Fighting Populism on Its Own Turf: Experimental Evidence

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Abstract

We experimentally evaluate how traditional parties may respond to the challenge posed by populist parties when facing issues that are particularly fitting for populist messages, such as the fabricated antagonism between "pure" people and "corrupt" elite. The testing ground is the 2020 Italian referendum on the reduction of members of Parliament proposed by populist parties. We implement both a large-scale field experiment, with almost one million impressions of programmatic advertising, and a survey experiment. In both settings, the treatments are two video ads: a video providing information on the likely costs of cutting MPs aimed at deconstructing the populist narrative and a video attacking the credibility of the populist politicians, who promoted the reduction of MPS, aimed at reducing trust in them. Our field experiment shows that the latter video is more effective at capturing the viewers' attention. Moreover, it decreases the turnout rate and, to a lesser extent, the "Yes" votes (in favor of reducing the MPs). We present a theoretical framework based two ingredients – trust in traditional parties and information acquisition – to account for these findings and to provide additional predictions. In the survey experiment, both (unskippable) videos reduce the "Yes" vote and increase the share of undecided. For voter of traditional parties, the effects are concentrated among people with

low previous political information. For individuals with no trust in traditional parties, previous political information plays no role.

Keywords:

JEL Classification:

1 Introduction

The last decade has witnessed an unprecedented rise of populism in Western democracies. Populist parties share a view of the society as partitioned into two antagonistic groups: "pure people" and "corrupt elite" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). Hence, they seek to challenge the corrupt establishment in the interest of the "people," with little patience for pluralism, protection of minorities, and constitutional checks and balances. Populist parties also feature anti-expert sentiments, anti-globalization stances, and an aggressive communication style on social media (De Vries 2018). A large literature has developed on the socio-cultural and economic motivations of populism (Margalit 2019, Guriev and Papaioannou 2020).

The populist combination of issues and communication style has posed a phenomenal challenge for traditional parties that struggled with finding adequate and successful responses. Several questions need to be tackled to formulate a successful and coherent strategy to face populism. Should traditional parties avoid all together addressing divisive issues that belong to the populist camp, such as anti-establishment or anti-immigration sentiments? Should they use a more inclusive and inspirational narrative, which appeal to a moral rhetoric to activate positive emotions among voters (Jung, 2019)? But even if avoiding to focus on populist-friendly issues turns out to be advisable, shying away from them may not always be possible. A second set of questions therefore arises. If forced to address these issues, should traditional parties deconstruct the populist narrative with facts, in an attempt to persuade voters – to "win the argument"? Or should we expect this information strategy to backfire, particularly among voters leaning toward populist parties (Nyhan and Reifler, 2010, Kahan et al., 2017)? Traditional parties might also mimic the populist rhetoric of framing and blame attribution (Busby et al., 2019), using the same tools of populists against them, e.g., depicting populist politicians as a new opportunistic and corrupt establishment. Is this "use the same weapons" strategy effective? Two crucial choices thus emerge: whether traditional parties should tackle or avoid "populist" issues, and whether they should use or avoid a "populist" framing. In the context of an intrinsically populist issue, we address the second research question by means of both a large-scale field experiment and a survey experiment in the field.

Our paper exploits a constitutional referendum on a populist-friendly issue—the reduction of the number of MPs in the Italian Parliament—to study the electoral effects of traditional political parties' messages to the voters. Reducing the number of MPs was proposed by two populist parties (the 5 Stars movement and the League) with the stated aim of reducing the cost of the political system, and had a strong anti-establishment content. The constitutional amendment, reducing the MPs in the Lower House from 630 to 400 and in the Senate from 315 to 200, was approved at large majority in both branches of the legislature. Yet, on January 2020, a petition was filed by 71 Senators to hold a confirmatory constitutional referendum. Public opinion was largely favorable to reducing the number of MPs. Polls run the week before the referendum, held on September 2020, predicted a 70%-30% victory of the "Yes" over the "No" votes, thereby confirming the constitutional amendment. Traditional parties did not take a firm stand on the issue (Forza Italia) or were internally divided (the Democrats), as they refrained from tackling such a populist-friendly issue.

We ran a large-scale field experiment during the electoral campaign for the referendum using electoral material designed and provided by a committee promoting the "No" vote (*Democratici per il No*) for its national campaign. We used a novel communication tool, programmatic advertisement, to deploy almost a million video "impressions" to Italian citizens in 200 municipalities of six Italian regions (Campania, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Lombardia, Toscana, and Veneto). These impressions consisted of non-skippable pre-roll videos displayed in a large host of websites, including newspapers, blogs, games, etc. The randomization was done at the municipal level. In parallel to the field experiment we ran a survey experiment on around 2,000 individuals, from the same municipalities involved in the field experiment, administering the same treatments to the sample.

Our informational treatments consisted of two video ads supporting the "No" vote, which differed in their tone and message, but were identical in their length and graphics. Both videos lasted 30 seconds. One video provided information on the amount of the effective cost savings obtained by reducing the number of MPs, and on its negative consequences for the democratic representativeness of the Parliament. It thus used a "win the argument" strategy aimed at deconstructing the populist message. The other video instead carried out a direct attack to

2

the politicians of the two main parties that promoted the reduction of the number of MPs, by explicitly pointing out their non-democratic or illegal behavior. It thus exploited a "use the same weapons" strategy aimed at reducing citizens' trust and credibility in these (populist) non-traditional parties too. For both videos, the final goal was to persuade voters to vote "No" at the referendum.

The results of our experiments suggest a role for campaigning even on lopsided, populist-friendly issues. In the field experiment, the video that attacked the credibility of the populist leaders proved to be better equipped than the informational video to capture the viewers' attention. Programmatic advertisement using this trust-reducing video reduced turnout by almost 2 percentage points, with a persuasion rate of around 4-5% (depending on the econometric specification). This effect is stronger among potential "Yes" voters as it is associated with a reduction in the "Yes" vote of around 0.5 percentage points.

We use a theoretical framework developed by Morelli et al. (2021), based on two crucial elements – individual trust in traditional politicians and information acquisition, to account for these findings. Individuals differ in their trust in traditional parties. Individuals with high enough trust vote for traditional politicians and acquire political information to monitor their behavior and the quality of their policy decisions. Instead, people with low levels of trust either vote for non-traditional parties that are willing to commit to policies before the elections, or abstain. These low trust individuals do not seek political information. According to this theoretical framework, in the referendum, low trust individuals should prefer the "Yes" vote, since they do not value much the independent role played by the MPs and should thus favor their reduction; whereas (high trust) voters of traditional parties should be more inclined to vote "No." Our findings in the field experiment on the electoral effectiveness of the treatments are consistent with this theoretical framework. The trust reducing video seems to convince individuals with low trust in traditional parties to turn their backs on non-traditional parties too. These individuals seem to disregard the non-traditional parties' advice to vote "Yes", deciding instead to abstain. Conversely, the informational video has little effect on these individuals, who do not seek information and might be more likely to skip it by closing the browser window.

The theoretical framework provides additional predictions that can be tested in the survey

3

experiment, in which the video treatments cannot be easily skipped. In line with these predictions, we find that among untreated individuals, who were not exposed to any of the two video treatments, intentions to vote "Yes" (i.e., to confirm the reduction of MPs) were stronger for individuals with low trust in traditional parties. These people were also less politically informed than voters of traditional parties. Indeed, among untreated individuals, political information played no role in determining voting intentions at the referendum for the low trust individuals. Instead, among untreated voters of traditional parties, more informed people were less likely to vote "Yes". Turning to our treatments, in the survey experiment, they were equally effective among individuals with low and high trust in traditional parties. However, for high trust individuals, the informational video was more effective than the trust reducing video, and it was particularly effective among the low informed people. Instead, among the low trust individuals, both videos were equally effective and no difference emerged according to prior levels of political information.

The paper proceeds as follows. Sections 2 and 3 describe the political background and the experimental design, respectively. Section 4 present the empirical results of the field experiment. Section 5 discusses the theoretical framework and the predictions for the survey experiment, which is presented in section 6. Section 7 concludes.

2   Political Background

The referendum on the confirmation of the constitutional amendment that reduced the number of Italian MPs in both Houses took place on September 20 and 21, 2020. Reducing the number of MPs had informally been proposed by the 5 Stars movement and the League, but was put on paper during the summer 2018 negotiations, when both parties signed a "government contract,"(Nota: "government contract" come traduzione letterale e' un po' confusionario in inglese; coalition contract o coalition agreement o coalition pact?) enumerating the policy measures to be implemented by the 5 Stars movement (M5S) and League coalition government. In the paragraph "Institutional Reforms, Autonomy and Direct Democracy," the contract stated: "It is necessary to begin with the drastic reduction of the number of MPs: 400

4

deputies and 200 senators." This reduction was motivated by the need of easing the working of the Chambers, of increasing efficiency in the legislative process, and of achieving spending reductions, but was clearly linked to the anti-establishment stance of both parties.

The legislative process for the constitutional amendment law (A.S. 805) that reduced the number of members of Parliament was initiated in the Senate jointly by a M5S Senator (Patuanelli) and a League Senator (Romeo) on September 2018. Following the procedure required for this type of amendments, it was approved twice each by both the Senate and the Lower House. On September 2019, the government was replaced by a new coalition government formed by the M5S and the Democratic Party (PD). On October 8, the constitutional law, which reduced the MPs in the Lower House from 630 to 400 and in the Senate from 315 to 200, was final approved in the Lower House, with 553 votes in favor out of the 569 representatives. In this last vote, MPs from the Democratic Party, who opposed the law in the two previous votes in the Senate and in the first vote in the Lower House, supported the reduction, in compliance with the agreement reached with their coalition partner, the M5S.

On January 10, 2020, a petition was filed by 71 Senators (mostly from Forza Italia, but also from the Democratic Party) to hold a constitutional referendum on this law. The referendum brought the question on whether to reduce the number of MPs directly to the Italian electorate. By voting "yes," voters would confirm the law that reduced the number of MPs, whereas by voting "no" they would request its cancellation, thereby keeping the current number of MPs. No minimum turnout quorum is required in constitutional amendment referendums: the majority of the valid votes cast determines the result of the referendum.

The issue was quite lopsided. Polls run six months before the referendum predicted a landslide (90%-10%) victory of the "yes" over the "no" votes, while polls run the week before the referendum predicted a 70%-30% win for the reduction in the number of MPs. Most major political parties were publicly in favor of the "yes," but they largely differed in their commitment to run a referendum campaign and in the extent of their internal disagreements. M5S was the most present in the media and strongly favored the reduction. League and PD were also visible, but recorded some dissenting interventions. Forza Italia left freedom of vote to its voters.

3   Experimental Design

We examine the effect of two different campaign messages in favor of voting "No," i.e., of dropping (?) the constitutional amendment that reduced the number of MPs. We exploited electoral material designed and provided by the committee *Democratici per il No* for its national campaign. From this material, we selected and used two video ads, which differed in their message, but not in their length nor graphics. One video was more factual and provided information on the negative consequences that reducing the number of MPs would have for the democratic representativeness of the Parliament. The other video brought a direct attack to discredit the politicians who promoted the reduction of the number of MPs.

We used these two videos in a large-scale field experiment with programmatic advertisement, involving 200 relatively small municipalities in six Italian regions, and in a survey experiment. These treatments coexisted with the real campaign, for both sides (No and Yes), and therefore their effects (if any) operated at the margin. However, we designed the field experiment so that the intensity of the treatment could be strong and thus have perceivable effects on the actual vote shares in the treated municipalities.

The field experiment was implemented between September 7 and September 18, 2020. The programmatic advertisement allowed to deploy almost one million impressions in 200 municipalities. The two treatments appeared as non-skippable 30-second pre-roll videos displayed in a large host of websites, including newspapers, magazines, blogs, games, etc. The randomization was done at the municipal level.

Our survey experiment was implemented between September 9 and September 18, 2020. Around 2,000 individuals from 390 municipalities (300 of which were also part of the field experiment) were exposed to one of the two videos realized by the committee *Democratici per il No*, or were part of the control group that received only a neutral video on how to vote at the referendum. Since the randomization was done at the municipal level, in both the survey and the field experiment, individuals from a given municipality were exposed to the same experimental condition.

3.1 Video Treatments

Our treatments consisted of two video ads, used to treat two groups of municipalities both in the field and in the survey experiment, according to the randomization protocol described below. Both videos were commissioned by a group promoting the "No" vote—*Democratici per il No*—and were produced by professionals video-makers. We selected these two videos from the entire electoral material available at the campaign committee, as they were the perfect fit for our research question. In the six regions in which we deployed the programmatic advertisement (Campania, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Lombardia, Toscana and Veneto), the campaign committee agreed not to use these videos for their own campaigning.

Both videos last 30 seconds. Besides their length, the videos share several features, such as the background colors, the speaker's voice, the narrative structure of the message, the tight rhythm of text and the music. In Italian, the first video contains 78 words and the second 81.

The video used for the municipalities in the first treatment group (T1) provides factual information and aims at deconstructing the populist narrative. Below is a transcript of the message read by a professional actor. In italics, we emphasize the parts shared by both videos. "*Perhaps you have been told that the referendum on September 20 is needed to* reduce the costs of politics....*They lied to you.* The cost savings will amount to only one coffee per year for every Italian. But there will be other consequences. Your municipality and the small regions will not have voice in Parliament. To bring a government down, it will only take a few turncoat Senators switching party affiliation. Hence, your vote will be worth less. Is all this worth a coffee a year? *"I vote NO."* While a background voice of a professional actor reads these statements, the video displays the text and faces of professional actors. It ends with a large "NO" appearing in white on the screen against a yellow background, which is immediately crossed-out, suggesting voters how to vote on their electoral ballot, and with the logo and the endorsement of *Democratici per il No* displayed in a corner.

The video used for the municipalities in the second treatment group (T2) moves instead a direct attack to the credibility of the politicians promoting the law that reduced the seats in Parliament and aims at reducing trust in these politicians. Below is a transcript of the message read by a professional actor. In italics, we emphasize the statements shared by both videos.

7

"*Perhaps you have been told that the referendum on September 20 is needed to* fight the ruling elite. *They lied to you."* The aim of this law is to reinforce them: the new ruling elite. Those who would like to replace the Parliament that originated from the Resistance movement with the private online platform run by the Casaleggio Co. Those who cut 115 Senators to save 28 million Euros, when it would only take one Senator—Matteo Salvini—to give back the 49 million Euros stolen by the Northen League. Do you still want to be fooled by them? "*I vote NO."* While a background voice of a professional actor reads these statements, the video displays the text and shows images of the politicians, who promoted the law, such as Di Maio and Toninelli (5 Stars movement's ministers) and Salvini (League). Also this video ends with a large "NO" appearing in white on a yellow background and being crossed-out, with the logo and the endorsement of *Democratici per il No* shown in a corner.

Both videos are available online at the experiment website (https://rebrand.ly/referendum2020)

3.2 Randomization

In the field experiment, we deployed the two videos using programmatic advertisement. Programmatic advertising is the automated transaction of buying and selling advertising online. It happens thanks to an algorithmic software that operates the sale and placement of digital ad impressions through exchange platforms in a fraction of a second. A publisher lists on the supply-side platform (SSP) the ad space for a particular viewer, who is currently on its webpage. This listing contains a wealth of information on the site, the ad space, and—thanks to the cookies on the viewer's device—the geographic location, demographics, and interests of the viewer. Demand-side platforms (DSPs) review this information to match users with the budget and targeting parameters of their advertisers. In real-time, DSPs make bids on behalf of their advertisers. The SSP picks the winner and shows the ad to the user on the publisher's site. The entire process happens in milliseconds, while the page is loading for the user.

Programmatic advertising has several advantages. It allows targeting users on a granular level, with the right message, in the right place, at the right time and on several devices, such as mobile, desktop, tablet, and TV. Hence, budget waste on likely uninterested viewers can be eliminated and feedbacks on the performance of each ad arrive in real time.

8

The programmatic campaigning we randomized in our field experiment was managed by a professional company (*Electica*). As explained above, the campaigning targeted 200 municipalities in six Italian regions (Campania, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Lombardia, Toscana, and Veneto): 100 municipalities were reached with the informational video (T1) for our "Win the Argument" strategy and 100 municipalities with the trust reducing video (T2) for our "Use the Same Weapons strategy,"

Our budget allowed us to fund around one million impressions in total. We instructed the professional company to use a bidding strategy that would allow each municipality to receive a number of impressions proportional to its size. In particular, we divided the municipalities into ten equally spaced intervals, from 2,500 to 15,000 in increments of 1,250. Using the midpoint of these ten intervals, we calculated the proportion of impressions to citizens for each municipality that would reach the target of one million and thus be compatible with our budget. Our targeted ratio of impressions to citizens was around 57%.

Using this bidding strategy, 842,172 impressions were deployed, which, accounting for multiple views by the same person, reached 587,114 individuals. The company in charge of the programmatic advertisement was instructed to place the bids to reduce, for each municipality, the discrepancy between the target and the number of obtained impressions, and to minimize the difference of the discrepancies between two treated municipalities within a given group (triplet, see below) of municipalities. These objectives were prioritized above reaching the exact target of one million impressions.

Randomization was implemented at the municipal level. As video impressions can be targeted by the zipcode in which the user is located, we exploited the (partial) correspondence between zipcodes and municipalities, to target different campaign messages to different municipalities. The choice was due to the fact that electoral outcomes are obtained at the municipal level. To allocate treatments to municipalities, we adopted the following procedure.

First, we restricted our focus to the municipalities with population (in 2018) between 2,500 and 15,000 inhabitants, that existed also at the time of the 2016 Constitutional referendum, had a unique zipcode, and were located in one of the following six regions: Veneto, Campania, Toscana, Lombardia, Lazio, and Emilia-Romagna.The former three regions held concurrent

regional elections along with the referendum.[1] This left us with a population of 992 munici-palities.

Second, from these municipalities, we selected those with sufficient "digital penetration," that is, a sufficient level of access by the citizens to online contents. A measure of digital penetration was provided by the company in charge of the programmatic campaigning, which collected information on the number of "impressions" shown in these municipalities during August 2020.[2] From our initial sample, then, 596 municipalities were selected that ex-ante guaranteed a sufficient degree of digitalization: 72 in Campania, 94 in Emilia-Romagna, 29 in Lazio, 214 in Lombardia, 73 in Toscana and 114 in Veneto.

Third, we formed as many triplets of municipalities as possible within each region, based on Mahalanobis distance using the following covariates: population, 5 Stars Movement and Democratic Party vote shares in the 2018 election, turnout, and percentage of Yes votes in the 2016 referendum.[3] Once the triplets were formed, we randomly sampled a subset of these in each region, to reach the total of 100 municipalities assigned to the first treatment (T1), 100 to the second treatment (T2), and 100 as pre-registered control municipalities. The remaining triplets were set aside. Specifically, we selected 18 triplets (54 municipalities) each in Veneto, Campania, Toscana, and Emilia-Romagna. In Lombardia, we selected 19 triplets (57 munic-ipalities), and in Lazio all the 9 triplets (27 municipalities) that could be formed, due to the small number of Lazio municipalities in the desired population range and above the digital penetration threshold.

Fourth, within each triplet, we randomly assigned one municipality to each treatment group – and thus to the corresponding video (T1 and T2) or to the control group. Our randomization protocol, including the list of municipalities and their treatment assignment, was submitted for pre-registration at EGAP.[4] Figure 1 displays the location of the treated and control municipal-

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[1]These six regions were chosen among the larger Italian regions, so that the three regions having concurrent re-gional elections (Veneto, Campania and Toscana) were paired with three neighboring regions with no contemporane-ous elections (respectively, Lombardia, Lazio and Emilia-Romagna)

[2]"Impressions" is the commercial term of trade for videos, banners, and native ads, which adopt the design and functionality of the environment in which they are placed.

[3]To form the triplets, we follow the procedure suggested at `http://biostat.mc.vanderbilt.edu/wiki/Main/MatchingTripletsPriorToRandomization`. We run 10000 iterations of the split-sample matching and select the allocation that minimizes the sum of within-triplet distance.

[4]The randomization of treatment assignments was carried out by Piero Stanig in consultation with Vincenzo

ities (see also Figures A.1-A.6 in the Online Appendix).

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the pre-treatment variables and for our two main outcome variables, namely, turnout rate and Yes vote share by municipalities at the 2020 referendum. Table 2 shows that the pre-treatment variables used in our randomization (population of the municipality, 5 Stars Movement and Democratic Party vote shares in the 2018 election, turnout and percentage of Yes votes in the 2016 referendum) are perfectly balanced across treatment and control groups.[5]

The videos were deployed as non-skippable pre-load rolls. In other words, they were placed before a regular content video as a 30-second advertisement, which could not be removed or skipped. Individuals clicking on a content video of their liking on a regular website were shown this 30-second ad. They could not skip the ad, but they could of course choose to close the browser. They would avoid watching the ad at the cost of not watching the video of their interest. Overall, 59% of the people watched the videos until the end, and 74% watched it for at least 15 (out of 30) seconds.

The videos were placed on a host of websites, which differ in their category and domain. Categories include Games & Comics, Home & Gardening, Law, Gov't & Politics, Business, Pets, Technology & Computing, Careers, Arts & Entertainment, News, Entertainment, Sports, Travel, Personal Finance, Automotive, Hobbies & Interests, Education, Shopping, Health & Fitness, Style & Fashion, Society, Science, Religion & Spirituality, Family & Parenting, Food Drinks, Real Estate, Photography Video, Messaging & Communication. Among the newspaper webpages, those hosting more impressions were three newspapers, Il Giornale, Libero, and Il Fatto Quotidiano,[6] and Ansa, the main wire agency in the country.

Galasso. In order to prevent conflicts of interest, the procedure and its outcomes in terms of the municipalities involved and their treatment assignment were not disclosed to the other authors. In particular, the lists of treatments assigned to each municipality were included in a preregistration document, which was embargoed until October 1st 2020, and was only shared between Piero Stanig, Vincenzo Galasso, and the two agencies that implement respectively the programmatic advertisement experiment and the survey experiment.

[5]Tables A.1-A.4 in the appendix provide descriptive statistics and balance tests for the restricted and very restricted samples uses in the analysis (see Section 3.3)

[6]Il Giornale and Libero have a clear right-wing political orientation, while Il Fatto Quotidiano is popular among 5 Stars Movement voters

3.3 Estimation and Samples

To measure the causal impact of our two treatments (T1 and T2) on the referendum outcomes, we estimate the following linear model by OLS:

$$Y_m = \alpha_1 T1_m + \alpha_2 T2_m + \beta_{j(m)} + \varepsilon_m, \tag{1}$$

where the outcome variables are the turnout rate and the "Yes" vote share for municipality m, $j()$ is a function that maps municipality m to its triplet j, and β_j is a triplet fixed effect.

In our empirical analysis, we report results from three different sample. First, we use the full sample of the 300 municipalities that were pre-registered (391, in the robustness analysis with quadruplets). Second, we use a restricted sample of 260 municipalities (351, in the robustness analysis with quadruplets), which we obtain by dropping the highest 10% and the lowest 10% municipalities in terms of intensity of the treatment. In fact, although the professional company running the programmatic campaigning adjusted the bidding strategy to keep each treated municipality close to its target, some discrepancies took place, due to different ex-post digital penetration across municipalities. It is important to notice that the level of digital penetration in a municipality is not at all related to our video treatments. Municipalities did not reach enough digital penetration (or had too much penetration), when not enough (or too many) individuals were accessing online contents. This online access is prior to (and unaffected by) our treatments. In fact, only after an individual had accessed an online webpage, the process of programmatic advertising (described in section 3.2) would take place, eventually leading to our video treatments to be shown. Finally, we use a third, very restricted sample of 114 municipalities (205, in the robustness analysis with quadruplets), in which we drop the entire triplet, if at least one municipality in the triplet was among the highest 10% or the lowest 10% in terms of intensity of the treatment. In tables 3 to 5, we report the results of the field experiment for the three samples. In a robustness check, we exploit the fact that the outcomes are official referendum returns –hence available for every municipality in the country– to increase the number of control observations. We form 4-plets by adding to each of the pre-registered triplets one of the municipalities –in the population of 596 municipalities– that were set aside

when the randomization was carried out. We match each triplet to the municipality, in the same region, that is closest in Mahalanobis distance to the centroid of the triplet in terms of the five pre-treatment covariates (population and past vote) used to perform the blocking.

4   Field Experiment

4.1   Empirical Results

In table 3, we show the video completion rate (VCR) by municipality as a function of the treatment. It emerges that the distrust inducing video (T2) had a higher completion rate, between 1.2 and 1.5 percentage points – depending on whether we consider the full sample or the restricted sample (columns 7 and 8). This difference is statistically significant.[7] This divergence begins already after 25% of the length of the videos (7.5 seconds out of 30), as shown in the first two columns. It persists after 15 seconds (columns 3 and 4) and widens after 22.5 seconds (columns 5 and 6). Hence, the video (T2) providing a direct attack to the credibility of the politicians is more effective in capturing the viewers' attention than the informative video (T1).

To assess the effectiveness of the two communication strategies, we run the model described in equation (1) for our three samples: the full sample of 300 municipalities, the restricted sample of 260 municipalities obtained after dropping only those municipalities that had too much or too little digital penetration (this is confusing as it involuntarily mixes dp at the time of the experiment with ex ante dp; I think these can be presented as "deviations from protocol deriving from differential web use across municipalities in the days in which the experiment was in the field" even though I recognize it's dangerous language...or simply we can define "overtreated" and "undertreated" above, relate it to web use, and here say that we prune the over- and under-treated) and on the more restricted sample of 114 municipalities that remain after eliminating all the triplets in which at least one municipality had too much or too

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[7]The effect is comparatively large, as the Petersen-Mummolo residual standard deviation is 2.7 percentage points, hence the different treatments differ by half of the variation in video completion rate net of the fixed effects. The raw standard deviation is 3.9 percentage points.

little digital penetration. Our outcomes of interest are the turnout rate and the percentage of "Yes" votes at the municipal level.

Table 4 shows that the trust reducing video (T2) decreases the turnout rate. The estimated reduction ranges between 1.32 percentage points in the full sample (column 1) and 2.85 percentage points in the more restricted sample (column 5). Our most preferred specification, with the restricted sample, shows a reduction of almost 2 percentage points (column 3). Associated with the reduction in the turnout rate, our results display a decrease in the "Yes" vote, albeit non statistically significant. Also the point estimates of the effect of the informational video (T1) on the turnout rate are negative. However, these effects, as well as the effects on the "Yes" vote, are not statistically significant in any of the three samples.

Table 5 reports the results of our empirical analysis adding municipalities to the control group and thereby forming quadruplets (see section 3.3). Our findings are robust to enlarging the sample of (control) municipalities. The estimated reduction in the turnout rate induced by the trust reducing video (T2) varies from 1.35 percentage points in the full sample (column 1) and 2.65 percentage points in the more restricted sample (column 5) – hence displaying the same magnitude as in Table 4. The treatment (T2) reduces the "Yes" vote, and is statistically significant (at a 10% level) in the full sample (Table 5, column 2).

Indeed, there exists a clear link between the estimated reduction in the turnout rate and the change in the Yes (and No) votes, which depends on whether the turnout decreases more among the Yes or the No voters (see a formal discussion in the Online Appendix). With an estimated effect on turnout of -1.9 percentage points (Table 4, column 3), an average turnout and an average Yes vote share in the control group of respectively 58% and 70%, our trust reducing treatment induces a drop of 3.3% in the total number of voters, which is consistent with a 4% reduction in the number of Yes votes and with a 1.7% drop in the number of No votes. To put these effects in perspective, we can calculate the maximum possible reduction in the Yes votes associated with a given reduction in the turnout rate and no change induced by the treatment among the No voters. The maximum effect on the Yes vote would be minus one percentage point, corresponding to a 4.7% reduction in the Yes votes. Hence, for a given effect on turnout, corresponding to -1.9 percentage points (or to a 3.3% reduction in votes), the

14

reduction in the Yes votes is equal to 4%, against a maximum of 4.7%.[8]

4.2 Persuasion Rates

Based on the estimates of the models in Table 4, we can also calculate the persuasion rate of the ads in the field experiment following Della Vigna and Gentzkow (2010). The persuasion rate is defined as $f = 100 \frac{y_T - y_C}{e_T - e_C} \frac{1}{1 - y_0}$ where y_T and y_C are the fractions of agents who take the action respectively under the treatment and the control, e_T and e_C are the fraction of agents exposed to the message under treatment and control, and y_0 is the fraction of agents who would take the action in the absence of the intervention. Importantly, in our setting $e_C = 0$ as the specific campaign videos which were distributed in our experiment were not available elsewhere, so no agent in the control group was exposed. This –combined with random assignment– also means that we can comfortably estimate y_0 with y_C. When it comes to e_T, there are two ways in which it can be calculated: as the average ratio between the crude number of (unique) impressions in a municipality/zipcode and the population in the municipality, or as the same ratio, adjusted for the video completion rate. The latter considers those agents who did not complete the video—by closing the browser window—as "not exposed" to it.

For turnout, only the trust reducing video (T2) has a statistically significant effect. The abstention rate y_0 (which in turn defines the fraction of the exposed population that could be persuaded) is 39.4%. The crude e_T are 28% for T2 and 30% for T1, meaning that on average the number of unique video impressions was a bit more than one quarter, and a bit less than a third, of the population of the municipality.[9] Adjusting for video completion rates, which are respectively 59.4% for T2 and 58.4% for T1, we obtain an exposure rate to the full video of respectively 16.6% and 17.4 % for T2 and T1. If we use the treatment effect estimated for the reduced sample, $y_T - y_C = 0.019$, the persuasion rates are 11.2% for the effect of T2 on turnout (unadjusted) and 18.9% for T2 on turnout (adjusted for video completion). Given that

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[8]Clearly, if we consider that the treatment may increase the turnout among the Yes voters, the reduction among Yes voters required to obtain a 3.3% overall vote reduction would be larger than 4.7%.

[9]The calculations for the exposure rates are based on the subset of observations that enter the estimation sample after discarding the upper and lower tails in terms of deviations from the target number of video impression to be delivered pre-specified by the protocol.

T1 has no statistically detectable effect on turnout, we do not calculate a persuasion rate. For the outcome "vote No", y_0 is 30.1%. The exposure rates are the same as above. In the case of vote choice, the treatment effect estimated for the reduced sample is $y_T - y_C = 0.005$. Hence, the persuasion rates for T2 are respectively 2.6% (unadjusted) and 4.3% (adjusted for video completion).

5 Rationalization and theoretical mechanisms

Findings from the field experiment show that: (1) the informative treatment (T1) has no significant effects on turnout rate and "Yes" vote share; and (2) the video completion rate is lower for the informative treatment (T1) than for the trust reducing video (T2). These two connected findings are fully consistent with the "commitment theory of populism", developed in Morelli et al. (2021). This theory suggests that, at time of election of policy-makers, low enough trust in traditional representative democracy induces individuals to prefer parties (or politicians) with simple pandering commitments. This preference for simple commitments drastically reduces the willingness to listen to information. The advantage of the traditional delegation to a political representative is that the optimal policy is uncertain at time of election, and hence ex ante commitment is typically suboptimal. However, uncommitted politicians can be captured by interest groups or elites, which may try to derail the actual policy from the optimal common value policy. Voters differ in the probability they attach to politicians being captured by the elites. Voters who fully trust politicians not to be captured will prefer to fully delegate the policy decision to the politicians, as in the traditional trustee model of political agency. In fact, in absence of external influence, delegation to a competent agent is desirable, since a common value policy is best chosen in the post-election period after observing the realization of the state of the world. On the contrary, voters who completely distrust politicians, that is, who believe that politicians will always be captured by the elites, prefer politicians willing to commit ex-ante to a policy outcome – or to abstain in case no credible commitment is made.

Hence, for low enough levels of individual trust in traditional politician, an individual will vote for a committed type of politician with no delegation to choosing common value policies.

Low trust thus implies the choice of populist politicians pandering to pre-set agenda.[10] In a scenario of commitment to policies, individuals will have no incentive to acquire information on the costs (and benefits) of designing new policies. Consistent with this, information on the potential costs associated with the reduction of MPs should not be of much interest for individuals who prefer simple commitments. Thus, the two findings of the field experiment – namely the lack of electoral impact of the informational video (T1) and its lower completion rate – could simply be due to populist voters' unwillingness to listen to such detailed information about the costs of reducing the number of MPs.[11]

In a nutshell, both findings of the field experiment can be determined by the different behavior of individuals with low and high levels of trust towards traditional parties vis-a-vis information. Individuals with low trust in traditional parties do not seek information to take their voting decisions in the referendum. Those voting for non-traditional parties only value the commitment of the MPS in their party to follow the party lines and to achieve the stated policies. Thus they favor a reduction in the number of MPs, to whom they attribute no particular relevance other than implementing the ex-ante agreed upon policies. As a result, there is no reason to believe that the general level of political information of individuals with low levels of trust in traditional parties is correlated with the specific information on the policy making costs of a specific policy – and in particular of the potential costs associated with the reduction of MPs. Moreover, since the information in the media on the referendum mostly supported the "Yes" vote, even the more informed among the low trust individuals had little chances of receiving the messages presented in the informational video (T1). Instead, among the high trust individuals, who vote for traditional parties, follow the trustee model of political agency and seek information to monitor the politicians, the level of political information is likely to be correlated with the knowledge of the pros and cons – thus including also the costs – of the constitutional reform.

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[10]The 5 Stars Movement offers the clearest example of the crucial attempt to attract voters with low trust and who desire commitments. Five policies defined the 5 Stars Movement in 2013: citizenship income at any cost; no-tav policy (i.e., against the building of fast-train infrastructures) at any cost; the promise to give back part of their Parliamentary salary; two-term limit for any political post; cutting the costs of politics by reducing the number of MPs.

[11]Interestingly, the completion rate for the informational treatment (T1) is significantly lower in the municipalities with larger 5 Stars Movement's vote shares.

The other video (T2) is a "trust reducing" treatment, which lowers the trust in the messages send by populist politicians, thereby reducing the relative trust that voters may have towards populist and traditional politicians. In other words, if before the trust reducing treatment (T2) an individual had a level of trust in traditional politicians (vs populist politicians) that made her almost indifferent between voting for a traditional politician (i.e., delegating the policy choice) or for a populist politician (i.e., committing to a policy) – or not voting at all, the trust reducing treatment (T2) may tilt this individual towards less populist positions, thereby inducing doubt on the "Yes" vote, leading to abstention or to a shift to the "No" vote camp.

In the next section, we use our survey data to test some theoretical predictions. An important feature of the survey is that the videos cannot be skipped. The respondent can only decide to drop out of the survey all together – or not to pay attention to the video. First, we concentrate on the differences in voting intentions at the referendum between individuals with high and low trust in traditional parties, who were not treated by our videos. We expect low trust voters to be more in favor of the "Yes" option. Second, we analyze the role of information for individuals with high and low trust in traditional parties. We expect individuals voting for non-traditional parties or abstaining to be less informed. In fact, the model predicts that low trust voters chose to ignore information on the possible costs (and benefits) of the constitutional reform. When forced to see the videos (T1 or T2) in our survey, we expect the two videos to have similar effects regardless of the initial level of political information of these low trust respondents. Instead, among the (high trust) voters of traditional parties, we expect their prior political information to play a role. The effectiveness of the informative message (T1) should be higher for voters with lower prior political information, who are thus less likely to have been exposed to informational messages in favor of the "No" vote.

6 Survey Experiment

6.1 Design

Our survey experiment was deployed in parallel with the field experiment. A professional survey company (*CE&Co*) interviewed 2,003 individuals between September 9 and 19, hence during the final two weeks before the referendum. All interviews were online (CAWI method) and lasted 8 minutes on average. Treatment assignment for the survey followed the randomization at the municipal level done for the field experiment. Respondents located in municipalities that were treated in the field experiment with programmatic advertisement received the same treatment also in the survey experiment. To reach the total target of 2,000 interviews in two weeks, additional triplets of municipalities were included in the survey experiment, besides the 300 municipalities used also in the field experiment. Part of these municipalities were chosen from those set aside in the field experiment. Another set of triplets was formed — using the same metric as before—from municipalities within the chosen population range and with unique zipcode, but failing the "digital penetration" thresholds required for the delivery of the programmatic advertisement. Within these additional triplets, we randomly assigned a treatment status (T1, T2, or C) to one municipality each.

The survey implementation company then chose respondents from the municipalities in these lists. A total of 755 individuals, located in 229 municipalities, were treated with the factual video (T1), 737 individuals in 242 municipalities were treated with the emotional video (T2), and 511 individuals in 207 municipalities were part of the control group. Individuals in the control group were shown a neutral video—released by the Italian Parliamentary TV Agency and freely available on the internet—with information on how to vote at the referendum. The survey collected socio-demographic information on the respondents, such as age, gender, educational attainments, as well as level of political information and their political preferences.

After this initial set of questions, one of the three videos was shown, depending on the (treatment or control) group that the respondent belonged to. Three questions were asked immediately after the videos. Answers to these questions are our outcome variables of interest.

Respondents were invited to answer an open question on what the video made them think. They were asked whether they intended to vote in the referendum, with answers being "yes" or "no." Finally, they were asked how they intended to vote, with answers being "Yes," "No," or "I have not decided yet." From this last item, we create three outcome variables: a dummy for choosing Yes vs *not* choosing Yes (hence "undecided" or "No"); a dummy for choosing undecided vs *not* choosing undecided (hence "Yes" or "No"); and a dummy for choosing No vs *not* choosing No (hence "Yes" or "undecided"). The coding of the variables that we adopt has a built-in redundancy, but it greatly simplifies the interpretation of the results. In the tables with the empirical results, the coefficients on each row sum to zero (up to decimal rounding), hence it is easier to understand how a treatment, in a loose sense, "moves" vote intentions.

We estimate linear probability models of the general form

$$Y_i = \alpha_{1g(i)}T1_{m(i)} + \alpha_{2g(i)}T2_{m(i)} + \beta_{j(m(i))} + \varepsilon_i, \tag{2}$$

where the outcome variables are indicators for vote intention (or other reactions to the video treatments) for respondent i, $m()$ and $g()$ are functions that map individual i respectively to her municipality m and to her "social group" g; $j()$ maps municipality m to its triplet j, and β_j is a triplet fixed effect. "Social groups" indexed by g are defined by support for traditional vs. non-traditional parties, by levels of political information, and by combinations of these two. We estimate standard errors clustered by municipality, which is the level at which the treatment is assigned.

To test our theoretical implications, we defined as individuals with high trust in traditional parties those who are willing to vote for traditional parties. In our survey, they are the respondents who reported that they would vote for the Democratic Party, for Forza Italia, Italia Viva and for other (minor, centrist) parties in the case of an imminent election. Individuals with low trust in traditional parties are instead the voters of non-traditional parties, i.e., those who reported they would vote for 5 Star Movement, League and Fratelli d'Italia, as well as those who declared that they would not vote at all in a political election. We disregard individuals who reported to be undecided, as we are unable to classify their type of indecision (for instance,

whether between traditional and non-traditional parties or between non-traditional parties and not voting), and those who did not answer. As measure of political interest, we use the answers to four questions on how frequently individuals obtain information about politics from (i) newspapers; (ii) radio or TV; (iii) blogs, internet; (iv) discussing with family and friends. Answers range from 1 (never) to 4 (very regularly). We average the answers on these four questions and construct a dummy variable for highly informed individuals, if their average level of information is larger than the median in our sample.

Table 6 provides descriptive statistics on pre-treatment and outcome variables. Table 7 shows that the demographic (age, gender, education) variables and the level of political information are balanced across treatment and control groups.

6.2 Preliminary Findings

Table 8 reports our preliminary findings on the first set theoretical prediction discussed in section 5. It shows the results of a linear regression model in which the individuals' voting intentions in the referendum are regressed on the individuals' political affiliation, but only for the respondents that were not treated, as shown in eq (1) (which one is this?). Findings at columns 1-3 show that, in line with the theoretical predictions, (untreated) voters of traditional parties are less likely to vote "Yes" and more likely to vote "No" at the referendum. Also consistently with the theoretical predictions, results in Table 8 (column 4) show that (high trust) voters of traditional parties are more politically informed than voters of non-traditional parties and no-voters.

Table 9 reports the results of a linear regression model testing the association between political information and voting intention in the referendum separately for (untreated) voters of traditional parties and for (untreated) individuals who either vote for non-traditional parties or abstain. As suggested in the previous section, political information is relevant among (untreated) voters of traditional parties, with more informed individuals more likely to vote "No" and less likely to vote "Yes" (see columns 1-3); this is not the case for (untreated) individuals who do not support traditional parties (see columns 4-6).

6.3 Main Empirical Results

Table 10 reports the estimates of the separate effects of the two treatments – Video 1 and Video 2 – (columns 1-3), the effect of any treatment (columns 4-6). The P-values for the difference in the effects of the two treatments on the three outcomes of interest are reported in the T1 vs T2 row. The main message that emerges is that both videos reduce the Yes vote intention by around 18 percentage points (column 1), increase the undecided (column 2), and, to a lower extent, the No vote intention (column 3). These results are confirmed by the estimates at columns 4-7 that consider jointly the two treatments. The 18.5 percentage points drop in the Yes vote is compensated by a 12.9 percentage points increase in the undecided and by a 5.5 percentage point increase in the No vote. Clearly from cross-sectional data one cannot observe actual vote flows from one to the other intention, but simply how the composition of vote intentions differs between control condition and treatments. There are no statistically detectable differences across the two treatments in their effects on being undecided, voting Yes or No. However, it is important to notice that the interviewed individuals did not have the opportunity to skip the 30-second video. Hence, unlike in the field experiment, where they could close the browser, they were forced to take the treatment. Respondents receive compensated from the survey company only if they answer all questions. In fact, only 163 individuals started the survey but did not finish it completely – and were thus not included in our sample. Among these 163 individuals, only 25 abandoned the survey after the videos. In particular, 13 respondents left during or after being treated with the informative video (T1), 6 during or after video 2 (T2) and 6 during or after the neutral video (the control group) – thereby confirming that the trust reducing video is more likely to be seen even in this controlled environment.

6.4 Text Analysis

After having watched any of the three videos, respondents to the survey were asked to write their thoughts about the video in an open question. These answers may allow us to elicit the intensity of the effect induced by the videos. Answers were short, ranging from one word, as

such "nothing," to around sixty words. Due to the shortness of the answers, traditional text analysis based on libraries are not well equipped to group them. We thus decided to classify the answers according to the following seven categories: (i) negative aggressive vs the video (f.e., "this is bullshit"); (ii) negative vs the video (f.e, "it sends a false message"); (iii) dubious (f.e., "it makes me undecided" "I don't know"); (iv) neutral (f.e., "nothing" "it deals with the referendum"); (v) favorable to the video (f.e., "it made me think" "it confirmed my intentions to vote NO"); (vi) generally aggressive, but not against the video (f.e., "all crooks"); (vii) else (f.e, "xxxx"). This last residual category includes the answers of those individuals who just filled some space to continue with the survey, since it was mandatory to provide an answer to the question.

Table 11 reports the estimates of regressions like that in eq (2), in which the dependent variable is a dummy variable that takes value one if the qualitative answer to the question about the video belongs to the category listed in the column title, and zero otherwise. The models compare the answers for the viewers of the informational video (T1) and the trust reducing video (T2) to those for the neutral video, which just reported information on how to vote. The row T1 vs T2 reports the P-values for the difference in the effect of the two videos. Not surprisingly, both the informational (T1) and the distrust inducing video (T2) are perceived as less neutral than the control video. They drive both negative – particularly the trust deducing video (T2) – and favorable – particularly the informational video (T1) – reactions. Both videos induce aggressive reactions against the content, but also – particularly the trust reducing video – general aggressive sentiment, not specifically directed towards the video's content. The informational video, unlike the other one, is also effective in increasing doubts.

6.5 Testing the Theoretical Mechanisms

The theoretical framework provides additional predictions related to the role of information for low and high trust individuals, which can be tested in the survey experiment. In fact, unlike in the field experiment, respondents to the survey could not skip the videos – although they could of course disregard it .

Table 12 reports the estimates of the separate effects of the two treatments – Video 1 and

Video 2 – (columns 1-3) for the voters of traditional parties. The informative video is particularly effective among those voters: it generates a reduction of 23 percentage points in the intentions to vote "Yes", equally distributed between being undecided or voting "No." Also the other video reduces the intentions to vote "Yes", but only by 12.6 percentage points. The remaining columns (4-6) report the heterogeneous effect according to political information. In line with the theoretical predictions, our treatments are particularly effective in reducing the intentions to vote "Yes" among low political informed respondents. This finding reinforces the existence of an informational cleavage among voters of traditional parties. Table 13 reports the results of our treatment for individuals with low trust in traditional parties, who would either vote for non-traditional parties or abstain, if an election were to take place immediately. Findings at columns 1-3 show that both treatments are effective in reducing the intention to vote "Yes" by around 19 percentage points. The undecided increase between 11 and 14 percentage points and the intention to vote "No" of 5 to 7 percentage points. Among these low trust individuals, there is no differential effects of our treatments according to their prior level of political information. This result is in line with the theoretical predictions.

7 Conclusion

In our study, we exploit the unique testing ground provided by the 2020 Italian constitutional referendum and by a programmatic-advertisement field experiment, in order to test the effectiveness of different strategies that traditional political parties may use to respond to the challenge posed by populist parties. The issue of the referendum—that is, an anti-establishment reduction in the number of MPs—is the turf where traditional parties must (best-)respond to the populist message. We experimentally evaluate the effectiveness of two different strategies: 1) providing factual information on the side effects of the populist reform, in order to "win the argument"; 2) attacking the populist politicians who promoted the reform as the new establishment to reduce their trust and credibility, thereby employed a "use the same weapons" strategy. In our field experiment, we find that the latter strategy is more effective at capturing the viewers' attention. This "use the same weapons" strategy reduces voters' turnout, particu-

larly among potential "Yes" voters and thus slightly decreases the "Yes" voter share.

PUNCHLINE: Trust reducing video is effective in increasing abstention particularly among low trust (in traditional parties) individuals, who seek less information and therefore are more likely to avoid informational messages. Among voters of traditional parties, who are less likely to vote "Yes", the informational message is particularly effective among individuals with low prior political information.

References

TO BE DONE

Tables and Figures

Table 1: Field Experiment, Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Median	St Dev	Min	Max	Nr. Obs
Pre-Treatment Variables						
5 Stars 2018	27.68	25.53	8.75	11.28	55.6	300
Dem 2018	20.39	19.31	7.3	6.55	41.68	300
Yes Vote 2016	42.46	41.72	8.71	25	63.74	300
Turnout 2016	72.42	74.33	6.32	51.74	82.65	300
Population	8796.21	8745	3521.14	2547	14953	300
Outcome Variables						
Yes Vote 2020	69.84	70.42	5.68	55.07	82.48	300
Turnout 2020	60.16	60.29	9.85	33.68	88.26	300

Table 2: Field Experiment, Balance Test

VARIABLES	5 Stars 2018	Dem 2018	Yes Vote 2016	Turnout 2016	Population
Video 1	0.21	-0.31	-0.27	-0.32	186.61
	(0.32)	(0.34)	(0.36)	(0.27)	(258.29)
Video 2	0.39	-0.49	-0.29	-0.36	-161.30
	(0.35)	(0.34)	(0.36)	(0.26)	(258.61)
Observations	300	300	300	300	300

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 3: Field Experiment, Videos Completion Rates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	VCR 25 pc	VCR 25 pc	VCR 50 pc	VCR 50 pc	VCR 75 pc	VCR 75 pc	VCR 100 pc	VCR 100 pc
Video 2 vs 1	0.54*	0.82**	0.58	0.93*	0.83*	1.25**	1.19**	1.52**
	(0.29)	(0.37)	(0.39)	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.61)	(0.52)	(0.65)
Obs	200	160	200	160	200	160	200	160
R-sq	0.57	0.66	0.59	0.69	0.59	0.66	0.57	0.63
Sample	Full	Restr.	Full	Restr.	Full	Restr.	Full	Restr.

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 4: Field Experiment, Estimation Results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Turnout	Yes Vote	Turnout	Yes Vote	Turnout	Yes Vote
	Rate	Share	Rate	Share	Rate	Share
Video 1	-0.268	0.023	-0.586	-0.424	-1.790	-0.897
	(0.815)	(0.539)	(0.879)	(0.613)	(1.239)	(0.845)
Video 2	-1.320*	-0.384	-1.896**	-0.549	-2.854**	-1.033
	(0.780)	(0.509)	(0.876)	(0.591)	(1.206)	(0.855)
Obs.	300	300	260	260	114	114
R-sq.	0.758	0.742	0.791	0.753	0.814	0.697
V1 vs V2	0.170	0.462	0.139	0.850	0.319	0.879
Sample	Full	Full	Restr.	Restr.	MR	MR

Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

V1 vs V2 reports the p-value of the F test of the difference between V1 and V2.

Table 5: Field Experiment, Estimation Results, Robustness

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Turnout	Yes Vote	Turnout	Yes Vote	Turnout	Yes Vote
	Rate	Share	Rate	Share	Rate	Share
Video 1	-0.299	-0.368	-0.656	-0.736	-1.581	-1.145
	(0.769)	(0.463)	(0.842)	(0.519)	(1.373)	(0.833)
Video 2	-1.351*	-0.776*	-1.685**	-0.848	-2.645*	-1.280
	(0.765)	(0.452)	(0.824)	(0.516)	(1.434)	(0.856)
Obs.	391	391	351	351	205	205
R-sq.	0.691	0.722	0.715	0.729	0.768	0.772
V1 vs V2	0.189	0.447	0.254	0.858	0.427	0.891
Sample	Full	Full	Restr.	Restr.	MR	MR

Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$.

V1 vs V2 reports the p-value of the F test of the difference between V1 and V2.

Table 6: Survey Experiment, Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Median	St Dev	Min	Max	Nr. Obs
Male	.36	0	.48	0	1	2003
Young	.21	0	.41	0	1	2003
Adult	.63	1	.48	0	1	2003
Old	.16	0	.37	0	1	2003
College	.29	0	.45	0	1	2003
High Political Info	.53	1	.5	0	1	2003
Voters of Traditional Parties	.22	0	.41	0	1	2003
Voters of Non Traditional Parties	.43	0	.49	0	1	2003
Undecided	.23	0	.42	0	1	2003
No Vote	.12	0	.33	0	1	2003
Low Trust Individuals	.55	1	.5	0	1	2003

Table 7: Survey Experiment, Balance Tests

VARIABLES	Male	Young	Adult	Old	College	High Pol Info	Traditional Parties	Non-Traditional Parties	Undecided	No Vote	Low Trust Voters
Video 1	0.001	-0.030	-0.004	0.034	-0.003	0.025	0.022	-0.034	0.013	-0.000	-0.034
	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.033)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.033)	(0.028)	(0.034)	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.033)
Video 2	0.009	0.010	-0.002	-0.008	0.004	0.051	0.044*	-0.032	-0.019	0.007	-0.025
	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.031)	(0.023)	(0.029)	(0.034)	(0.027)	(0.033)	(0.024)	(0.021)	(0.032)
Observations	2,003	2,003	2,003	2,003	2,003	2,003	2,003	2,003	2,003	2,003	2,003

Robust standard errors in parentheses, *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

29

Table 8: Survey Experiment Testing Basic Theoretical Implication

VARIABLES	(1) Yes	(2) Undecided	(3) No	(4) High Pol Info
Traditional Party	-0.185***	0.022	0.163***	0.093***
	(0.065)	(0.049)	(0.057)	(0.029)
Observations	340	340	340	1,537
R-squared	0.029	0.001	0.033	0.007

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 9: Survey Experiment Testing Theoretical Implication about Political Information

PARTY	Traditional				Non Traditional	& No Voters
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
VARIABLES	Yes	Undecided	No	Yes	Undecided	No
High Pol Info	-0.184*	-0.048	0.232**	-0.001	-0.080	0.081
	(0.109)	(0.082)	(0.104)	(0.061)	(0.051)	(0.053)
Observations	90	90	90	250	250	250
R-squared	0.033	0.004	0.062	0.000	0.012	0.013

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 10: Survey Experiment, ATE

VARIABLES	(1) Yes	(2) Undecided	(3) No	(4) Yes	(5) Undecided	(6) No
Video 1	-0.189***	0.129***	0.060**			
	(0.034)	(0.030)	(0.027)			
Video 2	-0.180***	0.130***	0.050**			
	(0.034)	(0.030)	(0.025)			
Any Video				-0.185***	0.129***	0.055**
				(0.030)	(0.026)	(0.022)
V1 vs V2	0.785	0.966	0.690			
Observations	1,726	1,726	1,726	1,726	1,726	1,726
R-squared	0.026	0.015	0.003	0.026	0.015	0.003

Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

V1 vs V2 reports the p-value of the F test of the difference between V1 and V2.

Table 11: Survey Experiment, Text Analysis

VARIABLES	(1) aggressive	(2) negative	(3) dubious	(4) neutral	(5) favorable	(6) gen. aggr.	(7) else
Video 1	0.015***	0.095***	0.049***	-0.383***	0.137***	0.089***	-0.002
	(0.006)	(0.023)	(0.016)	(0.032)	(0.022)	(0.019)	(0.010)
Video 2	0.017***	0.177***	0.016	-0.409***	0.057***	0.130***	0.011
	(0.005)	(0.026)	(0.012)	(0.031)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.011)
V1 vs V2	0.805	0.001**	0.031**	0.341	0.000***	0.042**	0.191
Observations	2,003	2,003	2,003	2,003	2,003	2,003	2,003
R-squared	0.004	0.029	0.006	0.130	0.021	0.022	0.001

Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

V1 vs V2 reports the p-value of the F test of the difference between V1 and V2.

Table 12: Survey Experiment, Voters of Traditional Parties

VARIABLES	(1) Yes	(2) Undecided	(3) No	(4) Yes	(5) Undecided	(6) No
Video 1	-0.230***	0.110*	0.120*	-0.356***	0.184*	0.172*
	(0.071)	(0.057)	(0.066)	(0.103)	(0.096)	(0.097)
Video 2	-0.126*	0.071	0.055	-0.282**	0.110	0.172*
	(0.076)	(0.055)	(0.067)	(0.109)	(0.091)	(0.095)
High Pol Info				-0.184*	-0.048	0.232**
				(0.109)	(0.082)	(0.104)
High Pol Info * V1				0.218*	-0.108	-0.109
				(0.131)	(0.125)	(0.144)
High Pol Info * V2				0.262*	-0.052	-0.210
				(0.144)	(0.113)	(0.138)
P-Values V1 vs V2	0.116	0.473	0.289			
Observations	404	404	404	404	404	404
R-squared	0.032	0.009	0.009	0.043	0.026	0.027

Table 13: Survey Experiment, Voters of Non-Traditional Parties & No Voters

VARIABLES	(1) Yes	(2) Undecided	(3) No	(4) Yes	(5) Undecided	(6) No
Video 1	-0.186***	0.114***	0.072**	-0.224***	0.157***	0.067
	(0.043)	(0.038)	(0.035)	(0.067)	(0.060)	(0.050)
Video 2	-0.193***	0.142***	0.051	-0.204***	0.134**	0.070
	(0.044)	(0.040)	(0.034)	(0.066)	(0.062)	(0.048)
High Pol Info				-0.001	-0.080	0.081
				(0.061)	(0.051)	(0.053)
High Pol Info * V1				0.067	-0.067	-0.001
				(0.087)	(0.074)	(0.074)
High Pol Info * V2				0.019	0.022	-0.042
				(0.087)	(0.077)	(0.069)
Values V1 vs V2	0.868	0.495	0.555			
Observations	917	917	917	917	917	917
R-squared	0.029	0.018	0.005	0.031	0.032	0.013

Figure 1: Randomization

Emotional video (T2)
Informative video (T1)
Control
Regions