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Reasoning Voters in Multiparty Systems

Franz Urban Pappi
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Editorial Note

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
1. Party preferences in multiparty systems	1
2. Preference formation	3
3. Party preferences and voting behavior	13
Conclusion	16
Literature	17

Introduction

Studying political behavior at the level of the general electorate has changed considerably from the early days of the predominance of the Michigan model in the 1960's (Campbell et al. 1960, 1966), and the juxtaposition of this social-psychological and the rational choice approach of Downs (1957). Beginning with the arguments of the revisionists (cf. Rusk 1987) in favor of issue voting and continuing with both the traditional and rational choice ideas about retrospective voting (Fiorina 1981), the concept of the reasoning voter functions as a bridge between political psychologists and realist versions of the rational choice approach, the latter trying to predict actual voting behavior, being not exclusively focused on calculating equilibrium conditions for the demand and supply of policy packages. The reasoning voter is approximately rational, trying to come to terms with a decision situation about which he misses important information. Adding the limited capacity of human beings to process information, Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock argue that judgemental heuristics solve Simon's puzzle, as they call the problem, in deference to Herbert Simon, of deciding rationally "with limited information and processing capacity" (1991: 18).

Applying a rational choice framework, Popkin coins the term "reasoning voter" to describe a similar situation in which "voters actually do reason about parties, candidates, and issues" (1991: 7). He assumes that voters act as investors of their vote in collective goods, at the basis of "costly and imperfect information under conditions of uncertainty" (1991:10). Public, as contrasted to private investors have less incentives to gather costly information so that Popkin characterizes the choice situation as a case of low-cost rationality. Gathering inexpensive information from friends and using information and calculation shortcuts are the available means to approach rationality in a low-cost decision.

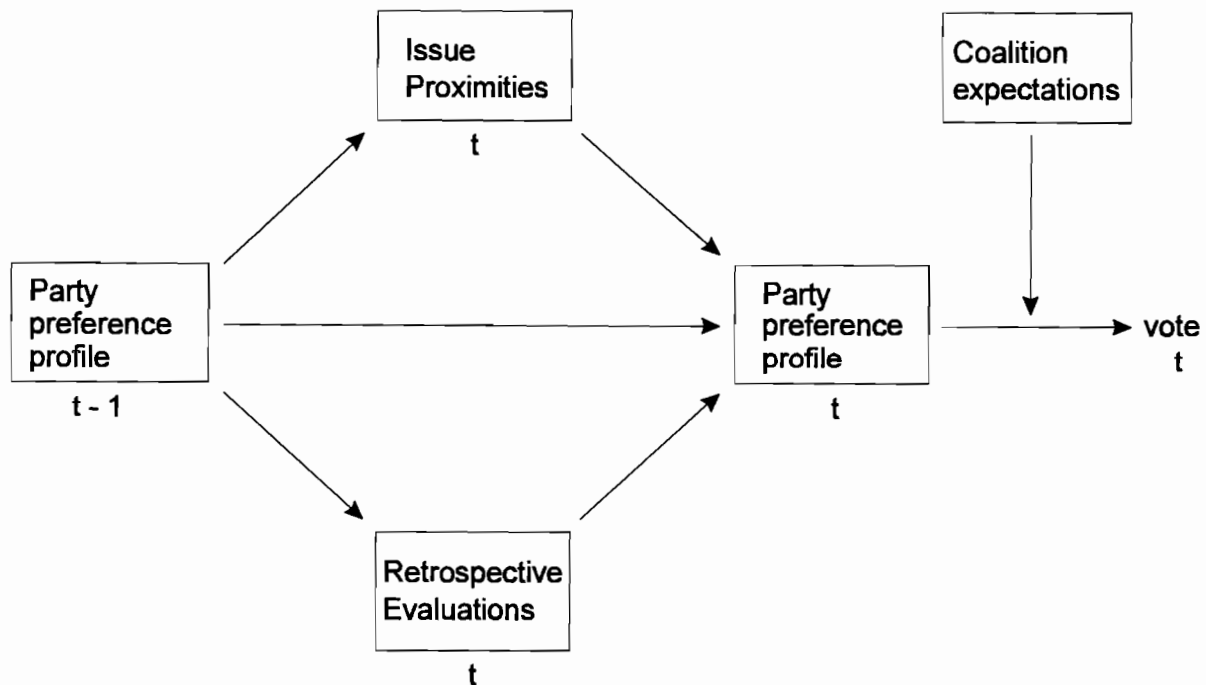
The general insight contained in the concept of the reasoning voter is not new. Since the original homo oeconomicus was gradually turned into a utility maximizer calculating the probabilities of the decision outcomes subjectively, it was only a small step to realize that the acquisition of perfect information is often too expensive (see already Downs 1957). What is new is that cognitive psychology can offer a set of experimentally tested results about schemata for acquiring, processing and retrieving information, about dominant frames simplifying the goal structure and about habits as quick decision rules in frequently returning decision situations of the same type (cf. Esser 1991). These theories enable the cognitive psychologist to model individual decision making, but in political science in general, and in voting research in particular, it is, in addition, necessary to consider the interface between the choices of individuals and the world of party politics and government policy. The problem which I shall discuss in this paper is preference formation and party choices of reasoning voters in multiparty systems. This is a necessary and separate task in a field where the research agenda focuses heavily the American two-party system and its presidential elections.

The most general characteristic of rational choice is a behavior which is consistent with one's

preferences, the preferences themselves having to fulfill minimal conditions of consistency as transitivity etc. Thus, I shall first discuss party preferences of voters in multiparty systems. Secondly, the forces influencing these preferences have to be taken into account, paying special attention to the factors identified by the rich tradition of voting research. Building on the concept of the reasoning voter, one has not to start from scratch but should ask how variables like issue proximities, retrospective evaluations of government performance and party identification can be interpreted in a model of preference formation in multiparty systems. Once this problem is solved, the last task will be to analyze the decision problem itself, taking into account future expectations about possible government coalitions with their incentives for sophisticated voting and, asking in addition whether the voters' paradox, that is participation in an election with an infinitesimal small impact on the outcome, appears as paradoxical as ever.

The overall model whose components are discussed in the following chapters is built on the assumption that party preference profiles of voters are the crucial link between the factors influencing the reasoning about parties and the final voting decision in multiparty systems. In this sense, party preference has an analogous causal status as the comparative candidate evaluations in the revised Michigan model of Markus and Converse (1979). From the different possible influences on party preference, issue proximities and retrospective evaluations are selected as the factors most proximate to the process of preference formation in the assumed funnel of causality. Issue proximities measure the substantive prospective element and the retrospective evaluations pertain to the performance of the present government. Future expectations are more difficult to integrate in models for multiparty systems, since the future government does depend not only on election results but also on future coalition building. When one wants to take coalition expectations into account, one can argue that these influence the final decision outcome since the voter has to reason about the government which will be a possible consequence of the different votes which are compatible with his party preference profile (see fig. 1).

Figure 1
A Model of the Voting Decision



1. Party preferences in multiparty systems

In a two-party-system, the relation between party preference and party choice in an election is rather simple, once the voter has decided to participate at all in an upcoming election. Either a voter prefers party or candidate A, and then he will choose this alternative, or he prefers party or candidate B and will, therefore, choose that alternative. Indifference should lead to abstention. It would be irrational to vote for the party which is not the first choice.

The choice problem in a three-party-system are not a straight- forward extrapolation of an election with two alternatives, since this time it may be rational to vote strategically for the second most preferred party because of the expectation that the most preferred party may loose and the least preferred party is then able to win. The strict preference order between three parties now contains $3! = 6$ logical possibilities and this only if no ties between two or all three parties occur. With three possible answers to every paired comparison between three parties (counting pairs for the same parties only once and not twice as ordered pairs), there exist 27 different possibilities to answer that question resulting in 13 consistent individual rank orders, ranging from a tie between all three parties, to six preference profiles with two party ties at either the first or last rank to the six strict rank orders. From three parties upward, it is no longer self-evident that voters have consistent preferences, even if this assumption is built into some measurement devices which are frequently used in voting research (as feeling thermometers).

Ideally, one would hope that the preferences of individual voters are consistent enough for an

expression in a precise utility function which is not the trivial outcome of measurement by fiat. Using paired comparisons between German parties, it can be shown that the minimal condition for rational voters, i.e. transitivity of strict preferences, is fulfilled for over 90 percent of the electorate (cf. Pappi 1983). These percentages are very similar to American data on preferences between presidential candidates running in primaries. Brady and Ansolabehere report percentages between two and ten percent of their respondents showing intransitive candidate orderings (1989: 149), but they are able to test whether the transitivity axioms are fulfilled for indifference judgements and in its negative form, too. These additional conditions have to be met if one is interested to formulate a utility function for weak rank orders of individual voters.

In normal election studies, the data one would need for the valid construction of a utility function for a set of parties are not available. But in many European election studies, feeling thermometer or sympathy scalometer questions are asked for all parties competing for seats in parliament, and it is possible to exploit this type of data for a construction of the party preference profiles of voters. Before discussing different types of measurements, we have first to clarify the theoretical status of the concept of party preference.

I propose to use party preference as the central intervening variable between the reasoning about and evaluations of parties on the one side and voting behavior on the other side. The status of this variable is similar to the status of comparative candidate evaluations in American models of the presidential vote. Making this status completely functionally equivalent would mean that the parties have to be presented as concrete options in the specific upcoming election. Thus, one would have to ask voters about their party preferences concerning one specific election, i.e. for a federal election in Germany e.g.: Which party do you prefer most in federal politics for the upcoming legislative period? When two elections are held on the same day, a federal and a state election e.g., one would have to ask two election-specific party preference questions.

The alternative is to conceptualize parties as consistent players in different games and to assume that voters in multiparty systems develop general party preferences. In most democracies, the different government levels are not of equal importance, so that, empirically, parties are evaluated overwhelmingly with respect to their national role.

The degree of election or situation specificity is one dimension to characterize party preference. A second important aspect is the time dimension. Should party preference just tap the momentary feelings towards parties or should it measure a more permanent attitude? This is again a question with both a theoretical and an empirical aspect. Theoretically, our answer is given by the causal diagram of figure 1. Since the party preference profile of today is influenced by the profile of an earlier period, there has to be some continuity in these preferences. An alternative would be to ask the question in a way which does stress the momentary character of preference to the detriment of the permanent aspects. In figure 2, the two dimensions are cross-tabulated.

Figure 2
Two Dimensions of Party Preference

Time Dimension	Situation or Election Specificity	
	yes	no
Momentary Preference	1	2
Permanent Preference	3	4

The concept of party preference is, of course, related to the concept of party identification. Party identification in its original, Michigan version is conceptualized as a permanent positive identification with a party as a general, and not a situation specific attitude object (cell 4 in figure 1). The party identification questions for European multiparty systems have, nevertheless, the shortcoming, that a certain degree of identification with one party cannot be interpreted as the inverse of the identification with the other parties. The American seven point scale running from strong over weak Democrats, Democratic leaners, and independents finally to strong Republicans, cannot be constructed for multiparty systems. Dutch authors have proposed a viable alternative to measure a permanent party preference profile which avoids the concentration on the most preferred party. The proposed question is supposed to measure general electoral utility of parties. The respondents are asked, for each party, how probable it is that they "will ever vote" for it (van der Eijk et al. 1986). This question can be interpreted as an equivalent of party identification in multiparty systems, since the phrase "will ever vote" transcends the momentary aspect of preference and focuses on elections in general and not only on a specific election (cell 4 of figure 1).

The conventional sympathy ratings of parties stress more the momentary character of these attitudes which are nevertheless not thought to be election-specific. Time series on a monthly basis do reveal many ups and downs for the different parties, but these movements are normally not decomposed into their different components, as e.g., the overall mean for the established parties, the variance of the respondents' ratings or the relative party ranks. The latter may remain relatively stable even if the mean level of sympathy or the size of the distances between parties change. What may look on the surface as a clear candidate for cell 2 of figure 2, may thus contain information on the more permanent aspects of party preference so that these questions could be categorized as a species in between cell 2 and 4. This location would be best compatible with the causal status of the variable in figure 1. It comes close to party identification interpreted as "a running tally of retrospective evaluations" (Fiorina 1981: 89), where the voter would have an account for every party he perceives as relevant and where he continually adds positive evaluations for each party and subtracts negative evaluations depending on his experience during legislative periods.

Situation specific party rankings are sometimes asked in pre-election polls (cell 1), the only empirically empty cell of figure 1 being cell 3 which asks for permanent election specificity. One can

imagine voters who have different, but relatively stable party preferences for different types or levels of elections. They would never vote e.g. for a post communist party at the national level, but they consider the respective local party as an option for a first or middle rank. Since voting research normally focuses on national elections, election specificity is a neglected variable.

There exist different devices to collect data on party preference profiles: paired comparisons, rankings or ratings. The latter two methods create consistent profiles by design, whereas paired comparison data allow empirical tests of consistency. The choice criterion itself should be general preference, whereas "will ever vote" is conceptually too proximate to voting behavior as the dependent variable.

The more conventional ranking or rating scales are frequently analyzed aiming at a simple spatial representation of the profiles. The space resulting from factor analysis or from unfolding techniques of preference or dominance data is then interpreted as the joint decision space of the electorate, summarizing the rankings or distances of the voters from the parties in the best possible way. Numerous analyses of this type have been performed for multiparty systems (see e.g. the early study of Converse for Finland, 1966, or the sophisticated study of Nannestad, 1994, for Denmark). Unfolding analysis allows to test hypotheses about the one-dimensionality of a party space, whereas factor analysis is more often applied for explanatory and not for confirmatory purposes. The interpretations of the resulting solutions do not always appear plausible, especially if more than one dimension is identified.

2. Preference formation

From the many forces affecting party preference, those factors are here singled out which supposedly have the most immediate impact on the preference formation of the reasoning voter (cf. figure 1). She must make up her mind using the available political information, without the willingness to invest in expensive monitoring.

Citizens in modern democracies are continuously exposed to a steady flow of political information, from the mass media and from discussions in their daily contacts. Not all people are interested in politics all the time and some may have difficulties in drawing conclusions from the news about domestic affairs in their country to the role of parties and the consequences for their party preference. The information shortcuts which could be relevant in this situation are schemata to process and retrieve political information, framing mechanisms to simplify the evaluation of parties or retrospective evaluations of government performance. The concepts of schema and frame were developed by cognitive psychologists (cf. Hastie 1986 for an overview, and Kahneman und Tversky 1982 for the introduction of the framing concept), and frequently applied to voting and public opinion research (cf. Sniderman 1993, or Iyengar 1991). Schema theory raised some controversy about its contribution to understanding political attitudes and behavior (see Kuklinski et al. 1991, and the rejoinder by Lodge and McGraw 1991, Conover and Feldman 1991, and Miller 1991). The core of the controversy is a

very general argument which can be raised whenever a new concept or approach is imported from one of the behavioral sciences into an established research field of another science. Do we gain fresh insights into our research problems or do we just retell old stories in a new jargon? Schemata as "the set of cognitions relevant to some concept" (Kuklinski et al. 1991: 1342) help the individual in information processing. Memory structures, and information input, processing, and retrieval are modelled by psychologists for individual persons, whereas political psychologists are more interested in the agreements between citizens in defining social situations. And especially for this latter task, there exist, of course, concepts which were developed long before schema theory became fashionable, as belief system, e.g., (Converse 1964) or ideological dimensions as political codes (see Klingemann 1979).

I shall discuss some of these concepts with the question in mind what they have to tell us about the reasoning voter and her problem of information processing. Some of these older concepts were developed as realist conceptions of voters against normative models of the informed rational voter. And what was originally conceived as a deviation from the homo politicus of civics textbooks or from the homo oeconomicus can nowadays be reinterpreted as the modal citizen who uses information shortcuts and judgemental heuristics in her reasoning about politics and parties. One consequence of these research results from cognitive psychology have been new conceptualizations of rational choice (see Lindenberg 1990, e.g.), which are more realistic, but which should nevertheless allow formal modelling.

The minimally reasoning citizen of traditional voting research is the retrospective voter. Following the traditional reward- punishment theory of Key (1966), he simplifies his reasoning by evaluating his own well-being in the immediate past for which he makes the incumbent government responsible, rewarding it for positive developments and blaming it for deteriorations. Fiorina (1981) adds mediated to these simple retrospective evaluations, when the citizen has to rely not only on his own experience, but also on judgements of others, of the mass media e.g., about the accomplishments of the incumbent government.

We are here interested in the impact of retrospective evaluations on party preferences in multi-party systems where coalition governments are the rule and not the exception. How citizens allocate government achievements to parties of a coalition is a problem which has to be solved empirically. In European voting studies, questions on party competence for different policy domains are sometimes asked, and these measures can be viewed as proxies of performance evaluations. Some researchers prefer to ask competence questions concerning more narrow political problems or more or less uncontroversial issues like unemployment, stable prices etc. (see the list in the 1989 European election study, Küchler 1991). The respondents are asked to rate or rank the importance or salience of each problem and then to name the party which they think would be best in handling the issue. Even without an explicit time frame, competence evaluations seem to be based on experiences with the parties in the past, and in the case of European elections, these experiences will stem from participation of parties in national governments more likely than from their European role.

Simple retrospective evaluations of government performance are based on the voters' experiences and do not seem prone to rationalizations in the same way as party competence judgements. Even scholars relying on these latter measurements concede that they may be, nevertheless, only reflections of more permanent affective ties to parties (Küchler 1991: 101), that is a consequence and not a cause of party preference. The easier the evaluation task is made for the respondent, the more he is tempted to report non-attitudes. This is a severe problem, especially for smaller parties, whose competence may be less visible when in government, and almost not evaluable when in opposition.

Rationalization is an easy option for respondents when they are just asked to pick the most competent party and do not have to compare the parties. Sniderman et al. have shown that informed and less informed American voters differ in the relative importance that incumbent approval and comparative prospective evaluations of candidates have on the vote. The more informed voter reasons more and bases her final decision less on incumbent approval than on a comparative candidate evaluation. She acts as an optimizer, whereas the less informed voter attempts "to decide whether the way things have been have been good enough", thereby acting as a satisficer (Sniderman et al. 1990: 131). In parliamentary systems with coalition governments, the satisficer is confronted with a more difficult task than in the American presidential system, but he may nevertheless choose between the larger coalition party or the party of the prime minister and the major opposition party. In Germany, only the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats present candidates for the chancellorship so that the system approaches a two-party constellation, at least for the less informed. They have thus a chance to avoid a complex comparison between all party options, but then it would be important to measure incumbent performance directly, instead of using questions which are built on the assumption that the respondents reason carefully about the comparative competence of the parties.

Party competence questions have another disadvantage as factors influencing party preference formation. They are sometimes ambiguous in utility terms. When a respondent has to evaluate the competence of a party with respect to a certain policy domain as e.g. European unification, she could name the party which she perceives as the most able promoter of unification when in fact she herself is against further unification. A party is competent if it is able to reach its goals, irrespective of the condition whether the respondent agrees with these goals or not. A respondent who opposes further European unification can nevertheless believe that a party in favor of such a policy is very competent and is, therefore, a competent opponent of his goals. Weird as this possible interpretation of some competence questions may look, it shows at least that these questions are not a very direct way to measure the utility component of party preference. Retrospective evaluations of government performance and judgements about future policies of the parties which the voter is able to compare with his own policy preferences are much more plausible ingredients of preference formation than competence ratings.

The proximities of voters ideal points to the perceived party positions on position issue scales are at the core of the rational voter model. Downs (1957) originally postulated that this voter will invest his

vote for that party which promises the best returns in the next legislative period and the issue proximities are supposed to measure these prospective returns. Position issues are linearly ordered sets of policy options resulting in a one-dimensional scale on which voters have single peaked symmetric preference curves. The farther a voter perceives a party's position from his ideal point in either direction, the greater his utility loss if this party would pursue its policy in government. The reasoning voter is here assumed to differ from the original rational voter in two major respects: She forms her party preferences not exclusively on the basis of issue proximities and she does not act as a consequential investor in that part of her future well-being which is influenced by government. I shall discuss the latter aspect in the next section. The first aspect was already dealt with since retrospective evaluations of government performance are one type of impact on preference formation which voting research identified as important, in addition to issue proximities. I do not exclude all other possible factors as candidate characteristics etc. by principle, but assume that they are more election specific and less general as types of impact on party preference formation in multiparty systems.

Issue voting raises many problems both for the informed and the less informed voters. The first group is not necessarily homogeneous in the sense that all these voters are driven by the same problems for which they look for governmental solutions and the latter group simply will often not know the policies which the different parties offer as solutions. The final result could be an electorate balkanized into many issue publics and a large additional group for which issue proximities are meaningless. Since it should be more cumbersome to gather and process data on many than on only two parties, multiparty systems should even have more uninformed voters than twoparty systems. And with an assumed increase of one-issue parties, the balkanization would be a more probable characteristic of multiparty than of two-party systems.

Interestingly enough, these hypotheses are not only not corroborated by research on multiparty systems, they are not even formulated. As an explanation for this paradox, a theory analogous to the functional of theory of party identification (cf. Shively 1979) is able to give a tentative answer: Citizens without direct information on the parties' positions concerning many issues will apply information shortcuts and the more they are forced by system characteristics to do that, the better oriented they become, compared to citizens in two-party systems.

Since Downs (1957), ideology is discussed as a possible information shortcut. This use of ideology should not be confused with ideological thinking in the sense of political sophistication as developed by Converse (1964). The ideologues show the highest level of political conceptualization, they have opinions on many issues and organize their political beliefs with abstract principles like "liberalism" or "conservatism" which are not idiosyncratic but shared by the elites, and their different attitudes are, therefore, consistent in the sense of these shared "official" ideologies. The original estimate of the percentage of ideologues in the American electorate was 2.5 percent, plus another 9 percent who were characterized as "near-ideologues" (Campbell et al. 1960; 249). Even if an increase in these numbers was observed, compared to the low levels within the American electorate in the late 1950's

(see Abramson 1983: 273), ideological thinking always remained a minority affair and not a powerful device for "cognitive misers" to receive orientation in the world of politics (see also Smith 1989).

Organizing one's own attitudes in terms of "official ideologies" which function as constraints for individual belief systems is not at all necessary when a citizen tries to orient himself in the world of politics with the help of ideological labels like left and right. In order to function as orientation shortcuts, these labels have to be attached, of course, to political parties in public opinion. Then even unsophisticated voters should be able to apply the left-right schema as a mere orientation device, under the condition that the labels are used to describe political topics in the mass media and that the parties are more or less consistently described in these terms. Fuchs and Klingemann "view the left-right schema as a mechanism for the reduction of complexity, which serves primarily to provide an orientation function for individuals and a communication function for the political system" (1990: 205). They find that over 90 percent of the West German and the Dutch electorate have at least a minimum understanding of the labels "left" and "right", whereas this figure is lower in the United States. Since the schema is closely linked in Europe to the cleavages characterizing party systems, it is able to fulfill its function as an information shortcut about political contents.

Many European researchers use the left-right scale in surveys both in order to gather data on the perceived positions of parties and to ask the respondents where they place themselves on the same scale. As a result, one has all the necessary data for a simple one-dimensional spatial model in which the differences between ideological self-placement and the perceived party positions are interpreted as utility loss terms. This is the most straightforward operationalization of Downs' idea that many party systems are characterized by one overwhelming ideological dimension, i.e. an economic left-right scale, on which both parties and voters are located, giving general hints in a complex world about their policy preferences.

This operationalization is appealing since voters in European multiparty systems do indeed perceive the parties' positions on the left-right scale relatively correctly (for Germany see Klingemann 1972, and Pappi 1983: 427). But in order to use these data as generalized issue proximities, one has in addition to make two assumptions:

- (1) The left-right-dimension is the only major schema applied to parties, or there does, at least, not exist another schema which would result in a different linear order among the parties.
- (2) The respondents are able to use their orientation device about parties also about themselves, i.e. they perceive their own policy preferences also in general left-right terms.

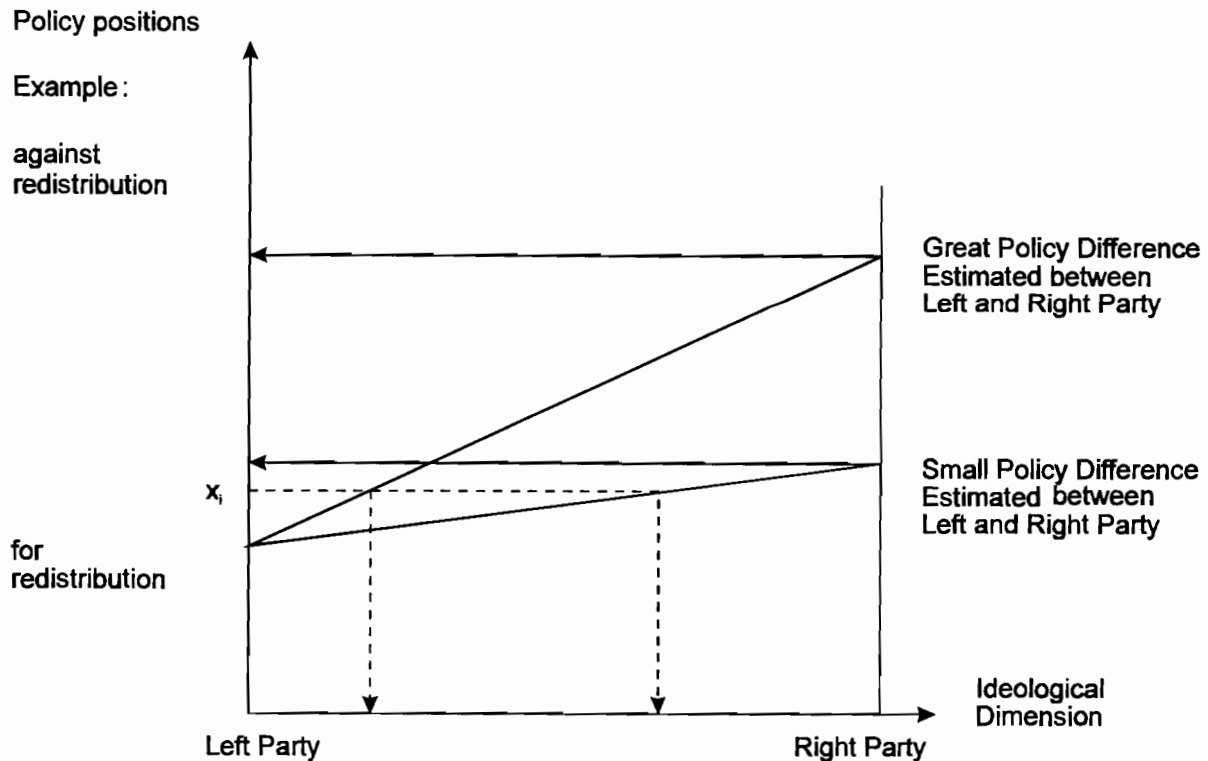
Hinich together with other authors, (cf. Hinich and Pollard 1981, Enelow and Hinich 1984, and Hinich and Munger 1992) has developed a theory which is not built on these assumptions but allows an empirical test of them. One can interpret their approach as a type of schema theory which postulates that citizens in modern democracies indeed use ideological labels attached to parties in public opinion as information shortcuts about concrete policy positions of these parties. But contrary to Downs' original model, the citizens do not have to place themselves directly on the ideological dimensions, since their primary goals are their policy preferences which can be summarized, with certain

assumptions, as derived ideological positions.

Downs had originally proposed a simpler model. "... each party takes stands on many issues, and each stand can be assigned a position on our left-right scale. Then the party's net position on this scale is a weighted average of the positions of all the particular policies it upholds. Furthermore, each citizen can apply different weights to the individual policies, since each policy effects some citizens more than others." (Downs 1957: 132-133).

Hinich and Munger criticize that this model does not work since it cannot guarantee coherence in ideological messages due to the different weights the voters assign to the policy positions. "If we allow for some overall coherence, we must still address the question of how voter preferences are expressed, for this expression determines which ideology parties try to associate themselves with in order to win elections. (Hinich and Munger 1992: 9). Hinich solves this central puzzle by a new spatial theory of ideology in which "the ideological dimension(s) (where politics is debated and decided)" are related systematically "to the complex, n-dimensional policy space (which voters actually care about)" (Hinich and Munger 1992: 9). This goal is reached by postulating a knowledge of the ideological positions of parties on one or more ideological dimensions which the voters have and which they use to guess about the policy stands of these parties. Thus, one has to assume only that the citizens have a vague idea how the ideological left-right dimension e.g. is related to policy stands with respect to a certain type of issues, say redistributive questions. When the voter has the idea that leftist parties are more in favor of redistribution, he can derive from that knowledge the probable positions of the parties on this policy dimension on which a party is placed the more to the redistributive end of the scale, the more leftist it is perceived. But the citizen does not see himself as more left or right on the ideological scale, instead he has a fixed preference concerning this special redistributive issue. Voters may differ in their perception how different the policy positions of the parties are with respect to the basic ideological dimension. Some voters perceive rather large differences between left and right parties with respect to redistributive issues, others may think that nowadays left and right parties do not differ too much concerning such issues. Depending on these estimates, voters with the same policy preference may end up in different derived positions on the underlying ideological dimension (see fig. 3).

Figure 3
Policy Preference of Voter i (x_i) and Two Possible Estimates of the Policy Positions of a Left and Right Party



When the campaign would be focused on only one issue, one would not need this theory because it would just complicate the decision situation. The aim of the theory is to find few ideological dimensions when there are many concrete policy issues which play a role in campaigns or in politics in general. Then it may well be that the underlying ideological space is only one-dimensional, even if the number of issues is quite large. On the other side, it is an empirical question whether a party system can be characterized by only one latent ideological dimension on which the parties differ or whether more than one latent ideological dimension underlies the political position taking in day-to-day politics. Thus, for Germany, one can make the argument, that the liberal party is perceived in a middle position between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats only when concentration is focused on law and order problems, abortion rights or new social issues, whereas in economic policy terms, the same party is perceived to the right of the Christian Democrats (see Laver and Hunt 1992, and for the electorate Pappi 1994).

Empirically, there are two ways to apply Hinich's theory. One can either use data on policy preferences of voters and perceived party positions for different issues and use factor analytic methods to recover the latent ideological space (Enelow and Hinich 1984: 213-215). The other possibility is to measure the ideological knowledge of the voters concerning the parties directly. Under the assumption that there is only one left-right dimension underlying policy differences in a multiparty

system, one can ask the usual left-right question with respect to the parties and use this information as an independent variable to predict the perceived policy positions of parties on specific policy dimensions (Hinich and Munger 1992: 23-25). Whatever estimation method one uses, one is able to derive ideological positions for the voters which are then used as the derived ideal points on the so-called predictive dimension or dimensions. The parties have positions in the same space so it is very easy to compute ideological distances between the voters' ideal points and the positions of the parties. These terms can then be used as independent variables among others to predict the party preferences, perhaps in the strict form of a party utility function of the voters which we have discussed in the last section.

3. Party preferences and voting behavior

The first question we have to answer in this section is whether retrospective evaluations of parties and issue proximities are indeed necessary first as predictors of party preference formation and secondly, through an indirect path, to a better understanding of voting behavior. The major argument for this model is that retrospective evaluations and issue proximities are indeed topics about which the voters are reasoning. But concerning actual voting behavior, we should first ask whether the voters have to reason in every new election. Could party preference or party identification of an earlier period not be treated as a standing decision, so that at least a substantial subset of the voters have finished their reasoning some time ago with the consequence that their party preference is only present in the rudimentary form that they know quite for sure which party they like most. Then, voting in general elections is possible just as a habit. It is a repeated action for most voters, so that participation and choice could be an almost automatic consequence of a stable attitude towards one favored party, beyond the control of conscious decision making (Ronis et al. 1989). On the other side, habits can also be seen as a conscious decision between a standard option with a certain known utility and an alternative with additional outcomes whose evaluation incurs additional information costs (see Esser 1991). The utility of the additional option will be expected only with a certain probability and it will not be a certain outcome as the one of the standard option. The new alternative will then be selected only if its expected utility is rather high compared to the search costs (Esser 1991: 67).

Appealing as it may be to apply this habit concept to the voting behavior at least of older cohorts in a democracy which have very frequently participated in elections (cf. Converse 1976), some caveats should be considered. Voting is indeed repeated behavior, but with much longer time intervals than normal every-day behavior. A citizen is confronted regularly with news about parties, but has to come to a conclusion for his choice relatively seldom. In addition, voting behavior is not costless, so that a decision to participate at all in a certain election may not be self-evident, especially when the bad news about ones favorite party abound. From these caveats, I draw the conclusion that a minimum of reasoning beyond pure habits should be taken into account.

Whatever the forces influencing preference formation, reasoning voters summarize their impressions

from party politics in a preference profile. Even pure habit voters prefer the party of their standing decision to all other parties and are only less open to new party signals in the ongoing election campaign so that their party preference of the earlier period carries over to the new election without short-term impacts. What remains to reason about are the election specific conclusions our potential voters draw from their preferences.

Logically, the decision situation is clear enough: One has to decide whether to participate in the upcoming election and which party to choose. In a two-party system, the most preferred party will be the party of one's choice so that the participation decision is the more difficult one. It gave rise to the voters' paradox, that is the explanation of high turnout when the expected utility of one's own participation is very small or even negative, considering the participation costs. These costs are certain, whereas the utility incomes of future governments have to be discounted by the small probability that the vote of the respective individual is decisive. Even if some researchers could show that turnout is positively correlated with the size of the party differential (utility term) and the closeness of the aggregate vote for the competing parties (probability term), the overall impact of participation norms (civic duty e.g.) is so much larger than the former factors that many authors starting from rational choice premises end up with participation norms as the major determinant of high turnout figures (see Barry 1978). In addition, they treat these norms as a factor independent from the rational calculus of party choice. It serves an expressive function, that is the satisfaction comes from the act of voting as such and not from its consequences for future governments as in the case of instrumental action. "Public orthodoxy seems to assume that though non-instrumental considerations are relevant in getting voters to go to the polls in the first place, such considerations cease to bear once the voter slips behind the curtain to pull a lever or mark a card." (Brennan and Lomasky 1993: 35). Brennan and Lomasky argue that both expressive and instrumental factors play a role in party choice. An example of expressive preferences are ethical principles which a person upholds for himself and which he sees symbolized by a party program, without asking about the consequences of the principles in political reality. In Weberian terms, one can characterize individual voters both as "zweckrational" (instrumental) and as "wertrational", that is oriented "to an absolute value..., involving a conscious belief in the absolute value of some ethical, aesthetical, religious, or other form of behavior, entirely for its own sake and independently of any prospect of external success" (Weber 1965: 175). Since a single voter is almost never decisive in general elections, expressive considerations gain importance compared to the investment decision, when a citizen invests his vote to maximize his returns from future governments.

In multiparty systems with coalition governments, the citizen as an investor of his vote has to overcome even more obstacles than in two-party systems with alternating governments. She has normally only the option to choose a party, but she is interested in the future coalition. When the parties do not announce their coalition preferences before the election or when the election outcomes are quite uncertain, a rational strategy aiming at a certain coalition government is impossible. Voting degenerates to a reporting of first preferences. When party competition is polarized between

government and opposition parties and when the government parties promise to continue their coalition, a rational voter whose most preferred party is coalition partner A, and whose second preference is coalition partner B, may vote sophisticatedly and choose B instead of A, if he thinks he is more decisive for the electoral success of B than of A. In Germany, coalition majorities often depend both on the relative advantage of the largest compared to the second largest party and on the success of the junior partner to gain more than 5 percent of the valid votes. In this situation, it makes sense to choose the party whose electoral prospects are less certain, thus maximizing the decisiveness of one's vote for the future preferred coalition government (cf. Eckstein 1994). But in general, we expect that voting in multiparty systems is even more characterized by expressive considerations than in two-party systems since the complexity of the decision situation discourages prospective instrumental voting. Parties advocating the absolute value of this or that to the detriment of practical, success-oriented politics flourish more than in a majoritarian democracy with alternating governments. And high turnout figures seem to confirm this type of "Gesinnungsdemokratie" which often degenerates to "Stimmungsdemokratie".

According to our model, both instrumental and expressive considerations can influence party preference formation. The respective explanatory problems are, therefore, not the causes, but the consequences of party preferences for actual behavior. Is it possible to show that the voter as a consumer draws different conclusions from his given party preference profile than the voter as an investor? The latter has to calculate his expected utility incomes from different future governments, whereas the former needs incentives which reward the revealing of a preference in an election.

Guttman et al. (1994) use the distinction between non voting due to indifference and due to alienation as a more general insight into the motives of voters as investors and as consumers. Going back to Hotelling's (1922) original example of ice cream vendors on a sea shore, they argue that "[c]onsumers abstain' from buying ice cream if the closest vendor is sufficiently distant. The positions of alternative vendors are irrelevant to the decision to buy ice cream. Voter-investors, in contrast, are interested in the victory of the favoured party against its rival(s). Here, the difference between the positions of the favoured party and its rival(s), and not the voters political distance to his favoured party is all important." (1994: 198). Empirically, they interpret feeling thermometers as direct measurements of utility and construct for the American presidential election of 1976 both the difference of the scale scores between Ford and Carter as a measure of indifference and the absolute level of the preferred candidate as a measure of alienation. Analyzing the 1972-1976 panel of the Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, they find a statistically significant effect of the absolute utility level, but not of the utility difference term on the probability of voting. Rattinger reports similar results for Germany (1993), where alienation is known as "Politikverdrossenheit". These results prove the importance of expressive considerations for the final act of voting.

The investor-voter in multiparty systems has to take into account the coalition possibilities and has to guess about the coalition probabilities on the basis of different election results. She will reason about

these possibilities during the election campaign, but not in between elections when behavior of government officials and parties is monitored and consequences are drawn from good and bad news and experiences concerning a general, not election-specific party preference.

The voters as consumers do not have to differ from the voter-investors during the preference formation phase. They diverge, the closer the upcoming election becomes. The consumer type needs more incentives from the mass media and from his peers to become involved, and the more biased the information is in one or the other direction, the higher the expressive value of his preference revelation, provided that he agrees with the partisan flavour of this information. As a consequence of this argument, the overall theoretical model of figure 1 should be changed in one respect: In addition to coalition expectations, there should be another possible influence on the causal path from party preference profile to vote, and this other influence is the influence of the climate of opinion on voters who are open to expressive considerations.

Conclusion

Continental European democracies have developed parliamentary systems in which governments are normally formed by coalitions. Two-party systems are the exceptions, the modal category being a moderate pluralism either in Sartori's (1976) original meaning of the term with three to five parties or with a larger number of parties which are nevertheless not sharply polarized in the sense that anti-system parties gain a substantial number of votes. These party systems make it very difficult for voters to anticipate future governments, but they facilitate on the other side political orientation by providing ideological signals about the positions of parties.

I have argued that the reasoning voter in multiparty systems will develop a party preference profile as a summary measure of his experiences and information about the performance and policy offers of the parties. Among the factors influencing preference formation, I have selected performance evaluations of governments and issue proximities, but this short list could be easily supplemented by future expectations, competence evaluations of party leaders and candidates for government offices and so on. I would only insist that these factors have a substantive link to the utility a citizen can associate with a party as a possible provider of collective goods.

Once citizens have formed consistent preferences for the parties, the major problem is to predict their voting behavior, taking into account the election-specific coalition expectations as an additional factor influencing the causal path from party preference to voting behavior. But since the single voter is not decisive, public investors differ from private investors, as Popkin (1991: 10) accentuates the problem, or expressive considerations gain an importance of their own as Brennan and Lomasky (1993) conceptualize the rationality problem, that is the problem that instrumental rationality is downgraded for voters in mass electorates. What is important to understand is that not the voters are downgraded as irrational, but the voting mechanism, for instance proportional voting in parliamentary multiparty systems, is seen as a less than perfect mechanism to reveal the policy preferences of the electorate.

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