



# **Citizens' Knowledge of Parties' Left-Right and EU Integration Conflicts: The Role of Cognition, Affect, and Political Parties**

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## **Abstract**

In representative democracies citizens are supposed to be well-informed about what parties do and say. Such information helps voters to choose parties and candidates which are likely to promote their interests in political decision-making. However, it is well established that many people often fail to become adequately informed about politics due to a lack of political interest and cognitive abilities. It is, furthermore, broadly acknowledged that our impression formation is to a considerable degree guided by affect and particularly by our party identity, which can severely bias our perceptions of parties' policy standpoints and their responsibilities. This dissertation investigates how our impression of what political parties stand for in the left-right spectrum as well as in the conflict over European integration is determined by voters' level of cognitive resources and by their party attitudes.

In addition, what people might know inevitably depends on the information environment, which is largely shaped by political parties' behaviour; our knowledge about politics depends on the quantity and quality of policy-relevant information disseminated by political parties. I discern between three policy-based strategies of party competition: 1) position-taking; 2) the manipulation of salience; and, 3) a politics of ambiguity. By employing these policy-based strategies parties create information that is crucial for representation. Thus, public knowledge about political parties is the outcome of a communicative process between voters and political parties. It depends on voters' cognitive and affective components as well as on the policy-based strategies of competition employed by political parties. Moreover, I explore how cognition and party affect are associated with party knowledge conditional upon the information environment as shaped by political parties.



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## **Bio**

Tomasz Siczek has received his PhD in Political and Social Sciences from the European University Institute, in Florence.

From January to June 2013 he was a visiting researcher at the University of Zurich. Currently, he is a lecturer and research assistant at the University of Zurich.

His research interests include political parties, political communication, political psychology, post-communist democracies, Europeanization. More recently, he has been particularly interested in how migrants' identities are formed in response to the rise of nationalism in Europe.