

Employment Insecurity, Incumbent Partisanship, and Voting Behavior in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

We argue that occupational unemployment rates, by informing perceptions of economic insecurity, serve as a salient and powerful heuristic for aggregate economic performance. Consequently, high and rising occupational unemployment leads to negative evaluations of the economy and reduces the probability of supporting the incumbent government. Simultaneously, however, such changes shift support toward left-wing parties. Thus, economic insecurity serves as a valence issue, but is also inherently a positional issue, due to the distributional consequences of welfare policies. This brings about a potential conflict as under left-wing incumbent governments the economically insecure are cross-pressured, which increases their likelihood of exiting the electoral arena completely. We test our hypotheses using a Bayesian hierarchical multinomial model, with individual-level data from 43 elections in 21 countries. We find support for the hypothesized effects of employment insecurity on voting behavior, with a follow-up analysis supporting the posited informational mechanism.

Keywords

elections, public opinion, and voting behavior, European politics, political economy

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The Great Recession ended in June 2009, at least on average. While the recovery has been rapid and robust at the top of the income distribution, the middle and lower classes continue to struggle and fall further behind (Saez, 2013). These developments are not without consequences: Individuals in middle- and low-income households are more worried about their future financial situation, are less likely to be receiving good economic news, and are more likely to support welfare policies that buffer the risk of economic shocks (Hacker, Rehm, & Schlesinger, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2014). Even though the Great Recession may have formally ended, many individuals, thus, continue to feel its effects.

Mainstream approaches to economic voting would have it that these differences in economic experiences are inconsequential for how voters evaluate the performance of the incumbent government. Voters are assumed to be informed by sociotropic, rather than egocentric, evaluations of the economy, suggesting that the state of the aggregate economy matters more for the voting calculus of individuals than the state of their household finances (Kiewiet, 1983). While perceptions of the economy may differ systematically across individuals, based on factors such as partisanship and political sophistication (Stevenson & Duch, 2013), the divergent economic experiences of individuals at the top and bottom of the income distribution should not affect evaluations of the incumbent government. Moreover, any effect that such differences might have on support for welfare policies that buffer the risk of economic shocks is assumed to be immaterial to the evaluation of the incumbent.

In this article, we argue that such broad differences in economic experiences do matter a great deal for how individuals evaluate the performance of the incumbent government. Although we are not the first to make this argument (see, in particular, Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011; Palmer & Whitten, 2011; Singer, 2011), we go beyond previous work in important aspects. Echoing Hacker et al.'s (2013) sentiment, we argue that mainstream approaches have relied on poorly conceptualized measures of people's economic experiences, overlooking in particular the role of powerful group-based heuristics in shaping perceptions of the aggregate economy and, as such, have not provided a full test of their effects on voting behavior. We employ such a measure, building on recent work on the effects of economic insecurity on policy preferences (Rehm, 2009) and well-being (De Witte, 2005), as well as recent work on the effects of "local," or group-based, information environments on economic voting, which highlight the importance of heuristics, based on "similar others," on perceptions of economic insecurity and the aggregate economy (Ansolabehere, Meredith, & Snowberg, 2014). In the simplest sense, we maintain that people experience different economies

and that such experiences, by shaping the salient available information about the economy, matter for their voting behavior.

We argue that the most important type of group-based information environment, at least in terms of economic perceptions and judgments, is an individual's occupation. Occupational unemployment rates (OURs) provide a salient cognitive heuristic, which strongly determine people's subjective employment insecurity, thus informing perceptions of the state of the aggregate economy and the potential for personal unemployment. Consequently, high and rising occupational unemployment leads to negative evaluations of economic performance and reduces the probability of supporting the incumbent government, regardless of the actual state of the overall economy. As such, employment insecurity is a valence issue, as voters prefer competent parties able to address the issue of unemployment, and thus reduces the probability of supporting the incumbent government (Mughan & Lacy, 2002). At the same time, however, high and rising occupational unemployment shifts support toward left-wing parties, the traditional champions of welfare policies that buffer the risk of economic shocks. As such, employment insecurity is a partisan issue, due to the distributional consequences of welfare policies (Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011; Wright, 2012).

In short, employment insecurity is an issue that combines aspects of the performance-based, government accountability logic of economic voting (e.g., Duch & Stevenson, 2008), with the issue-based, positional logic of voting for a party based on policy preferences (e.g., Wright, 2012). This dual electoral nature of employment insecurity brings about a potential conflict. Namely, under a left-wing incumbent government, economically insecure individuals are cross-pressured: Higher employment insecurity pushes them to punish the incumbent, while it pushes them to support left-wing parties, which are one and the same in this scenario. Accordingly, we argue that high and rising occupational unemployment increases the probability of electorally supporting the opposition and that this effect will be largest for right-wing incumbents as insecure individuals will, in a sense, have both a valence and a positional reason to vote against right-wing incumbents.

At the same time, employment insecurity should affect the more fundamental decision of abstaining from voting, especially under left-wing incumbents, as a poorly performing left-wing government will leave insecure individuals ambivalent and alienated from the political process. Consequently, occupationally insecure individuals will be more likely to abstain, and if they do not abstain, more likely to vote for the opposition, with the effects being magnified by a left-wing incumbent government and a right-wing incumbent government, respectively. Our argument, thus, also contributes to the growing work on the demobilizing effect of economic

insecurity (Brooks, 2014), as well as the role of abstention in economic voting (Tillman, 2007; Weschle, 2014).

We test our hypotheses using a Bayesian hierarchical multinomial modeling approach, with individual-level data from 43 elections in 21 European democracies from 1996 to 2013. We find robust support for our theory, in particular the hypotheses that high occupational unemployment increasing the probability of abstaining and rising occupational unemployment increases the probability of voting for the opposition. Moreover, we find that left-wing incumbent partisanship attenuates the effect of high occupational unemployment on opposition support, while right-wing incumbent partisanship attenuates the effect of high occupational unemployment on the probability of abstention, as we hypothesize. In a follow-up to the main analysis, we test the mechanism connecting OURs with concerns about employment insecurity and perceptions about national unemployment rates. We find that high OURs are associated with high subjective employment insecurity and a systematic overestimation of aggregate unemployment, as predicted by our theory.

Our findings demonstrate the importance of using better conceptualized measures of salient economic experiences, such as group-based heuristics, to properly evaluate the effects of the economy on voting behavior. We argue that an individual's occupation forms such a group-based information environment and show that OURs affect perceptions of both employment insecurity and the aggregate economy. In an uncertain world, where economic experiences diverge, people's local environments provide the salient information that shapes their impressions and preferences, and few local economic environments are as important as one's workplace and occupational network (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014). We also emphasize the need to move beyond the traditional assumptions of previous work on economic voting. This vibrant and rich literature has mostly neglected the essential insight that economic issues are often inherently partisan, which can have important implications for the effects of the economy on voting behavior. This multidimensional nature of much economic change, whereby a signal about the economic competence of the incumbent government is produced at the same time that voters shift their issue position in reaction to new economic circumstances, is exemplified by the fundamental issue of employment insecurity.

Literature Review

Our argument integrates and extends the literatures on economic voting and the effects of economic insecurity on policy preferences and political participation, which all too often fail to speak to each other, despite their obvious connection.¹ We build on three important insights from these literatures: that

voters use group-based heuristics to form evaluations of the performance of the economy, that concerns about unemployment are an especially salient consideration in evaluations of the economy, and that employment insecurity not only affects economic evaluations, but also support for welfare policies that buffer the risk of economic shocks. Our primary theoretical contribution to the literature involves synthesizing the implication of these arguments to better understand the effects of the economy on voting behavior. Below, we discuss how our argument relates to the extant literature.

The Basis of Economic Evaluations

In mainstream accounts of economic voting, individuals are assumed to be motivated by sociotropic, rather than egocentric (“pocketbook”), evaluations of economic performance. In other words, the state of the aggregate economy is assumed to matter more for the voting calculus of individuals than the state of their household finances (Evans & Andersen, 2006; Kiewiet, 1983). The dominant theoretical justification for this assumption centers on the appropriateness of each as a basis for evaluating the performance of the incumbent: Voters are assumed to hold the government responsible for the state of the overall economy, but attribute responsibility for household finances to more localized factors and, as such, the latter should not inform their judgments of government performance (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981).

Collectively, individuals are fairly good at sensing the very broad objective state of the economy (Erikson, MacKuen, & Stimson, 2000). Individually, however, perceptions of economic performance often differ radically, even though people are nominally exposed to the same aggregate economy (Duch, Palmer, & Anderson, 2000). This is perhaps unsurprising: Individuals have limited incentives to acquire detailed information about the performance of political candidates (Downs, 1957) and, as such, can be expected to act as “cognitive misers” (Fiske & Taylor, 2013), relying on heuristics when evaluating the performance of the incumbent government. Any systematic differences across individuals in the informational heuristics they use to make sense of the economy will affect observed differences in economic perceptions, explaining how perceptions can vary within the same economy (Stevenson & Duch, 2013).

The sources of such heuristics are often attributed to cognitive or motivational factors, rather than people’s own economic environment.² An alternative perspective, however, emphasizes the role played by local economic environments, which people interact with more directly than the aggregate economy. Books and Prysby (1999), for example, demonstrate how the fear of unemployment is shaped more by direct, personal experiences with

unemployment than by national or state unemployment levels, while Newman, Velez, Hartman, and Bankert (2015) show that the local economic context can have a strong impact on perceptions of the overall performance of the economy.

Related to this work is the argument that group-based heuristics provide an important source of economic evaluations, distinct from both egocentric and sociotropic considerations (Brady & Sniderman, 1985; Merola & Helgason, 2016), and can independently affect voting behavior (Mutz & Mondak, 1997). More recently, Ansolabehere et al. (2014) develop this account by emphasizing the importance of information gained from the “meco-economy,” a level somewhere between the aggregate and household economy, composed of “similar others,” on dimensions such as location, race, education, and gender. Importantly, the authors show how negative meco-economic conditions lead to negative evaluations of the aggregate economy and, in turn, less support for the incumbent, regardless of the actual performance of the economy.³

While the suggestion that individuals use group-based heuristics to make sense of political issues is well taken, we believe greater attention should be given to understanding the specific groups that form the basis for such heuristics. Conover (1985), providing a rare example, finds that, in general, a majority of individuals identify, first and foremost, with their economic group. Once we narrow the issue under consideration to economic performance, it seems even more pertinent to consider groups related to an individual’s economic position, rather than demographic characteristics, such as age and gender, as the basis for group-based heuristics. Occupation may form such a critical group-based information environment as it occupies a central role in people’s social network and has been shown to strongly affect people’s political preferences, social values, and personality (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014).

The Political Relevance of Employment Insecurity and Unemployment

The state of the economy can be evaluated based on a number of dimensions. In poor economic conditions, stagnant growth, high inflation, and high unemployment each play a prominent role in the media, but the detrimental effects of high unemployment is the factor with which people most easily relate to on a personal level, not least because it is often directly experienced by friends, family members, and neighbors (Conover, Feldman, & Knight, 1986). These factors contribute to making employment insecurity, that is, the concern over becoming unemployed, an especially salient consideration in

evaluations of the economy and, by extension, the performance of the incumbent government (Kiewiet & Udell, 1998).

Not only have concerns over unemployment been theorized to affect support for the incumbent, but also the more fundamental decision of whether to turn out to vote in the first place. Whereas some consider economic hardship a force for mobilization, based on the idea that economic difficulties push people to participate in the political realm to voice their grievances (Burden & Wichowsky, 2014), others view it as an impetus for political withdrawal, as economic hardships foster a preoccupation with personal problems that reduce the time and attention paid to the secondary concern of politics (Tillman, 2007). Most importantly, the specific hardship of economic insecurity has clearly been tied to greater electoral abstention (Brooks, 2014; Mughan & Lacy, 2002).

In each of these theories, both *changes* in and *levels* of employment insecurity may matter although for different reasons. On one hand, research on economic voting has tended to emphasize the importance of *changes* in economic conditions as a signal of incumbent competence (Duch & Stevenson, 2010). Whether an economy is improving or deteriorating can be expected to provide credible information about the government's ability to manage the economy. This view corresponds with recent behavioral research, which finds that people form judgments about social outcomes primarily by comparing situations against each other (Mussweiler, 2003). This implies that whether an individual experiences employment insecurity depends, to a large extent, on his or her reference point, with personal change from the recent past being a critical benchmark (De Witte, 2005).

On the contrary, the literature on employment insecurity often conceptualizes its effect in absolute terms, as *levels* of insecurity (e.g., Mughan & Lacy, 2002; Rehm, 2009). As such, insecurity is conceived of as a persistently negative outcome, which individuals might blame the incumbent government for not improving. However, such attributions of responsibility clearly provide a less direct signal about economic performance. After all, an individual might experience persistently high levels of employment insecurity, yet such a situation does not necessarily reflect on the ability of the current government to tackle the problem. This does not mean that people might still not blame the government for failing to reduce levels of insecurity, but it does make it less likely.

Whether the focus is on changes in or levels of insecurity, however, unemployment is conceptualized as a valence issue. That is to say, while the salience of unemployment may differ across individuals (Palmer & Whitten, 2011), for example, due to variation in employment insecurity (Singer, 2011), voters are assumed to have a common preference for low unemployment.

They are also assumed to have a desire to elect the political actor most likely to reduce unemployment, with changes in unemployment under the incumbent serving as a signal of his or her competence. Importantly, this conceptualization disregards the distributional conflict inherent to most policy issues and, in particular, the prospect of unemployment. Thus, concerns about unemployment are not assumed to have implications for policy or partisan preferences, above and beyond their effects on incumbent support or the decision to turn out to vote.

Positional and Partisan Aspects of Employment Insecurity and Unemployment

Just as unemployment can be framed in terms of a valence issue, it can also be framed as a positional issue, where voters have distinct preferences based on their ideology or economic interests (Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2011). Indeed, a growing literature on the determinants of redistributive preferences starkly demonstrates the importance of employment insecurity on policy preferences. Hacker et al. (2013), for example, show how insecure individuals are more concerned about their future financial position and more supportive of welfare policies that buffer the risk of economic shocks. Their work supports previous research, which suggests various factors that lead individuals to become more economically insecure and, in turn, more supportive of the welfare state (Rehm, 2009; Walter, 2010).

While such research is motivated both in terms of changes in and levels of insecurity, the latter is likely to play a stronger part in shaping policy preferences. After all, policy preferences—much like political ideology—are slow to change, generally exhibiting stability even under changing conditions (Sears & Funk, 1999). Thus, economic insecurity might have long-term effects on individual's social values and deeper policy preferences, as is the case with employment insecurity specifically (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014). Of course, economic perceptions are filtered through such longer term dispositions (Evans & Andersen, 2006), but there is a limit to the amount of information that might be altered through such a “perceptual screen” (Duch & Stevenson, 2010). As such, levels of employment insecurity should be more closely associated with policy preferences than changes in insecurity, given that the former are more likely to reflect long-term exposure to insecurity.

Whether one considers their historical roots (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967) or track record while in office (Hibbs, 1977), left-wing parties are generally considered the champions of the welfare state and should, thus, be particularly appealing to positional (or partisan) voters concerned about unemployment (Rehm, 2011; Wright, 2012). As such, support for left-wing parties should rise

with increasing concerns about unemployment, regardless of whether a left-wing incumbent government is in office or not (Swank, 1993).

As Powell and Whitten (1993) find, however, this tendency might make voters hold left-wing governments to a higher standard on employment performance than right-wing governments, meaning that left-wing incumbents who preside over rising unemployment will fare worse in elections than right-wing incumbents who see the same rise in unemployment. Such findings suggest that unemployment may be a partisan valence issue, whereby only left-wing incumbents are punished for high unemployment. Yet, Powell and Whitten's account disregards the positional effects of unemployment as voters in their perspective do not become more supportive of left-wing parties in the context of high unemployment. As we discuss below, we believe both positional and valence perspectives should be combined in the same framework. Thus, growing concerns about unemployment should increase support for left-wing parties and decrease support for the incumbent, implying that neither left-wing parties nor opposition parties will unequivocally benefit electorally from rising employment insecurity.

Such an account is consistent with recent cross-national evidence indicating that both right-wing and left-wing incumbents lose votes when presiding over growing unemployment (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2013). While this runs counter to older cross-national evidence finding that only left-wing incumbents are punished for higher unemployment (Powell & Whitten, 1993; Whitten & Palmer, 1999),⁴ it is likely that unemployment has gained greater importance across incumbent partisanship as partisan identities have weakened in recent decades among advanced industrial democracies (Kayser & Wlezien, 2011).⁵ As voters become more willing to punish their party whenever they oversee poor economic performance, even on indicators not traditionally associated with their party, unemployment becomes an important measure of economic governance even for right-wing incumbents.⁶

The Effects of Employment Insecurity on Voting Behavior

We base our theory on the preceding discussion. We assume that economic performance figures prominently in the electoral calculus of individuals and that employment insecurity forms an especially salient consideration in evaluations of the economy. In addition, we assume that individuals' vote choice is also shaped by their partisan, or policy, preferences, which are similarly shaped by economic conditions. Given the cognitive constraints faced by individuals, we assume they use informational shortcuts when forming opinions about the economy and that their occupation forms a relevant basis for

such heuristics. Thus, OURs will inform perceptions of the state of the aggregate economy, as well as the potential for personal unemployment.

Assuming that individuals attribute, at least partly, responsibility for their economic situation to the government, variation in employment insecurity will have implications for an individual's support of the incumbent government. Any employment insecurity attributed to the action or inaction of the government will reduce the probability of electorally supporting the incumbent and increase the probability of supporting the opposition. As such local economic perceptions form a critical group-based cue about the nature of the overall economy, it should affect incumbent support regardless of other economic indicators. That said, as changes in employment insecurity provide a better signal of the competence of the incumbent than levels of employment insecurity, changes should be more likely to affect incumbent support, compared with levels of insecurity.

Hypothesis 1: Rising and, to a lesser extent, high employment insecurity increases the probability of voting for the opposition.

While exposure to unemployment risk will push some individuals to prefer the opposition to the incumbent, it also has the potential to affect the more fundamental calculus of whether to vote at all for other individuals. In the present case, we argue that employment insecurity propels voters not only to choose to vote for the opposition, but also to exit the electoral arena altogether. As recent studies focusing on economic insecurity (Brooks, 2014) and employment insecurity (Mughan & Lacy, 2002) demonstrate, insecurity is associated with lower resources for electoral participation. People feel overwhelmed and stressed, and more willing to invest their spare time to directly insure against the possible loss of income in the future. Reducing the anxiety associated with insecurity becomes a greater concern and priority than staying informed and active in politics.

Although it is clear that employment insecurity should produce greater electoral abstention, we expect this effect to be stronger for high levels of employment insecurity than large increases in employment insecurity, as levels of insecurity reflect a long-term exposure to insecurity, while changes in insecurity are inherently short- to medium-term effects. Even though short-term exposure to greater employment insecurity can negatively affect mental and physical health, as well as general well-being, the long-term effects are at a different order of magnitude (Sverke, Hellgren, & Nswall, 2002). This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: High and, to a lesser extent, rising employment insecurity increases the probability of electoral abstention.

Thus, all else equal, we argue that employment insecurity increases the probability of voting for the opposition, as well as increasing the probability of abstaining. However, these effects are not unconditional. As mentioned previously, employment insecurity and the prospect of unemployment have a distinct positional effect on preference, in addition to the valence effects outlined above. Economically insecure individuals are more supportive of government redistribution through the provision of social insurance and, as such, one can expect them to be more supportive of parties that advocate for welfare policies that buffer the risk of economic shocks, regardless of the partisanship of the incumbent.

This brings about a potential conflict. Namely, under a left-wing incumbent government, individuals insecure about their employment are cross-pressured: greater employment insecurity pushes them to punish the incumbent, while it pushes them to support left-wing parties, who are one and the same in this scenario. In this case, these cross-pressures would attenuate the negative effects of insecurity on support for the incumbent. Conversely, the clearest case of reinforcing pressures is for individuals with large employment insecurity under right-wing governments. In a sense, they have both a valence and a positional reason to vote against the incumbent—thus, the effects of employment insecurity on opposition support should be larger under right-wing governments. We expect this conditional effect to be stronger under high levels of employment insecurity than under large increases of employment insecurity as the former is likely to produce a stronger partisan effect. This leads to the following contextual hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: The effects of employment insecurity on opposition support will be larger under right-wing incumbent governments, in particular for high employment insecurity.

What then of the occurrence of employment insecurity under a left-wing government? We argue that an “incompetent left” has a different effect on the behavior of insecure individuals than an “incompetent right.” While the latter enhances the support for the opposition, the former increases the likelihood that voters prefer abstention to voting for any of the suboptimal candidates. As individuals insecure about their employment are both unhappy with the incumbent and in need of a credible left-wing policy alternative to alleviate their insecurity, they are likely to feel alienated or indifferent toward the political system, two important drivers of political dissatisfaction (Smets & Van Ham, 2013; Weschle, 2014). On one hand, individuals might feel that the entire political system has failed to provide for them as even a left-wing incumbent government—the supposed champion of the poor and insecure—has failed to provide greater employment security. It is only logical for some

individuals to lose faith in the political system if the only politicians talking up their problems do not deliver on their promises (e.g., Brody & Page, 1973). Alternatively, people might simply believe that all candidates are too similar and not worth their time as apparently none of the political parties are able or willing to provide greater employment security. The result is dissatisfaction with the political system, which leads to growing rates of abstention, instead of the transfer of votes to the right-of-center opposition.⁷ As levels of employment insecurity are more likely to shift voters to the political left, such dissatisfaction should be strongest when faced with larger employment insecurity compared with faster growing employment insecurity.

Hypothesis 4: The effects of employment insecurity on electoral abstention will be larger under left-wing incumbent governments, in particular for high employment insecurity.

In sum, we expect rising (and, less so, high) employment insecurity to increase the probability of voting for the opposition regardless of the partisanship of the incumbent government, but that the effect will be stronger under right-wing incumbents. Furthermore, we expect high (and, less so, rising) employment insecurity to increase the probability of abstaining from voting regardless of the partisanship of the incumbent government, but that the effect will be stronger under left-wing incumbents. Both of these conditional effects should be stronger under high levels of employment insecurity as the partisan effect is stronger under more long-term exposure to insecurity. Figure 1 illustrates the four hypotheses, highlighting the moderating effect of incumbent partisanship on the relationship between employment insecurity and voting for the opposition, abstaining, and, ultimately, voting for the incumbent. As can be seen, we remain agnostic as to whether a right-wing incumbent suffers more due to strong employment insecurity than a left-wing incumbent. Instead, incumbent partisanship conditions how the incumbent loses support.

Data and Method

To test these hypotheses, we require individual-level data on voting behavior and employment insecurity under different political settings. In particular, we require a large number of national-level elections under both left-wing and right-wing governments. As elections and government turnover in any single country occur infrequently, this requires us to employ a cross-national approach, with multiple elections in multiple countries allowing us to properly test the hypotheses. The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)

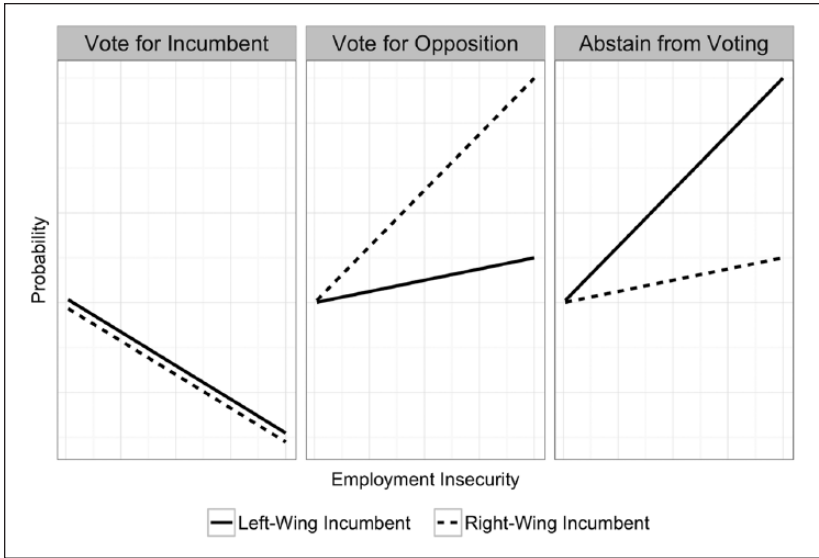


Figure 1. Graphical summary of hypotheses.

provides the basis for such a data set, with surveys of nationally representative samples of eligible voters after general elections in a large number of countries, as well as measures of a number of relevant individual and contextual factors. In our main analysis, we end up with a sample of 28,299 individuals across 43 elections in 21 countries.⁸

The dependent variable used in the analysis is the respondent’s self-reported voting behavior in the preceding lower house election. The CSES data set records the party voted for by respondents who turned out to vote. Separately, the data set also provides information on which party (or parties) formed the incumbent government at the time of election. Combining the information from these two measures, we code responses into the three categories of “Abstained,” “Voted for an incumbent government party,” and “Voted for an opposition party.”⁹

To capture our main independent variable, employment insecurity, we use the unemployment rate in respondent’s main occupation, reflecting the heuristical basis of its perceptions.¹⁰ We use a measure compiled by Rehm (2009), which captures OURs by gender, and are calculated as the share of the unemployed workforce in each of the nine International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88) professional categories, separately for each gender, using yearly data from the International Labour

Office's (ILO) Database on Labour Statistics and the European Union's Labour Force Survey.¹¹ To capture the separate effects of both high and rising employment insecurity, two measures are used: a measure of the level of occupational unemployment in the year of an election and a measure of the change in occupational unemployment in the year prior to an election. As our primary interest is in the within-country effects of occupational unemployment and how contextual country-election factors, such as government partisanship, condition the effects of occupational unemployment, we group-mean center occupational unemployment (along with all other Level 1 predictors discussed below) at the country-election level. This also enables us to estimate the effect of *relative* levels and changes in employment insecurity on voting behavior, with the country-election aggregate mean serving as the benchmark, following the important work on benchmarking (Kayser & Peress, 2012).

The measure of incumbent government partisanship was derived from an indicator included in the CSES data set on the "ideological family" of each political party, as determined by country experts. Based on the indicator, parties were classified as right-wing (0), left-wing (1), or other (0.5).¹² The partisanship of the incumbent government was then calculated as the weighted (by cabinet seats) average of the score for each party holding a cabinet seat in government. The final scale ranges continuously from 0 (*all cabinet seats held by right-wing parties*) to 1 (*all cabinet seats held by left-wing parties*).

We included several other explanatory variables in the analysis. At the individual level, we control for respondent's age, age-squared, gender, education, household income, political left-right ideology, as well as whether he or she is a union member or unemployed.¹³ At the national level, we control for several alternative hypotheses. To account for the potential importance of aggregate economic conditions, as well as a potential confounder on the effect of employment insecurity, we include a measure of economic growth and aggregate unemployment rates.¹⁴ The inclusion of the latter measure also allows us to directly compare the relative importance of aggregate and individual-level measures of unemployment and employment insecurity.

Finally, we also control for the vote share of the incumbent parties and voter turnout in the previous election. These last two measures control for a host of unobserved cross-national contextual differences, thus giving us more confidence in the results from our cross-national variables, while also ensuring our analysis controls for baseline levels of turnout and incumbent support. The online appendix contains descriptive statistics and sources for all variables included in the main analysis.

Estimation

We model the data using Bayesian hierarchical multinomial regression (Gelman & Hill, 2007; Jackman, 2009; Kruschke, 2014).¹⁵ Each respondent i in the data reported one of $J = 3$ vote choices: voting for the incumbent, voting for the opposition, or abstaining. Furthermore, each respondent i is nested within country-election s , and we expect that systematic country-election differences affect voting behavior.

We estimate variations on the following baseline two-level model:

$$Pr(y_{is} = j) = \frac{\exp(\beta_{js0} + \beta_{j1}OUR_{is} + \beta_{j2}OUR_{is} \times W_{sk} + \beta_{jZ}X_{iZ})}{\sum_{r=1}^{J=3} \exp(\beta_{rs0} + \beta_{r1}OUR_{is} + \beta_{r2}OUR_{is} \times W_{sk} + \beta_{rZ}X_{iZ})}$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} \beta_{2s0} \\ \beta_{3s0} \end{bmatrix} \sim N \left(\begin{bmatrix} \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{2k}W_{sk} \\ \gamma_{30} + \gamma_{3k}W_{sk} \end{bmatrix}, \Omega \right)$$

$$\Omega = \begin{bmatrix} \omega_{11}^2 & \omega_{12} \\ \omega_{21} & \omega_{22}^2 \end{bmatrix}$$

Without some restrictions, the parameters of the model are unidentified. We follow standard procedure and set one of the three choices as a baseline category, by restricting all coefficients to be equal to 0 for that choice. In our case, voting for the incumbent, $j = 1$, serves as the baseline, with other coefficients being interpreted with respect to that baseline. The probability of respondent i in country-election s choosing j is a function of the following components.

1. The choice-specific random intercept β_{js0} , which represents the probability that an “average” respondent in country-election s chooses j . The two random intercepts—one for the probability of voting for the opposition, β_{2s0} , and one for the probability of abstaining, β_{3s0} —are, in turn, a function of country-election predictors $\gamma_{20} + \gamma_{2k}W_{sk}$ and $\gamma_{30} + \gamma_{3k}W_{sk}$, respectively, with K indexing the number of country-election predictor variables. We allow the random intercepts, β_{2s0} and β_{3s0} , to be correlated.
2. The choice-specific effect of OUR_{is} , β_{j1} . In several specifications, we employ a cross-level interaction of OUR_{is} with a Level 2 covariate to examine if the effects of employment insecurity are modified by contextual factors (e.g., government partisanship). β_{j2} represents the choice-specific effect of such interactions. Due to the limited number

of higher level units, we assume the effect of OUR_{is} is fixed (as opposed to random) across country elections, conditional on contextual factors.

3. β_{jz} , which represents a matrix of Z choice-specific unmodeled coefficients multiplied by individual characteristics.

Following Jackman (2009), we specify independent normal priors for each of the β and γ parameters and an inverse Wishart prior for the covariance matrix, Ω . The priors are noninformative.¹⁶

We run three chains of a Gibbs sampler for a total of 90,000 iterations, discarding the first 10,000 iterations of each chain as burn-in, and thinning the remaining chains by a factor of 2. The resulting 40,000 iterations form the sample that we base our inferences on. Diagnostics based on Gelman and Rubin (1992) and Cowles and Carlin (1996) suggest that the chains mix well and show no sign of nonconvergence.

Empirical Analysis

The main results of the analysis are presented in Table 1. The first column contains the results from a baseline specification using both the level and change of occupational unemployment (OUR) to capture employment insecurity, but without contextual variables allowed to shape these effects. The second column, however, provides the results from a model where incumbent partisanship is interacted with both OUR level and OUR change, thus allowing it to condition the effects of both variables on voting behavior. These two models directly test the four hypotheses outlined earlier although graphical exploration of the interaction terms are necessary to interpret their effects.

Overall, the results in Table 1 are supportive of the hypotheses being tested. In model 1, we see that changes in occupational unemployment increase the probability of individuals voting for the opposition compared with the incumbent. Meanwhile, higher national unemployment rates are also associated with a higher proportion of voters supporting the opposition compared with the incumbent. These are standard economic voting effects, whereby voters punish the incumbent for poor performance. Importantly, for our purposes, the measure for changes in occupational unemployment is substantively significant, even when controlling for the state of the aggregate economy. This provides evidence in favor of Hypothesis 1, which suggested that rising employment insecurity, in particular, should reduce the probability of voting for the incumbent, regardless of the actual state of the aggregate economy. The measure for level of occupational unemployment does not reach significance although the coefficient is correctly signed.

Table 1. Hierarchical Multinomial Regression Models of Voting Behavior.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2
Opposition vote results		
Intercept equation, β_{2s0}		
Intercept	0.34 (0.09)*	0.34 (0.09)*
Unemployment rate (%)	0.25 (0.10)*	0.24 (0.10)*
Economic growth (%)	0.02 (0.09)	-0.01 (0.09)
Incumbent partisanship		-0.15 (0.09)
Incumbent last vote share (%)	-0.46 (0.09)*	-0.49 (0.08)*
OUR equations, β_{2s1} and β_{2s2}		
OUR level	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
OUR level \times Incumbent partisanship		-0.04 (0.01)*
OUR Δ	0.04 (0.02)*	0.04 (0.02)*
OUR $\Delta \times$ Incumbent partisanship		0.02 (0.02)
Abstain results		
Intercept equation, β_{3s0}		
Intercept	-1.00 (0.12)*	-1.01 (0.12)*
Unemployment rate (%)	0.38 (0.12)*	0.38 (0.12)*
Economic growth (%)	0.05 (0.12)	0.07 (0.12)
Incumbent partisanship		0.12 (0.12)
Last turnout (%)	-0.68 (0.10)*	-0.70 (0.10)*
OUR equations β_{3s1} and β_{3s2}		
OUR level	0.14 (0.02)*	0.15 (0.02)*
OUR level \times Incumbent partisanship		0.00 (0.02)
OUR Δ	-0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
OUR $\Delta \times$ Incumbent partisanship		0.03 (0.02)
Variance components		
Opposition vote, ω_{11}	0.58 (0.29)*	0.56 (0.28)*
Abstain, ω_{22}	0.74 (0.37)*	0.75 (0.37)*
Correlation, ρ	0.55 (0.12)*	0.62 (0.10)*

Posterior means and posterior standard deviations (in parentheses) shown, based on 40,000 Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) samples. $N = 28,299$ (respondents); $J = 43$ (country elections). Voting for an incumbent party is the baseline outcome. Control variables not reported: Age, age-squared, gender, education, income, left-right ideology, union membership, and an indicator for unemployment (see the online appendix for full results). OUR = occupational unemployment rate.

*Signifies that the 95% highest density interval (HDI) does not include 0.

Model 1 also provides evidence for the effects of employment insecurity on turnout, with levels of and changes in occupational unemployment displaying divergent effects on the decision to abstain. Thus, while proximate

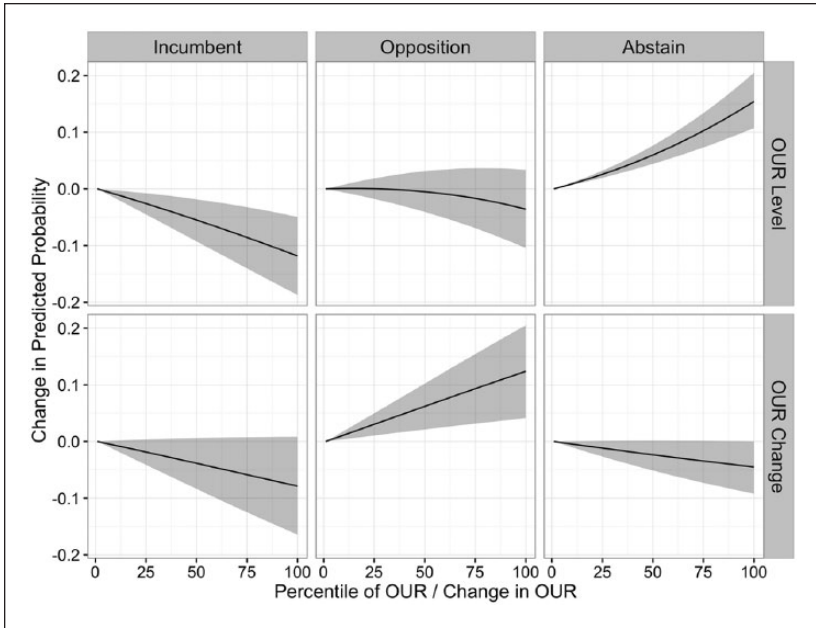


Figure 2. Predicted changes in voting behavior under high or rising occupational unemployment.

The figure is based on results from Model 1 in Table 1. The upper row shows the estimated effects of the level of occupational unemployment (OUR Level), while the lower row shows the estimated effects of yearly changes in occupational unemployment (OUR Change). The columns show, respectively, changes in the predicted probability of voting for an incumbent party, an opposition party, and abstaining from voting, when OUR (separately for level and change) moves from its lowest value to its highest value. Positive values indicate a higher probability of a specific vote choice. All other variables are held at their mean. Also, 95% highest density intervals are shown. OUR = occupational unemployment rate.

changes in employment insecurity have little discernible effects, the level of employment insecurity has large and robust effects. These results strongly suggest, at least when it comes to employment insecurity, that prolonged economic vulnerability results in a greater preoccupation with personal matters and decreases the time afforded to politics, perhaps as a result of the reduced well-being and motivation produced by exposure to anxiety over a long period of time. Overall, the evidence supports Hypothesis 2.

Figure 2 shows the substantive effects of these results on voting behavior. In the case of occupational unemployment levels (top row), a shift from the lowest to the highest value recorded in the data set is associated with a 12% lower probability of voting for the incumbent, a 4% lower probability of

voting for the opposition, and a 15% higher probability of abstaining. Thus, the figure clearly illustrates the demobilizing effects of high occupational unemployment. For changes in occupational unemployment, the results are more in line with standard results from the economic voting literature—thus, shifting from the minimum to the maximum increase in occupational unemployment in the data set is associated with an 8% lower probability of supporting the incumbent, 4% lower probability of abstaining, and a 12% higher probability of voting for the opposition. These results confirm that there are important differences in the short-term and long-term effects of employment insecurity, with the short-term effects being more in line with a standard valence effect, while the long-term effects are more in line with a strong demobilizing effect.

Model 2 sheds more light on these results, as it relaxes the assumption that the effects of employment insecurity are unaffected by the partisanship of the incumbent government. Considering first the effects of the level of occupational unemployment, we see that they differ significantly based on the partisan identity of the incumbent—thus, higher employment insecurity is associated with a lower likelihood of voting for the opposition, relative to the incumbent, under more left-wing incumbents. Relative changes in occupational unemployment, however, do not exert varying effects across incumbent partisanship on the likelihood of voting for the incumbent. The partisanship effect of changes in occupational unemployment is very small indeed, it would seem.

Figure 3 presents these results graphically. The subfigures capture the marginal effect, at various values of levels and change in occupational unemployment, of shifting from a right-wing incumbent government to a left-wing incumbent government. Thus, the figure allows us to discern how incumbent partisanship conditions the effects of employment insecurity.¹⁷ Comparing the probability of voting for the opposition and abstaining from voting at different levels of occupational unemployment is particularly telling (upper row, two rightmost figures). At low levels of occupational unemployment (left side of figures), government partisanship has negligible conditioning effects on the relationship between vote choice and employment insecurity—the marginal change in voting behavior is essentially 0. However, at high levels of occupational unemployment, the economically insecure respond in markedly different ways, based on the partisan identity of the incumbent. Namely, under a left-wing incumbent, they are more likely to abstain from voting altogether and less likely to support the opposition.

These results confirm the findings in Model 1 and provide strong support for our positional account. Voters facing high levels of occupational

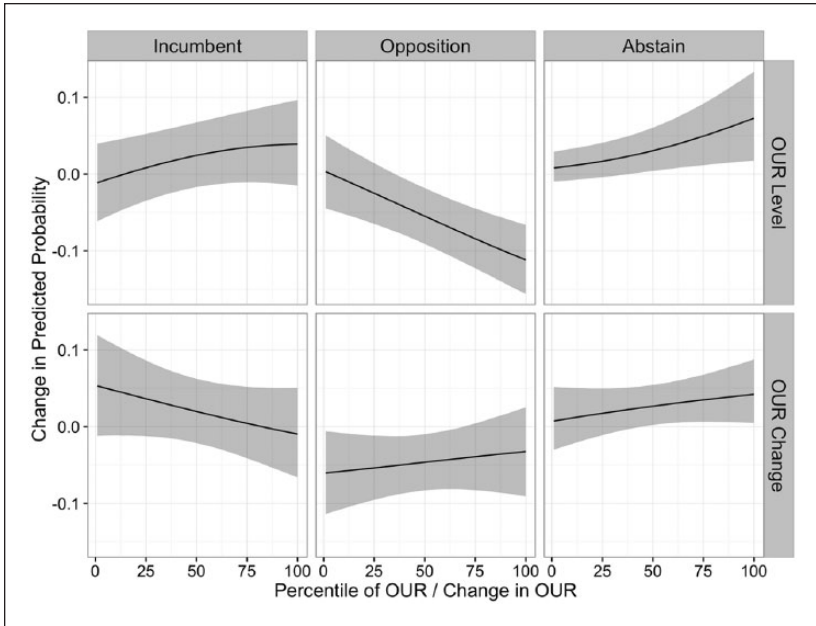


Figure 3. Marginal effect of government partisanship on voting behavior under high or rising occupational unemployment. The figure is based on results from Model 2 in Table 1. Each subfigure shows the difference in the effects of OUR (Level or Change) on voting behavior under left-wing incumbent governments, on one hand, and right-wing incumbent governments, on the other hand. Positive values indicate a higher probability of a specific vote choice under left-wing incumbents, as compared with right-wing incumbents. All other variables are held at their mean. Also, 95% highest density intervals are shown. OUR = occupational unemployment rate.

unemployment are more likely to abstain under a left-wing government than a right-wing government, thus providing support for Hypothesis 4.¹⁸ Conversely, under the same conditions of high occupational unemployment, voters are much more likely to vote for the opposition under a right-wing government than a left-wing government. Thus, the partisanship of the incumbent matters greatly for the voting behavior observed, because of how occupational unemployment makes voters more insecure, and thus more supportive of left-wing parties.¹⁹ This can somewhat also be seen using the change in occupational unemployment measure as voters are weakly more likely to abstain as occupational unemployment increases under a left-wing government than under a right-wing government. Hypotheses 3 and 4 are, thus, mostly supported in this analysis.

The online appendix provides results for several robustness checks, which vary important aspects of the two models. For Model 1, we do not find evidence that the effects of employment insecurity are conditioned by respondents' household income, education, or left-right ideology (Table A4), nor that the effects on opposition support are conditioned by national unemployment or economic growth (Table A5). Table A5 does suggest, however, that the effects of high employment insecurity on abstention are conditioned by these two factors, with both high national unemployment and high economic growth reducing the effect. These results provide additional evidence for the importance of relative levels of employment insecurity, as the overall economy provides a contextual benchmark, which changes the nature of the local heuristic information available through occupations.²⁰ Finally, separately adding a measure for either clarity of responsibility or the net unemployment replacement rate (NURR) does not affect the results substantively (Table A6). This suggests that our results, in this case, are not driven by underlying institutional differences, including variations in the social safety net.

For Model 2, our results remain substantively unchanged when we use an alternative measure of incumbent government partisanship (Table A7) and when we split the sample into pre- and post-2008 (Table A9). However, when we split the sample into Eastern and Western Europe (Table A8), the results differ significantly between the two subsamples. While the results remain substantively unchanged (and even stronger, in some cases) for the Western European subsample, there are virtually no discernible conditioning effects of partisanship in the Eastern European subsample. This is perhaps unsurprising, as our theory is based on traditional partisan theory, which might not apply equally in postcommunist Europe (Tavits & Letki, 2009).

Exploring the Mechanism

The previous analysis has shown that unemployment in an individual's occupation is associated with a greater tendency to support opposition parties, rather than incumbent parties, and a higher probability of abstaining from voting. Importantly, the question still remains: Are these findings driven by the informational heuristic suggested in the theoretical section or an alternative mechanism?

Our claim, in short, is that voters perceive different economies, based in large part on the group-based information heuristic of occupational unemployment. We agree with Stevenson and Duch (2013) that people vary in their perception of the "true" economy, but we emphasize how this perception is strongly driven by their experiences in the workplace and the labor market. This implies that a higher level of occupational unemployment

should increase the tendency of people to overestimate the aggregate level of unemployment in the economy and, equally, to have less accurate perceptions of aggregate unemployment levels. Following the logic of an informational heuristic, more economically insecure voters should thus have a different set of beliefs about the level of unemployment, resulting from the different informational shortcuts that they use (McGraw, 2003). Moreover, greater occupational unemployment should also be associated with greater subjective insecurity, thus confirming the validity of our measure of employment insecurity. Although we distinguish between the effects of changes in, and levels of, employment insecurity, our argument assumes that both types of local economic conditions function as heuristics, which implies that people will be just as likely to overestimate the true level of national unemployment under high levels or large increases in employment insecurity.

The main alternative explanation for our primary results is that individuals employed in occupations with a high or growing unemployment rate are simply more concerned about unemployment, and while their perceptions of unemployment levels, and economic performance more broadly, might be similar to those less insecure, they are more likely to react to the same indicators through their voting behavior (e.g., Powell & Whitten, 1993). In other words, the insecure would have the same perceptions and beliefs as the secure, only that the former would place greater weight on employment insecurity in their voting calculus. Recent work on the “salience” of the economy (Fossati, 2014; Singer, 2013), for example, implicitly assumes that voters perceive the same economic performance, but that their personal circumstances lead them to attach a greater weight to economic conditions in determining their voting behavior.

Unfortunately, the CSES data set employed in the main analysis does not offer specific measures of these intervening factors, which could be used to test the posited mechanism directly. Instead, we turn to the European Social Survey (ESS, 2008), which provides a battery of questions related to the subject of unemployment and employment insecurity. In particular, the survey gauged individual’s perception of the national unemployment rate, with a question asking how many working age individuals (out of 100) in their country he or she believed were currently unemployed and looking for work, with respondent’s answers given on a 11-point scale. To estimate the accuracy of the respondent’s perceptions, we recoded the actual unemployment rate to match the 11-point scale of his or her perceptions, with the absolute difference between the measures serving as our operationalization of respondent’s accuracy about national unemployment. We reverse code the variable, such that higher values imply greater accuracy in perceptions. In addition, respondents were asked how likely they thought that they would become

unemployed for at least 4 consecutive weeks in the next 12 months after the survey, with answers ranging from *not at all likely* to *very likely*.

We limit the sample to employed respondent and end up with a sample of 14,191 respondents in 22 European countries, surveyed between 2008 and 2010. In estimating the effect of occupational unemployment on these three measures, we included controls for respondents' age, age-squared, household income, education, political left-right ideology, as well as dummies for respondents who are female or union members. Moreover, to control for heterogeneity in respondents' political sophistication, we create an additive index based on their self-reported interest in politics, their belief that politics is too complicated to understand, and their difficulty in making up their mind about political issues ($\alpha = .79$). We also include country-level measures of the aggregate unemployment rate and economic growth. As before, all the Level 1 variables were mean-centered at the country level, such that the results can be interpreted as within-country effects. Finally, we include random intercepts at the country level, to allow for unobserved correlation between respondents living within the same country. Descriptive statistics of all variables are included in the online appendix.

We model the data using Bayesian hierarchical linear regression, with each respondent i nested within country s . We estimate the following baseline random intercept model for each of the three different outcomes:

$$y_{is} \sim N(\beta_{s0} + \beta_1 OUR_{is} + \beta_z X_{iz}, \sigma_y^2)$$

$$\beta_{s0} \sim N(\gamma_0 + \gamma_k W_k, \sigma_s^2)$$

Thus, the outcome is a function of a random country-level effect, β_s , modeled without country-level predictors W_k , as well as β_1 , the coefficient of OUR_{is} and a matrix of unmodeled coefficients, β_z , multiplied by individual characteristics. We specify independent normal priors for each of the parameters and uniform priors for the variance components. The priors are noninformative and do not affect the results of the analysis, following the same sensitivity tests as in the primary analysis. We again run three chains of a Gibbs sampler for a total of 90,000 iterations, discarding the first 10,000 iterations of each chain as burn-in, and thinning the remaining chains by a factor of 2. The resulting 40,000 iterations form the sample on which we base our inferences. Diagnostics again suggest that the chains mix well and show no sign of nonconvergence.

Table 2 reports the results, which support the mechanism posited in this article. Model 3 demonstrates that individuals suffering from greater occupational unemployment, both as an overall level and as a change from the previous year, do indeed feel more insecure about their employment,

Table 2. Mixed Effects Models of Economic Perceptions.

Variable	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept equation, β_{30}			
Intercept	2.94 (0.19)*	6.30 (0.69)*	5.51 (0.63)*
Unemployment rate (%)	0.04 (0.02)	0.37 (0.10)*	0.15 (0.09)
Economic growth (%)	0.52 (2.30)	-6.38 (9.01)	3.46 (7.99)
Unmodeled coefficients			
OUR level	0.02 (0.00)*	0.04 (0.01)*	-0.04 (0.01)*
OUR Δ	0.02 (0.01)*	-0.03 (0.02)	0.05 (0.02)*
Age	-0.03 (0.00)*	-0.07 (0.01)*	0.07 (0.01)*
Age squared	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)*
Female	-0.04 (0.02)*	0.62 (0.04)*	-0.58 (0.04)*
Education	-0.01 (0.00)*	-0.08 (0.01)*	0.08 (0.01)*
Household income	-0.05 (0.00)*	-0.11 (0.01)*	0.10 (0.01)*
Union member	0.00 (0.02)	0.11 (0.05)*	-0.11 (0.05)*
Political ideology	-0.01 (0.00)*	-0.02 (0.01)*	0.02 (0.01)
Political sophistication	-0.01 (0.00)*	-0.12 (0.01)*	0.11 (0.01)*
Variance components			
Country variance, σ_s^2	0.25 (0.05)*	1.01 (0.18)*	0.89 (0.16)*
Residual, σ_y^2	0.86 (0.01)*	2.37 (0.01)*	2.26 (0.01)*

Posterior means and posterior standard deviations (in parentheses) shown, based on 40,000 Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) samples. $N = 13,909$ (respondents), $J = 22$ (countries). Model 3 dependent variable (DV): Likelihood of becoming unemployed in next 12 months. Model 4 DV: Perception of national unemployment rate. Model 5 DV: Accuracy of perceptions. OUR = occupational unemployment rate.

*Signifies that the 95% highest density interval (HDI) does not include 0.

reporting a significantly greater likelihood of becoming unemployed in the next 12 months. This is clear evidence that these objective measures are connected to subjective experiences, hence validating our previous inferences. More importantly, Model 4 indicates that greater levels of occupational unemployment result in higher perceptions of national unemployment rates. Thus, beliefs about unemployment vary systematically with occupational unemployment. As Model 5 shows, such beliefs are not necessarily more accurate with regard to the overall level of unemployment in the country. In fact, we see that as levels of occupational unemployment increase, individuals become *less* accurate in their perceptions of national unemployment rates, consistent with the bias introduced from anchoring on an occupational unemployment heuristic.

On the contrary, large increases in occupational unemployment are associated with a more accurate perception, which is not consistent with an

information shortcut explanation. This raises the possibility that *changes* in employment insecurity might have a motivational effect, as individuals presumably become more interested in learning about aggregate economic conditions. It is possible that short-term increases in employment insecurity are more closely associated with anxiety and worry (e.g., De Witte, 2005), reactions that are known to trigger greater information search and learning (Valentino, Banks, Hutchings, & Davis, 2009). It is unclear what else might lead voters to perceive levels of aggregate unemployment more accurately following stronger increases in employment insecurity.

Either way, both of these accounts imply that people are perceiving different economies (either due to dissimilar heuristics, or desires for further information) as perceptions vary systematically based on both types of employment insecurity. As voters are boundedly rational and live in different information environments, the salient heuristics and cues available to them, such as occupational unemployment, are likely to play an important role in how they form an understanding of economic performance (e.g., Newman et al., 2015). This can be contrasted with the salience and weights argument provided by Fossati (2014), which cannot account for voter's different levels of knowledge about the economy across varying levels of economic insecurity. Ultimately, such variation in information sets results in different conclusions about the incumbent's economic performance and the voter's need for social insurance, as well as their general ability and desire to participate in politics.

Conclusion

The literature on economic voting suggests that individuals reward and punish incumbent governments based on their evaluation of aggregate economic performance. Yet, people have fundamentally different experiences of the economy, providing them with dissimilar perceptions of the economy (Ansolabehere et al., 2014; Stevenson & Duch, 2013). An important predictor of such experiences, we argue and show, is people's occupation and, in particular, the employment insecurity they experience in their profession. Occupational unemployment has been shown to affect policy and partisan preferences (Mughan & Lacy, 2002; Rehm, 2011), yet unemployment to date has either been conceptualized as a purely positional issue (Wright, 2012), or as a valence issue important only to some subgroups (Powell & Whitten, 1993).

We challenge these accounts by offering a theory of how high (and rising) occupational unemployment, by informing perceptions of employment insecurity, affects both the propensity of individuals to vote for incumbent government parties and left-wing parties, as well as their likelihood of

abstaining from the ballot box altogether. We argue that employment insecurity is both a valence and a positional issue, and contains a powerful demobilizing effect. By doing so, we also heed the call of both Hacker et al. (2013), who argue for more careful theorizing about the mechanisms linking personal economic experiences with voting behavior, and Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2011), who emphasize the importance of accounting for positional effects on economic voting.

More specifically, we find robust support for the hypothesis that employment insecurity increases the probability of voting for opposition parties and that this effect is mitigated by the incumbency of a left-wing government. While voters suffering from high employment insecurity might be less likely to vote for the opposition under a left-wing incumbent, they are also more likely to abstain from the election completely. Thus, left-wing incumbents are punished, albeit in a less direct way. The electoral effects might be comparable on aggregate, but the voting behavior is quite different, as are the implications for democratic accountability and party strategies.

This helps us better understand the question of the electoral cost for left-wing governments under periods of high unemployment. Consistent with previous work, we find that left incumbents do lose votes whenever presiding over high and growing unemployment (Palmer & Whitten, 2011) but not for the reasons previously assumed. Instead of left voters turning toward the opposition, our results highlight the important role of abstention as a way for left voters to express their disapproval or disillusionment with the incumbent. This provides a clear explanation for the finding that decreases in turnout tend to affect left parties the most (Pacek & Radcliff, 1995). However, further work is clearly needed to reconcile the conflicting evidence in the literature on the effect of unemployment on support for right-wing incumbents (e.g., Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2013; Palmer & Whitten, 2011). While our results point to the potential importance of analyzing the effect of local unemployment within countries, instead of the traditional aggregate analysis, it is also possible that recent decades have seen unemployment take on a more important role in economic voting, even among less typical leftist voters.²¹

The empirical analysis also supports our expectation about the difference between levels of employment insecurity, which captures long-term effects on political values and preferences, and changes in employment insecurity, which shapes short-term impressions about the economic competence of incumbents. The latter is clearly associated with a stronger punishment of incumbents, regardless of their partisanship. The former, meanwhile, is strongly conditioned on the partisanship of the incumbent, while also producing a demobilization effect. This evidence indicates the importance of understanding the temporal effects of economic factors, while also emphasizing

the critical need to integrate both turnout and vote choice when evaluating the effects of the economy on political outcomes.

In addition, however, the results raise important questions about the differential effects of these various economic experiences on people's motivation to acquire economic information. Although both measures of employment insecurity produce a greater feeling of insecurity, their effect on general economic beliefs seems to diverge, as increases in employment insecurity result in more accurate perceptions of national unemployment rates, the opposite effect of higher levels of employment insecurity. As scholars increasingly turn their attention to understanding economic perceptions, these results underscore the need to investigate the structural factors shaping people's desire to learn about the economy and update their perceptions, as opposed to simply using available heuristics or party cues. As it is clear that voters are neither perfectly informed about economic conditions, nor completely blinded by partisan biases, it is imperative to understand the scope conditions under which either end of this continuum dominates individual judgments about the economy.

All told, this article presents evidence for the theory that occupational unemployment serves as an informational heuristic for voters making up their mind about the state of the economy and individual insecurity. By utilizing a salient and influential group-based heuristic, we provide a clear measure of people's unique economic experience, which should be most likely to connect objective economic conditions with voting behavior. After all, although people tend to be misinformed or unaware about distant economic factors, such as most national indicators of the economy, they do tend to be fairly accurate at understanding and perceiving economic factors that are directly and closely relevant to them (Ansolabehere et al., 2014). As such, in contrast to previous work detailing the moderating effect of economic insecurity, we demonstrate the mediational effect of employment insecurity on the relationship between objective economic conditions and economic voting. Although voters are limited in their ability and desire to hold accurate views about the national economy, the evidence presented here shows that they respond systematically to local economic heuristics, both by updating their perceptions about the economy, and through their voting behavior. While we provide additional evidence suggesting that the OUR drives perceptions of the national economy, an important next step is confirming that changes in OURs precede both changes in perceptions of the economy and vote choice, for example, with individual-level panel data. Such findings would solidify the fundamental importance of occupations in the formation of political preferences (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014).

As it becomes clear that we should avoid assuming that voters experience and perceive the same economy, or that economic information only

has a valence *or* positional effect, or even that voting behavior can be analyzed by excluding abstention without distorting conclusions, the impetus is on advancing a more complete understanding of economic voting, integrating recent insights. The goal should be to understand complex questions, such as how voters form opinions about the economy under various circumstances, what factors produce stronger valence or positional effects, and exactly how the decision to abstain electorally relates to economic conditions and incumbent performance. This article takes a step in that direction although it also raises additional questions for future research. Next steps could include comparisons of different information heuristics (such as local geographic vs. group-based heuristics), analyzing the potential moderating effect of alternative left parties or populist protest parties, understanding how incumbent partisanship moderates the effect of local economic insecurity differently from other economic indicators, as well as a fuller analysis of the connection between economic information heuristics and egocentric and sociotropic economic evaluations. It is time that we start taking seriously individual economic experiences, as well as the multifaceted nature of economic signals, as they have important consequences for incumbent support and political participation.

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Notes

1. See Anderson (2007) and Healy and Malhotra (2013) for recent reviews of the literature on economic voting, and Alesina and Giuliano (2011) for a recent review of the determinants of redistributive preferences.
2. Hetherington (1996), for example, highlights the role played by media exposure, and Holbrook and Garand (1996) demonstrate how differences in political interests, as well as political sophistication, can alter perceptions of the economy (see

- also Gomez & Wilson, 2006). The most important “perceptual screen” is generally considered to be political partisanship, with partisans viewing the state of the economy more favorably when their party is in office (Bartels, 2002).
3. Note that such “macro-economic” information can both serve self-interested voters in their pursuit of voting for the party that best serves their personal ends and other-regarding voters in their pursuit of voting for the party that best serves society.
 4. But see Carlsen (2000) for conflicting earlier evidence.
 5. An important exception to this is the work by Palmer and Whitten (2011), who find an asymmetric unemployment effect using recent U.K. data. The divergent empirical results clearly deserve further inquiry, as we discuss at the end.
 6. It is also possible that inflation has lost much of its importance as an indicator of economic performance among advanced industrial democracies, following recent decades of uniformly low inflation, in particular as it compares with the large cross-national and temporal variation on unemployment.
 7. It is true that there might be cases of left-wing parties in opposition to a left-wing incumbent government, especially in multiparty systems. Such parties could potentially garner more votes from economically insecure voters unhappy with the incumbent, thus nullifying the posited mechanism. However, according to the theory, such parties should not play a critical role as an “incompetent left” would alienate the economically insecure, disillusioned by the false promises of their supposed allies, thus resulting in an aversion to the entire political establishment. Such alienation should be fairly sticky, given the difficulty of reestablishing political trust once it is lost (Levi & Stoker, 2000). Even if some voters might be persuaded by the promises of smaller parties, it is well known that smaller fringe parties are often avoided for strategic reasons (Cox, 1997). In any case, the presence of opposition left-wing parties should attenuate the posited effects and, thus, militate against finding support for the theory.
 8. We included election studies from Modules 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) in our analysis (www.cses.org). We limit the sample to individuals in the labor market, as well as countries that are widely accepted as modern democracies. Due to the limited coverage of our measure of economic insecurity, we only include European countries. As our theory is based on traditional partisan theory, it might not apply equally in Western Europe and postcommunist Europe (Tavits & Letki, 2009)—we account for this possibility by splitting the sample by subregion in the online appendix. See the online appendix for a full list of elections included in the analysis.
 9. In cases where no information was provided on the composition of the incumbent government, we consulted the Database of Political Institutions (Beck et al., 2001) and the European Election Database, (Norwegian Centre for Research Data, 2015). Note that no distinction is made between voting for the party of the chief executive or other coalition parties in multiparty governments. Although this has the potential to be consequential for analyses of incumbent voting, Duch and Stevenson (2008, p. 58) find that it rarely is in practice.

10. Unemployed individuals are categorized by their last occupation before becoming unemployed.
11. Using the 1-digit International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) classification is fairly coarse, classifying individuals into nine broad occupational categories. We believe a more fine-grained measure, for example, the 43 2-digit classification would be more appropriate given the basis of our argument, but we lack both theoretical guidance on the most salient level of occupational identification, as well as more fine-grained measures of occupational unemployment rates, making the discussion a moot point. On the upside, including fewer occupational groups has the advantage of yielding more precise estimates, which reduces the potential measurement error problem.
12. This follows the approach taken by Beck et al. (2001). Parties classified as communist, socialist, social democratic, or other left-wing family were coded as left-wing. Parties classified as conservative, Christian democratic, or other right-wing family were coded as right-wing. All other parties were coded as other.
13. In Table A10, in the online appendix, we exclude clear-cut positional variables (household income, left-right ideology, and union membership) from the model specification.
14. We excluded another commonly used measure of economic performance—inflation—as it provides little variation in our sample and, given our small sample of Level 2 units, we prioritized the inclusion of controls that we have theoretical reasons to suspect might alter the relationship between economic insecurity and vote choice, which is not the case for inflation.
15. See Stegmueller (2013) for a large-scale Monte Carlo simulation study demonstrating the superiority of a Bayesian approach over maximum likelihood estimation, when few Level 2 units are available, as is usually the case in the analysis of political behavior across country elections.
16. We tested two alternative specifications for the priors. First, following Gelman (2006), a uniform distribution was specified on the standard deviation of the various priors. Second, the variance of the priors was doubled. In both cases, the results of the analysis remained unchanged.
17. Figure 3 reports the effect of a shift from a right-wing to a left-wing incumbent government on voting behavior as we are ultimately interested in the marginal effect of government partisanship. For completeness, however, a figure showing the absolute probability of each vote choice separately for right-wing and left-wing incumbent governments is shown in the supporting information.
18. At first glance, the results for Model 2 seem to be at odds with the results shown in the figure, particularly for the interaction effect between government partisanship and the level of occupational unemployment (Occupational unemployment rate [OUR] level \times Incumbent partisanship) on abstention. However, it should be stressed that the coefficient in the table shows the relative marginal effect of the interaction term on abstention *in comparison* with the baseline category (voting for incumbent). The figure, however, shows the absolute marginal effect, which also takes into account the effect on the third category (voting for

the opposition). The apparent discrepancy would vanish if the third category would be set as the baseline category. As we are ultimately more interested in the absolute effect, it is necessary to interpret the results based on the figure, rather than the table.

19. As noted before, the presence of alternative left parties would undermine this effect, as people would simply vote for smaller left parties instead of abstaining. The fact that we find a strong support indicates that our contextual hypothesis holds even in the potential presence of alternative left-wing parties.
20. In fact, economic growth, when added additively as a control, is consistently insignificant. This indicates that while it shapes the effect of employment insecurity, its independent effect is dominated by that of insecurity. This is consistent with the close association between economic growth and unemployment rates, and the critical importance of unemployment in evaluations of economic performance in more recent years (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000).
21. As noted before, this could be either a reflection of decreasing partisan affiliation or simply a reaction to the decreased importance given to inflation in the West in recent years.

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