Does ostracism affect party support? Comparative lessons and experimental evidence

Joost van Spanje
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Till Weber
Baruch College, City University of New York, USA

Abstract
The success of anti-immigration parties (AIPs) in many European democracies poses a strategic problem for established actors: Immediate policy impact of AIPs can be averted by ostracizing them (i.e. refusing any cooperation), but this strategy may sway public opinion further in their favour. A comparative review shows large variation in the electoral trajectories of ostracized parties. We therefore propose a model of the context conditions that shape the repercussions of ostracism in public opinion. Under conditions that suggest substantial policy impact of an AIP were it to join a coalition government, ostracism should decrease the party’s electoral support. Vice versa, if context suggests strong “signaling” potential of an AIP if in opposition, ostracism should increase its support. To avoid apparent endogeneity of political context and party competition, the model is tested with a survey-embedded experiment on a representative sample from the Netherlands. Results confirm that ostracism is a double-edged strategy.

Keywords
anti-immigration parties, instrumental voting, ostracism, survey experiment

Introduction
Anti-immigration parties (AIPs) exist in many democratic societies. These parties have candidates elected to representative bodies in almost every established democracy. An additional boost came from the Syrian refugee crisis as well as from terrorist attacks striking European cities, but even before these events, the electoral rise of AIPs has represented one of the most important changes in party politics in recent decades (Gallagher et al., 2011). In several countries, AIPs have directly influenced government policy either by joining governing coalitions (such as in Austria or Italy) or by lending formal support to minority cabinets (such as in Denmark or the Netherlands).

While established elites allowed AIPs to have direct policy influence in some cases, they followed very different strategies in others. A particularly strong reaction to AIP success is a permanent boycott, often referred to as “ostracism.” Prime examples are found in France and Germany. In France, all other parties in the national parliament jointly decided to refuse all cooperation with the National Front (FN) (Mayer, 2013). In Germany, the National Democratic Party (NPD) faced a similar boycott (Staud, 2006).

Permanent boycotts of parties such as the FN and the NPD have had consequences in parliamentary arenas on national and state levels. Some parties have been kept from executive power; others have not gained decisive representation in national legislatures. Either way, however, what is important to study in parallel is the electoral arena (Sjöblom, 1968). This is because the electoral level determines how big a player the ostracized party becomes and to what degree they challenge the political establishment. Party leaders should thus also consider effects of their

Paper submitted 10 May 2017; accepted for publication 19 August 2017

Corresponding author:
Till Weber, Department of Political Science, Baruch College, City University of New York, 1 Bernard Baruch Way, Box B5-280, New York, NY 10010, USA.
Email: till.weber@baruch.cuny.edu
actions on public opinion: Does ostracizing AIPs affect their electoral support?

This is an important question for political science, as it touches upon the puzzle of why some AIPs are successful whereas others perform poorly (e.g. Van der Brug et al., 2005). The question is also important for society more generally, as these parties are frequently linked to political violence and cynicism (e.g. Jesse, 2001; Van der Brug, 2003). Yet, categorically refusing any cooperation with AIPs is often considered undemocratic because it restricts the free and fair competition for political power and support—a necessary condition for democracy (e.g. Dahl, 1971). From a normative perspective, political boycotts are therefore quite ambivalent.

The normative dilemma of ostracism is not easily amenable to political action because each of the two strategies (ostracism or cooperation) may be seen as irresponsible. What can be said in general, however, is that if moderate actors choose to boycott an AIP, they should aim to contain the real-world consequences of the normative downside. More specifically, a particularly poor outcome would be for ostracism to “create a demon,” that is, to produce a situation in which the mainstream parties are faced with growing AIP support. In this article, we therefore investigate the conditions under which ostracism reduces the electoral support for an AIP, and under which it backfires precisely by reinforcing this support. At the core of our model is the notion that AIP voters are not fundamentally different from voters of other parties in that they are attracted by the utility they derive from their party’s actions (see Van der Brug and Fennema, 2003; Van der Brug et al., 2000). If context suggests that the expected utility from cabinet participation of the AIP is high, that is, if voters can expect high policy impact, then ostracism should reduce support for the AIP. Vice versa, if the expected utility of AIP representation in opposition is high, that is, if voters can expect a strong “signal” from the AIP to the other parties, then ostracism should reinforce AIP support.

We begin our analysis with a comparative review of the electoral trajectories of 11 AIPs that differ with regard to whether and when they were ostracized by their established competitors. However, the empirical pattern—together with secondary evidence from the relevant literature—yields ambiguous results. This points to the importance of context central to our model. To understand the effects of ostracism, we need to understand the circumstances under which it will either boost electoral support or subdue it. However, addressing this task with observational data is easier said than done because party strategies are apparently endogenous to political context. Other parties will consider likely voter reactions before they decide to react to an AIP, and the AIP itself will consider the threat of possible reactions before they provoke the establishment with extreme statements. Any omitted context feature that affects these considerations can thus bias observational inferences. We therefore conducted a survey-embedded experiment in which the condition of ostracism is randomly assigned to participants. To be sure, why parties are ostracized in the first place is also an important research question (e.g. Art, 2007; Bale et al., 2010; Van Spanje, 2010a), and precisely because this is so, experimental manipulation is so helpful for our question of effects of ostracism. Experimentation allows us not only to control ostracism itself but also relevant context features and to identify those constellations that support or inhibit effects on party support. This strategy also has a downside in that it may compromise ecological validity, however. In order to maximize the ecological validity of our experiment (as explained below), we embed it in voter surveys and link it to the particular political context in the Netherlands.

Our study focuses on the main Dutch AIP, the Freedom Party (PVV), led by Geert Wilders. In a survey-embedded experiment, we manipulate information about responses to the PVV, and afterwards we measure the PVV’s electoral support. The research was carried out during the campaign leading up to the 2012 Dutch general election. The experiment was repeated 2 years later, in a nonelection year.

Using a real party rather than a hypothetical one is a major aspect of our strategy to increase the ecological validity of our experiment. This allows us to estimate reactions among actual AIP supporters to plausible real-world events. The PVV lends itself to our manipulation because elite reactions to its rise have been mixed. After the PVV had brought down a cabinet of the conservative party (VVD) and Christian Democratic Party (CDA) in 2012, both former allies have sent ambiguous signals whether they would cooperate with the AIP again. Moreover, the 2014 secession of more moderate PVV candidates under the label “Voor Nederland” (VNL) has further diversified coalition options in the rightist spectrum. Experimental manipulation is thus plausible for both the scenario with and the scenario without a boycott of the PVV.

At the same time, the PVV has received considerable support in the four general elections it has contested so far (5.9% in 2006, 15.4% in 2010, 10.1% in 2012, and 13.1% in 2017) and a substantially larger share of the electorate considered voting for this party (as indicated by “propensity to vote” items in our data). This opens possibilities for experimental effects on electoral support. Among AIPs, then, the PVV is a “least likely case.” If ostracizing the party still has an effect notwithstanding strong pro-PVV and anti-PVV sentiment as well as 2 years of formal PVV support of a national-level minority government, the effects of ostracism must be considerable. Our findings show that ostracizing the PVV would indeed have considerable effects on its electoral support, and these effects strongly depend on contextual factors, as expected.
Ostracism and support for AIPs: Comparative lessons

Many AIPs are ostracized. Ostracism of a party is defined as all other parties systematically refusing to cooperate with it politically (e.g., Van Spanje and Van der Brug, 2009). An example of an ostracized party is the Center Democrats in the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s (Mudde and Van Holsteyn, 2000). As another example, the Flemish Bloc (VB) in Belgium has been completely isolated since five other Belgian parties signed a formal agreement to boycott the party in 1989 (Damen, 2001; Pauwels, 2010). Such boycotts are not only about government coalition building. They also encompass other forms of cooperation between parties such as joint press releases, electoral alliances, and joint legislative activities.

With ostracism being a common tool of party competition in Europe, there are a sufficient number of cases for a comparative analysis of electoral effects. In Figure 1, we show the electoral trajectories of 11 AIPs, six of which were ostracized and five of which were not.\footnote{Conveniently, three of the ostracized parties have not always been in this situation, so that we can observe their performance before and after the decision to ostracize them (as indicated by the arrows in Figure 1). Each of these three parties—two from Belgium and one from France—enjoyed an initial increase of their vote but it is hard to say whether these gains are a reaction to the ostracism or would have occurred either way. Moreover, the further trajectories of the three parties differ dramatically. The trajectories of the three AIPs that were ostracized from the outset are more homogeneous in that none of them ever had a decisive electoral breakthrough. This suggests that ostracism might be more successful if used against nascent parties rather than against those that have already achieved electoral success. However, also in this case it is}

Figure 1. Electoral trajectories of ostracized versus non-ostracized AIPs. AIP: anti-immigration party.
difficult to attribute the difference to ostracism. The three German parties operate in a country where the far right is discriminated for historical reasons, and the Swiss one has faced tough competition on the right.

Looking at the trajectories of the non-ostracized AIPs in the lower figure, we see large variation. Two of the five—one in Austria and one in Denmark—are among the strongest parties in their countries, while two others—one in the Netherlands and the other one in Denmark—have become defunct, and the fifth—in Italy—hover around 5%. Moreover, we see some of the same dramatic ups and downs that are also characteristic of the ostracized AIPs. Overall, it is far from clear whether ostracism had an effect on the trajectories and, if so, whether it helped contain these parties or perhaps rather reinforced their electoral success.

Our ambiguous findings regarding the repercussions of ostracism in public opinion are not overly surprising, given that they are in line with earlier comparative studies by Downs (2001, 2002, 2012) and Van Spanje and Van der Brug (2009).\(^2\) Downs studied reactions to several AIPs in Western Europe, distinguishing between “engage” and “disengage” strategies of the establishment. The “disengage” strategies are either to “ignore” or to “isolate” the nonmainstream party. The isolating strategies can be divided into “legal restrictions” (\textit{de jure}) and “blocking coalitions” (\textit{de facto}). It is clear that ostracizing a party is a “de facto isolation” reaction. In his 2002 piece, Downs studied four AIPs in Belgium, Denmark, France, and Norway, two of which have been ostracized and two of them have not. The study did not find consistent electoral effect of \textit{cordons sanitaires}. Similarly, Van Spanje and Van der Brug (2009) found that ostracism had mixed effects. Based on surveys of representative samples of voters in eight countries, they concluded that some parties had slightly benefited from being ostracized whereas others had been slightly hurt.

\textbf{Toward a contextual theory}

The repeated findings of inconsistent electoral effects of ostracism lead us to the question of the \textit{circumstances} that these effects depend on. In the following, we theorize about these circumstances and test our expectations experimentally. This approach will allow us to overcome the problems of potential endogeneity of party strategy and political context as well as omitted variable bias that we encountered in our comparative review.

Our theoretical expectations are based on accounts of instrumental support (e.g. Enelow and Hinich, 1990; Shepsle, 1991). “Instrumental” simply means that voters prefer parties that are likely to have policy impact (Austen-Smith and Banks, 1988; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996). In multiparty systems, instrumental support has many manifestations, a well-known one being coalition-oriented voting (Bargsted and Kedar, 2009; Karp and Hobolt, 2010; Meffert and Gschwend, 2010; Meffert et al., 2011). Anti-immigration voters, while sometimes described as more affectively driven, do not seem to differ from other voters in terms of their instrumental motivations (see Tillie and Fennema, 1998; Van der Brug and Fennema, 2003; Van der Brug et al., 2000).\(^3\) In particular, previous studies have established that anti-immigration voters are concerned by AIPs’ perceived effectiveness in terms of policy influence (Bos and Van der Brug, 2010). If a boycott of a certain party by its competitors conditions these perceptions, it will therefore affect AIP support.

Instrumental support in our model may target two distinct forms of policy impact: direct and indirect. Direct impact means that the AIP itself will be able to implement its policies; indirect impact means that the AIP’s success influences the policies that are implemented by other parties. In the latter case, although an AIP vote might seem “wasted,” it is instrumental as a signal to mainstream forces (e.g. Kselman and Niou, 2011; Piketty, 2000; Weber, 2011). Let us consider two examples to illustrate this, the French FN and the Danish DF.

The French FN is a typical example of an ostracized party. That party is excluded from cooperation with other parties and has minimal direct policy influence, because a party in a multiparty system cannot substantially affect policy-making unless it cooperates with other parties. To policy-oriented voters, a vote for the FN is therefore only useful as a signal to parties that actually have policy power. A policy-driven FN vote carries a voter’s message that parties that copied the FN’s core policy stances would be more likely to receive her vote. The fact that the FN is ostracized makes this signal particularly powerful, as growing FN support creates considerable media attention that may have further aided the party’s rise (e.g. Birenbaum and Villa, 2003). The logic behind such an effect is that votes for an ostracized party highlight the normative dilemma outlined in the introduction: They undermine the legitimacy of established parties, which claim moral superiority in saving democracy from its enemies but are then punished by the very \textit{demos} they pretend to protect.

At first sight, it might seem futile if voters signal an anti-immigration message to parties that ostracize an AIP. After all, combining ostracism of an AIP with copying its policy stances may undermine the ostracizing parties’ credibility. However, it is certainly possible for skilled politicians to combine these strategies, as the boycott is often based on \textit{how} the AIP proposes its policies rather than on the content of these policies. An example is long-time Dutch main right leader Frits Bolkestein, who in 1991 expressed Islam criticism similar to that of AIP leader Hans Janmaat while systematically boycotting him at the same time (Tillie, 2008: 6). More generally, research suggests that AIPs have had their policy proposals copied by other parties regardless of other reactions to AIPs (e.g. Van Spanje, 2010b).
Next, consider the example of the Danish People’s Party (DF) as a non-ostracized AIP. Because the DF does not face a systematic boycott, a vote for that party does not serve as a signal to other parties. This said, a likeminded policy-oriented voter does not even need to signal to other parties in the first place because, not being ostracized, the DF has direct influence on policy-making (e.g. Albæk, 2003). For instance, the party has supported several minority cabinets over the last 15 years, receiving significant policy concessions in return (Jupska˚s, 2015).

Overall, then, an ostracized AIP’s signaling function counters its lack of direct policy influence, while a non-ostracized AIP has more direct policy influence but is less useful as a signaling device. Given these assumptions, the net effect of ostracism on voter support produced in a particular circumstance is expected to hinge upon contextual factors such as mainstream party positioning (see also Van Spanje, 2017; Van Spanje and de Graaf, 2017). This may explain that in cross-national studies, no convincing evidence has been found for negative net effects of ostracism of parties on their electoral support (Downs, 2002; Van Spanje and Van der Brug, 2009). This argument nuances the common expectation that boycotts generally damage the targeted party (e.g. Art, 2011) and also the claims that some AIPs have benefited from their isolated position (e.g. Mudde, 2007).

It may sound strange to talk in terms of policy influence when thinking of AIPs that often make radical and unrealistic promises. However, the policies a party proposes are no more than indications of what it will try to do if in government. Such indications—however unrealistic—are useful for instrumental voters who realize that after the election no party will completely get its way. These voters will discount promises made by AIPs based on their expectations about the implications of the election outcome, just like they discount the promises of any other party (see Grofman, 1985; Kedar, 2009). Similarly, if other parties decide to adopt an AIP’s agenda, they will not just copy all its policy proposals but rather move in their direction to some degree. There is quite some empirical evidence that such imitation occurs (e.g. Abou-Chadi, 2016; Green-Pedersen and Krostrup, 2008; Han, 2015; Van Spanje, 2010b). There also is quite some research into effects of such imitation on voters, yet with mixed findings (e.g. Arzheimer, 2009; Dahlström and Sundell, 2012; Meguid, 2005; Van der Brug et al., 2005).

The treatment model

Given our theorizing about instrumental support for AIPs, we expect two things. First, the effect of ostracizing an AIP on support for that party should become more negative with the expected utility potential AIP voters derive from cabinet participation of their party. Second, the effect should become more positive with the expected utility potential AIP voters derive from representation of their party in opposition. If government utility is high and opposition utility is low, ostracism undoes any effective AIP influence on policy; instrumental support should thus decrease. In contrast, if government utility is low and opposition utility is high, ostracism substantiates policy influence; instrumental support should thus increase.

The size of the two utilities, and thus the net ostracism effect, depends on the political context. We study four context features that affect the utility voters derive from AIP activity: the AIP’s electoral strength (“AIPsize”), its policy position on integration issues (“AIPextremism”), the policy position of the AIP’s closest competitor with regard to its immigration stance (“CompetitorTough”) (see also Van Spanje, 2017; Van Spanje and de Graaf, 2017), and possible legal measures against the AIP’s leader (“Prosecution”). These features were extracted from the literature discussed above on the specific basis that they affect the utility function of potential AIP voters in ways that are theoretically plausible and empirically relevant.

Before we describe the experimental manipulation of these features, let us set out our theoretical expectations of how they moderate the effect of ostracism on party support. We begin by building a simple theoretical model of political context. Given that our research design involves five treatments, four of which are expected to moderate the effect of the fifth, we formalize our expectations for the sake of maximum transparency. However, since this strategy may, on the downside, be perceived to increase complexity rather than to reduce it, we will also disaggregate the model and estimate the effect of each context feature separately after the main analysis.

First consider expected government utility. To have direct policy impact, an AIP first needs to get into government. This is especially true in the case of the Netherlands, our empirical case, where opposition parties are more powerless vis-à-vis government parties than in other countries (e.g. Andeweg and Irwin, 2014; Herman, 1976). In a multiparty system, getting into government means that the AIP has to pass the “bottleneck” of coalition formation. The first ingredient of government utility therefore is a party’s “coalition potential,” to use Sartori’s (1976) terminology. According to standard coalition theory, coalition potential increases with party size in parliament and programmatic proximity to other parties (De Swaan, 1973; Leiserson, 1970). Parliamentary size increases the chance that a party is pivotal in forming a majority government, and programmatic proximity mitigates the policy concessions expected from potential partners. Proximity can increase (i.e. the policy gap may become narrower) either because an AIP moderates its views or because its closest competitor adopts a tougher anti-immigration agenda.

Coalition potential thus involves three of our context features: AIP strength, AIP policy, and mainstream policy.
The fourth context feature, criminal prosecution of the AIP’s leader, is included to do justice to the fact that the choice whether to ostracize an AIP never occurs in isolation from legal considerations. While ostracism is a measure used against AIPs in the political sphere, prosecution is an equivalent measure in the legal sphere (Downs, 2001), and so the trials of Geert Wilders in the Dutch case are representative of procedures against AIPs and their leaders in many other countries (Fennema, 2000; Van Spanje and de Vreese, 2015). Substantively, if the AIP’s leader is prosecuted for political statements, other parties should be hesitant to compromise their reputation in a joint cabinet and expose themselves to accusations of complicity from the opposition. Legal prosecution should then reduce coalition potential.

Overall we thus have

\[
\text{CoalitionPotential} = \text{AIPsize} - \text{AIPextremism} \\
+ \text{CompetitorTough} - \text{Prosecution}
\]  

(1)

Getting into government is a necessary condition for direct policy influence, but it is not sufficient for lasting impact. The second ingredient of government utility is the policy impact an AIP can expect to have once they hold executive power in a coalition cabinet. This impact should increase with AIP size, following Gamson’s Law of proportionality of seats in parliament and seats in cabinet (Gamson, 1961). Moreover, distance to the AIP’s closest competitor is important because meaningful impact requires a policy agenda that would not have been implemented otherwise. Thus

\[
\text{ExecutiveImpact} = \text{AIPsize} + \text{AIPextremism} \\
- \text{CompetitorTough}
\]  

(2)

The expected utility of government participation of an AIP then is a combination of CoalitionPotential and ExecutiveImpact

\[
\text{UtilityGov} = \text{CoalitionPotential} + \text{ExecutiveImpact} \\
= (\text{AIPsize} - \text{AIPextremism} \\
+ \text{CompetitorTough} - \text{Prosecution}) \\
+ (\text{AIPsize} + \text{AIPextremism} \\
- \text{CompetitorTough}) \\
= 2 \times \text{AIPsize} - \text{Prosecution}
\]  

(3)

Turning to expected opposition utility, an AIP’s policy influence can only be indirect. In Sartori’s (1976) terminology, the equivalent to direct coalition potential is called “blackmail potential” (the original concept dates back to Downs, 1957). A party has blackmail potential “whenever its existence, or appearance, affects the tactics of party competition and particularly when it alters the direction of the competition” (Sartori, 1976: 123). Blackmail potential is effective when a party bare of coalition potential voices concerns that are neglected by the establishment but shared by a significant number of voters. Therefore, the first variable that promotes blackmail potential is AIP size, that is, the party’s expected support. Second, distance to its closest competitor is a requirement, because the other parties can only be “blackmailed” if there actually is a significant policy difference—either because the AIP is very extreme and/or because its closest competitor is very moderate. Third, criminal prosecution of the AIP’s leader matters because it brings an AIP’s radical opposition character to the fore. As Sartori (ibid.) already observed, “the blackmail party generally coincides with an anti-system party.” By highlighting this link, prosecution communicates to the electorate that the establishment will not make concessions absent electoral pressure. At the same time, it reinforces the image of targeted suppression of anti-immigrant concerns and so provides voters with a particularly effective blackmail signal in the form of a “professional martyr” (Harris, 1994: 209).

Overall, we thus have

\[
\text{UtilityOpp} = \text{AIPsize} + \text{AIPextremism} \\
- \text{CompetitorTough} + \text{Prosecution}
\]  

(4)

The overall effect of ostracism then depends on the difference between expected utility in government and expected utility in opposition. Equation (5) shows how we construct ContextDisposition, the variable that expresses this difference. On this basis, we overall expect context to be opportune for ostracism when support for the AIP is sizeable, its views are not overly extreme, the mainstream right takes a tough stance on immigration, and there are no parallel legal procedures against the AIP’s leader.

\[
\text{ContextDisposition} = \text{UtilityGov} - \text{UtilityOpp} \\
= (2 \times \text{AIPsize} - \text{Prosecution}) \\
- (\text{AIPsize} + \text{AIPextremism} \\
- \text{CompetitorTough} + \text{Prosecution}) \\
= \text{AIPsize} - \text{AIPextremism} \\
+ \text{CompetitorTough} \\
- 2 \times \text{Prosecution}
\]

(5)

Before we proceed, note two features of our formalization. First, the theoretical model is based on simple additive relationships of its elements. We prefer this to multiplicative relationships because the latter would require well-grounded assumptions concerning the zero-point of each factor. Since the concepts of our model—such as government utility, coalition potential, or executive impact—exist independently of our experiment and our treatments are only meant to vary them (rather than to constitute them entirely), assuming zero-points would be arbitrary. Our “utility” variables should thus be interpreted as moderators
of the utility voters derive from party activity, rather than as absolute (cardinal) utilities themselves.

The second noteworthy feature of our model is that all elements receive the same a priori weight. This is adequate given that we have no strong expectations of the relative importance of the various context features, all of which are based on similar experimental treatments. For the a priori model, we will thus weight all features equally, which also implies unity weight for prosecution, the only feature to have double weight in the conceptual formalization of equation (5). Note that we will relax these assumptions in a separate section of our statistical analysis where we calibrate the model and estimate the empirical weight of each feature separately. To anticipate the result of this exercise, the a priori model turns out to be essentially confirmed.

Context disposition, scaled 0–1, will be the main moderator variable in our analysis. Its effect can be modeled statistically as a multiplicative interaction with ostracism, the main treatment. This interaction decides whether ostracism increases or decreases support for an AIP. High context disposition means that the AIP is deprived of its influence and support decreases; low disposition indicates the opposite.

Finally, we introduce a second moderator variable to reflect that our theory of instrumental voting predicts variation in the impact of ostracism depending on a voter’s general AIP affinity. In all contexts, the effects of ostracism on AIP support should be particularly pronounced for voters who are already predisposed toward the party. Only for these voters should it be of concern whether an ostracized AIP will have a say in cabinet. In contrast, voters who would not consider the AIP an option in any case should be unaffected by ostracism and its context. We express this expectation by an interaction of ostracism and context disposition with voters’ AIP affinity. The regression model is thus given by

$$\text{AIP support} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Ostracism} + \beta_2 \text{AIP affinity} + \beta_3 \text{Context Disposition} + \beta_4 \text{Ostracism} \times \text{Context Disposition} + \epsilon$$

The coefficients of interest are $\beta_1$, $\beta_4$, $\beta_5$, and $\beta_7$, that is, those that jointly make up the effect of ostracism. We expect estimates close to zero for $\beta_1$ and $\beta_5$, indicating that ostracism does not matter for individuals with very low party affinity. For $\beta_4$, we expect a significant positive effect and for $\beta_7$ a significant negative effect. $\beta_4$ indicates that ostracism increases AIP support when context disposition is low. $\beta_7$ should be larger than $\beta_4$ in absolute size, thus indicating that the overall effect of ostracism on AIP support turns negative as context disposition increases.

The experiment

We conducted a survey-embedded experiment with 3153 participants representative of the electorate of the Netherlands. Two large online studies were fielded: a pilot study in Amsterdam, the country’s largest city, in September 2012, and a nationwide study in September 2014.

In the first round, administered by the Department of Research, Information and Statistics of the City of Amsterdam, a random sample of 2826 eligible voters from an opt-in database was invited via email to complete an online questionnaire. The response rate was 61%. In the second round, administered by TNS Nipo, a random sample of 2214 eligible voters was recruited and contacted in a similar way. The response rate was 65%. Participants from both samples are largely representative of the respective electorates in terms of important sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, education, employment status), yet as the samples showed similar responses to the treatments, they were ultimately pooled.

The experiment had a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ design. Thirty-two groups of about 95 voters each were confronted with information about four Dutch political parties—the anti-immigration PVV and the right-wing/conservative VVD, CDA, and VNL—on the following five conditions, which reflect the concepts of our model explicated above. Complete wordings are in the Online Appendix.

- **Ostracism**: PVV ostracized versus PVV not ostracized

  We confront voters with one of the two recent statements by VVD and CDA politicians: either that these parties will systematically refuse cooperation with the PVV or not.

- **AIP size**: PVV high in polls versus low in polls

  We confront voters with one of the two recent statements by VVD leader Wilders versus moderate statements.

- **AIP extremism**: Extreme statements by PVV leader Wilders versus moderate statements

  We confront voters with one of the two interpretations of the PVV’s standing in the polls: either that the PVV is strong or weak.

- **Competitor tough**: VVD tough versus liberal in the area of integration

  We confront voters with one of the two statements made by Wilders about integration: either a compilation of his harsher statements or a compilation of milder statements.

- **Competitor tough**: VVD tough versus liberal in the area of integration

  We confront voters with one of the two presentations of the VVD’s position: either with a compilation of tougher positions or a compilation of more liberal views.
Prosecution: Wilders prosecuted again versus Wilders not prosecuted again

We confront voters with one of the two interpretations of possible criminal prosecution of Wilders after the election: either that this is very possible or that it is virtually impossible.9

Note that none of the information given to the participants was incorrect. Still, all participants were debriefed right after the end of the questionnaire. The debriefing note read

Just to be sure we declare that the text you read may have contained not only facts about political parties but also interpretations of facts and (biased) selections of facts about these parties. In this study we intend to register your reactions to the text and not to influence you in any way.

The research project received ethical clearance from the University of XYZ’s Institutional Review Board.

Our dependent variable, AIPSupport, was measured after the manipulation using a “propensity to vote” scale (PTV). Voters are asked to indicate on an 11-point scale the propensity that they “will ever vote for” a political party. The PTV is a long-standing measure of party support in numerous national and international studies (e.g. Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996) and it has been included in Dutch election studies since Van der Eijk and Niemöller (1984).

The question is explicitly designed to measure the generalized electoral utility a voter derives from supporting a party (Van der Eijk et al., 2006). It thus lends itself to our purpose of testing reactions to experimental manipulation of this utility. At the same time, the question is purely hypothetical (unlike, e.g. reported vote choice) and so yields a general measure of party support that correlates with other important expressions of public opinion, such as ideological views, religious values, government approval, or economic perceptions (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Van der Brug et al., 2007).

To make the link to the treatments less obvious, we asked PTVs for all parties represented in the Dutch parliament, as normal election surveys would have it. Our dependent variable is the PVV item from this battery (a 0–10 scale with mean = 1.66 and standard deviation = 3.08).

A pretest study was conducted in October 2009 with 46 students of ABC University.

### Estimating party affinity

Two of the three independent variables in equation (6) (ostracism and context disposition) are defined by our randomly assigned stimuli. The third one, PVV affinity, cannot be assigned at will but needs to be measured empirically. Conceptually, this variable describes whether an individual belongs to the potential electorate of the PVV and should thus react to our treatments, or whether the individual would not consider the PVV a legitimate choice under any circumstances. This is essentially a binary question, so the variable should be measured as a probability. We estimate this probability from a logistic regression of PVV vote intention (coded 1 vs. 0 for all other parties and abstention) on a set of attitudinal predictors: left-right self-placement, support for multiculturalism, and subjective salience of immigration. The predicted probability from the logistic regression is our basic measure of PVV affinity. Estimation results and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

To interpret the affinity score adequately, keep in mind that the dependent variable of the predicting regression (vote intention) is conceptually related to the dependent variable in our main analysis of the treatment effect (the PTV). In this latter analysis, the affinity score will be entered as an independent variable. Importantly, while vote intention is a post-treatment variable, this does not induce endogeneity because the vector of affinity predictors was measured prior to the manipulation and is thus random with regard to all treatments. Arithmetically, the affinity score is merely a weighted mean of left-right self-placement,

---

**Table 1. Prediction of PVV affinity from logistic regression, including descriptive statistics.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Logit coefficient</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>Marginal effect</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent: PVV vote intention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-right self-placement</td>
<td>0.20***</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiculturalism (four-item scale)</td>
<td>-0.97***</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>-0.050</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience of immigration</td>
<td>0.28***</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.02***</td>
<td>(0.46)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke’s R²</td>
<td>0.329</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of cases correctly predicted</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>3153</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Missing values were multiply imputed using Stata 13. Descriptive statistics are for the original data.

*The effect of a one-point move on the independent variable on the probability of the dependent variable taking the value of 1, measured at means of all covariates.

**p < 0.01.
multiculturalism, and immigration salience, all of which were asked pre-treatment. For our data, this implies that PVV affinity is necessarily uncorrelated with the treatments. It existed before and independently of our experiment.

**Results**

Table 2 shows OLS estimates of the treatment effects. We build the model in four steps to demonstrate the operation of all basic variables without interactions. The bivariate treatment effect in model 1 is not significantly different from zero. This is what we expected, given that the direction of the treatment effect should be zero on average and should, for each particular condition, depend on the randomly assigned context features. Models 2 and 3 add two-way interactions with PVV affinity and context disposition, respectively. As expected, the treatment still does not show any noteworthy effect. The final model 4 then estimates all coefficients of equation (6). Our hypotheses are supported by the results: The coefficient of the two-way “Ostracism \times PVV affinity” interaction term is significantly positive, and the coefficient of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 (basic)</th>
<th>Model 2 (interim)</th>
<th>Model 3 (interim)</th>
<th>Model 4 (complete)</th>
<th>Model 5* (calibrated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ostracism</td>
<td>0.11 (0.12)</td>
<td>0.06 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.26)</td>
<td>-0.17 (0.25)</td>
<td>0.03 (0.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVV affinity</td>
<td></td>
<td>20.49** (0.92)</td>
<td></td>
<td>16.27** (2.04)</td>
<td>16.67** (1.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context disposition</td>
<td>-0.39 (0.33)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.43 (0.32)</td>
<td>-0.22 (0.26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ostracism \times PVV affinity</td>
<td>-0.17 (1.17)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.48* (2.82)</td>
<td>6.79** (2.52)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ostracism \times Context disposition</td>
<td>0.22 (0.47)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.48 (0.45)</td>
<td>0.10 (0.37)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVV affinity \times Context disposition</td>
<td>9.50* (3.98)</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.19** (3.23)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ostracism \times PVV affinity \times Context disposition</td>
<td>-14.37** (5.36)</td>
<td>-15.46** (4.71)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.58** (0.08)</td>
<td>0.68** (0.08)</td>
<td>1.77** (0.19)</td>
<td>0.89** (0.18)</td>
<td>0.77** (0.15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The calibration of the model is described in the text below this table.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

![Figure 2](image-url)
three-way “Ostracism × PVV affinity × Context disposition” interaction term is significantly negative and larger in absolute size than the two-way interaction.

To see the substantive implications of these results, consider Figure 2, which aggregates all relevant coefficients into the overall treatment effect and reports levels of significance (see Brambor et al., 2006). Direction and size of the effect are conditional on PVV affinity (represented by the horizontal axis) and context disposition (represented by the five lines for different scenarios in quartile steps). For affinity scores lower than about 13%, the estimated treatment effect does not significantly deviate from 0 for any scenario (as indicated by the dotted lines). As expected, voters who do not consider the PVV an option in the first place are unaffected by the manipulations. For higher affinity scores, the treatment effect then diverges significantly in both directions, depending on context disposition. If the context is disposed against ostracized parties, that is, if expected PVV utility in opposition is low relative to expected PVV utility in government, ostracism diminishes PVV support. Vice versa, if the context is favorably disposed toward ostracized parties, that is, if expected utility in opposition is high relative to expected utility in government, ostracism increases PVV support. Both effects are quite sizeable. In a favorable context, ostracism may diminish PVV support among likely party voters by up to 3.5 points on the 11-point PTV scale. Vice versa, in an unfavorable context, ostracism may enhance PVV support by up to three points.11

**Model calibration**

Finally, we turn to the task of model calibration anticipated above. As explained in our modeling section, the context variable of context disposition is based on a simple formalization of additive and equally weighted elements. To relax these assumptions and determine the empirical role of the various ingredients of context disposition, we estimated a regression similar to model 4 in Table 2, just that the four experimental context features—AIPsize, AIPextremism, CompetitorTough, and Prosecution—are each interacted with ostracism and PVV affinity, instead of their aggregate measure, context disposition. The empirical weight of each feature is then determined by the coefficient of its three-way interaction term (Ostracism × PVV affinity × Feature). The estimated coefficients are as follows (see the Online Appendix for full regression results):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIPsize</td>
<td>-1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIPextremism</td>
<td>6.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CompetitorTough</td>
<td>-7.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosecution</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The calibration results show that the two ideological features (AIPextremism and CompetitorTough) are particularly important moderators of the effect of ostracism. But all elements behave as predicted in that they have coefficients with opposite signs as compared to the conceptual formalization in equation (5). This needs to be so because the three-way interaction of context disposition (model 4 in Table 2) has a negative sign. The calibrated version of context disposition is then calculated as

\[
\text{ContextDispositionCalibrated} = 1.02 \times \text{AIPsize} - 6.57 \times \text{AIPextremism} + 7.15 \times \text{CompetitorTough} - 1.09 \times \text{Prosecution}
\]

Just like the basic version of context disposition, the calibrated version is rescaled 0–1. Model 5 in Table 2 shows that prediction of PVV support based on this measure is very similar to model 4, which is based on the a priori measure. The calibration marginally improves the strength and precision of the estimates as reflected in the larger coefficients and lower standard errors.

Finally, we conduct two sets of additional analyses. A first set shows that our empirical findings hold when controlling for voter knowledge on the factual strategies of mainstream parties against the PVV. A second set of analyses demonstrates that it is the experimental manipulations rather than other factors that drive the effects (“manipulation checks”). This boosts our confidence in the experiment’s results. See the Online Appendix for the details of these additional analyses.

**Conclusion**

In Europe, the degree of political tolerance of AIPs varies. A reaction common among other political parties is to “ostracize” an AIP, which we have defined as the systematic refusal to politically cooperate with that party. While ostracism effectively prevents a party from gaining access to power in multiparty systems, our comparative analysis showed that the effects of this reaction on electoral support are ambiguous. In this article, we have therefore designed a contextual model of these effects based on the assumption of instrumental voter support guided by expected policy outcomes. Moreover, we have tested the model empirically in a survey-embedded experiment among a representative sample of the Dutch electorate. Results show that, in line with the predictions of our model, the effect of ostracism is sizable yet depends on the political context. In contexts where a party can be more useful to likeminded voters in government than in opposition, ostracizing that party hurts it electorally. In contexts where the party is considered more of use in opposition than in government, the party benefits from its pariah position. As expected, these effects are concentrated among voters with some initial support for the AIP.
These findings confirm, and go beyond, the conclusion that isolating challenger parties does not hurt them electorally. They confirm that treating a party as a pariah does not have a general impact (cf. Van Spanje, 2017; Van Spanje and Van der Brug, 2009). They go beyond this conclusion by suggesting that this hides two specific effects. One of these effects—that an enhanced signaling function is profitable for a pariah—is in accordance with theoretical considerations outlined by Van Spanje (2017). The other effect—that a pariah is vulnerable to the perception that a vote for it would be wasted—is in line with the finding that a party loses votes when not only being treated as a pariah but also being parroted. This “parroting the pariah effect” has been shown in analyses of communist and AIP performance in 15 countries since 1944 (Van Spanje, 2017; Van Spanje and de Graaf, 2017). In the current article, being parroted (CompetitorTough) plays a key role in expected utility in government versus in opposition. In that sense, this article takes this research strand a step further, more precisely modeling the role of the mainstream right’s policy positions, and identifying several other relevant factors.

The findings also call for more research on the topic. We have studied only one party in one country. Although finding results in this “least likely case” is quite telling, the question is to what extent we can generalize to other cases such as the VB in Belgium, FN in France, or NPD in Germany. Furthermore, our stimuli have been constructed on the basis of real-world material, which increases ecological validity but may compromise internal validity. Even if our manipulation checks give little reason to think that our stimulus material was not adequate—quite the contrary, see the Online appendix—lab experiments could be conducted to replicate our findings. Finally, given that we have confirmed the expectation of null effects among unlikely anti-immigration voters, future studies could focus on the subsets of the electorate which our analysis identified as particularly prone to ostracism effects.

Keeping in mind these limitations of our study, we can point to at least four implications of our findings. First, in specific circumstances (sizeable support for the AIP and tough immigration stances of the mainstream right), other parties can deal an AIP an effective blow by ostracizing it, not only by keeping that party from power but also by damaging it electorally. Second, in other circumstances (extreme stances of the AIP and prosecution of its leader), the decision to ostracize an AIP may backfire and give that party considerable electoral opportunities. Third, the AIP’s competitors can affect some of these circumstances themselves—at least in terms of their own position on immigration (cf. Van Spanje, 2017). Fourth, we have found no indications that ostracized AIPs benefit from “sympathy support” from outside their natural voter base. An effective establishment strategy would therefore focus on potential AIP supporters and how useful the party is in their eyes in government or opposition.

Similarly, future studies should concentrate on voters’ perception of AIPs. This is particularly important given the interplay of different mainstream party strategies and their possible effects on how voters see AIPs. In a next step, potential heterogeneity of such effects may be explored. After all, such effects are likely to vary from voter to voter—for instance, according to trust in mainstream parties and mainstream news media. An anti-immigration voter who trusts mainstream parties and media may believe them when they portray an AIP as a pariah—or as parroted—and when they do not. An anti-immigration voter who distrusts mainstream parties and media, by contrast, may have radically different views—perhaps views that the AIP leadership pushes on her for strategic reasons. In view of our findings, such systematic differences in perception may have important electoral consequences.

On a final note, our theoretical model is not limited to immigration policy and our findings may well become relevant beyond the case of AIPs. Various types of parties in several established democracies have been ostracized by other parties, including interbellum fascists and cold-war communists in Western Europe. Ostracist strategies may be waged again, for example, against Islamist or anti-capitalist parties in the near future. Experimental methods allow us to study mass responses to elite reactions against these and other parties, possibly even before such measures become reality. The normative trade-offs and practical consequences highlighted by our study suggest that scholars and decision-makers alike may be well advised to pay careful attention to the impact of ostracist strategies on public opinion.

Acknowledgements
Earlier versions of this paper were presented at APSA 2010, MPSA 2014, the 2014 ECPR Joint Sessions Working Group “Defending or Damaging Democracy” in Salamanca and the 2014 NKWP/VPW Annual Meetings workshop “Dealigned Electorates” in Maastricht. We would like to thank the participants for helpful feedback, and in particular our discussants David Art, Annabella España-Najera and Antje Schwenmiche.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The authors would like to thank the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) for funding based on a personal “VENI” research grant to Joost van Spanje (#451-12-033).

Supplemental material
Supplemental material for this article is available online.
Notes

1. For this article, AIPs are defined as “parties that oppose immigration to the country in which they operate, and attach much importance to that anti-immigration position.” The case selection follows Van Spanje (2011) who identified as relevant AIPs parties for which data are available about their immigration position and that stand out as particularly restrictive on immigration. Information on ostracism was taken from the expert survey and literature review reported in Van Spanje (2017). Vote shares are from Nohlen and Stöver (2010) and Nordsieck (2017).

2. Further work by Meguid (2005, 2008) suggests that AIPs gain votes if mainstream parties co-opt their policies. These “issue-based” reactions, as Meguid (2008) calls them, also feature prominently in this article, along with the cordon sanitaire, which is a “non-issue-based” response—see our “Treatment model” section below.

3. This is not to say that anti-immigration votes are exclusively policy-based. The point is that AIP voters do not differ categorically from the electorate at large with regard to the nature of their motivations: much of their party support will be instrumental, some of it will not.

4. Without a doubt, more factors matter for AIP support. Omitted variable bias is not a concern, however, given that all our independent variables will be manipulated experimentally.

5. Parties may also be distant from or close to an AIP on other policy issues than immigration. However, the vote for AIPs is mainly about immigration (e.g. Van der Brug and Fennema, 2003; Van der Brug et al., 2000). While other issues may become linked with immigration (e.g. crime, nationalism, unemployment, European integration), these are clearly subordinated to the enormous importance that AIPs attach to their core issue (Van Spanje, 2011).

6. Our measure of AIP affinity is exogenous with regard to the treatments, as described below.

7. Descriptive statistics of our samples and the respective populations are in the Online Appendix. Note that the Amsterdam sample shows moderate deviations in terms of age and education.

8. In the second round of the experiment, the VVD was replaced with the newly founded VNL, which had now become the PVV’s closest competitor.” Results are similar for both specifications at 0.013, and with the four contextual factors respondents knew what renewed prosecution would entail. In fact, Wilders was tried again in 2016.

9. Wilders had been prosecuted before in a high-profile trial, so his immigration position and that stand out as particularly restrictive on immigration. Information on ostracism was taken from the expert survey and literature review reported in Van Spanje (2017). Vote shares are from Nohlen and Stöver (2010) and Nordsieck (2017).

10. The correlation of the affinity score with the ostracism treatment is 0.013, and with the four contextual factors −0.006, 0.022, −0.022, and 0.012, respectively.

11. To make sure that these values are not undue extrapolations from the linear interaction, we restricted the data to affinity scores >0.25 and estimated the specification of model 3 from Table 2 on this subsample, with similar results to those shown in Figure 2 (effect range of −3.1 to +2.8).

References


Van Spanje JHP (2010a) Parties beyond the pale. Why some political parties are ostracized by their competitors while others are not. Comparative European Politics 8(3): 354–383.

Author biographies

Joost van Spanje is associate professor of political communication at the University of Amsterdam. His current research team investigates legal action against anti-immigration parties in 21 European countries since 1965 and its effects on citizens. Joost currently also studies how news media in established democracies cover new political parties. He has published 26 ISI-ranked journal articles as well as the monograph “Controlling the Electoral Market” (2017).

Till Weber is associate professor of political science at Baruch College, City University of New York. His work covers a variety of democratic processes, including voting behavior, party competition, legislative politics and cabinet government.