders for some time (*The Economist* 2014, Dargent 2015, Alexiadou and Gunaydin 2019), with positions against the enhanced role of experts in political office -because they weaken democratic responsiveness- on the one side (Fischer 1990; Mansbridge 2003; Berman 2017), and in favour of a bigger role for experts in the executive –because they allow for responsible solutions far from partisan strife- on the other side (Majone 1998; Radaelli 1999; Moravcsik 2002; Pettit 2004; Schudson 2006; Alesina and Tabellini 2007, 2008).

One of the often-suggested alternatives to the alleged failings of party government is precisely technocracy (*The Guardian* 2011), which essentially is a form of power, representation, and legitimation in which the justification of political action resides in expert knowledge (Bickerton and Invernizzi-Accetti 2017; Caramani 2017). While in its ideal-typical form it is a strong critique of party government and constitutes an alternative to it, technocratic practices –understood as experts' engagement in decision-making– might however present themselves in various forms of varying intensity (Caramani 2017: 60). Some of the 'weaker' forms of expert involvement in political decision-making are compatible with party government, with political parties incorporating experts, taking advantage of experts' knowledge and advice in decision-making, or instrumentalizing them (Alexiadou and Gunaydin 2019). In this way, experts' role in decision-making might be entangled in party government, or might even potentially be a corrective to its perceived failings, and eventually improve public satisfaction with parties (Dommett and Temple 2019).

In this paper we analyse public demand for the involvement of experts in executive office, focussing specifically on what has become known as *technopols* (see Joignant 2011: 518, 524-525; Alexiadou 2020). We employ a survey experiment fielded in Spain, a country affected by a crisis of representation. We combine two experimental designs, a conjoint experiment and two priming

manipulations. With the conjoint design we gauge whether technical expertise is an attribute that voters value positively in candidates to political office. The type of expert that the conjoint experiment presents — *technopols* — is a highly educated and trained one who, at the same time, is affiliated to a party (Joignant 2011, Alexiadou 2020). Empirically, this is the most common type of expert involvement in executive office. To the best of our knowledge, our conjoint design is the first one that explicitly isolates the influence of candidate expertise on voting choices from that of other important attributes, i.e. the candidate's partisanship or education.

Having estimated the baseline voter demand for technopols, we leverage two priming manipulations to gauge whether the type of framing applied to the crisis of representation shapes the demand for experts. Specifically, we analyse the impact of two different explanations for such a crisis, one that emphasizes a *lack of responsibility* among politicians, and another that emphasizes a *lack of responsiveness* in party government. We choose these two framings because they represent the main criticism waged against party government by, respectively, proponents of technocracy and proponents of populism (Mair 2013, Caramani 2017).

Our findings suggest that candidates' expertise is a strong determinant of whether respondents choose the candidate for high-ranked positions in a government. The weight of expertise on respondent's choices, moreover, is stronger than that of all other candidate socio-demographic attributes as well as the candidate's party affiliation. How the crisis of representation is framed does not have a strong impact on respondents' preferences, however. While respondents primed with information emphasizing politicians' *lack of responsiveness* show a slightly weaker appetite for expertise, neither priming manipulation has a substantial impact on respondents' choices. This finding would suggest that voters do not associate technopols with a sharp trade-off between more responsibility and less responsiveness.

The article is structured as follows: in the next section we review the theoretical debate around technocracy and experts' role in political decision-making, its link with the crisis of democratic representation, and outline the theoretical expectations of the research. After that, we describe the characteristics of the experiment and discuss its suitability to answer our research question. We move then to the presentation of the empirical results before discussing their implications for the ongoing theoretical debate. We conclude the article by highlighting our main findings and suggesting some potential avenues for further research.

The crisis of party government and the involvement of experts in office

Contemporary democracies are party democracies. However, since the 1990s several phenomena have converged to place party democratic governments under strain (Mair 2008, 2013). The development of globalization and of multi-level regional integration processes have favoured the role of independent, non-partisan, non-popularly elected institutions isolated from electoral politics to cope with the growing complexity of political decision-making. Additionally, citizens have shown remarkable levels of distrust towards parties, straight anti-partisan sentiments, and notable disinterest in politics. In this context, parties have found increasing problems to articulate and aggregate citizens' heterogeneous and very diverse preferences. As a result, representative democracy has experienced a redefinition, one that emphasizes the importance of output legitimacy and diminishes the role of popular sovereignty (Scharpf 2006; Mair 2013: 9).

The 2008 Great Recession highlighted the challenge to representative democracy associated to those developments. It has made evident the tension between responsiveness and responsibility, between representing citizens' preferences and governing effectively. Two alternative options have appeared as a response to the political crisis and, in essence, as alternatives to the perceived failings of conventional representative democracy and party government: populism and technocracy (Mair 2013: 20). The populist alternative has been widely analysed. Populists reject the 'political class', and defend a reinvigorated version of responsive government in which popular will would not be mediated by parties and politicians.

The alternative posed by technocracy has received less attention, however. Technocracy delegates political authority mostly to experts in charge of defining the general interest, and of deciding through rational and objective reflection solutions to social problems (Centeno 1993; Caramani 2017). Populism and technocracy both grow from the tension between responsibility and responsiveness that experience contemporary party governments (Mair 2013; Caramani 2017). But while populism focuses especially on the lack of responsiveness by parties, technocracy focuses on the lack of responsibility. Where populism aims at restoring responsiveness, technocracy aims at restoring responsibility. Thus, technocracy criticizes the lack of effective government by parties that are focused on electoral politics rather than on effectively solving social problems (Centeno 1993; Caramani 2017). The complexity of political decisions requires, the technocratic argument follows, experts' intervention rather than citizen participation. Experts bring to political decision-making the scientific knowledge, rational reasoning, technical objective solutions that might be used in the identification and implementation of the appropriate policy decisions (Fischer 1990). In that way, technocratic solutions are above partisan conflict; they are above parties' factional and sectoral interests; they displace politics (Hoppe 2005; Caramani 2017). They represent the common interest of society, a unique interest that can be objectively identified. Technocracy thus embodies the trustee

model of representation: a technical elite is entrusted the task of defining the common interest and solving social problems.

However, the involvement of experts in political decision-making does not always take the form of technocratic government. There is in fact a continuum in the degree of involvement of experts in executive office. On one extreme we have technocracy in its purest form. "Pure" technocracy involves unelected officials not selected through parties taking decisions that are not determined by parties (Caramani 2020: 27). Yet the actual involvement of experts in political decision-making varies very much in depth, influence and power (Pielke 2007; Caramani 2017). As Meynaud (1968: 31) stressed, many experts would never acquire the degree of autonomous influence on the decision-making process that would grant them the condition of technocrats. Echoing this reality, Habermas (1971) understood the role of expertise expanding in a continuum in which at one pole science dominates politics and, at the other it plays an informative role. Caramani (2020: 22) also conceives technocratic power as a continuum, with fully technocratic scenarios where experts set themselves the goals in complete autonomy and independence at one end, and with experts only involved in implementing the goals set by popular will at the other end.

In an intermediate position we find, as Bertsou and Caramani (2020: 158) suggest, experts appointed by the parties who work in a party competition context. Empirically, the involvement of experts' in actual political decision-making most often takes place in these intermediate roles. One of these is that of *technopols* (Joignant 2011; Alexiadou 2020). *Technopols* are professional experts that also have a prior party allegiance (Centeno 1994; Joignant 2011; Dargent 2020). In some cases, as Joignant (2011) remarks for the Chilean case, they entered their parties at an early age or they have been part of the party leadership, or as Dargent (2020) and Centeno (1994) mention for the Mexican case, they took part in internal party struggles against more traditional factions. *Technopols* are then neither independent technocrats nor professional politicians without any professional or technical expertise. They combine political resources with technical expertise, in part thanks to their university professional qualifications, and are one of the most common instances of experts' involvement in democratic governance.

Voter demand for expert politicians

In this paper we focus precisely on voters' demand for the involvement of *technopols* in political decision-making. Hence, we do not analyse technocrats in their purest form, i.e. defined as non-partisan independent experts. Our focus is on experts with education credentials in a certain policy area who also have a party affiliation (Joignant 2011; Alexiadou and Gunaydin 2019: 3-4). Our choice

responds to the fact that the involvement of experts with partisan affiliations is empirically more common than that of pure independent technocrats. Indeed, choosing *technopols* for positions of political office might be a strategy through which parties may respond to the tensions between responsiveness and responsibility. Through them parties adapt to the claims for an effective government without losing the party linkage that facilitates responsiveness. *Technopols* ensure expertise but, far from technocratic solutions, they do not jeopardize the representative role of parties and conventional party competition. With *technopols*, parties could act technocratically (Caramani 2020: 8) without incurring the potentially negative effects on the political process of purer forms of experts' government.

The research question that our paper addresses is whether voters prefer these experts in executive office over traditional (non-expert) party cadres. This is a relevant question for two reasons. First, while both populism and the involvement of experts are presented as alternatives to the classic government of representative parties, we know much more about voter support for populism than about voter attitudes towards experts. The second reason is theoretical in nature: Experts in office are expected to be guided by their technical knowledge and hence they may be less responsive to public opinion. Hence, the demand by voters of experts constitutes an apparent paradox: Voters choose representatives that may be more insulated from citizen pressure than standard party members.

Despite this apparent paradox, we argue that, everything else equal, voters prefer experts in office. The normalization of the presence of non-partisan technocratic institutions in contemporary governance and of the role of experts in public life has fostered among the public the view of expertise being part of the resources of a 'good-type' of politicians (Fearon 1999). Public opinion analyses have shown a relatively widespread support for experts' involvement in decision-making in Western societies (Dommett and Warren-Pearce 2019). In addition, growing political dissatisfaction and lack of trust in democracy and political parties might promote attitudes favorable towards experts. In a recent work, Bertsou and Pastorella (2017) found a positive relation between mistrust in political institutions and negative views towards democratic government, and technocratic preferences. Their findings confirm that in countries where governments have a poor record and, very specially, where corruption is a relevant political issue, technocratic preferences rise. Spain is a case that fits the premise -it presents both relatively high levels of political corruption and a poor government record- and therefore this argument predicts pro-expert attitudes in the Spanish context.

Hence, our first hypothesis establishes that, everything else equal, in the context of an economic and political crisis, voters tend to prefer technically expert politicians to non-expert ones. This baseline and descriptive expectation is in line with what has been found in previous analyses regarding the relevant presence of attitudes favourable to experts' involvement in government, of stealth democracy

attitudes, and technocratic attitudes in Western societies (Font et al. 2015; Lavezzolo and Ramiro 2018; Bertsou and Caramani 2020). Therefore:

- **H.1.** *Ceteris paribus,* voters prefer party candidates with high technical expertise to ones without technical expertise.

In addition to studying the overall demand for experts in office, we examine a second factor that could define the preference for experts in office. Specifically, we explore whether the way in which the crisis of democratic representation is framed shapes demand for politicians who also can offer voters professional expertise. Following the previous discussion on how the crisis of representative party government manifests in the tension between responsibility and responsiveness (Mair 2008, 2013), we consider two dimensions of the crisis of representation: i) lack of *responsiveness*, and ii) lack of *responsibility*. Experts in office tend to be seen as more competent and responsible, eager to implement policy decisions that are considered necessary and effective, far from short-term partisan electoral goals; but they tend to be seen as insulated from popular demands, without policy commitments with voters, unaccountable and in no need to represent citizens' preferences and getting their approval (Blondel 1991; Alexiadou and Gunaydin 2019).

We expect these traits of experts to also appear in citizens' considerations. First, we expect that voters will consider technopols to be more responsible than traditional cadre politicians due to their expert knowledge. Hence, when exposed to an account of the crisis that places the blame on a *lack of responsibility* among politicians, we expect respondents to become more inclined to support *technopols* for office. Second, while *technopols* combine their professional expertise with a partisan allegiance, we hypothesize that voters will see technopols as potentially less responsive than ordinary party members as they may prioritize their expert knowledge over loyalty to the party's principles. Hence, when primed to think about the crisis as one produced by a *lack of responsiveness* of incumbents, we expect respondents to become more reluctant to choose *technopols* for office. This leads us to the following two hypotheses regarding the effect of the priming manipulations:

- **H.2.A.** if voters are primed to think about the lack of responsibility of party democracy, we expect these voters to become more inclined to support expert candidates.
- **H.2.B.** if, on the other hand, voters are primed to consider the lack of responsiveness in party democracy, we expect voters to become more reluctant to support expert candidates.

Lastly, we examine whether respondents' individual-level characteristics explain any variation in the demand for experts in office. This exploration is motivated, among others, by previous researches that have found a relationship between political disaffection or political mistrust and preferences for

experts' involvement in political decision-making or 'stealth democracy' attitudes, i.e. the preference for an efficient and objective government informed by experts, that reduces the conflict and that do not require an intense political involvement by individuals (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Bengtsson and Mattila 2009). Hence, we expect that the same individual level predictors of 'stealth democracy' support will also correlate with a preference for the involvement of experts in office.

3. Research Design

To test these hypotheses we fielded an online survey questionnaire to a representative sample of the Spanish population (N=2400). The choice of Spain as case study responds to the fact that it has recently undergone a period in which the phenomena associated with the crisis of representation have been notably visible. It experienced the 2008 Great Recession acutely. This has included skyrocketing unemployment levels, a banking sector bailout, the implementation of unpopular austerity policies since 2011, and rising political dissatisfaction amidst serious political corruption scandals affecting the Conservative party PP. This has provoked, among other political consequences, high levels of electoral volatility, the weakening of the electoral support for mainstream parties, and the entry of new parties in parliament. Thus, the Spanish context offers a very suitable place to gauge the overall level of demand for experts in office when party government democracy is under serious stress. In addition, it allows to test whether the two main framings of the crisis of representation -lack of *responsiveness* or lack of *responsibility*- modulate the level of the public's preference for experts in positions of executive office. While the fieldwork has focused on a single case, the findings can arguably be extrapolated to (a good number of) other Western countries in which the party government model is also experiencing similar strains.

The survey fielded combines two experimental designs.[1] The first design is a conjoint experiment. In it, respondents are presented with a pair of candidates to fill the role of Spanish Minister of Finance. We use the Minister of Finance because it is conventionally considered the most important role after the prime minister in parliamentary governments (Alexiadou 2020), it is associated with a specific area of knowledge and it has been used to estimate the degree of technocratic-ness of a cabinet in some analyses (Valbruzzi 2020).[2] Respondents are asked to choose the most preferred one between the two (forced choice). Each candidate is defined by eight attributes (gender, age, region of birth,

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[1] The online-survey was implemented by Netquest between March 28th. and April 3rd., 2019; the sample included sex, age and regional quotas to achieve an accurate representation of the Spanish population; and a pre-registration plan for the analysis of our experiment was submitted to AsPredicted: http://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=as2bj8

[2] The role of prime minister, although being the most intuitive to leverage credibility to the experiment, it is difficult to map to a specific competence, i.e. to an expert knowledge such as Health, Education or Agriculture.

marital status, educational achievement, partisan affiliation, political trajectory and level of expertise in Economics), which are presented to respondents in unsystematic order and with its potential categories or values randomized. We have constrained some components combinations to ensure that all profiles presented to respondents are reasonably realistic.[3] The list of candidate attributes and their possible values are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Candidate's attributes shown in the experiment and their components.

Gender[4]	Male
	Female
Age	Ranges from 30 to 80 years old
Region of birth	Spanish autonomous communities
Marital status	Single
	Married
	Living with a partner
	Widow/er
Educational achievement	Secondary
	College
	Postgraduate
Partisan affiliation[5]	Popular Party
	Socialist Party
	Podemos
	Ciudadanos
Political trajectory	"Recent entry in political life"
	"Long trajectory in political life"
Expertise in economics	"LOW: No past professional experience in Economics"
	"HIGH: Renowned expert in Economics"

The aim of incorporating attributes such as a candidate's level of education or past political trajectory along with candidate's expertise in economics is to estimate the effect of *expertise* on the preference for the candidate net of other attributes that correlate with it, such as level of education or past political trajectory. This is the main advantage of conjoint designs: it allows to isolate the effect of an attribute in the context of multidimensional choices, as is the case of a Minister of Finance (Hainmueller et al. 2014). In addition to education and political trajectory, we include two attributes that have been found to be strong predictors of voters' choices, such as party affiliation and region of

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[3] Specifically, profile candidates with high expertise could only be 40 years or older and needed to have at least a college-level degree.

[4] Gender is inferred from silhouette and the name of the candidate. With the aim to present realistic profiles to respondents we have assigned fictional names to candidates generated with information from the *National Statistic Institute* of Spain. We created a list of the most frequent male and female first names and surnames between the 40's and the 90's for the whole regions of Spain with three exceptions: Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia, for which we have made a unique set of names and surnames

[5] With respect to party affiliation, the party family of each party goes as follows: Socialist Party (PSOE): center-left/social-democrat; Popular Party (PP): conservatives; *Podemos*: radical-left; *Citizens* (Ciudadanos): right/liberal.

origin. The rationale for the first is rooted in the literature of party identification (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960; Goren 2005). Regarding the second, we acknowledge the need to control for potential in-group *vs.* out-group logics in determining preferences due to the very active role played by the center-periphery cleavage in Spanish politics (Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu 2019). This conjoint design, thus, allows us to gauge the impact of technical expertise on respondents' preferences isolated from the impact of other important factors.

The number of attributes presented to respondents (eight) seeks to find a good balance between potential masking and survey satisficing problems (Bansak et al. 2019). Each respondent is exposed to five random pairs of candidates (i.e. five rounds of voting).[6] For each pair of candidates, the respondent picks her preferred one, thus evaluating ten candidates. Figure 1 provides a screenshot of how profile pairs are displayed to respondents during the survey. The presentation of candidate profiles is preceded by the following question: *"Please, read the description of these two potential candidates to fill the position of Minister of Finance", Which one would you prefer?*

Figure 1. **Screenshot of profile pairs during the survey experiment**: The presentation of candidate profiles is preceded by the following question: *"Please, read the description of these two potential candidates to fill the position of Minister of Finance", Which one would you prefer?* The attributes that appear in this screenshot are (in order): gender (which is inferred from the silhouette and name of the candidate), civil status, level of expertise in Economics, age, political trajectory, region of birth, level of education, party affiliation.

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6 Although the order of candidate's attributes were randomized, for each respondent the sequence was kept constant along the five rounds of voting.

The conjoint design is complemented with a priming manipulation. *Before* being exposed to any candidate pairs, the respondent may be assigned to either of three experimental conditions gathered in Table 2: a control condition, a *lack of responsiveness manipulation*, and a *lack of responsibility condition*. All manipulations, including the control group, present a reference to the bad economic situation in Spain. The two non-control arms prime a type of interpretation of the crisis. The "lack of responsiveness" prime emphasizes the fact that political parties have failed to listen to voters in tackling the crisis. The "lack of responsibility" prime, in turn, emphasizes how vote-seeking incentives have precluded political parties from effectively tackling the roots of the crisis. As noted in our hypotheses above, we expect that the "lack of responsiveness" prime will decrease demand for experts in office, while the "lack of responsibility" prime will increase demand for expertise.

The reason we have adopted a conjoint experimental design to estimate the demand for experts stems from the advantages of this type of design over the traditional vignette experiment. Indeed, while vignette designs seek to identify causal effects, they often cannot assign the effect to specific components of the manipulation. Conjoint experiments present a possible solution by identifying the causal effects of specific components of a given treatment (Hainmueller et al. 2014). Hainmueller et al. (2014) identify several key advantages to conjoint analysis: ecological validity, cost-effectiveness, multidimensional tests, reduced social desirability bias, and additional insight for practical problems. They also note the efficiency of conjoint survey experiments, which can not only recover the effects of specific dimensions but effects across dimensions as well, allowing researchers to ascertain relative weights subjects apply to each dimension. Additionally, conjoint experiments present researchers with an opportunity to reduce partisan bias in the responses from subjects (Goggin et al. 2019).

Table 2. Statements in the three experimental conditions

Experimental condition	The respondent reads the following statement:
Control	*"Eleven years after the start of the crisis, the unemployment rate is still very high and wages have not recovered."*
Lack of responsiveness manipulation	*"Eleven years after the start of the crisis, the unemployment rate is still very high and wages have not recovered.* *Successive governments have lacked sensitivity towards social problems. They have not listened to voters nor represented citizen demands. They have ignored what people want. They have distanced themselves from the interests of the electorate and have made*

	decisions in their offices without taking into account the needs of citizens."
Lack of responsibility manipulation	*"Eleven years after the start of the crisis, the unemployment rate is still very high and wages have not recovered.*
	Successive governments have not been able to find solutions to the country's problems. The economic policies put in place have shown that our rulers are incompetent. They have missed the opportunity to make reforms that improve the economy in the long term since they have been more concerned with winning votes to stay in power. They have not taken into account the general interest and have acted irresponsibly. "

There are also potential drawbacks and limitations to conjoint experiments, nonetheless. Conjoint experiments rely on ranking and ordering of preference alternatives and any political behavior that cannot be expressed through these mechanisms may not be accurately analyzed using conjoint experiments (Hainmueller et al. 2014). Although conjoint experiments may have advantages in ecological validity compared to traditional survey experiments, Hainmueller et al. (2014) note the provision of multiple pieces of information may invoke unnatural forms of cognitive processing by the subjects. Additionally, the requirement of advanced computer programming abilities may discourage some researchers from attempting conjoint experiments (Hainmueller et al. 2014). Still, compared to potential alternatives, namely vignette designs, conjoint analysis has been shown to have superior external validity. Hainmueller et al. (2015) highlight conjoint analysis performance on an external validity comparison with vignette designs and despite vignette designs' close approximation of real-world preference elicitation methods, conjoint designs closely match qualitative benchmarks of political attitudes (Hainmueller et al. 2015). Goggin et al. (2019) note how conjoint experiments expose potential problems with vignette experiments, as vignettes may prime particular dimensional thinking which results in biased results.

The priming manipulation is also appropriate to test our hypotheses 2.A and 2.B. The reason is that priming in experiments involves highlighting some information to increase the salience of a particular issue (Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Lenz 2009). Primes are informational heuristics devices and can be used to quickly and effortlessly make judgements, evaluations, or decisions (Krosnick and Kinder 1990). In conducting an evaluation, subjects do not have the cognitive capacity to consider all issues or relevant considerations (Druckman and Holmes 2004). Druckman and Holmes (2004) note crucial differences between priming and persuasion as priming attempts to change the criteria on which subjects conduct their evaluations rather than the changing of perceptions. However, Lenz (2009)

underlines issues of falsely attributing subject learning or issue opinion change effects to priming as the effects are observably similar.

4. Empirical analysis

To test our hypotheses we run an OLS regression where the dependent variable is a dummy with value 1 if the candidate was selected by respondents in a pair-choice vote (0 otherwise). The candidate's attributes are the independent variables.[7] Given that our conjoint experiment design imposes a few constraints in the randomization of attributes to avoid unrealistic candidate profiles (e.g. a 30 years old candidate with a secondary school degree but high expertise in economics), we estimate the average marginal component effects (AMCE) factoring all levels of all attributes. Doing so, we capture the variance introduced by the unequal randomization. Additionally, regarding candidate's profiles, we control for the types of combinations respondents may face when voting.[8] Errors are clustered at the respondent level as each respondent votes five times and these observations are not independent.

4.1. The impact of expertise and some heterogeneous effects.

The first set of results related to hypothesis H.1. are plotted in Figure 2. This figure shows AMCE coefficients (Hainmueller et al. 2014) from standard OLS regression.[9] These coefficients can be interpreted as the marginal effect of a given attribute value (e.g. having a college degree) on the probability of choosing the candidate compared to the reference attribute value (e.g. having a secondary education). Regarding the expertise variable, the reference category is not having technical expertise in economics. Hence, the high-expertise coefficient in the figure indicates how being an expert candidate changes the probability of being chosen relative to a candidate that is not an expert.

In line with our first hypothesis, the results show a positive impact of the candidate's expertise on its probability of being chosen to fill the position of Minister of Finance. On a scale from 0 to 1, support for a candidate increases 0.32 in magnitude if the candidate has a high level of expertise in Economics. The effect is statistically discernible from 0 at a 95% confidence level. This result is

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[7] See Table A.1 in the Appendix for some descriptive values on selected and not-selected candidates by level of expertise in economics.

[8] One dummy variable for combinations of high expertise candidate *vs.* high expertise candidate, another dummy variable for a vote between low expertise candidate *vs.* low expertise candidates, leaving the base category for high expertise *vs.* low expertise (and vice versa).

[9] This and all reported results are robust to estimates using nonlinear (probit) models and are available upon request.

robust to different operationalizations of the candidate's other attributes such as partisanship, region of birth (in-group *vs.* out-group), and quadratic age effects. Most importantly, the preference for candidates with expertise in Economics is robust to controlling for respondents' fixed effects (see Tables A.2 through A.5 in the Appendix). The substantive magnitude of the impact is considerable. It is the highest among all candidate attributes. This is particularly relevant when benchmarked against the weight of one of the main drivers of voting choices, i.e. party affiliation. Indeed, a match between the respondent's party affiliation and the candidate's implies an increase of 0.28 in the probability of being chosen. So, a candidate's level of expertise stands out as the most important attribute determining the respondent's choice, ahead of the education, sex, region of birth, age, civil status and even the candidate's partisan affiliation. This result is consistent with hypothesis H.1, namely that, all else equal, voters prefer politicians with high expertise over non-experts ones.

A substantive interpretation can be derived from this finding and it is informative to the theoretical discussion on the tension between party democracy and technocracy. In a context of economic crisis and political strain, voters' demand for representation based on the linkage role provided by parties may be weakened in favor of other types of demand, i.e. effective and responsible government grounded on expert knowledge.

Examining the rest of candidate attributes, we find that some of them also help explain choices between candidate profiles, although their effect is smaller than that of candidate expertise or party affiliation. According to our experiment, the probability of being elected to fill an executive position increases if the candidate's level of education is high (graduate or postgraduate). This also arises if the respondent and candidate share the same region of birth. Interestingly female candidates tend to be preferred over male ones, even for a position traditionally male-dominated as that of Minister of Finance. This last finding goes in the opposite direction of what is found in the portfolio allocation literature (Claveria 2014; Goddard 2019) but it is in line with results from experimental studies on gender bias in politics (Teele et al. 2018; Clayton et al. 2019) which show that participants tend to prefer female candidates over male ones.
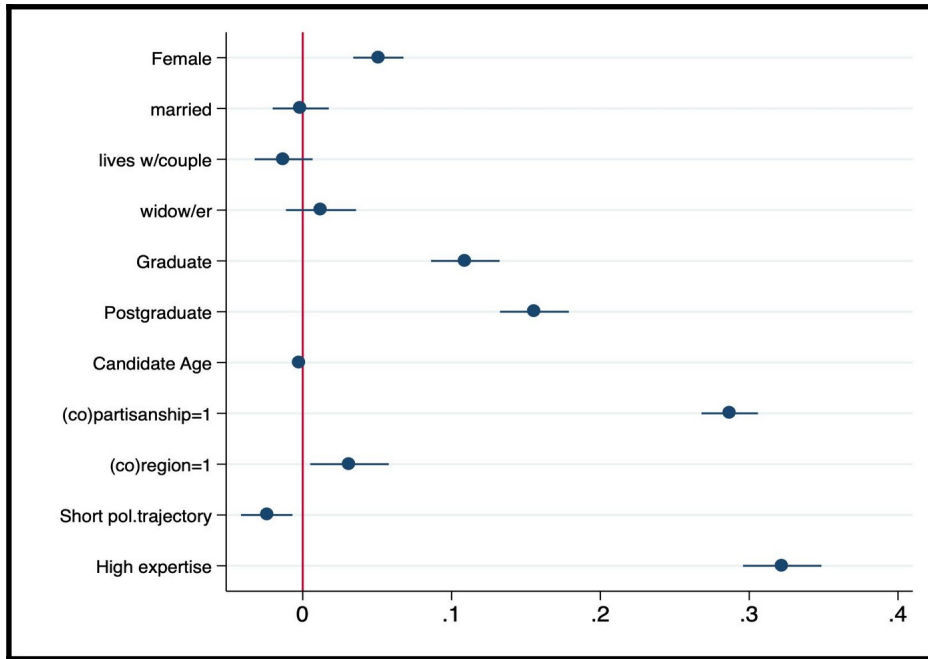
Figure 2. **Results**: Estimates are average marginal component effects (AMCE) from OLS regression. The dependent variable is a dummy with value 1 if the candidate was selected and 0 otherwise. The independent variables are all levels of the candidate's attributes. For *sex*, "Male" is the reference category; for *civil status*, "Single" is the reference category; for *education*, "Secondary school" is the reference category; for *short political trajectory*, "Long trajectory in political life" is the reference category; for *expertise*, "Low expertise in Economics" is the reference category. *(co)partisanship=1* estimate shows the effect of candidate's party affiliation when it is shared with respondent's vote in 2016 Spanish General Election. *(co)region=1* coefficient indicates the effect of the candidate's region of birth when it matches the respondent's one. The type of pair-choice combinations respondents may face when voting is also controlled in the analyses with dummy variables (not displayed). Errors are clustered at the respondent level, with error bars showing 95% confidence intervals.

Additionally to these results, and with an exploratory aim, we have performed a set of supplementary analyses to examine if, as shown by the literature on 'stealth democracy' (e.g. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Bengtsson and Mattila 2009; Webb 2013; Coffé and Michels 2014; or Lavezzolo and Ramiro 2018), certain respondent characteristics predict support for the presence of experts in office. The intuition is that the same voters' characteristics that account for stealth democracy preferences also explain the demand for experts in political decision-making. This intuition is confirmed in our data, as shown in the interactions between respondents' features and candidates' expertise profile (see Figure 3). The probability of choosing an expert candidate increases the higher the respondent's level of education, the more right-wing on the ideological scale she is, and the better her personal economic situation. We also confirm what was previously found by Lavezzolo and Ramiro (2018) in relation to party choice in the Spanish context: Respondents that had voted for the center-right party Ciudadanos (*Citizens*) in the previous general elections tend to give more weight to the candidate's expertise level when making choices between candidates for the Minister of Finance.
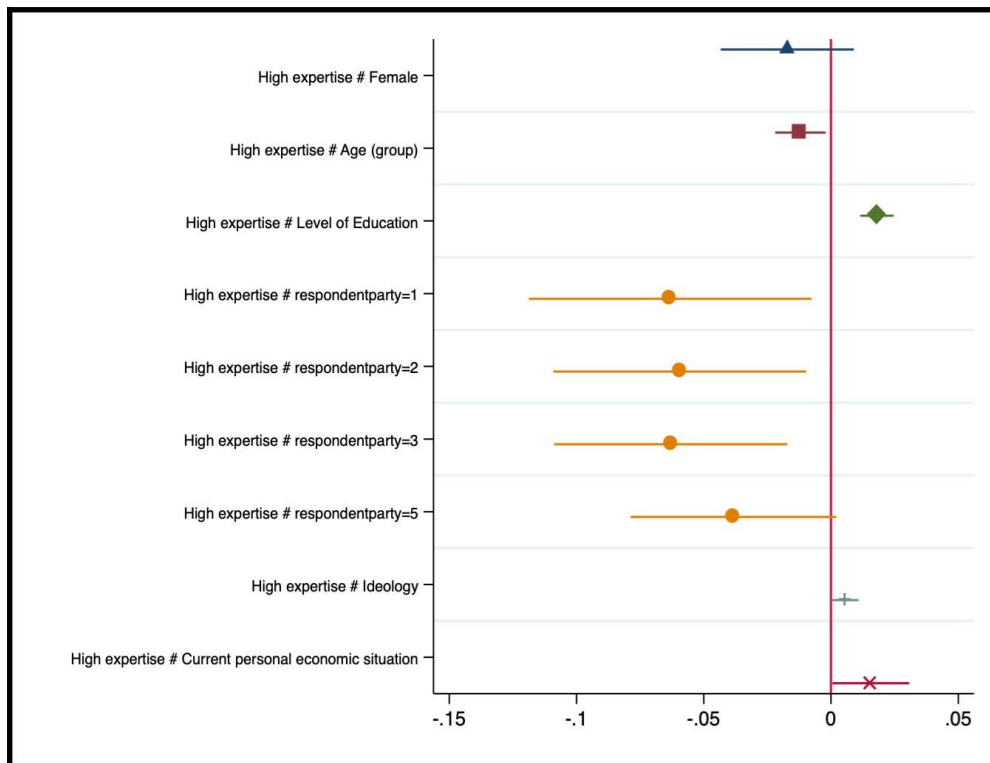
Figure 3. **Heterogeneous effects**: OLS coefficients from interactions between respondents' characteristics with candidate's expert profile. A separate regression has been performed for each interaction and, as such, they are represented in the picture (different symbols). Estimates are average marginal component effects (AMCE). The dependent variable is a dummy with value 1 if the candidate was selected and 0 otherwise. The independent variables are all factors levels. As regards respondent's characteristics, for *Sex*, "Male" is the reference category; *Age (group)* is an ordinal variable with 6 values, being the youngest category (18-24) the reference; *Level of education* is an ordinal variable with 11 values, being "Less than 5 years of education" the reference category; *Vote in 2016 Spanish General Election* is a nominal variable, having voted for *Citizens* (*Ciudadanos*) being the reference category; *Ideology* is a 0-10 points scale variable (from left to right); and *Current personal economic situation* is an ordinal (5 points scale) variable, being "Very bad" the category of reference. The type of pair-choice combinations respondents may face when voting is also controlled (not displayed). Errors are clustered at the respondent level, with error bars showing 95% confidence intervals.

4.2. The shaping effect of the crisis of representation on the demand for experts.

Figure 4 shows the results for the second set of hypotheses (H.2.A and H.2.B), which examine how different primings of the crisis of democratic representation shape the demand for expert party candidates. As before, we plot the AMCE from standard OLS models. The analysis of the demand for expert candidates shows no evidence that emphasizing a *lack of responsibility* in politicians increases support for expert candidates. Indeed, the demand for experts barely changes if respondents receive the priming treatment highlighting a lack of responsibility among politicians. The relevant coefficient, *high expertise X responsibility*, is negative (-0.02), which goes against the expectation, although this point estimate is not statistically distinguishable from zero.

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Nevertheless, we do find evidence that the *lack of responsiveness* prime does reduce the appetite of voters for the involvement of experts in executive office. The coefficient, *high expertise X responsiveness*, indicates that the probability to vote for an expert decreases 0.03 points in a 0-1 scale. So, if people are primed with information about the economic crisis but emphasizing politicians' inability to listen to voters' preferences, the demand for a candidate's expertise weakens. While statistically significant, however, the substantive magnitude of the impact is small: It only reduces the effect of expertise on choices from 0.33 to 0.30.[10]
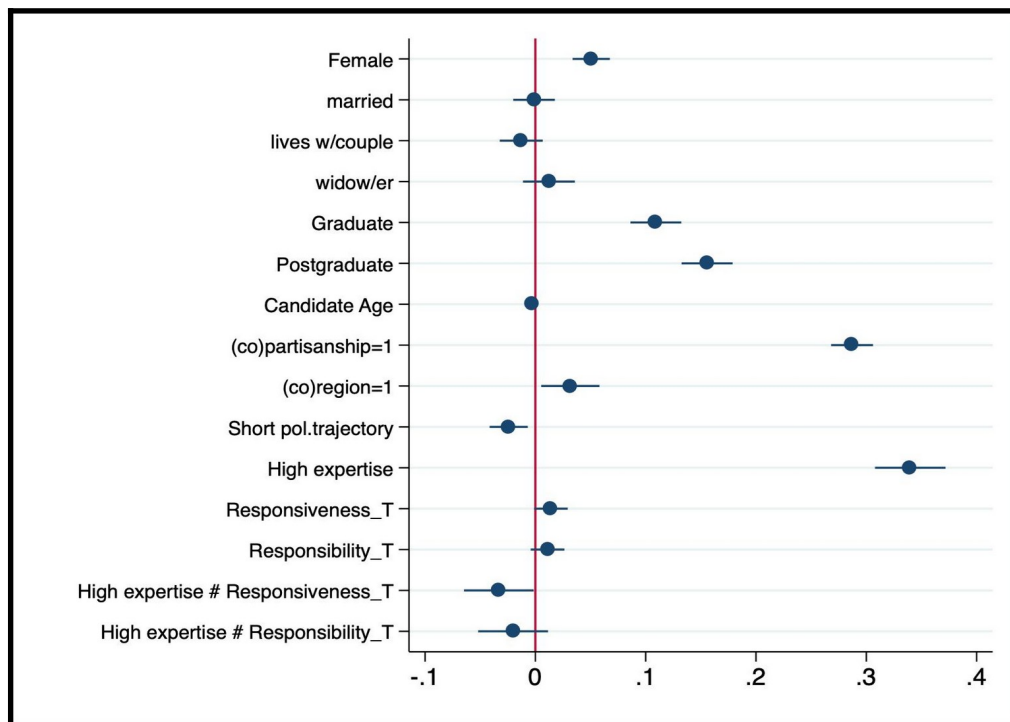

Figure 4. **Priming effects**: Estimates are average marginal component effects (AMCE) from OLS regression. The dependent variable is a dummy with value 1 if the candidate was selected and 0 otherwise. The independent variables are all levels of the candidate's attributes. Coefficients for interactions show the effect of the candidate's high level of expertise in Economics when respondents were primed with a *Responsiveness manipulation* or a *Responsibility manipulation*. The type of pair-choice combinations respondents may face when voting is also controlled in the analyses with dummy variables (not displayed). Errors are clustered at the respondent level, with error bars showing 95% confidence intervals.

5. Discussion

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10 Although this last result is statistically significant, it is important to emphasize that the dummy variable captures the contrast between the control group and the group that has received the lack of responsiveness treatment, but not the difference between the two primings. In fact, according to the results, we observe that both primes generate a negative coefficient and do not differ statistically from each other. This could be due to the fact that our manipulations have not been able to differentiate one from the other, or that the lack of responsibility treat is actually being interpreted as a statement about the absence of responsive politicians. We come back to this in the Discussion section.

Voters demand expert politicians. The results of the conjoint experiment clearly point in this direction: A candidate profile with expertise is, *ceteris paribus*, much more likely to be chosen to be Finance Minister than a candidate without specific technical competence. The strength of this preference becomes particularly remarkable when compared against the weight of candidate partisanship: The conjoint results suggest that respondents give more weight to the candidate being a technical expert than to her belonging to their preferred political party. Substantively, what this might imply is that a Socialist Party voter, everything else equal, marginally prefers a Minister of the Popular Party with technical expertise than a Minister of the Socialist Party that lacks such technical competence. The fact that expertise is a more important determinant of the respondent's choice than the candidate's party affiliation indicates a decisive weakening of the capacity of partisanship to structure public preferences, at least under circumstances of economic crisis and political strain.

What might explain such a strong preference for candidates with technical expertise? One non-exclusive explanation is contextual: In a scenario of poor economic and political outcomes -such as those in the last decade in Spain- voters may blame traditional career politicians and turn their attention to technical experts with the expectation that they will be more capable to find effective solutions. The strong preference for candidates with expertise could also be partially accounted for by the type of position that is to be filled, that of the Minister of Finance. For this type of position the importance of technical expertise -economics, banking- may be particularly clear to voters, especially in comparison to other cabinet positions for which voters may instead prioritize responsiveness to preferences and values rather than technical expertise. A second explanation lies in the very nature of the type of expert that the conjoint experiment focuses on, namely candidates that have technical expertise but at the same time hold a party affiliation. These *technopols* might be seen by voters as an optimal compromise in the responsibility vs responsiveness tradeoff. Being experts, they have the technical knowledge to identify effective solutions to economic and social problems. At the same time, having a partisan affiliation, they cannot completely disregard public opinion lest they might cost their party the following election. Hence, they need to be (at least somewhat) responsive to voters.

The double identity of these expert politicians might also explain why neither priming manipulation substantially changes respondents' preferences. As we have seen, the *lack of responsibility* manipulation does *not* change demand for these expert politicians and, while the effect of the *lack of responsiveness* priming is statistically significant and with the expected sign, its substantive magnitude is fairly small. The null impact of the *lack of responsibility* priming could be due to ceiling effects: The baseline demand for *technopols* in the control group is already very high and, as a result, the *responsibility* priming cannot increase it much further. The weak effect of the *lack of responsiveness* manipulation could be due to the fact that respondents do not value responsiveness

very highly in a position like that of the Minister of Finance and therefore they do not see a trade-off for this kind of position. A broader explanation would be that voters do not consider that *technopols*, as experts with a partisan allegiance, entail a trade-off between responsibility and responsiveness. In other words, the evidence would suggest that voters do not consider that having a *technopol* in office implies trading higher responsibility for lower responsiveness.

Our finding that voters strongly support the choice of expert politicians for positions of executive office might in turn explain why they are the most common form of expert involvement in politics. Being heavily favored by voters, political parties are likely to see them as electoral assets and go out of their way to recruit them. Enrolling *technopols* thus becomes a winning strategy for political parties. By fielding candidates that combine technical expertise with party membership political parties can perhaps find the optimal strategy to attract voters: In this way parties can offer expertise and potential effective government without endangering their representative linkage. Doing so, parties would answer to the public's demand for both responsiveness and responsibility, bridge the responsiveness-responsibility divide and, incidentally, approximate their role as depicted by the responsible party model of government (Dahl 1956; Birch 1964; Caramani 2020). This, as our results also show, is what voters essentially want: effective and responsible government based on expert knowledge that, at the same time, is also responsive. As Tucker and Zilinsky (2020) remind us, this should not be seen as contradictory as since voters might reasonably hold priorities other than representativeness. Citizens do not seem to favour technocratic government isolated from the public's preferences, the type that would challenge democracy, but responsive experts within the context of representative government. This is something that parties are able to provide.

6. Conclusion

This paper has sought to gauge voter demand for the involvement of experts in positions of political decision-making. It has focused on the case of Spain, a country wherein several years of poor economic and social outcomes have led to low levels of trust and satisfaction with fundamental political actors. Most studies that have addressed this type of crisis in representative government have tended to focus on the surge of a populist challenge (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Kriesi 2014; Rodrik 2018). Yet, much less attention has been paid to the other main alternative that challenges party democracy: technocracy or the government of experts (Caramani 2017).

To help fill this gap we have fielded a conjoint experiment to explicitly measure whether voters want candidates with technical expertise in positions of political power. Many experiments have been fielded to isolate preferences for specific politician characteristics, such as social class (Carnes and

Lupu 2016), gender (e.g. Teele et al. 2018), and others. Ours is, to the best of our knowledge, the first one that isolates the weight of candidate expertise on voter choices relative to that of other factors such as partisanship.

We have reported robust evidence that voters strongly prefer expert politicians over non-expert ones. The impact of this trait is the strongest of all candidate attributes. Indeed, shared partisanship between the candidate and the respondent is a less relevant predictor of respondents' choices than expertise. At the same time, neither priming experiment -lack of responsibility and lack of responsiveness-substantially changes the strength of demand for expert politicians. The strong preference for expertise and the weak effect of both priming experiments could be explained by the kind of expert politicians that the conjoint experiment has focused on: Candidates that combine technical expertise with a partisan affiliation, which constitute the most common form of expert involvement in executive office. Having both expertise and partisan loyalties, voters perhaps see them as a way to strike a compromise between effective policy-making and responsiveness to public opinion.

While our experiment has been fielded in Spain, we expect our results to extrapolate to other settings that are also affected by a crisis of party government. For instance, it is likely that in scenarios where preferences for 'stealth democracy' (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Bengtsson and Mattila 2009; Coffé and Michels 2014) are widespread, we should also find a substantial demand for experts in public office. Future work will be able to test whether the strong preference for expert involvement in office also holds in other settings with party representative government in crisis.

Building on the evidence reported in this paper, future research will be able to examine demand for other types of expert involvement in politics. In this manuscript we have focused on the most common form of participation. But, as Bertsou and Caramani (2020) argue, there is a continuum of types of expert roles in politics, from the pure government of experts (technocracy) to experts adopting subordinate roles implementing decisions made by traditional career politicians. Future conjoint experiments could gauge demand for each major type of expert involvement and examine how voters navigate the trade-offs entailed in each form of expert participation. Such study could test the claim made by several scholars that voters appreciate the role of experts in office but might be reluctant to give *unconstrained* power to independent unresponsive technocrats (Webb 2013; Ganuza et al. 2017; Dommett and Temple 2019).

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Table A.1. Selected and not-selected candidates by level of expertise in Economics. Frequencies, *row percentage* and **column percentage**

	Low expertise	High expertise	Total
Not-selected candidate	7542	4458	12000
	62.85%	*37.15%*	*100%*
	58.36%	**40.25%**	**50%**
Selected candidate	5381	6619	12000
	44.84%	*55.16%*	*100%*
	41.64%	**59.75%**	**50%**
Total	12923	11077	24000
	53.85%	46.15	*100%*
	100%	**100%**	**100%**

Table A.2. Robustness check. Results for Hypothesis 1. Model with different operationalization of candidate's partisanship.

Dependent Variable: Selected Candidate	
Candidate Sex = 1, Female	0.051***
	(0.009)
Candidate Civil Status = 2, married	-0.005
	(0.010)
Candidate Civil Status = 3, lives w/couple	-0.014
	(0.010)
Candidate Civil Status = 4, widow/er	0.011
	(0.012)
Candidate Level of Education = 2, Graduate	0.113***
	(0.012)
Candidate Level of Education = 3, Postgraduate	0.158***
	(0.012)
Candidate Age	-0.003***
	(0.000)
respondentparty = PSOE	-0.000
	(0.001)
respondentparty = Unidas Podemos	-0.001
	(0.001)
respondentparty = Ciudadanos	-0.000
	(0.001)
respondentparty = Other parties	-0.000
	(0.001)
(co)region = 1	0.033**
	(0.014)
Candidate Political Trajectory = 1, Short pol.trajectory	-0.023**
	(0.009)
Candidate Level of Expertise = 1, High expertise	0.319***
	(0.014)
tecno_choices = 2, Low vs. Low	0.170***
	(0.008)
tecno_choices = 3, High vs. High	-0.183***
	(0.007)
Constant	0.308***
	(0.016)

Observations	24,000
R-squared	0.086

Standard error in parenthesis, p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A.3. Robustness check. Results for Hypothesis 1. Model with different operationalization of region of birth (in-group *vs.* out-group).

Dependent Variable: Selected Candidate	
Candidate Sex = 1, Female	0.051***
	(0.009)
Candidate Civil Status = 2, married	-0.002
	(0.010)
Candidate Civil Status = 3, lives w/couple	-0.013
	(0.010)
Candidate Civil Status = 4, widow/er	0.012
	(0.012)
Candidate Level of Education = 2, Graduate	0.109***
	(0.012)
Candidate Level of Education = 3, Postgraduate	0.156***
	(0.012)
Candidate Age	-
	0.003***
	(0.000)
(co)partisanship = 1	0.288***
	(0.010)
newco_region = 2, in-group-Spain	-0.010**
	(0.004)
newco_region = 3, in-group-CAT	0.047
	(0.029)
newco_region = 4, in-group-BC	0.046
	(0.065)
Candidate Political Trajectory = 1, Short pol.trajectory	-
	0.024***
	(0.009)
Candidate Level of Expertise = 1, High expertise	0.322***
	(0.013)
tecno_choices = 2, Low vs. Low	0.170***
	(0.007)
tecno_choices = 3, High vs. High	-
	0.186***
	(0.007)
Constant	0.277***
	(0.016)

Observations	24,000
R-squared	0.124

Standard error in parenthesis, p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A.4. Robustness check. Results for Hypothesis 1. Model with quadratic age effects.

Dependent Variable: Selected Candidate	
Candidate Sex = 1, Female	0.051***
	(0.009)
Candidate Civil Status = 2, married	-0.002
	(0.010)
Candidate Civil Status = 3, lives w/couple	-0.013
	(0.010)
Candidate Civil Status = 4, widow/er	0.016
	(0.012)
Candidate Level of Education = 2, Graduate	0.110***
	(0.012)
Candidate Level of Education = 3, Postgraduate	0.156***
	(0.012)
Candidate Age	0.001
	(0.001)
Candidate Age (sq)	-0.000***
	(0.000)
(co)partisanship = 1	0.287***
	(0.010)
(co)region = 1	0.032**
	(0.013)
Candidate Political Trajectory = 1, Short pol.trajectory	-0.024***
	(0.009)
Candidate Level of Expertise = 1, High expertise	0.319***
	(0.013)
tecno_choices = 2, Low vs. Low	0.178***
	(0.008)
tecno_choices = 3, High vs. High	-0.187***
	(0.007)
Constant	0.230***
	(0.020)

Observations	24,000
R-squared	0.125

Standard error in parenthesis, p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A.5. Robustness check. Results for Hypothesis 1. Model with respondent's fixed effects.

Dependent Variable: Selected Candidate	
Candidate Sex = 1, Female	0.051***
	(0.006)
Candidate Civil Status = 2, married	-0.001
	(0.009)
Candidate Civil Status = 3, lives w/couple	-0.014
	(0.009)
Candidate Civil Status = 4, widow/er	0.011
	(0.011)
Candidate Level of Education = 2, Graduate	0.114***
	(0.010)
Candidate Level of Education = 3, Postgraduate	0.163***
	(0.010)
Candidate Age	-
	0.003***
	(0.000)
(co)partisanship = 1	0.357***
	(0.010)
(co)region = 1	0.034**
	(0.014)
Candidate Political Trajectory = 1, Short pol.trajectory	-
	0.025***
	(0.006)
Candidate Level of Expertise = 1, High expertise	0.321***
	(0.010)
tecno_choices = 2, Low vs. Low	0.170***
	(0.010)
tecno_choices = 3, High vs. High	-
	0.188***
	(0.010)
Constant	0.263***

	(0.013)
Observations	24,000
Number of idpanelista	2,400
R-squared	0.135
Fixed effects	YES

Standard error in parenthesis, p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1