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LEADER OVER POLICY? THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL LEADERS ON POLICY PREFERENCES

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Leader over policy?

The influence of political leaders on policy preferences [1]

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To extend the existing literature on political polarization beyond the traditional setup (an ideologically well-defined two-party setup), we run survey experiments in the great Buenos Aires area of Argentina to explore the role of leader and party endorsement in shaping public opinion over policies, in a context of a weak and ideologically elusive party system dominated by strong personalistic leaders. We find evidence of a significant (leader as well as party) endorsement effect, regardless of the degree of ex ante polarization (so that sponsorship may introduce polarization on ex ante unpolarized issues). In addition, we document asymmetries relative to party and leader (some leaders have larger polarizing effects than others; negative identification with a leader seems to prevail over positive identification) and the ineffectiveness of co-sponsorship and "against-character" endorsement to broaden policy support.

Keywords: Policy preferences, political decisions, leader endorsement, party labels, weak party systems

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1. Introduction

Research has found that party labels have a great effect in policy support in bipartisan party systems due to different causal mechanisms, such as heuristics (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006), motivated reasoning (Bolsen et al., 2014), group influence (Cohen, 2003), or the instrumental consideration of policy results and just personal values held by decision makers (Johnson & Eagly, 1989). Cohen (2003) showed that individual views on policies tend to reflect not only ideological but also partisan preferences: democrats were more likely to support policies proposed by democrats and more likely to oppose those endorsed by republicans and vice versa. Along the same lines, Bolsen et al. (2014) found that a coalition (or cross-party sponsorship) helps build support for a policy proposal on a polarized issue. However there is no evidence on whether these effect remains in the absence of an ideologically well-defined two-party setup -which is usually the case in many modern democracies. Moreover, it is not clear whether the influence is exerted through the voter´s identification with the party´s historical views (ideological affinity), or with the party as a reference group (emotional affinity) regardless of the policy agenda.

To address this issue, we test the impact of parties´ and leaders´ endorsement in Argentina, a political environment of catch-all parties with broad ideological agendas dominated by strong personalistic leaders. Thus, the paper contributes to the literature in two ways. Firstly, by building in previous findings we address how leaders, along with parties, influence in policy preferences using survey data from Argentina, a developing country with a weaker political system, dominated by broad and relatively new coalitions driven by strong personal leaders. Specifically, we document that the endorsement effect, namely, the relation between parties and policy support unveiled by Cohen (2003), is replicated in

present-day Argentina. To make the endorsement effect more general, we deliberately select both polarizing and non-polarizing issues to run the tests (where polarization is understood as the alignment between the support/opposition for a leader and their support/opposition to a policy, in the absence of an explicit endorsement.). We find that the effect of endorsement on opinion can be strong enough to introduce polarization on ex ante unpolarized issues.

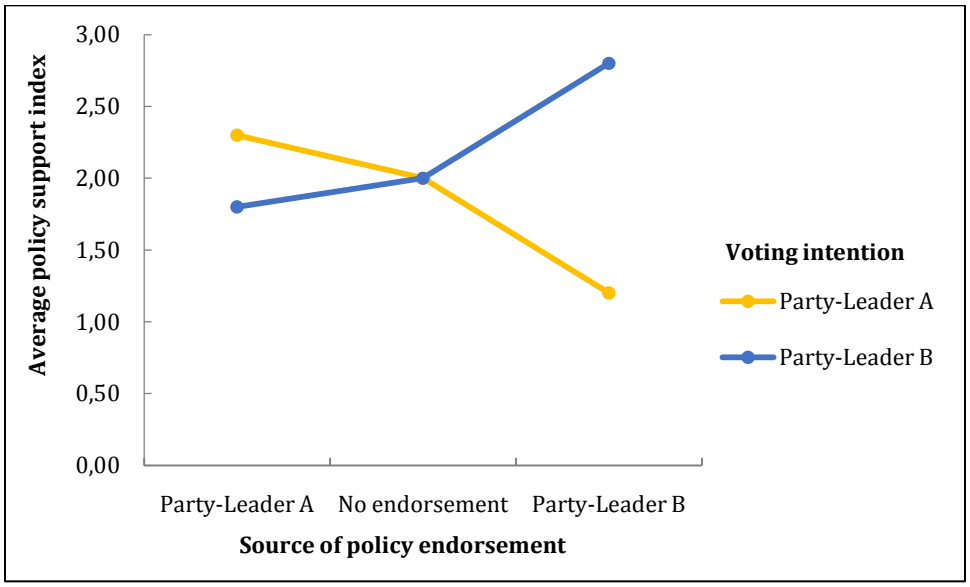
Secondly, by examining whether the endorsement effect differs with the leader, namely, whether both the negative and positive identifications are stronger for "polarizing leaders". As an alternative hypothesis, we examine whether the endorsement effect exhibits asymmetries relative to in- and out-party/leader endorsements - namely, whether the positive identification induced by "our" (in-party/leader) endorsement is weaker than the negative identification caused by "their" (out-party/leader) endorsement (as in Goren et al., 2009 or Nicholson, 2011).

We summarily illustrate both cases in the following charts, which show the potential link between the source of endorsement of a given policy and the policy's average approval level among different groups of voters (supporters of party-leader A and supporters of party-leader B). Figure 1a sketches the "polarizing leaders" hypothesis. In this case, the endorsement of one of the leaders-parties has a larger effect (both negative and positive) on the average policy approval of both groups of respondents. Figure 1b. sketches the "in/out endorsement" hypothesis. For a group of respondents that claim to support a given leader or party, the decline in average policy approval when the policy is endorsed by the opposing leader-party is larger than the increase in average approval when the policy is

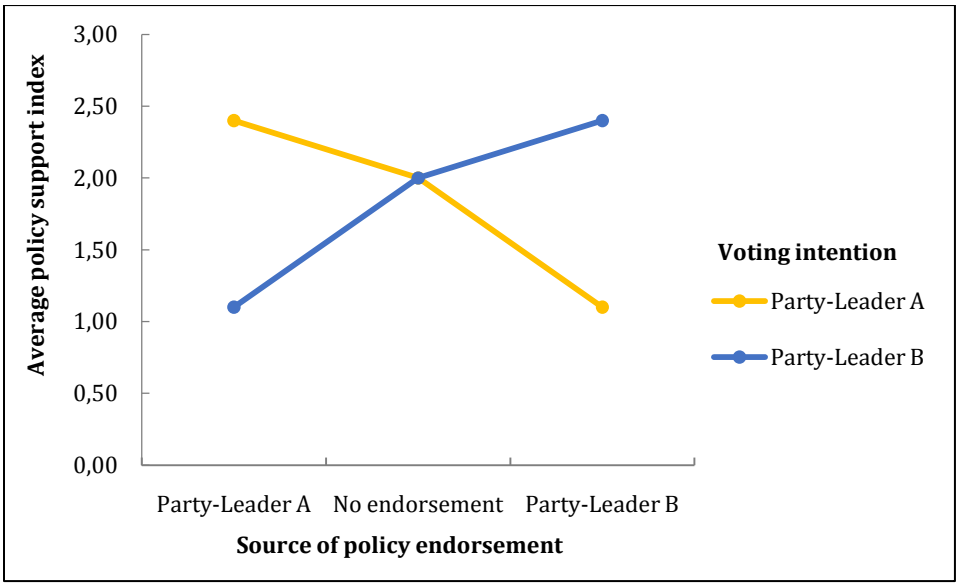
endorsed by their party-leader of preference (relative to average approval when the source of the policy proposal is not specified).

Figure 1.

1a. A polarizing leader's endorsement effect dominates



1b. Out-party endorsement dominates



We find evidence for the "polarizing leader" hypothesis: one of the leaders (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner) exerts a stronger influence (positive on her own party, negative on the opposing party) that the other (Mauricio Macri) and, as a result, has a stronger polarizing effect (as measured by the extent to which her endorsement of the policy lengthens the distance between in- and out-party support). The same results, to a lesser extent, are found when the endorsement is expressed by the party rather than the leader.

As a first step towards understanding the net effect of endorsement (do we gain more than we lose by explicitly sponsoring a policy?) we compare the additional support and disapproval associated with an individual party/leader endorsement. Our results suggest that a given leader´s positive influence on his own constituency is significantly weaker than her negative influence on the opposing constituency.

In addition, the existence of asymmetries related to the effect of policy endorsement begs the question of whether cross-party endorsements (co-sponsorship) contribute to de-polarization (due to positive identification, as in Bolsen et al., 2014), or whether they cancel each other (due to negative identification or the presence of a polarizing leader). In line with our previous results, our findings show that cross-party sponsorship does not change the overall support for a policy proposal.

A related question, previously addressed in the literature in a different context, is whether a leader's "against character" endorsement (a conservative supporting a progressive position, or vice versa) helps narrow the divide over ex-ante polarized issues. We find that "against character" endorsement helps erase differences in opinion, but it does so mostly through negative identification, thereby lowering overall policy acceptance as a result.

2. Background

Policy preferences help citizens to distinguish between candidates' government programs and, in this way, to shape voting decisions (Aldrich, 1989; Cutler, 2002; Ansolabehere et al., 2008) and to build linkages with political parties that better represent their prior beliefs (Butler & Stokes, 1974). For instance, it can be expected that conservative people will support less public expenditure if the Republican Party promotes it (Cohen, 2003). The same results apply to liberal with Democrats (Bullock, 2011).[2] Leaders' policy preferences also allow voters to make them accountable (Arcenaux, 2008).

Partisanship as heuristics or shortcuts (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006) is a way to make a right [3] and easy decision and to save time in a context of competing information (Druckman & Lupia, 2016).[4] Alternatively, sometimes partisanship can be the driver of motivated reasoning: people try to accommodate facts, information and, more generally, interpretations in order to fit their partisan identity (Bolsen et al., 2014). This may lead to higher levels of polarization when a policy has out-party endorsement (Nicholson 2011)[5].

[2] Also Bullock (2011) reports that Democrats always prefer liberal changes in politics, but are able to tolerate a conservative reform if they think a Democrat had sponsored it. This effect was less acute when people had information on the policies in question.

[3]Right political decisions are those taken according to people's preferences whatever those preferences are. A biased political decision is one whose outcome contradicts the decision-makers' original wishes, desires and goals (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006). If decision-makers are willing to support the policies sponsored by their leaders of preference, even when these policies are openly against party core values, then we can understand there is a mismatch between their intentions and decisions.

[4] Considering parties' stands toward policies helps to mitigate risk in decision making under uncertainty (Cukierman & Tommasi, 1998), since decision-makers may not have the time or interest needed to appreciate the consequences of policy choices and/or assess their results.

[5] Nicholson (2011) finds that Democrats' opposition to certain bills grows when in the McCain cue treatment, the republican candidate supports them. Also, the support decreases with the endorsement of the opposition candidate. For instance, Democrats support towards the immigration bill goes from 52% to the 33% when presented under the McCain cue.

Previous work has mainly tested the effects of party endorsement on policy preferences in the US. Would parties still be effective shortcuts under a different party system with weak party labels (Lupu, 2016) without a clear ideological identity are dominated by strong personal leaders? We address this question by extending the analysis to a developing country with the aforementioned characteristics, Argentina, where the electoral arena is shaped around leaders in a context of a party system is in transition[6].

In Argentina, partisan identities are not built around an ideological divide. Once in office, political leaders and congress representatives push for different policies and legislative agendas, from center left and right. Electoral competition has been dramatically changing (Torre 2003 and 2017) due to the decline of one of the main political parties (the UCR) the lasting fragmentation of the other (Peronism) and the emergence of a new political center-right party at the federal level (PRO). PRO's candidate, Mauricio Macri, succeeded at building the electoral alliance Cambiemos and winning the presidency in 2015.

The lack of a clear ideological identity within parties does not, however, prevent the political polarization of Argentine electoral politics: public discourse follows a divide between supporters and opponents of former President Cristina Fernandez and her force (Frente Para la Victoria or FPV, a branch of the Peronist party that was in office from 2003 to 2015); Macri and his alliance Cambiemos appear as her antagonists.

[6] Because institutions do not channel important conflicts, they also do not completely shape political decisions. Take, as an example, electoral rules. Elections are fair, clean and competitive; there is no doubt that Argentina is a democracy. However, presidents use electoral rules as instruments of survival for them or their parties. In the last 30 years, the rules to elect the President have changed every two elections (1983: Electoral college using Party Lists, 6 year terms and no reelection. 1995: Runoff election using Party Lists, 4 year terms and one reelection. 2003: "de-blocking" of candidates. Multiple Peronists competing with each other. 2011: Open Primaries).

In all these matters, Argentina's party system is very different to the US and can therefore be used to complement and refine the findings of the literature. Specifically, the case of Argentina allows us to assess if decision-making conditional to party labels work in similar ways when leaders are seen as responsible for policy making and the main political divide is built around them.

3. The experiment

We start by asking a first group of respondents which of the two predominant political figures, President Mauricio Macri and opposition leader and former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, they would vote for in a presidential election, and whether they agree or disagree with individual public policies of varying degrees of complexity. For two other groups of respondents, we replicate the experiment using the same set of policies, but now allegedly sponsored by one of the two politicians´ parties. For a fourth group of respondents, we test for the influence of a legislative coalitions by asking people's opinion on co-sponsored policies. Subsequently, we conduct between-subject comparisons to test the incidence of partisan sponsorship and co-sponsorship on policy support. Finally, we repeat the experiment in another group of respondents, this time using the political leaders rather than their parties as policy sponsors. Our sample is comprised of 2716 respondents that were reached through a series of telephone surveys undertaken between October 2016 and July 2017 in the Province of Buenos Aires[7].

[7] The telephone survey reached individuals from several districts (1st, 2nd and 3rd sections of Gran Buenos Aires, Bahía Blanca, La Plata, Mar del Plata, Campana, San Nicolás, Tres Arroyos and Tandil). A stratified random sampling design was utilized in order to ensure the weight of each district in the calling list was proportional to its weight in total Province of Buenos Aires population.

3.1 Policy preferences

Respondents were asked to express their level of support for one out of a number of policies that targeted a variety of contemporary issues. These issues included topics ranging from tax policy to immigration restrictions. Measuring attitude towards a wide spectrum of policies is key to isolate participants' reaction to policy endorsement from the intrinsic nature of a given policy. In order to make the endorsement effect more general, we deliberately selected both polarizing and non-polarizing issues to run the tests.[8]

The 7 policies we chose were: (1) Establishing a Universal Basic Income for all citizens, (2) Guaranteeing minimum non-contributive Retirement Benefits to all citizens, (3) Protecting local production from competing imports, (4) Establishing an ARS 3000 Minimum Retirement Pension, (5) Establishing an ARS 6000 Minimum Retirement Pension, (6) Implementing an income tax exemption for all employees, and (7) Deporting illegal immigrants[9].

3.2 Endorsement manipulation

Party endorsement

Our first experiment involved manipulating party policy endorsement in the policy approval inquiries. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions of the endorsement. The "no endorsement" version – which constitutes our control condition -

[8] Recall polarization is understood as the alignment between the support/opposition for a leader and their support/opposition to a policy, in the absence of an open endorsement.
[9] Policies (1)-(6) were used to estimate the impact of in-party and out-party endorsement on opinion. To assess the impact of co-sponsorship, policies (1)-(3) were used. Lastly, to measure the impact of leader endorsement, respondents were asked about policies (1)-(3) and (7).

inquired the participant's opinion regarding a given policy without specifying if this policy came from a specific party. For example, on the establishment of a Universal Basic Income, respondents in the control condition were asked the following:

> *Do you agree with the proposal to guarantee all citizens a Minimum Income afforded through taxes?*
>
> - *Highly agree*
> - *Agree*
> - *Disagree*
> - *Highly disagree*
> - *Don't Know*

Respondents' answers were translated into a policy approval index that ranged from 0 (Highly disagree) to 3 (Highly agree)[10].

The respondents who were assigned to one of the three treatment condition heard a similar statement with a small addition. For example, those in the "Cambiemos proposal" condition heard the following:

> *Do you agree with **Cambiemos' proposal** to guarantee all citizens a Minimum Income afforded through taxes?*

[10] "Don't know" answers were removed from our sample. In addition, the scale we used to measure policy approval did not feature a neutral level in order to minimize the amount of 'uncertain' responses (Matell and Jacoby, 1972).

Meanwhile, those in the "FPV proposal" condition heard that the same policy had been proposed by the FPV. Likewise, participants in the "Co-sponsorship proposal" heard that the policy had been proposed by FPV and Cambiemos.

Leader endorsement

In an alternative version of this experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of the following three versions of the policy question (1) unendorsed (control condition) (2) endorsed by Cristina Kirchner (3) endorsed by Mauricio Macri.

Political affiliation & other individual characteristics

Since we aim to understand how people react to leaders/party's endorsement, it is key to single out the subjects' political affiliation. To do so, we rely on several measures. First, participants were asked to state what candidate they would choose if Presidential elections were held on the day of the survey (0=Mauricio Macri, 1=Sergio Massa, 2= Cristina Kirchner, 3= Other). In addition, participants were asked to indicate their image perception of Cristina Kirchner and Mauricio Macri on a scale of 1 to 5 (1= highly positive image, 5= highly negative image). Because we aim to identify the effect of same-party and opposing-party endorsement, we limit our sample to those participants who state they would vote for either Mauricio Macri or Cristina Kirchner, the main polarizing forces in Argentina's current political scenario.

Further, all participants were asked to specify their gender, age-group, education level and occupation-group at the beginning of the survey. This information proved useful to test

whether the impact of partisan endorsement on attitudes towards policies differed across individuals, independently of their political affinities.

Overview of the experimental design

Vote intention of respondent	Treatment group	Policies	Opinion
Kirchner	Unendorsed policy (1)	Establishing a Universal Basic Income for all citizens	Highly agrees
	FPV/Kirchner endorsement (2)	Guaranteeing minimum Retirement Benefits to all citizens	Agrees
	Cambiemos/Macri endorsement (3)	Protecting local production from competing imports	Disagrees
Macri	Unendorsed policy (4)	Establishing an ARS 3000 Minimum Retirement Pension	Highly disagrees
	FPV/Kirchner endorsement (5)	Establishing an ARS 6000 Minimum Retirement Pension	Doesn't know
	Cambiemos/Macri endorsement (6)	Implementing an income tax exemption for all workers	
		Deporting illegal immigrants	

Note: In the first version of the experiment, policy questions were endorsed by the main parties (FPV, Cambiemos). In the second version, the endorsement came from the main leaders associated to these parties (Kirchner, Macri).

4. Results

4.1 In- (out-) party endorsement strengthens (weakens) the support for a particular policy.

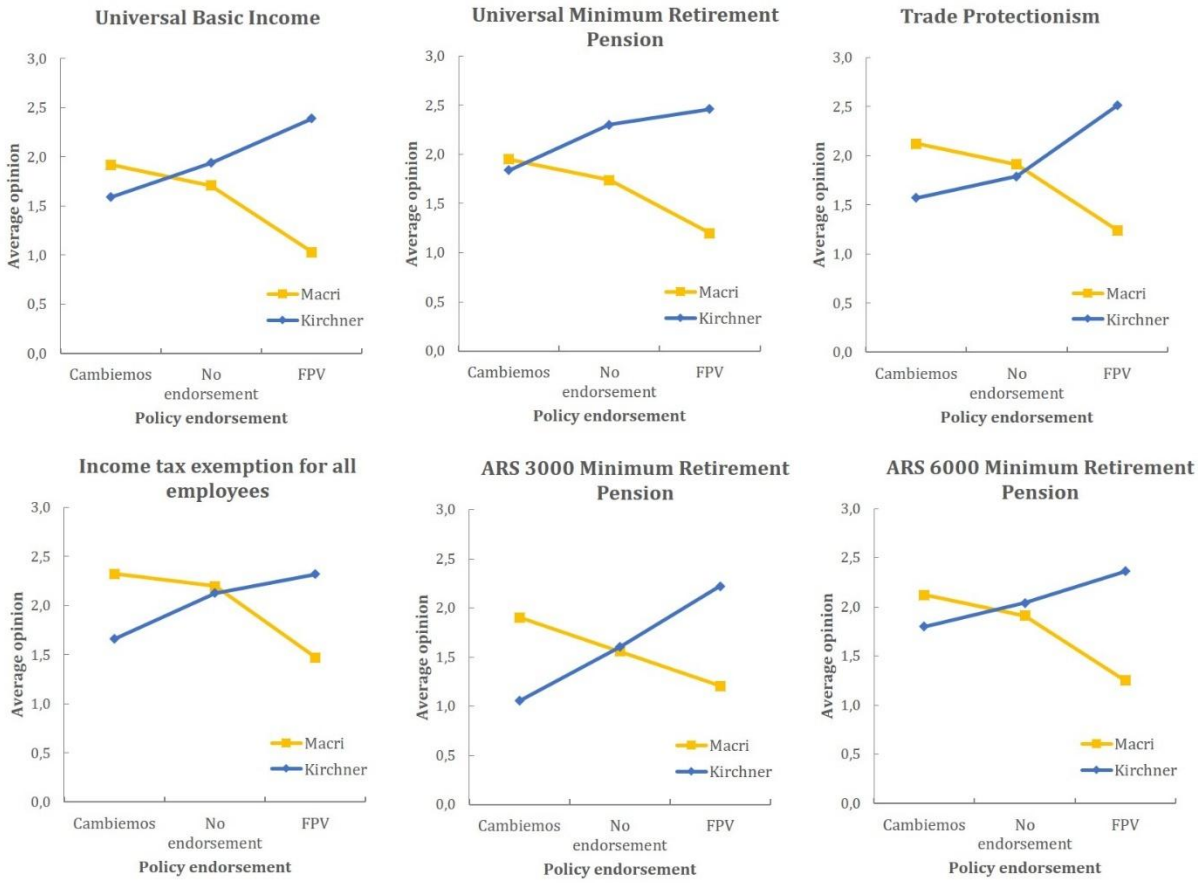
Subjects' attitudes towards policy proposals were first examined using a 2 (participant voting intention: Macri or Kirchner) x 3 (policy endorsement: Cambiemos, no endorsement, FPV) analysis of variance (ANOVA). Our goal was to determine if, among Macri and Kirchner voters, in- and out-party endorsement of a policy significantly influenced opinion.

Figure 2a and b illustrate our findings, in terms of average support and percentage of voters, respectively.

Statistical results, robust to the inclusion of standard covariates (gender, age, education, occupation), are reported in Table 1. As predicted, the relevant interaction involving participants´ political affiliation and party endorsement proved highly significant to explain attitude towards all proposals analyzed. Regardless the intrinsic nature of the policy, Macri (Kirchner) supporters were more likely to show approval towards a policy if told that Cambiemos (FPV) had proposed it, and less likely to support it if told that FPV (Cambiemos) had proposed it[11].

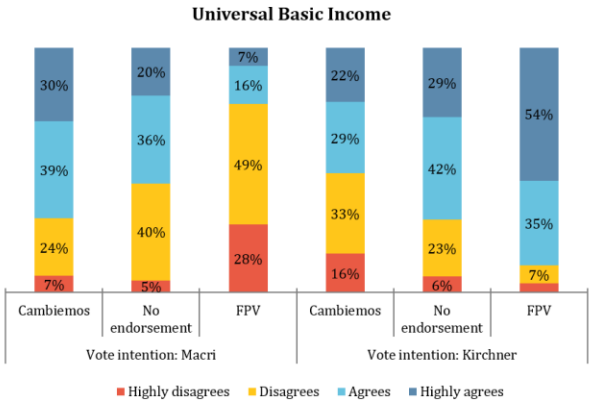
[11] As stated in the Appendix to this document, we do not find that differences in any of the covariates can explain differences in the impact of policy endorsement on opinion once we control for individual political affiliation. Moreover, measuring political affiliation through respondents' image of party leaders instead of through their voting intention does not significantly alter our results, with those with a very positive or positive image of Mauricio Macri reacting positively to a Cambiemos-endorsed policy, and those with a negative or very negative image of Mauricio Macri reacting relatively more positively to a FPV-endorsed proposal.

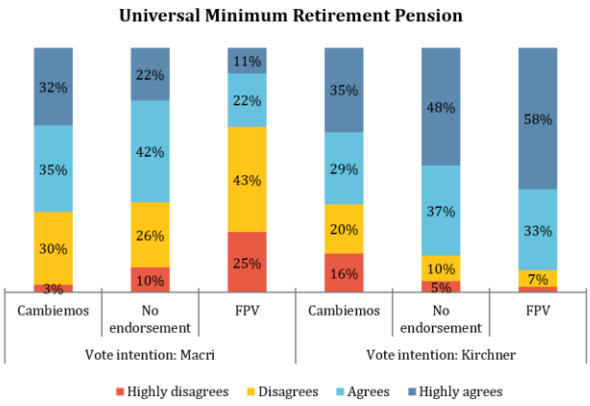
Figure 2a. Average policy approval by voting intention and party endorsement

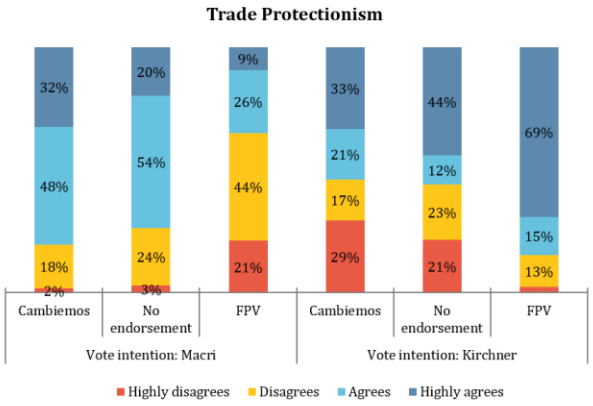


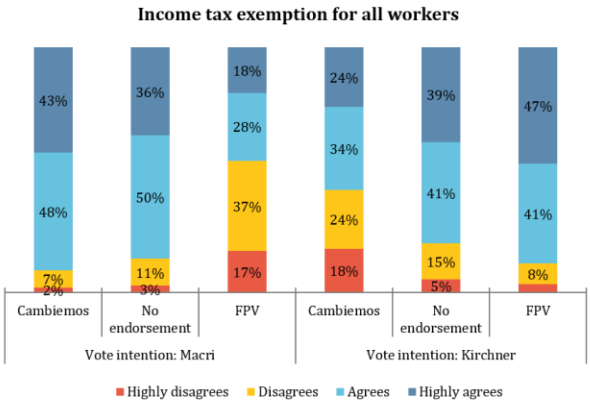
Note: The variable "Opinion" equals 3 when the subject is highly in favor of a policy and 0 when she is highly against a policy.

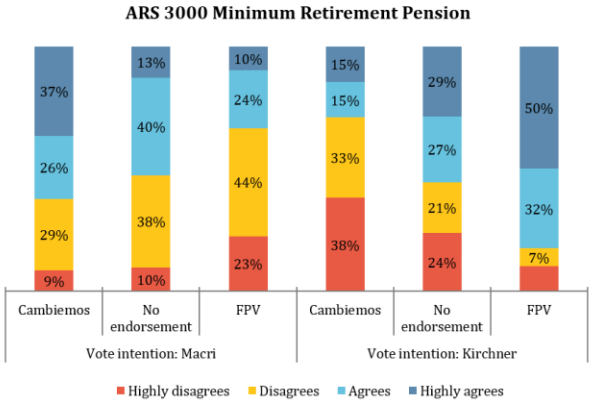
Figure 2b. Level of policy approval by voting intention and party endorsement











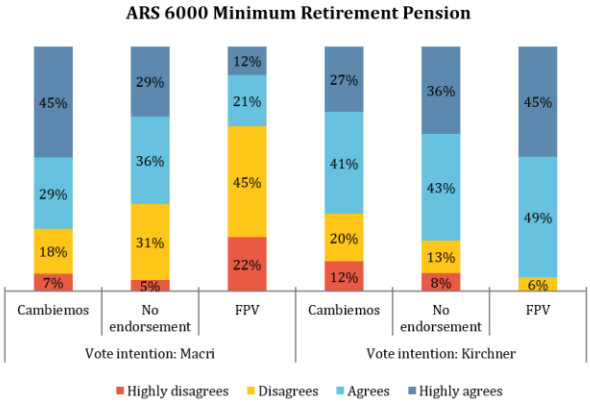


Table 1. Effect of party endorsement on attitude towards policies

VARIABLE	Trade protectionism				Universal Basic Income				Universal Minimum Retirement Pension			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Partial SS	df	F	P-value	Partial SS	df	F	P-value	Partial SS	df	F	P-value
Model	106.20	15	7.78	0.00***	106.29	15	8.74	0.00***	115.91	15	9.809	0.00***
Vote intention	3.18	1	3.50	0.06*	23.84	1	29.42	0.00***	47.54	1	60.349	0.00***
Endorsement	4.06	3	1.49	0.22	1.45	3	0.60	0.62	4.95	3	2.096	0.10*
Vote intention#Endorsement	89.87	3	32.90	0.00***	69.21	3	28.47	0.00***	46.65	3	19.739	0.00***
Residual	669.17	735			572.89	707			589.30	748		
Controls	Yes				Yes				Yes			
Number of obs.	751				723				764			
Adj. R-Squared	0.12				0.14				0.15			

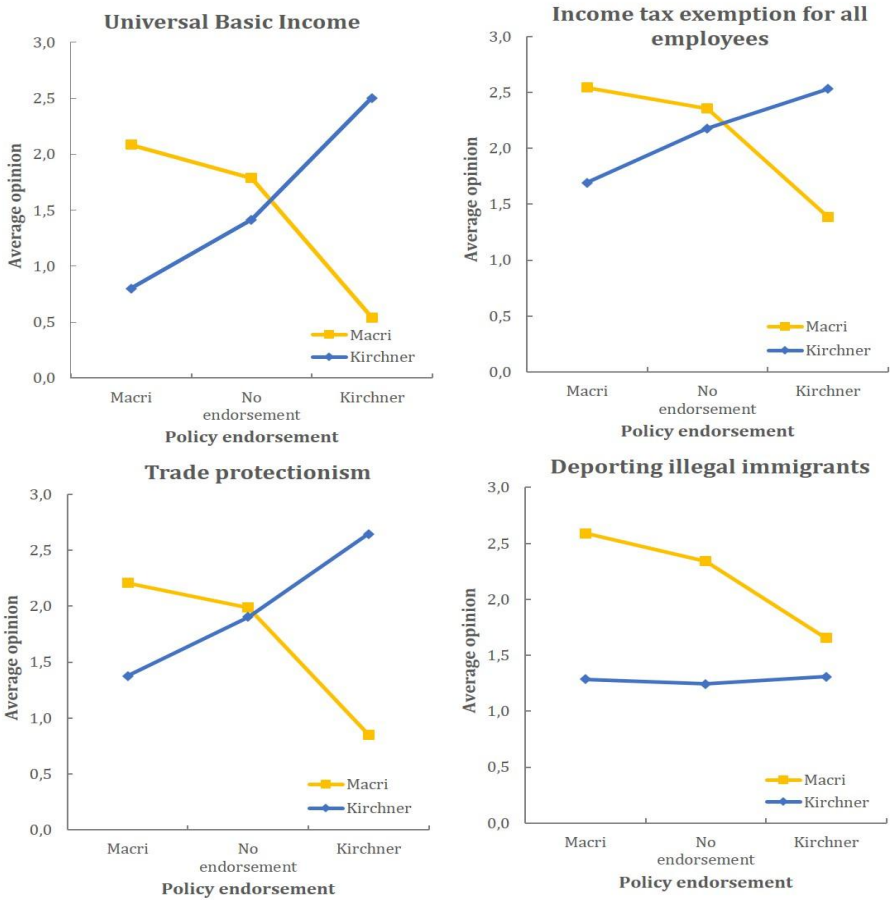
VARIABLE	Income tax exemption for all workers				ARS 3000 Universal Minimum RP				ARS 6000 Universal Minimum RP			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Partial SS	df	F	P-value	Partial SS	df	F	P-value	Partial SS	df	F	P-value
Model	52.60	13	5.90	0.00***	85.89	13	7.13	0.00***	74.94	13	7.65	0.00***
Vote intention	0.18	1	0.26	0.99	0.00	1	0.00	0.99	8.20	1	10.88	0.00***
Endorsement	7.40	2	5.40	0.11	4.14	2	2.23	0.11	2.52	2	1.67	0.19
Vote intention#Endorsement	38.57	2	28.13	0.00***	63.88	2	34.44	0.00***	33.39	2	22.14	0.00***
Residual	413.34	603			426.53	460			291.03	386		
Controls	Yes				Yes				Yes			
Number of obs.	617				474				400			
Adj. R-Squared	0.09				0.14				0.18			

Note: ANOVA results. Dependent variables: opinion regarding policies (0 to 3 scale, where 0=Highly disagree, 3=Highly agree). Covariates (gender, age, education, occupation) included as controls. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

4.2 In- (out-) leader endorsement strengthens (weakens) the support for a particular policy.

We replicate the experiment replacing parties by their leaders, and report the results in table 2. The endorsement effect remains significant for all 4 policies tested: it is not the affiliation to the parties (which, as noted, are relatively new and broad in their ideological scope) that drives the results, but rather the affinity with the leaders. This, a priori, cast doubt on explanations that rely more on ideological aspects of the influence. Figures 3a and b illustrate the results.

Figure 3a. Average policy approval by voting intention and leader endorsement



Note: The variable "Opinion" equals 3 when the subject is highly in favor of a policy and 0 when she is highly against a policy.

Figure 3b. Level of policy approval by voting intention and leader endorsement

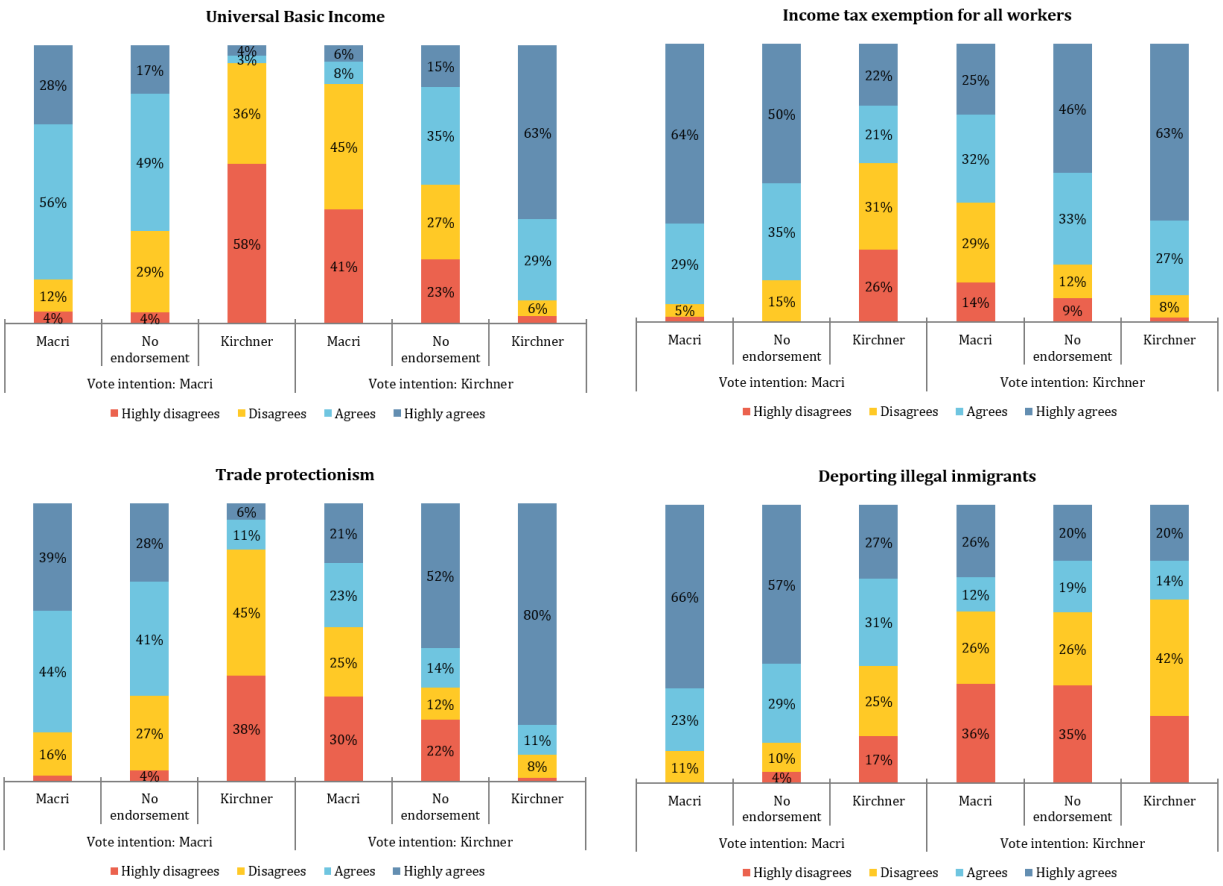


Table 2. ANOVA - Effect of leader endorsement on attitude towards policies

VARIABLE	Universal Basic Income				Tax exemption for all workers			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Partial SS	df	F	P-value	Partial SS	df	F	P-value
Model	221.86	13	26.60	0.00***	90.86	13	9.19	0.00***
Vote intention	1.02	1	1.59	0.21	0.16	1	0.21	0.65
Leader endorsement	1.78	2	1.39	0.25	7.05	2	4.63	0.01***
Vote intention#Endorsement	196.74	2	153.32	0.00***	74.30	2	48.84	0.00***
Residual	277.81	433			352.89	464		
Controls	Yes				Yes			
Number of obs.	447				478			
Adj. R-Squared	0.43				0.18			

VARIABLE	Trade Protectionism				Deporting illegal immigrants			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Partial SS	df	F	P-value	Partial SS	df	F	P-value
Model	185.977	13	17.49	0.00***	167.29	13	13.570	0.00***
Vote intention	8.973	1	10.97	0.00***	86.77	1	91.480	0.00***
Endorsement	3.264	2	2.00	0.14	14.92	2	7.870	0.00***
Vote intention#Endorsement	135.836	2	83.04	0.00***	17.30	2	9.120	0.00***
Residual	368.874	451			431.57	455		
Controls	Yes				Yes			
Number of obs.	465				469			
Adj. R-Squared	0.32				0.26			

Note: ANOVA results. Dependent variables: opinion regarding policies (0 to 3 scale, where 0=Highly disagree, 3=Highly agree). Covariates (gender, age, education, occupation) included as controls. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

4.3 Parties/leaders differ in their polarizing influence

Having determined that both parties´ and leaders´ endorsements significantly influence policy support, both by positive and negative identification, we test whether this influence is symmetrical across leaders. More specifically, we test the extent to which the influence depends on the leader (are some leaders more polarizing?), or the relationship with the voter (is the positive influence on own voters stronger, weaker or equal to the negative

influence of the other party´s voters?). This comparison is relevant both to understand the party´s cohesion (are voters brought together by affinity or against a common adversary?) and to approach the critical question of coalitions (can co-sponsorship build up a constituency by adding up support from diverse quarters?).

Tests 1 and 2 of tables 3a and 3b presents our results. As can be seen, in 3 out of 4 cases Kirchner´s negative influence on Macri´s voters significantly exceeds Macri´s own positive impact on his voters. Meanwhile, Kirchner's influence in her own voters also appears to be larger than Macri's, although we find evidence that this is significantly so in only one of the analyzed policies. In none of the policies Macri's influence is significantly larger than Kirchner's for any group of voters. As a result, in 3 out of 4 cases the political divide widens significantly more under Kirchner´s sponsorship.

We also find that Kirchner's polarizing nature is translated, to some degree, to her party. FPV is significantly more influential on Macri's voters than Cambiemos in 4 out of 6 policies, while also being significantly more influential on Kirchner's voters in one of the policies. Meanwhile, the effect of Cambiemos' endorsement on average policy proposal is never larger than FPV's. In 2 out of the 6 policies, the political divide widens significantly more under FPV's sponsorship.

Overall, both experiments indicate that Kirchner – and the party associated to this leader – exerts a significantly stronger influence on policy approval than Macri. This finding supports the hypothesis that certain leaders have larger polarizing effects on opinion than others, instead of suggesting that out-party endorsement is always more influential than in-party endorsement (our alternative hypothesis). In the context of present-day Argentina,

this phenomenon could be linked to Cambiemos' emergence as a coalition party that agglomerates those in opposition to the prior governing party, FPV.

4.3 Negative identification is stronger than positive identification

Does the endorsement effect work through positive identification with my own party or leader, or through negative identification against the opposing party or leader? We compare the additional support and disapproval associated with an individual party/leader endorsement. Is the leader´s positive influence on his own constituency significantly stronger or weaker than the negative influence on the opposing constituency? This comparison is relevant to assess the net effect of endorsements (do we gain more than we lose by explicitly sponsoring a policy?).

Tests 5a and 5b in table 3a and b report our results. We find that –in the case of Kirchner's endorsement – the negative effect on the average opinion of detractors (Macri voters) is significantly stronger than the positive effect on supporters (Kirchner voters) for 3 out of the 4 policies. Meanwhile, the positive effect of Macri's endorsement on his supporters is not significantly different in size from its negative effect on his detractors. Analyzing party endorsement, we find 3 cases (two related to FPV's endorsement, one to Cambiemos') in which negative identification is significantly stronger than positive identification, while there is no evidence that the opposite is ever true. While our findings are mostly influenced by Kirchner's negative influence in Macri's constituency, overall the strength of negative identification appears to be always larger or equal in size to that of positive identification.

Table 3a. Asymmetric polarization - Parties

POLICIES	(1) Universal Basic Income	(2) Universal MRP	(3) Trade Protectionism	(4) Tax exemption	(5) ARS 3000 Minimum RP	(6) ARS 6000 Minimum RP
1: Kirchner voter, no endorsement (KNE)	2.061***	2.386***	1.938***	2.283***	1.503***	1.940***
	(0.156)	(0.152)	(0.159)	(0.108)	(0.181)	(0.185)
2: Macri voter, no endorsement (MNE)	1.824***	1.822***	2.065***	2.352***	1.517***	1.812***
	(0.146)	(0.146)	(0.151)	(0.108)	(0.171)	(0.157)
3: Kirchner voter, FPV endorsement (KFPV)	2.521***	2.550***	2.664***	2.474***	2.092***	2.263***
	(0.150)	(0.149)	(0.159)	(0.137)	(0.182)	(0.166)
4: Macri voter, FPV endorsement (MFPV)	1.140***	1.283***	1.404***	1.629***	1.154***	1.151***
	(0.143)	(0.142)	(0.147)	(0.136)	(0.160)	(0.157)
5: Macri voter, Cambiemos endorsement (MC)	2.030***	2.038***	2.280***	2.479***	1.850***	2.028***
	(0.139)	(0.140)	(0.147)	(0.121)	(0.167)	(0.171)
6: Kirchner voter, Cambiemos endorsement (KC)	1.711***	1.934***	1.714***	1.817***	0.923***	1.706***
	(0.159)	(0.159)	(0.160)	(0.135)	(0.195)	(0.189)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	562	592	585	617	474	400
R-squared	0.809	0.826	0.809	0.868	0.751	0.835
Test 1: Differential impact of party endorsement on Macri voters						
(MNE-MFPV)-(MC-MNE)	0.478**	0.323	0.446**	0.596**	0.03	0.445*
P-value, H0: MNE - MFPV = MC - MNE	0.0243	0.124	0.044	0.0011	0.9022	0.0652
Test 2: Differential impact of party endorsement on Kirchner voters						
(KFPV-KNE)-(KNE-KC)	0.110	-0.288	0.502**	-0.275	0.009	0.089
P-value, H0: KFPV - KNE = KNE - KC	0.656	0.229	0.046	0.175	0.975	0.7654
Test 3: Differential change in polarization due to party endorsement						
(KFPV-MFPV) - (KNE - MNE) - [(MC-KC) - (MNE-KNE)]	0.588*	0.035	0.948**	0.321	0.039	0.534
P-value, H0: (KFPV-MFPV) - (KNE - MNE) = (MC-KC) - (MNE-KNE)	0.070	0.909	0.005	0.239	0.9192	0.1637
Test 4: Ex-ante polarization						
MNE - KNE	-0.237*	-0.564***	0.127	0.069	0.014	-0.128
P-value, H0: MNE - KNE = 0	0.078	0.000	0.355	0.454	0.929	0.406
Test 5a: Party endorsement effect on supporters and detractors - Cambiemos						
(MM-MNE)-(KNE-KM)	-0.144	-0.236	-0.009	-0.339**	-0.247	-0.018
P-value, H0: MM-MNE= KNE-KM	0.441	0.202	0.957	0.037	0.279	0.941
Test 5b: Party endorsement effect on supporters and detractors – FPV						
(KK-KNE)-(MNE-MK)	-0.224	-0.375**	0.065	-0.532**	0.226	-0.338
P-value, H0: MM-MNE= KNE-KM	0.230	0.040	0.736	0.003	0.3013	0.1028

Note: The 6 first lines of the table feature the average opinion on a given policy for a subgroup of the sample. Each subgroup contains all subjects that had the same voting intention (Macri or Kirchner) and received the same treatment (No endorsement, Cambiemos endorsement or FPV endorsement). Control variables included: Sex, age, education, employment status. Based on the coefficients presented in the upper section, the lower section of the table features tests of our main hypotheses. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 3b. Asymmetric polarization - Leaders

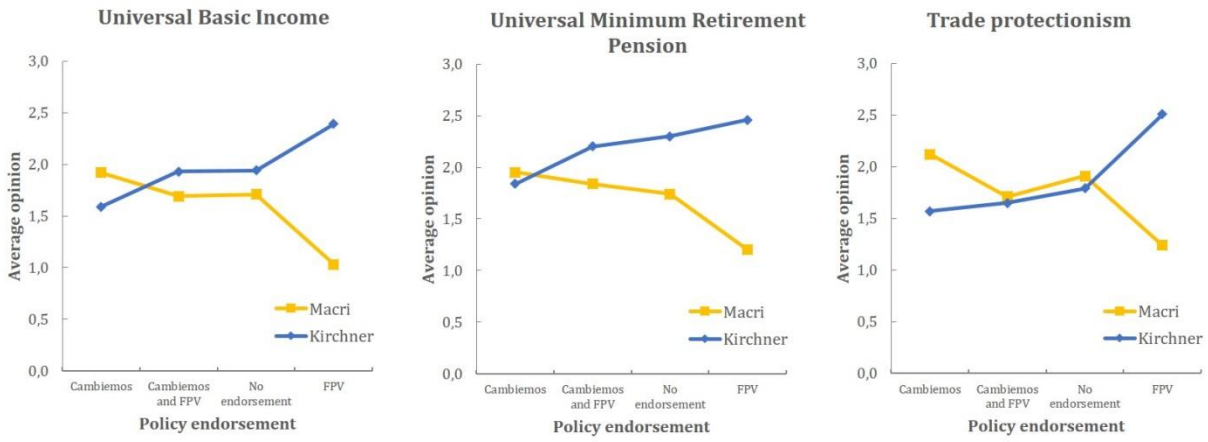
POLICIES	(1) Universal Basic Income	(2) Trade Protectionism	(3) Income Tax Exemption for workers	(4) Deporting illegal immigrants
1: Kirchner voter, no endorsement (KNE)	1.551***	1.827***	2.161***	1.472***
	(0.157)	(0.170)	(0.165)	(0.185)
2: Macri voter, no endorsement (MNE)	1.925***	1.912***	2.340***	2.570***
	(0.142)	(0.158)	(0.150)	(0.167)
3: Kirchner voter, Kirchner endorsement (KK)	2.640***	2.569***	2.516***	1.536***
	(0.159)	(0.174)	(0.175)	(0.209)
4: Macri voter, Kirchner endorsement (MK)	0.677***	0.775***	1.372***	1.883***
	(0.154)	(0.169)	(0.157)	(0.173)
5: Macri voter, Macri endorsement (MM)	2.221***	2.133***	2.526***	2.818***
	(0.141)	(0.156)	(0.159)	(0.177)
6: Kirchner voter, Macri endorsement (KM)	0.935***	1.301***	1.676***	1.514***
	(0.172)	(0.187)	(0.173)	(0.186)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	447	465	478	469
R-squared	0.826	0.827	0.867	0.799
Test 1: Differential impact of leader endorsement on Macri voters				
(MNE-MK)-(MM-MNE)	0.952***	0.916***	0.782***	0.439
P-value, H0: MNE-MK = MM-MNE	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.102
Test 2: Differential impact of leader endorsement on Kirchner voters				
(KK-KNE)-(KNE-KM)	0.473**	0.216	-0.130	0.106
P-value, H0: KK - KNE = KNE - KM	0.050	0.415	0.604	0.711
Test 3: Differential change in polarization due to leader endorsement				
(KK-MK) - (KNE - MNE) - [(MM-KM)-(MNE-KNE)]	1.425***	1.132**	0.652*	0.545
P-value, H0: (KK-MK) - (KNE - MNE) = (MM-KM)-(MNE-KNE)	0.000	0.002	0.057	0.166
Test 4: Ex-ante polarization				
MNE - KNE	0.374**	0.085	0.179	1.098***
P-value, H0: MNE - CNE = 0	0.006	0.571	0.196	0.000
Test 5a: Leader endorsement effect on supporters and detractors - Macri				
(MM-MNE)-(KNE-KM)	-0.320*	-0.305	-0.299	0.290
P-value, H0: MM-MNE= KNE-KM	0.097	0.150	0.126	0.183
Test 5b: Leader endorsement effect on supporters and detractors – Kirchner	-0.159	-0.395*	-0.613**	-0.623**
(KK-KNE)-(MNE-MK)	0.392	0.056	0.003	0.009
P-value, H0: MM-MNE= KNE-KM				

Note: The upper section of the table features the conditional average opinion on a given policy for a subgroup of the sample. Each subgroup contains all subjects that had the same voting intention (Macri or Kirchner) and received the same treatment (No endorsement, Macri endorsement or Kirchner endorsement). Control variables included: Sex, age, education, employment status. Based on the coefficients presented in the upper section, the lower section of the table features tests of our main hypotheses.
Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

4.4 Cross-party endorsements cancel each other

We use our Universal Basic Income, Minimum Retirement Pension and Trade Protectionism questions to evaluate the role of cross-partisan endorsement in shaping attitude toward policies. Our results differ from those of Bolsen et al. (2014), which states that "[bipartisan endorsement's] effect on opinion does not decrease the likelihood of partisan motivated reasoning; rather, its effect on opinions is in line with that of a same party endorsement". On the contrary, as Figure 4a and b illustrate, and table 4 shows in a more rigorous way, we find no significant differences in average opinion when comparing the no endorsement treatment with the bipartisan endorsement treatment for both groups of voters.

Figure 4. Bipartisan endorsement



Note: The variable "Opinion" equals 3 when the subject is highly in favor of a policy and 0 when she is highly against a policy.

Table 4. Bipartisan endorsement

VARIABLES	(1) Respondent vote intention	(2) N	(3) Avg. opinion Cambiemos and FPV endorsement	(4) Avg. opinion No endorsement	(5) Difference
Universal Basic Income	Macri	218	1.770	1.789	-0.019
			(0.141)	(0.139)	
	CFK	168	2.019	2.015	0.004
			(0.149)	(0.152)	
Universal Minimum Retirement Pension	Macri	218	1.868	1.769	0.099
			(0.135)	(0.134)	
	CFK	168	2.228	2.326	-0.098
			(0.145)	(0.140)	
Trade protectionism	Macri	218	1.819	2.012	-0.193
			(0.144)	(0.143)	
	CFK	168	1.753	1.895	-0.142
			(0.156)	(0.152)	

Note: Opinion regarding a given policy is expressed on a scale of 0 to 3, where 0=Highly Disagree and 3=Highly Agree. The sample is divided between Macri voters and CFK voters (Column 2). For each policy in Column 1, the last column of this table provides p-values for the difference of average opinion across two types of policy endorsement (Cambiemos and FPV, unspecified). Covariates (gender, age, education, occupation) included as controls.
Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

4.5 Against-character endorsement de-polarizes, but does not raise average policy approval

Test 4 in tables 3a and 3b shows that the majority of the policies we analyzed did not feature a significant degree of ex-ante polarization, understood as the difference in opinion between the group of voters **before party or leader endorsement is specified**. In these cases, we find that the effect of endorsement on opinion is strong enough to introduce polarization on ex ante unpolarized issues. A related question, which we assess in this section, is whether leader or party endorsement can succeed at depolarizing policy

approval in the cases were ex-ante polarization exists. Test 4 in tables 3a and 3b shows that, among our set of policies, establishing a Universal Minimum Retirement Pension and deporting all illegal immigrants are the ones that generate the largest degree of polarization across Kirchner and Macri voters **before party or leader endorsement is specified**. Across our samples, only these policies show a difference in average opinion (using our 0-3 scale) larger than 0.5 across both groups of voters. This signals a comparatively large degree of ex ante polarization, with Kirchner´s voters favoring the establishment of a Universal Minimum Retirement Pension significantly more than Macri´s, and Macri´s voters favoring the deportation of illegal immigrants significantly more than Kirchner´s. Partisan positions regarding these policies therefore make it a convenient locus to analyze the impact of against-character endorsement.

Our test strongly supports the importance of against-character endorsement in bridging opinion gaps when prior polarization exists. In the case of the establishment of a Universal Minimum Retirement Pension, against-character endorsement is represented by Cambiemos. As shown in Table 5, while the opinion gap between Macri and Kirchner voters increases when the policy is endorsed by FPV, we find that the Cambiemos endorsement closes the gap between the average opinion of Macri and Kirchner voters to the point that this difference disappears, generating across-group opinion averages that are not statistically different. Meanwhile, a similar result is obtained when analyzing the proposal to deport all illegal immigrants. In this case, claiming the policy is supported by Cristina Kirchner – who in this case is the source of against-character endorsement – does not completely eradicate the gap in policy support among Kirchner and Macri voters. However, it reduces the difference in average opinions from 1.1 to 0.3.

Despite bridging opinion gaps, we find that against-character endorsement does not increase average approval regarding these policies. In the case of the Universal Minimum Retirement Pension, average policy approval slightly declines from 1.96 (no endorsement) to 1.94 (Cambiemos endorsement). The decrease in support is even more significant with regard to the deportation of illegal immigrants: the against-character endorsement of Cristina Kirchner makes average opinion fall from 2.01 to 1.87. Overall, because when a leader endorses "against character", the followers that it persuades due to positive identification are outweighed by the opponents it dissuades due to negative identification.

Table 5. Ex-ante polarization and against-character policy endorsement

POLICY & ENDORSEMENT	(1) N	(2) Avg. Opinion Macri voter	(3) Avg. Opinion Kirchner voter	(4) Difference
Universal Minimum Retirement Pension				
Cambiemos	197	2.038	1.934	0.104
		(0.090)	(0.096)	
No endorsement	172	1.822	2.386	-0.564***
		(0.089)	(0.089)	
Frente para la Victoria	202	1.283	2.550	-1.267***
		(0.087)	(0.077)	
Deporting illegal immigrants				
Mauricio Macri	179	2.818	1.514	1.304***
		(0.067)	(0.141)	
No endorsement	157	2.570	1.472	1.098***
		(0.095)	(0.127)	
Cristina Kirchner	133	1.883	1.536	0.347**
		(0.115)	(0.149)	

Note: Opinion regarding a given policy is expressed on a scale of 0 to 3, where 0=Highly Disagree and 3=Highly Agree. For each type of policy endorsement in Column 1, the last column of this table provides p-values for the difference of average opinion across voting intention (Macri and Kirchner). Covariates (gender, age, education, occupation) included as controls.
Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

5. Discussion

We showed that political endorsement affects policy support. While previous works have assessed these effects using party labels in bipartisan party environments, we extend the analysis in two different directions. On the one hand, we focused on both leaders and parties. We conducted survey experiments (between 2016 and 2017, N = 2,716) in the main district of a federal developing country with a weak personalistic party system in transition. On the other hand, we refined the findings by singling out specific characteristics of the endorsement effect.

We explored the role of policy endorsement in shaping public opinion; the asymmetry in the influence of different parties and leaders, and the relative strength of in/out party/leader endorsement; the effect of co-sponsorship, and the relationship between "against-character" endorsement on voters' positions on ex-ante polarized issues.

Our findings confirm the existence of a prevalent endorsement influence (voters increase support when policies are sponsored by their party/leader, and decrease it when they are sponsored by the opposing party/leader), regardless of the degree of ex ante polarization. As a result, sponsorship may introduce polarization on ex ante unpolarized issues. We find evidence indicating that certain leaders have larger polarizing effects on opinion than others. Moreover, our results indicate that the endorsement effect works primarily through negative identification against an opposing party or leader, rather than through a leader´s positive influence on his own constituency.

Unlike previous findings of the theory, we find no effect of co-sponsorship in eliciting additional support toward a policy (relative to no endorsement). Lastly, for ex ante

polarizing issues, against-character support (when a leader sponsors a policy that public opinion does not generally associate to his/her agenda) does help bridge differences in opinion across groups of voters, by winning over its own voters but alienating the other party´s, without significant gains in overall support.

These findings have relevant normative implications, since they help understand the limits to the formation of coalitions for policy support in a context of increasing polarization (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). The relevance of our findings is accentuated by the fact that they apply to a developing country with a weaker political system, driven by strong leaderships.

For all these reasons it is particularly important to analyze the conditions in which citizens would be willing to support these policies. What is the most adequate to "sell" an issue to the public (alternatively, who is more likely to implement a reform successfully)? From a normative point of view, the findings of our paper are discouraging: coalitions or leaders do not seem to significantly improve policy support.

Appendix: Individual characteristics and image of the leader

One of the advantages of using a telephone survey to recollect our data is that it guarantees a larger degree of heterogeneity in our sample. Thus, it allows us to test if the statistical impact of partisan policy endorsement on opinion is uniform across individuals of different age, gender, level of education or occupation. This appears to be largely the case. Conducting an analysis of variance (ANOVA), we do not find that differences in any of these covariates can explain differences in the impact of policy endorsement on opinion once we control for individual political affiliation. This result is particularly relevant with regard to education, since this variable could be used as a proxy of individual sophistication. Assuming individuals with a better understating of policies are also those with a higher education level, then one could have expected their opinion on policies to be less shaped by partisan policy endorsement. This is not the case, suggesting individuals' tendency to evaluate information through a partisan lens is not related to their sophistication or understanding of the policy. This is consistent with the fact that "experts" those whose knowledge on politics is above the average has also more tools to justify their own position (Lau and Redlawsk2006).

Another way of testing the robustness of our findings is changing the variable we use to measure participants' political affiliation. Instead of considering their vote intention in presidential elections, we use the image participants have of Mauricio Macri and Cristina Kirchner as a proxy of political affiliation. In this specification, those participants that claim to have a very positive or positive image of Mauricio Macri are considered to be supporters

of Macri. Meanwhile, those who have a negative or very negative image of Mauricio Macri can be considered to stand at the other end of the political spectrum, supporting Cristina Kirchner. The reverse is true if we use the image of Cristina Kirchner as an independent variable. Changing the way in which we measure political affiliation does not change our findings, with those with a very positive or positive image of Mauricio Macri reacting positively to a Cambiemos-endorsed policy, and those with a negative or very negative image of Mauricio Macri reacting relatively more positively to a FPV-endorsed proposal[12].

[12] ANOVA tables available on request.

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