Has the Great Recession weakened Partisanship and Government Accountability in the Advanced Democracies?

By

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Abstract

Numerous studies show that citizens use elections to hold politicians accountable for their performance in managing the economy. At its simplest, voters reward the incumbents for good economic performance and punish them for a bad one. However, less is known about the role of partisanship for ensuring government accountability. Does partisanship weaken or strengthen the accountability mechanism? We answer this question by studying the relationships between partisanship and the accountability of governments before, during and after the Great Recession when the belief of European’s in the effectiveness of their governments was severely tested. The findings show that declining partisanship has strengthened government accountability and that the Great Recession has reinforced the effects. The findings suggest that partisan attachments are grounded more strongly in the past performance of governing parties than in early socialisation processes experienced by their supporters. Europeans placed more emphasis on economic and leadership performance to inform their partisanship. This, in turn, has the effect of strengthening political accountability rather than weakened it. It means that the prominence of economic evaluations during the Great Recession has facilitated rather than hindered a strengthening of political accountability in Europe.
Introduction

One of the most important features of democratic rule is the possibility of holding politicians to account for their decisions. Accountability pertains to the connection between performance and consequences (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes, 1999a; Romzek, 2015). Plenty of studies on the accountability mechanism have investigated how the performance of politicians influences citizens’ voting behaviour (for an overview, see Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000; Nannestad and Paldam, 1994). The literature on economic voting is particularly important in this regard (see for example Lewis-Beck and Paldam, 2000; Powell and Whitten, 1993; Whiteley et al, 2013). It shows clearly that voters reward incumbents for good economic performance and punish them for a bad one. From originally examining a simple reward-punishment model (Key, 1968), this literature has subsequently developed to look at the influence of institutional structures such as coalition governments on accountability (see for example Anderson, 2000; Powell and Whitten, 1993), the effects of links between countries on accountability (Gerber and Huber, 2009; Keyser and Perez, 2012) and the effects of partisanship on economic evaluations (Evans and Andersen, 2006; Wlezien, Franklin and Twiggs, 1997). However, the specific role of parties in influencing the extent to which voters hold governments accountable has not been extensively examined.

In light of recent literature in political theory, parties and partisanship should be granted a larger role in explaining accountability than has previously been assumed. Research suggests that parties substantially aid the task of legitimatising and holding elected representatives to account (Goodin, 2008; Kölln, forthcoming; Rosenblum, 2008, 2014; White and Ypi, 2010, 2011). The main argument here is that parties and partisanship help to assign responsibility for governmental outcomes. This makes them essential structures for reinforcing democratic accountability. However, despite these theoretical insights, it is well-
known that partisanship is in decline in many advanced democracies (for example Dalton, 1984, 2013; Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995; Whiteley, 2014). This poses questions about the precise role of parties in sustaining democratic accountability. In particular does declining partisanship weaken or strengthen democratic accountability? It turns out that the answer to this question depends on which conception of partisanship is adopted.

This paper investigates the relationship between party performance on valence and spatial issues and partisanship. It uses the unique and high-impact event of the Great Recession 2007-10 in Europe as a treatment in a quasi-experimental research design to evaluate the role of issues and leadership performance in influencing partisanship, thereby holding politicians to account. The analysis uses the Cumulative File of the European Social Survey, which involves repeat surveys in many European and some non-European countries over the period 2002 to 2012. These surveys are well-suited to test the relationships between issue performance and partisanship both across time and space.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section sets out two alternative conceptions of partisanship and examines their connections to political accountability in democratic systems. We then specify and test models of these theoretical alternatives in order to determine how partisanship works, a necessary precondition for understanding its role in explaining accountability. Subsequently we examine the connection between partisanship and accountability at the individual level using the data pooled across both time and space. This is followed by a section looking at the dynamics of partisanship at the aggregate level over the ten-year period of the cumulative European Social Surveys. The aggregate analysis makes it possible to closely model the dynamics of relationships between partisanship and accountability.
Partisanship and democratic accountability

Theories of representative democracy hold that accountability is an important tool for citizens to incentivise politicians to implement their promises made at election times (Pitkin, 1967; Urbinati and Warren, 2008). A politician is given the task of representing voters by answering to citizens ‘for what he does’ (Pitkin, 1967: 55). In electoral democracies, both authorisation and accountability of representatives are facilitated through recurring elections (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes, 1999b; Gastil, 2000; Urbinati, 2005). It is a ‘standard view’ in this literature that citizens use ‘retrospective voting’ to hold politicians to account (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes, 1999b: 40): Voters observe the performance of politicians and reward or punish them on Election Day. This view is consistent with what we know empirically about how voters make decisions in elections (see Lewis-Beck, Nadeau and Foucault, 2013; Whiteley et al., 2013).

Parties and partisanship play only an indirect and ambiguous role in this ‘standard view’ first and foremost because citizens vote for one party rather than another. If they are voting out of a sense of party loyalty, which remains largely unchanged over time, then accountability is weakened. In this situation a party can remain in government even though its performance in delivering on the issues that individuals care about is poor. In other words in this interpretation partisanship moderates the extent to which the accountability mechanism applies (see Kayser and Wlezien, 2011; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011). To illustrate this point, Kayser and Wlezien (2011: 388), for example, find that ‘declining partisan attachment increases governmental accountability for economic outcomes’. Similarly, Tilley and Hobolt (2011: 328) also argue for the importance of partisanship for understanding governmental accountability. Their experimental findings indicate that ‘voters do adjust their views on who
is responsible in line with their partisanship’. Thus accountability is weakened because citizens view performance through the lens of partisanship.

However, beyond these empirical findings, recent advances in political theory propose a more direct way in which parties and partisanship are important for democratic accountability. Parties as organisations offer a coherent programme and increase transparency and the predictability of policy outcomes (Goodin, 2008; Kölln, forthcoming; Rosenblum, 2014; White and Ypi, 2010). Parties stand for a joint political programme and a political ideal that competes with alternatives. That way parties increase transparency and clarity of responsibility for political outcomes, which are important for providing information about performance and thus democratic accountability (Kölln, forthcoming; Romzek, 2015). In addition, political theorists also argue for the relevance of partisanship for democratic accountability. The main argument is that partisans are committed to ‘political pluralism, to regulated political rivalry, and to shifting responsibility of governing’ (Rosenblum, 2014: 282, 2008: 120ff). Partisans take ‘responsibility for the institutions that organize public discussion’ and ‘to other like-minded citizens’ (Rosenblum, 2014: 277; emphases in original). They represent and argue along the lines of a party’s political programme because partisanship implies a ‘public comparative exercise’ (White and Ypi, 2011: 386) of political alternatives. Accordingly, partisanship is not only an expression of responsibility and commitment that independents cannot claim (Rosenblum, 2014: 277), it is also an attitude that positively affects democratic accountability. Thus a key to understanding the role of political parties in supporting democratic accountability is to understand the nature of partisanship in contemporary democracies.

There are two rival interpretations of partisanship which have dominated the field for many years. Firstly, the ‘Michigan’ model regards partisanship as a long-term emotional
attachment that is typically acquired by individuals in adolescence or early adulthood and which they tend to carry through in later life (e.g., Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1969; Green, Palmquist and Schickler, 2002). This conception of partisanship was introduced in the early American National Election Studies and the concept was seen as an enduring product of socialisation processes in the family and community which largely took place in early adulthood. In this conception, partisanship is seen as an unmoving characteristic of an individual’s political beliefs, which strongly influences their voting behaviour and which remains stable or is strengthened throughout their lifetime. This implies that it is largely untouched by issue perceptions, particularly those relating to economic performance, and so plays a minimal role in making governments accountable for their delivery of policies. Moreover, since partisanship is thought to mould issue perceptions – incumbent party supporters are less likely to be pessimistic about the state of the economy, for example, than opposition party supporters - it can have the effect of reducing accountability. So it weakens the ability of voters to evaluate the performance of political parties.

There is, however, an alternative conception of partisanship originally introduced by Fiorina (1981), which sees it as a running tally of past performance evaluations – in effect, a cumulative record of voter evaluations of policy delivery over time. In this view a poor performance on the key valence issue of the economy and public services by an incumbent party is likely to weaken the partisanship of its supporters over time. Unlike the Michigan conception of partisanship, this interpretation sees it as one aspect of the process by which voters hold parties to account. Updated continuously over time with older evaluations progressively discounted in favour of newer ones, these tallies are subject to considerable dynamics (e.g., Fiorina, 1981; Achen, 1992; Franklin, 1992).
If partisanship is the product of a cumulative ‘running tally’ of retrospective policy evaluations, with the economy being the most important of these, then it will not be exogenous but by implication wholly endogenous to policy performance. There is now a lot of statistical evidence to suggest that party identification is dynamic both in Britain and in several other contemporary mature democracies (e.g., Clarke et al., 2004, 2009; Clarke, Kornberg and Scotto, 2009; Clarke and McCutcheon, 2009; see also Neundorf, Stegmueller and Scotto, 2011; Whiteley et al., 2013). Accordingly, party identification can be regarded as being one component among a broader valence politics model of electoral choice that emphasizes the importance of performance judgments for understanding the individual- and aggregate-level etiology of party support. We turn to this next.

The valence politics model has its origins in Stokes' path-breaking critique of spatial models of party competition (1963, 1992). The valence politics model is based on the conjecture that voters' primary concern in deciding which party to support is the capacity to deal with what Stokes called valence issues—those issues where there is widespread agreement on the desirability of particular policy outcomes, e.g., low rates of unemployment and inflation coupled with vigorous, sustainable rates of economic growth, efficient, cost effective health care and educational systems, security from threats posed by terrorists and common criminals. Although voters agree on the policy outcomes they want, there may be, and often is, substantial disagreement about the capacity of rival parties and leaders to deliver these outcomes.

Three main factors drive voters’ assessments in the valence model. First, since party identifications are conceptualized as cumulative evaluations of party performance, partisanship itself represents a major, predisposing, influence on electoral choice. The second factor involves party leader images. Since leaders are key political decision makers, voters’
perceptions of their demonstrated and anticipated performance represent a crucial aspect of valence calculation: the more highly a voter thinks of a particular leader the more likely that voter is, *ceteris paribus*, to support that leader's party. As described in the language of cognitive psychology, leader images constitute 'fast and frugal' heuristics (Gigerenzer, 2008, 2011) for voters seeking guidance in a political world characterized by high stakes and abundant uncertainty.

Assessments of the capacities of competing parties to deal with most important issues facing the country are the third factor. Quite simply, voters will tend to support the party that they consider best able to deal with the issues that they consider most important. Typically—not invariably—these are valence issues as described above. Given the pivotal importance of the economy, valence models invariably include an economic component. There are generally two sorts of economic mechanisms at work: judgments of the economic management capacities of the rival parties and evaluations of the past and future state of the economy as a whole. In addition there are public evaluations of their own personal finances. Regarding the former, the basic proposition is that voters tend to support the party that is seen as most capable of managing the economy effectively. As for the latter, the basic claim is that people who believe the economy (either national, personal or both) is performing relatively well typically want to preserve the political *status quo* that has produced their sense of prosperity—and they therefore tend to support the incumbent government. In contrast, if national or personal economic conditions are judged negatively, voters are prepared to abandon an incumbent government for one of its opposition rivals.

Alongside valence issues, there has been a long tradition of examining spatial issues in the literature on electoral behavior and party competition. Since the publication of Anthony Downs' *An Economic Theory of Democracy* in 1957, many political scientists have adopted...
spatial models of party competition as the explanatory vehicle in their analyses of electoral choice (for reviews, see Merrill and Grofman, 1999; Adams, Merrill and Grofman, 2005). Thus spatial models have been the principal rivals to the valence model of voting behavior. As is well known, in the Downsian model voters discern where competing parties stand on various position issues and then calculate distances between parties' positions and personal 'ideal points'. Voters maximize utility by casting a ballot for the party closest to them. In an issue-proximity world, considerations such as party identification, leader images, or competence on valence issues are irrelevant.

A comprehensive analysis of the valence and spatial models in general election in Britain and elsewhere shows that electoral politics is dominated by the valence model, although the spatial model also makes a contribution to the explanation of electoral choice (Clarke, Sanders, Stewart and Whiteley, 2004; 2009; Whiteley, Clarke, Sanders and Stewart, 2013). These empirical finding are true for two main reasons. Firstly, in the complex and uncertain world of electoral politics, the requirements for reasoned choice imposed on voters by the valence model are much easier to meet than those required by the spatial model. The valence model focuses on retrospective rather than prospective evaluations, and it concentrates on a limited number of issues. With this model voters are not being required to make complex judgements about where they are located in an issue space and where the different political parties can be found, or to judge how likely political leaders are to keep their promises. The second point is that the valence model makes it much harder for politicians (wittingly or unwittingly) to manipulate voters and mislead them into making the wrong choices (Riker, 1980, 1986). This is because it is harder for parties to manipulate opinions when voters are judging them on their records as opposed to their promises. Overall,
the valence model dominates the spatial model because it is both easier to use and more reliable.

So far we argued that the Michigan and the ‘running tally’ model compete over the origins of partisanship. We have also argued that the quality of political accountability depends on which conception prevails in citizens’ minds. If the Michigan model dominates, partisanship should weaken accountability. However, if the ‘running tally’ model is prevalent then partisanship should strengthen political accountability. In this case accountability operates via valence judgements on issues rather than through party loyalties. Figure 1 depicts the relationships.

(Figure 1 about here)

We are using the Cumulative File of the European Social Survey (ESS) 2002-2012 to test the hypotheses. It is a pooled cross-sectional data set and is based on biannual surveys and representative probability samples of European citizens. This means that the data represent repeated cross-section surveys at the individual level, but it constitutes a panel at the country level. We exploit these features for our analyses and use the aggregated country level data to model the dynamics across time. The individual level data are used to separately test the connections displayed in Figure 1. Since the data are pooled cross-sectional time series care has to be taken to estimate the effects. These models face econometric problems, particularly heteroscedasticity in the cross-sectional observations and autocorrelation in the model residuals (Wooldridge, 2002; Kennedy, 2003). At the very least it is necessary to cluster the data by countries when estimating effects, since successive observations within countries are not independent of each other, and so ordinary least squares regression can produce misleading results.

1 Design weights are applied for the entire analysis.
Respondents in the ESS confirm once more what numerous studies have shown before: partisanship in many of the advanced democracies is in decline. Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents indicating that they feel close to one particular party and for comparability purposes it includes only those sixteen countries that participated in all six rounds. In 2002 there were almost 52 per cent of partisans whereas the ESS in 2012 recorded only 48.6 per cent. This overtime trend should be qualified when inspecting country differences over time. Figure 3 illustrates that some countries such as Germany, Switzerland or Norway had more partisans in 2012 compared to 2002, but that other countries such as Hungary, Ireland or Portugal lost a substantial share of partisans in the same period of time. The combination of this particular time period and the country patterns propose a possible relationship with the Great Recession, something we can also examine.

(Figure 2 and 3 about here)

**Individual-level Analysis**

The individual level analysis is designed to model the rival conceptions of partisanship across all countries participating in the ESS at least twice over the ten year period from 2002. In order to test for the effects of the Great Recession on government partisanship amongst Europeans we use partisan support for any of the incumbent parties at the time of the survey as a binary dependent variable, where government partisanship was coded as 1. The data set includes more than 290,000 cases across all countries and all six rounds of the ESS\(^2\). In the analysis of partisanship, several logistic regression models with clustered standard errors accounting for the nested structure are estimated with the package *lme4* (Bates et al, 2013) in R. First we inspect the over-time trend of government partisanship by including dummy variables for each of the ESS waves as independent variables and use the first year of 2002 as

\(^2\) Listwise deletion is applied through the individual-level analysis to handle missing values.
the base line to. Table 1 summarises the results. As Figure 2 and 3 already indicated, government partisanship has been systematically declining amongst European citizens between 2002 and 2012. However, it is noticeable that partisanship dipped markedly after the financial and economic crash in 2008-09. This can be seen with the help of the odds ratios for the first model in Table 1. The odds of being a government partisan was 22 per cent and 32 per cent lower in 2010 and 2012, respectively, compared to 2002. In the survey waves following the financial crash, which are commonly associated with the period of the Great Recession, declining rates of government partisanship accelerated.

(Table 1 about here)

Next we test for the origins of partisanship. The Michigan model emphasises the importance of socialisation processes linked to demographic variables such as social class and educational experience as determinants of partisanship. We operationalized this conception by including age, gender (1=female), ethnic minority membership (1= yes), years of full-time education, and social class as independent variables. Social class is a five-point index running from one (unskilled worker) to five (high-grade service class) based on the ESS variables recording respondents’ and their partners’ occupation, employment relations and number of employees. The running tally model is operationalized with two variables. The first records respondents’ evaluation of the ‘present state of the economy’ (0= extremely dissatisfied; 10= extremely satisfied) and the second taps respondents’ leadership evaluation by asking them for their level of trust in politicians (0= no trust at all; 10= complete trust). The variables pertaining to age, years in education, trust in politicians and satisfactions with the economy are rescaled to facilitate comparisons with the binary variables (Gelman, 2008). We also report the unstandardized estimates on the basis of the original scale of the input variables.
The second model only reports the effects of the Michigan conception of partisanship. According to this model, respondents’ age has the strongest effect on government partisanship. The results mean that the odds of being a government partisan increases with age by 62 per cent; gender, ethnic minority status and social class have small negative effects on government partisanship whereas years of education yields a minimally positive effect. The third model only estimates the effects of economic evaluations and leadership trust on government partisanship. Both factors have strong positive effects: The odds of being a government partisan are around 52 per cent higher with higher satisfaction with the economy and about 97 per cent higher with higher levels of trust in politicians.

Table 1 next documents the results for the combined model. Model fit indices improve substantially compared to both previous models and the results of an ANOVA test also confirm that the differences in model fit indices are statistically significant at conventional levels. The odds ratios indicate that the running tally model presents a stronger explanation for government partisanship than variables in the socialisation model. As can be seen, both variables associated with the running tally model continue to exert strong effects of roughly the same magnitude as before, even after taking the Michigan model into account. Respondents’ age also still has a strong effect but the other variables pertaining to the Michigan model have minor or much weaker effects. These findings lend support to the running tally model as a more powerful explanation of government partisanship. Evaluations of leadership and economic performance are a stronger explanation of government partisanship.

However, as the earlier results show, the Great Recession needs to be taken into account. It should have influenced the running tally variables as the economy deteriorated and incumbent parties and leaders came under increased scrutiny across Europe. To explore
this possibility, a dummy variable was created defined as zero for ESS rounds 1-4 and one for ESS rounds 5-6. Adding this variable to the full model not only significantly improves the fit indices, but the coefficient is also negative and significant (see Table 1). It reinforces the earlier findings that surveys conducted in 2010 and 2012 yield on average a negative effect on government partisanship. In fact, the odds of being a government partisan during this period of time was still about 14 per cent lower than before, even after taking other explanations for partisanship into account. This also suggests that the Great Recession might have moderated the effect economic evaluations had on the probability of being a government partisan. The final columns in Table 1 thus document the results of including an interaction term. As expected the odds associated with economic evaluations and the interaction term are larger than 1 and significant while the odds on the time dummy are smaller than 1 and significant. Figure 4 shows the corresponding marginal effects plot when all covariates are held at their means. It illustrates that especially positive economic evaluations yielded a stronger effect on government partisanship during the recession compared to before.\(^3\)

(Figure 4 about here)

Overall the test of the first hypothesis using individual-level data shows that government partisanship in Europe between 2002 and 2012 finds stronger roots in the running tally model. Economic and leadership evaluations are more strongly associated with government partisanship compared to the variables in the Michigan model. In addition, the Great Recession seems to have had a highly significant impact since positive economic evaluations had a stronger effect during the recession than earlier.

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\(^3\) Estimating and interpreting interaction effects pose a particular challenge in models of logistic regression (Ai and Norton, 2003). Even in additive models the coefficients on independent variables already depend on each other to estimate the likelihood of event occurrence. Therefore, the coefficients on the interaction term as well as the constitutive terms only represents the conditional effects holding all covariates at their means. However, it might be that the conditional effect is different for other values of the covariates. To explore this possibility and as a robustness check to our results, we also investigated the conditional effects when all other covariates are held at a standard deviation below and above the mean. The results confirm our earlier findings, and the additional estimation only changed the level of predicted odds ratios, yet not their direction.
Next we turn to the second part of our individual-level analysis and focus this time on the effects of partisanship rather than its causes. What are the implications for accountability if partisanship is more strongly rooted in economic and leadership evaluations as opposed to socialisation processes? We argued above that economic and leadership evaluations should directly and positively affect accountability and this should not be funneled through partisanship. To test this expectation at the individual level we introduce a key measure of government accountability in the ESS, which asks about respondent satisfaction with the performance of the government in their country. It is measured using an eleven-point scale, which varies from zero (very dissatisfied) to ten (very satisfied).

(Figure 5 about here)

Figure 5 depicts changes in mean satisfaction with government in sixteen European countries over a period of ten years, focusing again just on the countries surveyed in all six rounds of the ESS Cumulative File. In 2002 the mean satisfaction score was 4.48, but by 2012 it had fallen to 4.28, a significant though not a large drop. It can be seen that the lowest mean score on satisfaction with government occurred in 2010 at the height of the recession, and by 2012 a small recovery had taken place. These observations should be qualified by inspecting changes in satisfaction levels over time at the country-level. Figure 6 shows satisfaction levels in these sixteen countries in 2002 and again in 2012. In a number of countries such as Switzerland, Germany and Norway satisfaction levels increased during this period. But it is also noteworthy that they declined rather dramatically in Spain, Ireland and Portugal, countries particularly affected by the Great Recession.

(Figure 6 about here)

Satisfaction with the performance of the government is modelled using the binary measure of government partisanship as well as the two variables associated with the running
tally model (economic and leadership evaluations). If our expectations hold we should see that the running tally model yields strong effects on government satisfaction and thus on accountability independent of government partisanship. The results of this analysis are reported in Table 2, where entries are standardized coefficients. Standard errors are again clustered by country.

(Table 2 about here)

The first column in Table 2 documents a very simple model that only contains the three main independent variables. As can be seen, both variables associated with the running tally model exert strong effects on government accountability. For example, a one-unit increase in economic evaluations increases satisfaction with government by an estimated 0.48, which corresponds to half a unit on the eleven-point scale. Similarly, leadership trust increases satisfaction with government by around a third of a unit, whereas being a government partisan only increases satisfaction with government by 0.12 units. Clearly, the valence variables have a direct effect on the accountability measure even when governmental partisanship is controlled.

These strong effects associated with the ‘running tally’ model largely persist even after including several additional attitudinal and spatial covariates in the model. Evaluations of educational and health policies and satisfaction with democracy are additional valence variables, and attitudes towards inequality and gay rights and the left-right ideology scale are additional spatial variables. Satisfaction with democracy is the only one that yields similarly strong effects as economic and leadership evaluations. In addition, the effect of being a government partisan is still relevant in the full model. Overall, then economic and leadership evaluations, or the running tally model, have strong positive effects on government accountability even after taking into account government partisanship and the spatial
variables. This lends support to our hypothesis above. Partisanship is more strongly rooted in performance evaluations, and these evaluations independently lead to a stronger accountability mechanism.4

The Aggregate Dynamics of Partisanship

In the previous section we have established that partisanship is more strongly influenced by issues and leadership evaluations than by social background characteristics. The Michigan model emphasises the importance of demographic variables such as social class and educational attainment as determinants of partisanship while discounting the importance of these more dynamic variables. So these finding are more consistent with ‘the running tally’ version of partisanship, since this variable is clearly not the ‘unmoving mover’ of the Michigan model.

However the individual level models do not fully take into account the dynamics of accountability over the ten years of the cumulative ESS file. This cannot be done at the individual level since the ESS is not a panel but rather a series of cross-sectional surveys. If we concentrate on the aggregate level of analysis by deriving mean scores on the various measures for each country and year, then this turns the dataset into a panel with repeat measures of key variables in countries over time. Thus aggregate analysis is used in order to examine the dynamics of effects within and across countries over the ten year period. To maximise the number of cases we will examine all thirty-two countries surveyed at least twice in the cumulative file. This produces an unbalanced panel research design with different countries entering and leaving the panel on different occasions (Frees, 2004).

What are the implications of the different conceptions of partisanship for the dynamics of accountability? If the Michigan conception of partisanship is correct then this will act as a

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4 The inclusion of demographics improves model fit but does not substantially alter the results.
barrier to accountability, a point made earlier. In a dynamic model of government satisfaction then partisanship will remain strong and significant even if issue perceptions relating to the economy are highly negative. If on the other hand partisanship is a running tally of past evaluations then it is likely to be eclipsed by more recent issue evaluations in any modelling and become non-significant in an estimating equation.

There are a variety of techniques for estimating these models, but a common approach is to incorporate fixed effects into the models (see Cameron and Triverdi, 2010: 235-268). A fixed effects regression involves, in effect, adding dummy variables to the equation in order to control for country level variables that might influence perceptions of government performance. The overall idea is to model the dynamics without idiosyncratic factors associated with particular countries clouding the issue. The results of this exercise appear in Table 3, which contains three different versions of the models.

(Table 3 about here)

The minimal model is designed to see if satisfaction with government did decline over the period, and so it includes a dummy variable for each of the waves of the ESS, with 2002 being the base category. It can be seen that there is weak evidence that satisfaction with government declined overall in 2010 in comparison with 2002; it fell by about 0.14 units. This replicates the findings in Table 1 above which are also observed in Figure 5. The full model in Table 3 contains six valence variables and four spatial variables. To discuss the former first, mean levels of partisan support for the incumbent government is not a statistically significant predictor of satisfaction with government performance in this model. This implies that the other valence variables are picking up the effects and therefore masking the impact of the running-tally of past valence evaluations on government performance. These findings are not consistent with the Michigan partisanship, since as the earlier discussion
indicated, partisanship should continue to have a significant impact on government evaluations if it worked exogenously and independently of valence evaluations.

Economic evaluations had a highly significant impact on satisfaction with government performance in the full model in Table 3. A similar point can be made about satisfaction with democracy. These results imply that support for the current government is influence both by specific and diffuse support (Easton, 1965), that is, support for the performance of the current government, but also a more diffuse support linked to the effectiveness of democracy in general. The third key variable is trust in politicians, the proxy measure of leadership evaluations in the valence model. It is clear that the valence model completely dominates the explanation of changes in satisfaction with government observed during this turbulent period in the history of Europe. The parsimonious version of the model in the third column of Table 3 indicates that the model explains a large percentage of the variance both within and across countries over time. It is noteworthy that none of the spatial variables involving attitudes to European integration, redistribution and equality and gay rights, together with the left-right ideological scale explain changes in attitudes to the performance of governments. The accountability mechanism works through the valence and not the spatial model.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

This paper investigated the connections between partisanship, valence issues and government accountability. To answer the question posed in the title, the Great Recession seems indeed to have weakened partisanship while it appears to have strengthened government accountability. As important as political parties and partisanship are for democracies, weakening partisanship does not necessarily affect accountability in a negative way. As the theoretical discussion and the individual- and aggregate level analyses of the Cumulative File of the European Social
Survey 2002-2012 demonstrate, the relationship between partisanship and accountability very much depends on the precise conception of partisanship utilised in the analysis. If partisanship is conceived of as a product of early socialisation processes it has the potential to weaken accountability. However, the results presented above support an alternative idea: between 2002 and 2012 partisanship amongst Europeans has been more strongly a product of on-going performance evaluations of those in power – a ‘running tally’. This explanation for why citizens felt close to any of the incumbent parties was even more pronounced during the height of the economic crisis. Europeans placed more emphasis on economic and leadership performance to inform their partisanship. The results of the individual-level analysis and of modelling the dynamics on the country level further suggest that this, in turn, strengthened political accountability rather than weakened it. Europeans are holding their governments accountable despite weakened partisanship. The prominence of valence issues and particularly economic evaluations during the Great Recession has facilitated rather than hindered a strengthening of political accountability in Europe. Our data do not allow a full un-packing of the causal relationships between the origins of partisanship and its consequences for accountability. Therefore, a logical next step is to test the hypotheses with individual-level panel data, a topic for another paper.
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Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Summary of Connections

Michigan model → partisanship → accountability

‘running tally’ model → partisanship → accountability
Figure 2. Partisanship in Sixteen Countries 2002-2012

Question: *Is there a particular political party you feel closer to than all the other parties?*
Figure 3. Partisanship over Time in Sixteen European Countries
Figure 4. Marginal Effect of Economic Evaluations on Government Partisanship for before and during the Great Recession

Note: Graphing with package visreg (Breheny and Burchett, 2014) in R. All covariates are held at their means.
Figure 5. Satisfaction with Government in Sixteen Countries 2002-2012

Question: ‘Now thinking about the [country] government. How satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job?’
Figure 6. Satisfaction with Government over time in Sixteen European countries,
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Recession Estimate</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>Michigan Estimate</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>Running tally Estimate</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>Combined Estimate</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>Combined with Post-crash Estimate</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>Interaction Estimate</th>
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Note: Dependent variable is government partisanship. For each model the first column reports the unstandardized estimates and the second column the odds ratios on the basis of rescaled input variables. ‘*’ p < 0.1, ‘**’ p < 0.05 ‘***’ p < 0.001
Table 2. Satisfaction with Government Models in 32 European Countries 2002-2012: individual level

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Note: Dependent variable is satisfaction with government. Entries are standardized coefficients. ‘***’ p < 0.001
Table 3. Satisfaction with Government Models in 32 European Countries 2002-2012:
aggregate level

(N=152 country/years)

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Note: Fixed Effects regression with standard errors clustered by country. Entries are unstandardized coefficients. ‘*’ p < 0.1, ‘***’ p < 0.01