

# Political Parties, Left-Right-Orientations and the Vote in Germany and France <sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

Many will agree that political parties, current political issues and the candidates that are up for election are the central factors that determine citizens' vote choices (Campbell et al. 1960).<sup>2</sup> However, it never has been easy to assess the relative prominence of these factors. Problems with the measurement of party identification outside of the United States of America have demonstrated this at an early stage (Budge et al. 1976). This is astonishing enough because parties themselves are a relatively easy matter: here at least we know what we are talking about. The case of issues is more complicated. Both their form and their effectiveness are debated.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, issues are bound to vary between electoral systems and often even between elections. Measurement problems are reduced if one focuses on ideological orientations instead of issue preferences. Technically speaking, ideological orientations are latent variables which to some degree determine preferences about specific political issues.

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<sup>2</sup> The collection of data that this research paper is based on was made possible by the DFG (German Research Foundation), the Fritz-Thyssen-Foundation, the Central Archive for Empirical Social Research, University of Cologne and the MZES at the University of Mannheim. This is greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank Thomas Gschwend and Bernhard Wessels for their co-operation during preparation and realisation of the surveys that are analyzed here. I also thank the "French Connection" at the MZES (members are Thomas Gschwend, Fabrice Larrat, Dirk Leuffen, Christine Pütz, Christine Quittkat and Stefan Seidendorff) for critical suggestions on the occasion of a first presentation of the results of this analysis. Karlheinz Reif has read the final manuscript and commented upon it which is also appreciated. Remaining errors, of course, are mine alone.

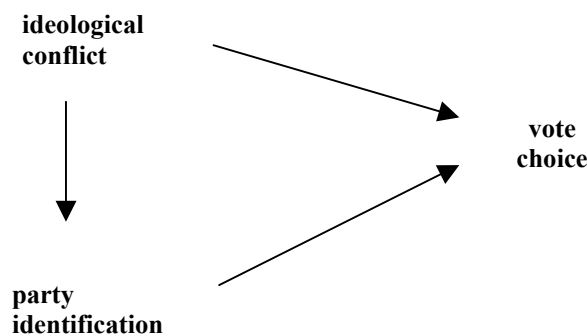
<sup>3</sup> Form refers to possible forms of issues (especially *position issues* vs. *valence issues*), while effectiveness refers to the "mechanisms" of influence on vote (most important here are the *smallest distance theory*, *directional theory*, *saliency* or *issue ownership theory*); cf. with more detail Schmitt 2001: chap. 1.3.

In European politics and beyond such ideological orientations correspond to the left-right dimension (Klingemann 1978, Laponce 1981, Bobbio 1996). This dimension is occasionally labelled as a “*super issue*” (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976, Inglehart 1984) and understood as an “*imperialistic political code*” (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989) that integrates the central political issues of the time and records eventual changes.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper we ask about the relative importance of party identification and ideological orientations for the voting decision in Germany and France. In doing so, we need to take into account that the two do not vary independently from one another. Aggregate-analyses indicate that ideological conflict intensifies party identifications (cf. Schmitt and Holmberg 1995; Schmitt 2002). Transferring these aggregate findings to the analysis of individual level data, we need to determine the following causal relationships (see figure 1).

Figure 1

**The Theoretical Model:  
Three Constructs and Their Interrelationship**



We will test this model in a comparative analysis of political orientations and voting behavior in two quite different electoral systems, Germany and France. This corresponds with a “most different systems design” which starts out with general, system-unspecific explanations and only introduces system-specific qualifiers if the former cannot be uphold.<sup>5</sup>

While the differences between these electoral systems are well known, one thing perhaps is worth recalling. During the Fifth French Republic the main political actor has been its directly elected president. If there is a German equivalent to this political role, it is the federal chancellor who is, how-

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<sup>4</sup> An example is the environment issue which at the beginning of the 1980s was largely independent of left and right. Twenty years later it clearly belongs in the left issue spectrum.

<sup>5</sup> See for this Przeworski and Teune (1970: 34 ff).

ever, only indirectly elected by the members of the German parliament. As a result, the election of the president of the French republic is usually<sup>6</sup> the national first-order election, while this role in Germany belongs to the election of the members of the federal parliament (*Bundestagswahlen*).<sup>7</sup> Another important difference is that, due to the constitutional position of the president and due to the fact that the French electoral system favours individual candidates over political parties,<sup>8</sup> the party system of the Fifth French Republic is characterized by instability and ongoing party system changes, while the post WWII German party system is characterized by stability and concentration, the latter mainly in the initial phase of party system development during the first decade after the war. Altogether, it is probably right to say that in French electoral politics people seem to be more important than parties, while in the German system the opposite seems to apply.<sup>9</sup>

Despite those important differences between German and French electoral politics we suggest that, in principle, the effect of party identification and ideological orientations on the voting decision should be similar in both countries. This proposition will be examined on the basis of two CSES II post-election surveys conducted in 2002, one in Germany and one in France.

## **2. Partisanship and Ideology as Determinants of the Vote in Germany and France**

Previous research contradicts our proposition. French parties seem to be marginal. Political leaders – especially those with the potential to become president at some point in the future, i.e. *les présidentiables* – set up parties, they change their names and alliances, they split and reunite them. As a result, parties are volatile entities. Compared to them, ideological camps are relatively stable. *L'extrême gauche*, whatever parties represent it, is a constant in French politics, as well as the moderate left, the right or the extreme right. People seem to identify with ideological camps: early on, aggregate analyses have shown that the ideological vote is a locally deep-rooted phenomenon (Siegfried 1913). Individual-level evidence points in the same direction: ideological orientations are found to be central elements in the calculus of the French voter (Haegel 1993, Fleury and Lewis-Beck 1993a, 1993b).

This is not to say that scholarly views on the significance of political parties for the voting decision would all coincide. French analysts tend to assume that party identifications hardly exist and certainly

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<sup>6</sup> If it does not closely follow a legislative election in which case the presidential contest tends to be degraded to a more acclamatory second-order event.

<sup>7</sup> A first-order election answers the power question. Other, less important, elections are second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Reif 1984). For details about the overriding role of the president of the Fifth Republic – in particular if he can count on a majority of votes in the National Assembly – see Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet and Moreau 2000: 48-62; see also Meny 1993.

<sup>8</sup> In France, public subsidies towards campaign expenditures are awarded to individual candidates, while German subsidies are given to parties.

<sup>9</sup> The significance of the “presidentiables” for the development of the party system is emphasized by Zadra (1996: 140 and passim). Pütz (2004) however emphasises the relevance of parties.

do not constitute a pivotal factor for the voting decision. This view has been supported by US colleagues (see Converse & Dupeux 1966 and Fleury and Lewis-Beck in the debate with Converse and Pierce). But there are other scholars, even from the same school, who have produced evidence that French parties, however instable they might be, still form the primary objects of political orientation (Converse and Pierce 1986, 1993; Pierce 1995; Evans 2004).

In Germany, by contrast, party identification is seen as the main determinant of voting behaviour (Glu-chowski 1983; Falter et al. 2000; Rattinger 2000). In fact, early election studies found the relationship between party identification and voting decision to be so strong that doubts arose about the conceptual independence of party identification from the vote – party identification and the voting decision correlated too strongly (Kaase 1976). This association has weakened somewhat since, not least because of the bipolar competition structure confronting four relevant parties in two adversary ideological blocs.<sup>10</sup> Such a bi-polar competition structure involving four distinct parties, known as “*quadrille bipolaire*”, also existed in France in the 1980s (see Reif 1982).<sup>11</sup> The electoral consequence of such a constellation is that voters find a serious choice alternative in their own ideological camp and can therefore vote against the long-standing party preference without changing ideological sides.

### 3. How Party Identification and Ideological Orientations Relate to One Another

Party identifications are nurtured by ideological conflict. Without ideological conflict, they shrink and lose their impact on the vote. Conversely, ideological conflict between the relevant parties of a party system strengthens the partisan base in the electorate, both with respect to the number of their supporters and regarding the impact of such “ideologically loaded” party identifications on vote choices (Schmitt 2002). The progressive decline of party identification in Germany during the ongoing coalition governments of SPD and *Die Grünen*, is a recent and perhaps therefore particularly obvious example. Because of the majority of the CDU/CSU-led countries in the *Bundesrat*, whose approval is needed for all important legislative initiatives, both of these assemblies *de facto* act under the constraints of a mutually consenting all-party-coalition. Under these circumstances when everybody knows that at the very end a compromise has to be reached, it is hardly opportune to fuel ideological conflict.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> These are the Greens and the SPD on the left, the CDU and the FDP on the right. In cases where the Greens are too weak to represent a true alternative to the SPD, especially in East Germany, the PDS takes their place.

<sup>11</sup> Then the partisan actors were the PCF and the PS on the left side, and the UDF and the RPR on the right. After the consolidation of the National Front, three political camps are distinguished – left, right and extreme right (see Grunberg and Schweisguth 2003; with counter-arguments Andersen and Evans 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Constellations of “divided government” also exist in France. Known under the label of “co-habitation”, they consist of a government in which the president can not rely on a majority in parliament, so that president and prime minister belong to different political camps. This first happened under the presidency of Francois Mitterand and has repeated itself under Jacques Chirac. “Co-habitation” tends to question the authority of the President and to obscure in the eyes of the public

This example also emphasises the impact of the institutional setup on the formation, durability and effect of party identifications. Clear government alternatives, the accountability of governments for accomplishments and failures and in structural terms: a majority-vote based, two-(plus-) party system favouring one-party governments – these are the contexts under which ideological conflict prospers and party identifications flourish. Coalition governments, and in particular situations of divided government, in which the other big party can influence government policy because it has to support it, tend to depress the development of party identifications. The same applies for the increasing integration of the political systems of Germany and France in the multi-level system of the European Union.<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. Data Basis, Research Design, Hypotheses**

Two largely identical representative post-election surveys are the data-base of this article, one conducted in France after the second round of the French Presidential election of June 2002, and the other conducted in Germany after the federal election of October 2002.<sup>14</sup> Among other questions, both surveys carried the second module of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems.

The present analysis of these data is organised like follows. First, we will document the distribution of party identification and left-right-orientations in Germany and France. In accordance with the literature we expect party identifications to be more frequent in Germany than in France, while the French should have fewer problems than the Germans to position themselves and the relevant parties along the left-right continuum.

In the second step we will look at the interaction between party identification and ideological orientations and perceptions. We will examine whether the perceptions of left-right-positions of relevant parties vary in accordance with the degrees of party identification. If ideological conflict produces party identification, voters that identify with a party should perceive the ideological distance between parties to be greater than voters without party identification. We then turn to the interrelation between the left-right self placement of respondents and their likelihood of identifying with a party. Here, we expect that respondents who can not position themselves on the left-right-dimension as well

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political responsibilities and accountability. The policy consequences of the French “co-habitation” are, however, perhaps less far-reaching than those of the German “Politikverflechtung”.

<sup>13</sup> The multi-level system of the European Union also requires compromise and co-operation of different political orientations and thus severely limits ideological confrontation at least on the EU-level of government action.

<sup>14</sup> The French survey was supported by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, the Central Archive for Empirical Social Research, University of Cologne and the MZES at the University of Mannheim, and realised by by Thomas Gschwend and the present author. The German survey was supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG), and realised by Bernhard Wessels and the present author. Full data-sets of both surveys are available from the Central Archive in Cologne; the “CSES core” of them is also available from the CSES website.

as those who avoid to side with the left or the right camp but position themselves in the neutral centre are less likely to identify with a party than others.

In a third and final step we examine the effect of ideological orientations and party identifications on the vote. As a result of a partially limited data matrix (we will come back to this in more detail), a multiple regression model cannot be applied; instead, we will identify the effects of left-right-orientations on the voting decision unconditionally first, and then again for the different degrees of party identification. We expect that the effect of left-right-orientations should increase with increasing party identification, and moreover covary with perceived ideological distinctiveness of the choice options.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 The Distribution of Party Identifications and Left-Right-Orientations

Citizens' party identification is established following the CSES-standard. According to this, respondents are initially asked whether they feel close to one of the parties. Those who agree to this question are called identifiers. Those who give a negative response are asked whether they feel a bit closer to one of the parties than to the others. Respondents agree to this question are called sympathisers.<sup>15</sup> Finally, those who give a negative response to both questions are considered as independents. Based on these simple questions, Table 1 reports about frequency and strength of party identification in Germany and France.

Table 1

**“Do you think of yourself as close to any particular party?” If NO:  
“Do you feel yourself a little closer to one of the parties than the others?”  
(in percent)**

	Germany	France
identifiers (“yes”)	35	57
sympathisers (“a little closer to one”)	39	17
independents („no, not close“)	25	25
don’t know, no answer	1	1

Source: CSES II-surveys in both countries. In the German data set, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Analyses are based on weighted data.

<sup>15</sup> At this point, the CSES measure asks further questions both about strength and direction of party identification. We do not touch these in the present analysis. The beauty of the simple opening questions is that they also cause little measurement problems even in intercultural comparison. See for such problems of the cross-national analyses of party identification the methodological appendix to Schmitt and Holmberg (1995).

A first finding is that almost all respondents in both countries answered these questions, only one percent “did not know” or “refused” to answer. This suggests that the instrument is well understood. With regard to substantial results, both in Germany and France one in four respondents declines both questions, and is thus classified as independent. This also suggests that three in every four Germans and three in every four Frenchmen feel more or less close to one of the parties. However, this is where the similarities between German and French voters in 2002 come to an end. Contrary to conventional wisdom, we find party identifiers to be more frequent in France than in Germany: 57 percent of our French respondents confirm to the question of whether or not they feel close to one of the parties while only 35 percent of the Germans answer that way.

How do we evaluate these discrepancy to what we thought to know? Can we trust these findings, are these results valid? We argue that they are, and justify this claim with the fact that we analyse very simple and identical survey instruments.<sup>16</sup> This has not been possible before, a fact that among others Converse and Pierce (1986) refer to as a possible limitation to the validity of their results.

While the French in 2002 present themselves as clearly more partisan than the Germans at the same time, they also are less willing to determine which party they identify with. When asked “Which party is that?” about half of the German respondents name, while only one in five French respondents shows his colours in response to this question (Table 2).

Table 2  
**“Which party is that?”**  
(In percent)

	Germany	France
party named	48	22
don’t know, no answer	27	53
not applicable	25	25

Source: CSES II-surveys in both countries. In the German data set, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Analyses are based on weighted data.

One possible understanding of this assumes that the French, as opposed to Germans, consider the question about the direction of their party attachment as “inappropriate” and therefore do not like to

<sup>16</sup> If there is such a thing as “identical wordings” of a survey question that is asked in two different languages and cultures: of course we can not rule out that different nuances of meaning could have been brought into the stimulus during the translation of the English master questionnaire.

answer it willingly (see e.g. Converse and Dupeux 1966, who attribute differences in party identification between France and the US to the specifics of French political socialization). An alternative explanation could focus on material differences between the German and the French party system and emphasise that French parties are much more volatile than the German ones. In France, party labels change more often, so that people might be able to support one of the competing parties on the basis of its personnel, ideology and policies, without actually knowing how this party currently presents itself and how it might be called. Which of these two explanations is more appropriate is hard to say. However, this does not matter much in this context since both change little about the fact that after the elections in 2002 party identification in France was a more frequent phenomenon than in Germany.

We turn to left-right-orientations of Germans and French and start again with an examination of the proportion of missing values (Table 3 and Figure 2). It appears that the respondents obviously have no problems to deal with the left-right concept<sup>17</sup> or to disclose their views and locate themselves on the left-right scale.<sup>18</sup> This might be somewhat more so for the French than for Germans, but a difference between 4 and 6 percent of missing values is hardly worth mentioning.

Table 3  
**Left-Right Self-placement**  
(in percent)

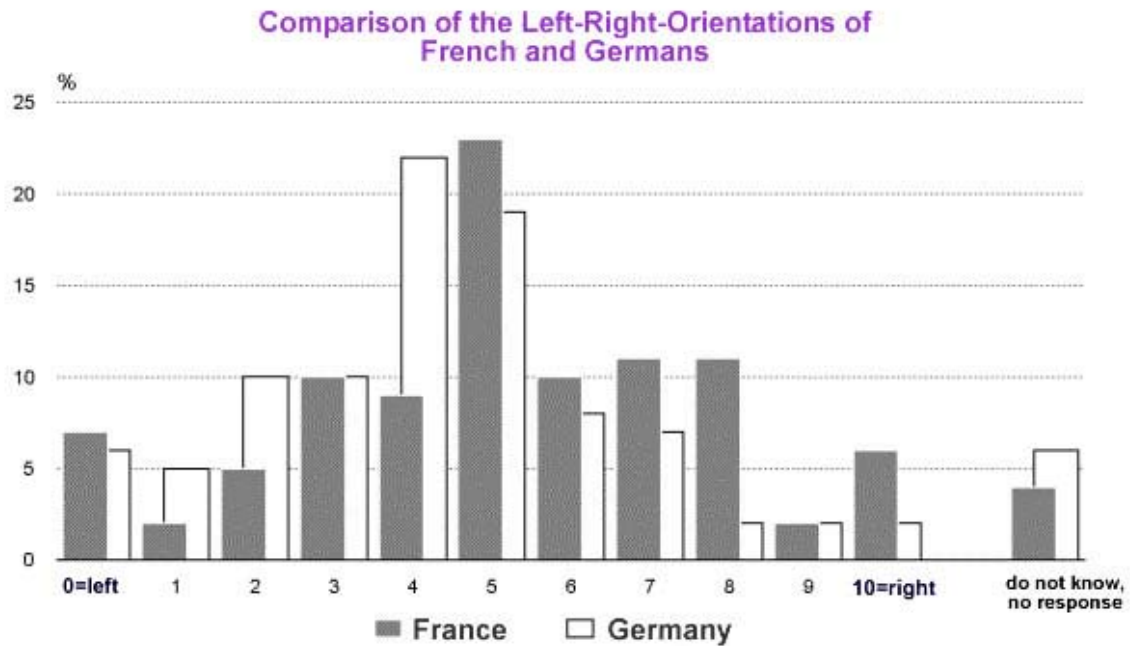
	Germany	France
left=0	6	7
1	5	2
2	10	5
3	10	10
4	22	9
5	19	23
6	8	10
7	7	11
8	2	11
9	2	2
right=10	2	6
dk, na	6	4

Source: CSES II-surveys in both countries. In the German data set, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Analyses are based on weighted data.

<sup>17</sup> This cannot be taken for granted. The data of CSES I has shown that the reach of the left-right-dimension as a scheme for interpretation of socio-political conflicts is limited. In some Asian political systems (South Korea and Taiwan for example) the left-right-dimension obviously does not play much of a role.

<sup>18</sup> This also cannot be taken for granted. Researchers still discuss if “long” scales like the 11-point left-right-scale applied here can even be used in a telephone survey. They worry that the respondents would have difficulties to position themselves without visualisation of the dimension on a card that could be handed out in a personal interview. Our results seem to invalidate such concerns.

Figure 2



Legend: Values are percentage of all respondents. The data sets were weighted representatively. Source: CSES II-Survey

Another difference between German and French findings is more remarkable, especially since it comes again unexpectedly: Germans position themselves a little further to the left than the French. We interpret this as a consequence of the different climates of opinion at the time when the surveys were conducted. The German survey was realised after an election won very closely by the red-green coalition of SPD and the Greens. The emotions in the left camp were overflowing, left-wingers – new and old – triumphed. The French left however was deeply depressed when Lionel Jospin, the presidential candidate of the socialist party, was defeated in the first tour of the presidential ballot (by Jean-Marie LePen, the candidate of the extreme-right Front National). Left-wingers quarrelled with themselves, in particular because they themselves have brought it about (due to the lack of co-ordination about left candidatures). The degree to which these contextual factors influence the ideological self-assessment of the citizens has not been investigated to a great extent. But it cannot be seriously questioned that they exist.<sup>19</sup>

## 5.2 The Interaction of Party Identifications and Ideological Orientations

We assume that ideological polarisation enhances party identification and strengthens its influence on vote choices. Ideological polarisation is understood as the distance of the relevant political parties to

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<sup>19</sup> This assumes that left-right-orientations, much as party identifications, can change in response to contextual factors. Especially the ideologically less determined might be influenced by the spirit of the time and adjust their assessment to the predominant climate of opinion.

an ideologically “neutral” centre. The further the parties deviate from this centre or are perceived as such,<sup>20</sup> the stronger the polarization in the party system. This applies especially to the big parties, which significantly set the tone for the political debate between all parties (see Schmitt 2002, van der Eijk, Schmitt and Binder 2005). We examine this interaction first by differentiating the perception of party positions according to the level of party identification. Our assumption is supported, if respondents who identify with a political party perceive the party system as more polarized than independents. The assumption is rejected if there is no consistent difference in the perception of party positions between respondents that are attached to or detached from political parties.

Table 4 provides some answers to these questions. We initially inspect again proportions of missing values and standard deviations, before we turn to the average positioning of parties. In both countries, relatively high proportions of missing values are found for comparatively young parties, e.g. the *Schill* party in Germany (23 percent) or the *Démocratie Libérale* (DL, 17 percent) and the *Mouvement des Citoyens* (MdC, 12 percent) in France. This suggests that it takes some time until almost all citizens and voters realise the ideological position of a political party. If we look at those respond to our questions, the results for France and Germany differ somewhat. German voters tend to agree on the position of the parties in the middle, while increased standard deviations are found for the extreme parties on the left (PDS: 2.8) and on the right (*Republikaner*: 3.7 and *Schill*: 3.4). Such an almost symmetrical order of agreement does not exist in France. There, only the dispersion in the perceptions of the *Front National* (FN: 3.5) is unusually high. All other parties are on about the same level.

Table 4 also shows that the perception of party positions in fact varies systematically with the level of party identification of beholder. Both in Germany and in France, respondents that identify with a political party see the parties as being ideologically further apart than independents. However, the diopters of the partisan lenses differs in strength between the two countries. This shows particularly in the perceptions of the ideological position of the major two parties. In Germany independents view SPD and CDU at an average of just 1.4 scale points apart from each other. But this minimal distance grows significantly with increasing party identification: from 1.4 to 2.3 scale points for sympathisers and finally to 3.4 scale points for identifiers. We conclude that ideological polarization between the two major German parties is only noticeable through partisan lenses. This is different in France, where the ideological differences between the PS and RPR (today UMP) are easy to identify even for independents (distance 2.3 scale points). Sympathisers already see these parties 3.1 scale points apart. And this distance increases only slightly to 3.4 scale points for identifiers. This clearly suggests that party competition in France is more ideologically founded than it is in Germany. This nicely conforms

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<sup>20</sup> This applies to the perception of ideological distances, because - as is generally known - perception of reality is real in its consequences. Regarding this so-called “Thomas Theorem,” see Robert K. Merton (e.g. 1995; 380 and passim).

with earlier research findings (Schmitt and Holmberg 1995, Schmitt 2002) and explains the higher proportion of party identifiers in France.

Table 4

**The perception of party positions according to the level of party identification**  
(figures are arithmetic means=AM, standard deviations=SD and percent missing values=MV)

	all			strength of party identification					
	AM	SD	MV	identifiers		sympathisers		independents	
Germany									
	AM	SD	MV	AM	SD	AM	SD	AM	SD
self-placement	5,5	2,3	6,1	5,6	2,6	5,5	2,2	5,5	2,1
Republikaner	8,8	3,7	10,3	8,7	3,8	8,8	3,7	7,9	4,1
Schill	8,2	3,4	22,9	8,3	3,4	8,0	3,4	7,5	3,7
CSU	7,4	2,6	7,3	8,0	2,6	7,2	2,5	6,6	2,7
CDU	7,0	2,4	6,6	7,4	2,5	6,9	2,3	6,2	2,5
FDP	5,8	2,1	9,2	6,3	2,1	5,6	1,9	5,5	2,1
SPD	4,4	2,2	6,1	4,1	2,3	4,6	2,2	4,8	2,2
Greens	4,1	2,2	7,3	4,0	2,2	4,0	2,1	4,6	2,3
PDS	3,1	2,8	8,9	2,9	2,9	3,5	3,2	3,7	3,1
AM-Distance									
major parties	2,6			3,3		2,3		1,4	
polar parties	5,7			5,8		5,3		4,2	
France									
	AM	SD	MV	AM	SD	AM	SD	AM	SD
self-placement	6,2	2,6	3,5	6,1	2,8	6,3	2,0	6,3	2,2
FN	8,7	3,5	6,8	8,9	3,5	9,2	3,0	8,0	3,8
RPR	7,7	2,3	9,0	7,9	2,4	7,9	2,0	7,0	2,7
UDF	7,4	2,2	9,6	7,6	2,1	7,5	1,9	6,7	2,5
DL	6,9	2,4	17,4	7,1	2,4	6,9	2,4	6,2	2,5
MDC	5,6	2,2	11,8	5,6	2,1	5,7	2,0	5,5	2,4
PS	4,6	2,4	4,5	4,5	2,4	4,8	2,0	4,7	2,5
Greens	4,6	2,1	5,7	4,5	2,1	4,7	1,8	4,6	2,2
PCF	3,4	2,3	5,4	3,3	2,3	3,2	1,9	3,7	2,4
LO	3,3	2,4	5,7	3,1	2,4	3,0	2,2	4,0	2,6
AM-Distance									
major parties	3,1			3,4		3,1		2,3	
polar parties	5,4			5,8		6,2		4,0	

Source: Source: CSES II-surveys in both countries. In the German data set, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Analyses are based on weighted data. The two major German parties are CDU and SPD; in France these are RPR and PS. The polar parties in Germany are the *Republikaner* and the PDS, in France these are the *Front National* and the *Lutte Ouvrière*.

There is another way of looking at the association between left-right-orientations and party identification. If ideological polarization in fact enhances party identification, we can not only expect that identifiers and sympathisers perceive greater ideological distances between the major parties than in-

dependents do – this has already been demonstrated. Party identifiers and sympathisers are following partisan cues more closely than others and are more often exposed to ideologically framed conflicts between the parties. As a result, independents should be less familiar with the left-right dimension and less able to position themselves on it than party supporters. As a consequence, we expect the proportion of missing values in left-right self-placements of independents to be higher than that of party identifiers and sympathisers. Further, independents should place themselves over-proportionally in the neutral centre of the scale. Table 5 and figure 3 report on our findings in view of these expectations.

Table 5

**„Without party identification“  
according to the ideological self-placement on the left-right-scale**

(in percent)

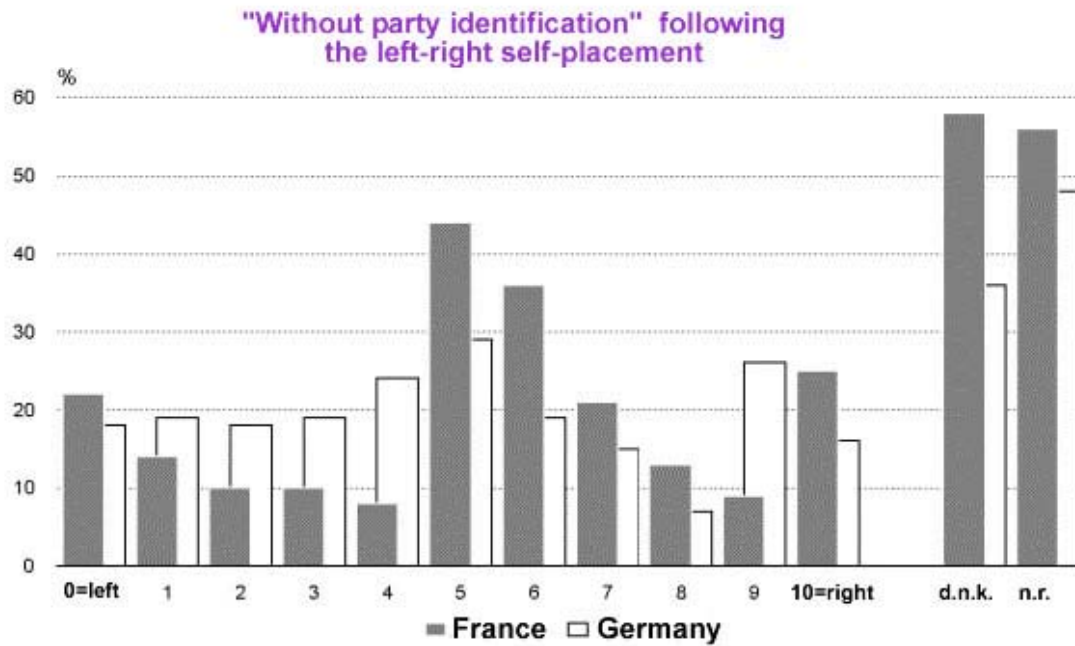
	left	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	right	dk	na
Germany	18	19	18	19	24	<b>29</b>	19	15	7	26	16	<b>36</b>	<b>48</b>
France	22	14	10	10	8	<b>44</b>	36	21	13	9	25	<b>58</b>	<b>56</b>

Source: CSES II-surveys in both countries. In the German survey, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Both data sets were weighted representatively for the analysis.

Independents are over-proportionally represented among those who do not report a left-right placement. More than half of the French who do not know where to locate themselves (dk: 58 percent) or refuse to answer (na: 56 percent) are independent. In the German survey, these percentages are a little lower (36 and 48 percent, respectively), but still significantly higher than all the other values for the left-right self assessment.

The expected concentration of independents in the centre of the left-right dimension becomes also apparent. In the French post-election survey independents account for 44 percent of those locating themselves in the centre category. In the German survey the respective value reaches 29 percent. While it is still higher than any other scale value, it is significantly lower than the French finding. One is tempted to relate this discrepancy to different structures of party competition. The German party system has been characterized by centripetal competition. Its liberal FDP, a relevant party early on, places itself right in the centre of the political spectrum. In this context, a centrist self-placement is probably less of a refusal of partisanship than in France. In the party system of the French V. Republic, the direction of party competition is mostly centrifugal, with parties in the centre traditionally facing severe problems (see on this already Deutsch et al. 1966).

Figure 3



Legend: For every left-right-category the percentage of respondents who does not identify with any party is indicated. Source: CSES II-surveys in both countries. In the German survey, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Both data sets were weighted representatively for the analysis

Putting these party system specific differences aside, we conclude in full accordance with the most different system design that in both systems the percentage of independents is slightly lower among people placing themselves in the centre of the left-right scale than among those who don't know or do not answer, but still significantly higher than in all other scale values.

### 5.3 The Effect of Party Identifications and Left-Right-Orientations on the Vote

Before we turn to the effect of left-right orientations and party identification on the vote, we need to review – if only very briefly – the different forms that vote choices take in both countries. In elections of the members of the German *Bundestag* every voter has two votes, one for a local candidate and one for a party list. When these two votes are allocated differently<sup>21</sup>, we might assume that they are inspired by different motives. In the case of sincere voting, it seems plausible that party identification and ideological preferences influence the party vote, while specific candidate characteristics and local issues might determine the candidate vote. For strategic voters, however, motives might differ signifi-

<sup>21</sup> Vote-splitting is an increasing phenomenon in the German voting system. In our post-election survey in 2002, 25 percent of the telephone respondents voted for a candidate of another party than the one which they supported with the party vote. In this group, the most frequent combination is a first vote for the SPD candidate in the local constituency combined with a party vote for the Greens. 40 years ago, the Cologne election study which was conducted at the election of 1961, found only 7 percent of the respondents splitting their vote.

cantly. They typically would support the candidate of their most preferred party if he or she stands a chance to win the direct mandate; and support the potential junior partner of the preferred government coalition with the party vote. Astonishingly enough, there is hardly any empirical research done on the different motives individual vote splitting.

In French presidential elections, there are again two different voting decisions to be analysed, this time in two different ballots. The first ballot is often described as a sincere vote for the most preferred choice option (“*vote du coeur*”). Things change in the second tour, when utility considerations become much more important (“*vote utile*”; e.g. Nohlen 2000: 283). A typical example is a voter who supports the presidential candidate of another than his or her most preferred party, because the own candidate did not make it to the second ballot. The “*vote utile*” goes typically to the candidate of the own ideological camp who received the most votes in the first ballot.

How can we determine the effect of party identification and ideological orientations on vote choices? This is basically a regression task, in which the probability of choosing one of the choice option (parties or candidates) is regressed on the ideological distance and the strength of party identification, plus the interaction of these two factors. This is typically solved with the help of a stacked data file, in which the choice options define the stacks. However, this research design cannot be applied due to the fact that many French voters do not disclose which party they identify with. For French voters, the directional component of their party identification cannot be identified.<sup>22</sup>

This incomplete data matrix leads us to apply an alternative strategy of analysis, which does not require the directional component of party identification and can be carried out without stacking the survey information according to choice alternatives. In both countries we first determine the effect of left-right orientations on reported or intended choices of one of the voting alternatives. In a second step, we examine how this effect changes for the three categories of party identification that are distinguished here – identifiers, sympathisers and independents.<sup>23</sup> While in this manner we still cannot determine effect of party identification on the vote, but statements about the interaction effect of left-right orientations and party identification on the voting decision are now possible.

Table 6 shows the unconditional effect of left-right-orientations on a series of different voting decisions in Germany and France. Reported are estimates of explained variance (Nagelkerke’s Pseudo R Squared) from multinomial logistic regressions, in which the vote is dependent and left-right orientations are independent. The German results show that ideological orientations determine the voting decision to a certain degree. Irrespective of whether we analyse respondents’ first or second

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<sup>22</sup> Given this background, we do not see how the structural equations analyses reported by Evans (2004) could be performed.  
<sup>23</sup> In terms of our initial plan of analysis in figure 1, we redirect the arrow that formerly ran from party identification to the voting decision to the arrow between ideological orientation and voting decision.

vote, and disregarding the federal election referred to (2002 or 1998), it is always about 20 percent of the variance in the vote recall that can be explained by left-right-orientations.

Table 6

**The impact of left-right orientations on vote choices in Germany and France**  
(Results are Nagelkerke's Pseudo R Squared)

	Germany	France	
recall federal election 2002			recall presidential election 2002
first vote	.21	.37	first ballot
second vote	.21	.09	Second ballot
recall federal election 1998			recall presidential election 1995
first vote	.19	n.a.	first ballot
second vote	.18	.56	second ballot

Source: CSES II-surveys in both countries. In the German survey, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Analyses are based on weighted data. n.a.= not ascertained.

In situation in France is different. There, the impact of left-right orientations on the vote in a first-order election is significantly stronger, with 37 percent explained variance in the first tour of the presidential election in 2002 and 56 percent in the second tour of the preceding presidential election in 1995. Due to its atypical limitation of the choice set to two right-wing candidates (Chirac and Le Pen), the second tour of the presidential election 2002 is an exception which should not obscure the rule. The proportion of explained variance in vote choices is two or even three times higher than in Germany. Earlier surveys that were conducted in the context of the series of French election studies produce similar estimates.<sup>24</sup>

Left-right orientations are a significantly stronger predictor of vote choices in France than in Germany – at least in standard choice situations which provide a left-wing and a right-wing choice option. But what can we say about the influence of the interaction between party identification and ideological orientations on the voting decision? This interaction is the more important for vote choices the more the effect of left-right orientations on the vote differs between our three categories of party identification – identifiers, sympathisers and independents.

<sup>24</sup> In these French surveys, left-right orientations are measured on a 7-point scale, instead of the 11-point scale used in the CSES. This should not affect the comparability of the results, however. The explanatory power of left-right self-placement for the voting decision of the French is, according to these surveys, about three times as strong as in Germany. The results of the French election study for the presidential election of 1995 (1988) suggests that left-right orientations determine the voting decision at a Nagelkerke-value of 53 (59) percent for the first round, and a value of 64 (65) percent in the second round. “Blancs et nuls” as conscious (protest-) voting decisions are considered valid choice options, while other missing values are excluded from the calculations.

Table 7

**The impact of left-right orientations on vote choices in France and Germany  
– controlled for party identifications**

(Nagelkerke's Pseudo R Squared and number of valid cases in parentheses)

	Germany	France	
Recall federal election 2002: second vote			Recall presidential election 2002: first ballot
all (1800)	.21	.37	all (679)
identifiers (706)	.30	.48	identifiers (423)
sympathisers (723)	.18	.27	sympathisers (112)
independents (361)	.12	.22	independents (141)

Source: CSES II-surveys in both countries. In the German survey, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Analyses are based on weighted data.

Table 7 shows the results of this final step of the present analysis. In Germany, we analyse the second vote of the 2002 federal election. In France, we examine the voting decision in the first round of the presidential election because this decision is largely independent of contextual influences (like for example its own results). The findings show that the effect of left-right-orientations on the vote is twice as high for identifiers than it is for independents. This is so in both countries and is therefore independent of the strength of the unconditional effect of left-right orientations on the vote.

Left-right orientations obviously depend on party identifications to be able to realise their full potential impact on the voting decision. It is the partisan interpretations of ideological differences between the voting alternatives, which identifiers are more exposed than sympathisers, and sympathisers more than independents, that turn ideological orientations of citizens into the important factor for the voting decision that was found in our analysis.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> It could be argued that the decisive factor is not party identification, but the elevated level of political interest that comes with it – and that increasing political knowledge is the cause for the increasing effect of left-right orientations on vote choices. However, this is not what we find empirically: the impact of left-right orientations on the voting decision is very low for French voters with a strong interest in politics (Nagelkerke-value of 16 percent) and very high for politically not interested respondents (Nagelkerke-value of 73 percent; the question of the political interest was not included in the German survey).

## 6. Summary and Outlook

The question of French party identifications is a controversial issue in the literature. Some consider them as not very developed and instead emphasise the importance of ideological orientations for the voting decision. Others see them as the main structure that forms political attitudes and affects political behaviour. In this piece we have avoided taking sides on this matter and suggested a model which relates ideological orientation and party identification to one another. According to this model, party identifications live of ideological conflict between the parties. The stronger the ideological polarization of the party system, the wider and firmer should the support for political parties be, and the more ideological *and* partisan should the voting decision be. This is nothing particular French; we rather expect that these mechanisms can be found in all democratic electoral systems.

Against our expectations, we have initially observed that there are not fewer but more party identifiers in France than in Germany. We then found that the perception of ideological conflicts between the relevant parties of the system “produces” party identification in both countries – or the other way around, that identifiers perceive greater ideological distances between the parties than independents do. We also learned that independents in France see more of an ideological distance between PS and RPR than German independents see between SPD and CDU, and concluded from this, that the higher proportion of party identifiers in France is caused by a more ideological party competition.

In the end we examined the effect of party identifications and ideological orientations on the vote. It appeared that voting decisions in France are more strongly grounded in ideology than in Germany – exceptions like the second round of the presidential elections in 2002 can only confirm the rule here. This also conforms with the earlier finding that the French party competition is more ideological than its German counterpart. Finally, with respect to party identification we have demonstrated a clear reinforcement effect: the closer voters are to one of the political parties, the more important are ideological orientations for the voting decision.

In this paper, we intended to add support to what had previously has been derived from the analysis of aggregate data. We were able to demonstrate the interrelation between ideological polarization, party identification and voting decision on an individual level in two quite different electoral systems. The good news is: party identification in France has the same effect as in Germany. That they are more frequent there is somewhat surprising – given the political science folklore – but ultimately plausible considering the stronger ideological constraints of party competition in France. The fact that French party identifiers do not reveal the direction of attachment is contrary to the German findings. We attributed this to the greater fluidity of the French party system. However, it is about at this point that comparative research should add further information and more robust evidence.

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