Parties, politicians, and policies

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Chapter 4
Individual Determinants of the Calculus of Voting

The analyses of the preceding chapter demonstrated that voters do not always rely on the same calculus when casting their ballot. Depending on the circumstances, voters give different weight to party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances. The aim of this and the following two chapters is to investigate the sources of this variation in the calculus of voting. This chapter focuses on individual level variables and Chapter 5 on contextual factors that affect voters' reasoning. In Chapter 6, these separate models will be combined in a full explanation. The strategy of first analysing different sources of variation separately has advantages over attempts to immediately combine all sources in a single model. First, partial analyses allow me to elaborate expectations and findings for separate sources of variation without the need to complicate these by the interrelations between different determinants. The latter can be relegated to Chapter 6 that reports the complete analysis. Developing the full analysis step by step therefore has the advantage of making the line of argument in the book more intelligible. Second, separate analyses make it possible to assess the explanatory power of rivalling accounts. For example, is the party system of a political system more important for variations in voters' reasoning than the availability of mass media? Questions like this can only be answered if such characteristics are analysed separately. Third, the possibility to compare the findings of partial analyses with those of the
full model helps to gauge the consequences of the interrelation between different sources of variation in voters’ reasoning. Differences between results of partial and full models indicate whether it is optional or necessary to control for related variables to obtain unbiased effect parameters.70 A more detailed discussion of omitted variable bias and differences between the partial and the full model specifications is provided in Chapter 6. The drawback of this stepwise approach is, however, that the results based on the partial analyses have to be regarded as preliminary as they may be different after controlling for related variables.

The analyses of this chapter focus on the question of whether or not voters’ characteristics impact on the calculus of voting. Chapter 1 reviewed the literature in this respect which argues that voters’ reasoning may vary due to differences in political sophistication (e.g., Pattie & Johnston 2001), different information they are exposed to71 (e.g., Krosnick & Kinder 1990), variation in perceived issue saliency (e.g., RePass 1971), experiences during political socialisation (e.g., Inglehart 1977), etc.72 In general, as voters

70 For instance, is it advisable to estimate the effect of education on variations in the calculus of voting without controlling for the age of respondents? Analysing effects of education and age in a first step separately and in a second step jointly can help to answer this question. To the extent that the effect of education differs significantly between both model specifications, controlling for age is necessary to obtain an unbiased estimate for the effect of education.

71 Priming studies suggest individual media consumption as a source of the heterogeneity in voters’ reasoning (Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Krosnick & Kinder 1990; Krosnick & Brannon 1993; see also Kroh 2003). Unfortunately, variables on individuals’ media exposure are not obtainable. However, the relevance of mass media is investigated in Chapter 5 in the form of the aggregated media availability in different societies.

72 One can think of many more individual characteristics that may be of relevance for voters’ reasoning as, for instance, voters’ ideological position, political values, degree of political cynicism, political interest, personality traits etc. The characteristics mentioned in the main text are the ones most frequently cited in the literature.
INDIVIDUAL DETERMINANTS

perceive the political competition in elections in their own way, they will rely on different calculi of voting. Variation in voters’ perception of elections may originate from their views on politics, their informational basis, their social and political background, etc. The available data allow me to focus in this chapter on voters’ social background and political awareness\(^73\) as determinants of voters’ reasoning.

This chapter consists of three parts. The first part elaborates and investigates why and to what extent voters’ social background determines individual variation in the vote function. The second part introduces voters’ political awareness as a determinant of individuals’ calculus of voting. The major findings of the chapter are summarised in the third section.

4.1 Social Background: Demographics

Classical approaches to the study of electoral behaviour focused on voters’ social background characteristics as explanatory variables of vote choice (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Berelson et al. 1954).\(^74\) Although voters’ social background seems to have become less important for the explanation of

\(^{73}\) I will use the term of political awareness throughout this book to denote the extent to which voters’ are politically informed. The term awareness acquires in the literature often additional meanings and is therefore somewhat imprecise. However, as I rely repeatedly in this book on the notion of ‘being politically informed’ and as the phrase of ‘the extent to which voters are politically informed’ is rather awkward, I use the simple term of awareness instead.

\(^{74}\) On the aggregate level of political systems, social cleavages resemble the link between social groups and parties (Lipset & Rokkan 1967). Such cleavages date back to 19\(^{th}\) century processes like nation building or industrialisation and divide societies into groups that differ in their affiliation to political parties, which allegedly represent interests of these social groups. Depending on specific historical or socio-structural context of societies these linkages might occur in different constellations (e.g., Knutsen 1989; Lane & Ersson 1994; Lijphart 1999).
vote choice in many societies, is has not entirely lost its relevance (e.g., Nieuwbeerta & Utte 1999; Evans 1999). As social background (still) is important for vote choices, one may plausibly expect that social background also impacts on the reasoning of this decision. But in which ways may voters' demographics arguably do so? I will distinguish two arguments in this section. A first argument relates to the distinction between socially aligned and non-aligned voters, or in other words, the distinction between socially more or less embedded voters. A second argument relates to the stabilising effect of age for party leanings.

Social Embeddedness
Several authors note that in recent decades the effect of traditional social cleavages on vote choice weakens due to social modernisation (e.g., Dalton et al. 1984; Crewe & Denver 1985; Franklin et al. 1992). One aspect of this social modernisation is the disbanding of traditional social groups and networks and a rising individualisation in many societies (e.g., Beck 1983). Increasing levels of urbanisation and mobility, secularisation, and diminishing social class differences are indicative for the decline of traditional social bonds (e.g., Dalton et al. 1984; Schnell & Kohler 1995). I expect citizens to vote less according to cleavage-motivated partisanship when they have no or weak bonds with churches and social classes, and when they live in urban areas, i.e. when they live in neighbourhoods with supposedly weaker social bonds.

As traditional social cleavage loyalties are increasingly ineffective for vote choice (e.g., Dalton &

\footnote{In the German context, for example, many scholars speak in this respect of the 'neue Mittelschicht' (cf. Brinkmann 1988).}

\footnote{One may object that I omit cognitive mobilized as an important factor of the dealignment of traditional social cleavages (e.g., Dalton et al. 1984). I will return to this point in Section 4.2. This section will focus specifically on the effects of political knowledge and education (as indicators for cognitive mobilization) on voters' reasoning.}
Wattenberg 2000), voters nowadays orient themselves more according to short-term aspects of elections, such as issues (Nie et al. 1976; Pierce & Hagener 1982) or candidates (Lanouée & Headrick 1994; Dalton et al. 2000). Empirical evidence in several Western democracies indicates that issue voting profits most from a decline in socio-structural voting (Franklin et al. 1992). In view of this literature one may expect that the reasoning of vote choice differs between socially aligned and non-aligned, or more specifically, socially embedded and socially non-embedded voters: the former more strongly supporting their own social group when casting ballots and the latter relying particularly on short-term orientations of elections, such as policy and candidate evaluations. Therefore, I expect lack of embeddedness to positively moderate short-term factors of elections, namely evaluations of politicians and policies.  

Electoral Experience

The Michigan approach of vote choice discusses a second argument for the relevance of demographic variables for the

77 To turn this argument on its head means that socially aligned voters cast their ballots (more strongly) according to their position relative to social cleavages in societies and not (so much) according to issues and candidates. The design and the data of this study impair the estimation of the direct effect of social background variables on vote choice (see Chapter 2). It is therefore not possible to investigate this expectation. One may link social ties indirectly to estimated components of the vote function. Campbell et al. (1960) depict the explanation of vote choice by the picture of a funnel of causality, in which voters' social background and political values affect their party identification and their party identification in turn affects short-term considerations of vote choice, such as evaluations of policies and candidates. As party leanings originate from social background, they may be considered the component of the vote function that resembles in part the effect of voters' social background on vote choice. One may therefore expect that aligned voters rely on party leanings (instead of issues and candidates) more often when casting ballots. However, as this is a very indirect argument, I do not refer to it in the main text.
analysis of voters’ reasoning. Converse (1969) notes that voters adopt party loyalties during political socialisation and that these loyalties strengthen by electoral experience.\textsuperscript{78} Their stability is therefore not equal over life span. Since younger citizens cannot base their vote decision on past electoral experiences, their choice relies less persistently on party loyalties. Following this argument I expect electorally experienced voters to base their vote decisions on party leanings more often than electorally inexperienced voters.

\textit{Measurement and Empirical Findings}

Three variables are obtainable from CSES that resemble traits of social embeddedness. Union membership of respondents is used as a proxy for (working) class embeddedness. Voters not associated with labour unions will presumably be less affected by class differences. Church attendance is interpreted as a proxy for a loyalty to the own religious background. Again, one may expect more dealigned voters among respondents who do not attend religious services. Finally, urban (versus rural) residence may also indicate social dealignment.\textsuperscript{79} Age is used as a proxy for electoral experience of citizens.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{78} For the transferability of Converse’s (1969) notion of time and partisanship to other political systems see Gluchowski (1983).

\textsuperscript{79} The available measures are imperfect. There may be, for instance, many respondents who attend frequently religious services but do not vote in accordance with their social background (as religiosity is may be not politicised in political systems) and many respondents who do not attend religious services may vote in line with their social group membership (as being an atheist may be a political statement in some societies). An alternative approach to obtain data on voters’ degree of alignment is to estimate it. Estimating the effect of social background variables on vote choice in statistical models generates such data. This approach seems for the purpose of this book, however, deficient due to problems of endogeneity. Estimating the impact of social background on vote choice, assuming that the magnitude of this effect measures ‘alignment’, and using this measure again to explain to what extent social background impacts on vote choice is highly recursive. Preferably, one would like
All possible interaction effects between the four background variables (age, union membership, church attendance, and rural/urban residence) and the three components of the analysed vote function (party leaning, leader evaluation, left-right distances) are estimated in a multilevel model of thirty parliamentary elections. This have measures of respondents degree of alignment that are external to actual voting behaviour. One may, for instance, construct a alignment or embeddedness variable on basis of voters' perceived social group loyalties (e.g., class loyalty, church loyalty, etc.). As such data are unavailable, the use of proxies for such measures (union membership, church attendance, etc.) appears a reasonable solution.

One may object that electoral experience does not relate to age uniformly in all political systems analysed. In transition democracies, old voters may have as little electoral experience with the new political systems as young voters have. This, however, reduces experience literally to the number of times an individual participates in free elections. For transition democracies this implies that (old) voters entered the new political system without any predisposition. In the literature this is also referred to as the tabula rasa thesis (cf. von Winter). This thesis does not fit with the empirical observation that many voters in transition democracies follow stable political loyalties in their vote choice (e.g., Kaase & Klingemann 1994; Miller & Klobucar 2000; Brader & Tucker 2001). Such findings appear plausible to me, as voters during communism did have political experiences. These may have differed substantially from voters in Western societies, however, they should nonetheless enable citizens to develop some stable political opinions (even if this only concerns the question whether or not voters support the communist party).

I would therefore argue that citizens of Eastern Europe did not start from scratch in the first free parliamentary election as suggested in the tabula rasa thesis. In the context of East Germany, some scholars argue in this respect that quasi party attachments may have emerged during communist times (Bluck & Kreikenbom 1993). Yet, the situation of the GDR has been a specific one within the countries of the former Warsaw Pact. GDR citizens were highly informed about the political system of the FRG by West German mass media which facilitated such quasi attachments. In short, I consider age to be a reasonable proxy for electoral experience across political systems.

Interaction models usually require including all main effects in the analysis. This is done for the main effects of party leaning, leader evaluation, and left-right distance. However, the main effects of
means that on top of the specification of a random effects model as reported in Table 3.1 in the previous chapter, twelve interaction terms are included. Results of this analysis are presented in Table 4.1. All explanatory variables of the model have been transformed to a standard normal distribution before the analysis. In models in which interaction terms are included, centring has the advantage that correlation between independent variables is decreased (Jaccard et al. 1990; Aiken & West 1991). The variance of all variables has been fixed to 1 to allow comparability of the size of parameter estimates. Note for the interpretation of these effects that individual level variables like age, union membership, etc are standardised in each country separately. This is necessary because the calibration of these variables is not always comparable across countries. Their compositional variance is therefore uninterpretable. The implication for the interpretation of interaction effects is that they have to be read as derivations from the country mean of the moderating variable. Hence, the main effect of, for instance, party

individual characteristics such as age or urban residence are omitted since their effect on discrete vote choice is not computable. This is because they are constant across choices. For an illustration of this see Appendix 2. Thus, in the chosen statistical approach the main effects of variables like age and urban residence cannot be specified and therefore cause no omitted variable bias.

This entails party leaning, leader evaluation, and left-right distance as well as age, union membership, church attendance, and urban residence. Interactions between components of the vote function (e.g., party leaning) and individual characteristics (e.g., age) thereby follow a standard normal distribution as well.

This is, however, at the expense of the interpretability of these parameters. In this study, their comparability is more important than predictions derived from models, which would argue in favour of preserving the units of the independent variables. The key interest here is not to make exact inferences on how large the effect is of, for example, leader evaluations for religious or working-class respondents, but whether religiosity or working-class membership increases or decreases leadership effects.

For a discussion of this point see Chapter 2.
leanings with $\beta_0 = 0.486$ refers to respondents that are of average age in their countries (see Table 4.1). The interaction effect between age and party leanings of $\beta_{Age} = 0.038$ signifies an increase (decrease) of the relevance of party leanings in the vote function of respondents, above (below) the average age in a population.

Table 4.1 reads as follows. The row denoted by $\beta_0$ provides information on parameter estimates and standard errors of the main effects of party leaning, leader evaluation, and left-right distance. The second row, denoted by $\beta_{Age}$ reports information on interactions between the variable age on the one hand and party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances on the other hand. Hence, each column combines results on a single component of the vote function moderated by individual level characteristics. Random effects, $\sigma$, reported in the second part of the table provide information on variances and covariances of the estimated parameters of main effects across thirty contexts.\(^{85}\)

\(^{85}\) As mentioned in Chapter 3, the magnitude of these variance parameters is not comparable between models. One cannot say that the variance of the coefficient of leader evaluation is slightly reduced from $\sigma^2 = 0.105$ in the base model (Table 3.1) to $\sigma^2 = 0.102$ in the interaction model (Table 4.1). This is because the basis for calculating (co)variances has changed by the introduction of moderating effects (Goldstein 1995). In the base model of this book (Table 3.1), the computational basis for (co)variance estimates is the deviation of context-specific effect parameters from the estimated main effects across all respondents and contexts. In all other models reported in this book, interactions are added to this base specification. This means that the estimation of (co)variances does not relate to the context-specific increments/decrements from the overall main effects as in the base model but to deviations from the conditional main effects defined by the moderating variables. As these moderating variables potentially correlate with each other and as they potentially affect parameter estimates of party leaning, leader evaluation, and left-right distance in a similar direction, it is possible that covariances change from significant to insignificant or positive to negative between model specifications. This does, however, not mean that considerations of vote choice are per se interrelated across contexts. Chapter 3 shows for the base model that this is not the case. A meaningful interpretation of
Table 4.1 Social Background and Voters’ Reasoning:
Multilevel Conditional Logit Model of Vote Choice in 30 Parliamentary Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Party Leaning</th>
<th>Leader Evaluation</th>
<th>Left-Right Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed Effects, Level 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta_0$</td>
<td>0.486** (0.007)</td>
<td>1.002** (0.015)</td>
<td>- 0.529** (0.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta_{Age}$</td>
<td>0.038** (0.006)</td>
<td>0.003 (0.012)</td>
<td>0.016 (0.011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta_{Labour Union}$</td>
<td>0.005 (0.006)</td>
<td>0.005 (0.012)</td>
<td>- 0.026* (0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta_{Church Attendance}$</td>
<td>- 0.015* (0.006)</td>
<td>0.004 (0.012)</td>
<td>0.011 (0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta_{Urban Residence}$</td>
<td>- 0.004 (0.006)</td>
<td>0.011 (0.012)</td>
<td>- 0.039** (0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random Effects, Level 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma_{Party Leaning}$</td>
<td>0.016** (0.001)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma_{Leader Evaluation}$</td>
<td>- 0.000 (0.001)</td>
<td>0.102** (0.002)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma_{Left-Right Distance}$</td>
<td>0.004 (0.006)</td>
<td>- 0.029** (0.003)</td>
<td>0.061** (0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Fit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N_{Individuals}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N_{Contexts}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-26600.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2_{Level 1, Vote Choice + Slopes}$</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2_{Level 2, Random Slopes}$</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; standard errors in parentheses.

Data Source. CSES.

The first conclusion one can draw from Table 4.1 is a very general one: voters’ individual characteristics have some moderating effect on the calculus of voting; four of the twelve interaction effects are significant. This confirms the central thesis of this book, namely, that voters’ reasoning is heterogeneous. Voters do not make use of a uniform covariance parameters of interaction models requires reporting and interpreting the conditional main effects, the country-specific deviances from these effects, as well as their interrelation for all three components of the vote function. I will do so for the full model of voters’ reasoning reported in Chapter 6. For all analysis of Chapter 4 and 5 I refrain from describing (co)variances as they are not directly interpretable. However, as (co)variance parameters are an integral part of the estimation procedure of the Multilevel Conditional Logit model, I document them in the tables of this book.
decision-making process when casting ballots. Whereas findings of a random slope model (Table 3.1) in the previous chapter demonstrate that voting differs across political systems, the results of the interaction model of Table 4.1 show that voting also differs (within political systems) between individuals.

Although findings confirm the idea of heterogeneity of the vote function in general, socio-demographic variables do not tell much about voters’ specific reasoning of vote choice. As expected, age as proxy for electoral experience moderates positively the effect of party leanings. In other words, older voters rely more strongly on party leanings in making their vote choice than younger voters do. What also fits with my expectations is that voters in urbanised areas weigh policy evaluations more strongly in their vote choice. This finding may be explained by the argument that politically non-aligned voters are overrepresented in urban areas and that these non-aligned voters more often rely on short-term factors of elections, such as issues. Two findings are unanticipated: church attendance moderates negatively the effect of party leanings and union membership relates positively to the effect of left-right distances.\(^{86}\) The parameter

\(^{86}\) The two moderating effects of union membership and urban residence for policy voting may be traced back to a higher cognitive mobilisation of these groups of voters. In all likelihood, policy voting requires more political information than other considerations of vote choice (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Stokes 1963) and is therefore more frequently used by politically informed citizens (e.g., Pattie & Johnston 2001). Arguably, members of labour unions and voters living in urbanised areas may be cognitively more mobilised and are therefore more sensitive to policies (e.g., Dalton et al. 1984). The correlation matrix of individual characteristics in Table A3.2 of Appendix 3 supports this conjecture. There is a positive correlation between union membership and urban residence on the one hand and variables of political awareness on the other hand. This argument in fact formulates an omitted variable problem. As soon as one controls for the cognitive mobilisation of respondents, the moderating effect of union membership and urban residence on policy voting should be weaker or disappear. Section 4.2 will introduce
estimate of leader evaluation is unaffected by any of the background variables in this analysis. This finding may be as seen indicative for the presumption that processes of dealignment (diminished class differences, secularisation, and urbanisation) strengthen the role of policies in voters’ reasoning in particular but leave the impact of leader evaluations unchanged.  

To illustrate the magnitude of interactions consider the one between age and party leanings. The base effect of party leanings is estimated as $\beta_0 = 0.486$, the moderating effect of age as $\beta_{Age} = 0.038$. The moderated effect of party leanings can be computed for different values of the moderating variable age. This can be illustrated by looking at three different values: the mean value of the moderating variable and the mean value ± one standard deviation (e.g., Aiken & West 1991). Recall that age had been transformed to a standard normal distribution to allow straightforward comparability of effect parameters. Hence, the mean of the age variable is zero and the standard deviation is one. The expected effect of party leanings for different levels of age can therefore easily be calculated as $0.486 + (0.038 \times (-1)) = 0.448$ for respondents who are one standard deviation younger than the mean, $0.486 + (0.038 \times 0) = 0.486$ for respondents with mean age, measures of voters’ political awareness, which allow an investigation of the link between union membership, urban residence, political awareness, and policy voting. The conjecture of an omitted variable problem will be taken up again in Chapter 6 where I estimate the moderating effects of socio-demographic variables while controlling for the political awareness of respondents. The analysis will show that the moderating effect of union membership and urban residence respectively on policy-oriented voting is insignificant when controlling for the political awareness of respondents.

87 It has to be critically noted, however, that the set-up of the analysis presented and the available measures do not enable a definite answer in this respect. Also, linking up union membership, church attendance, and urbanisation with the concept of dealignment is not without problems. The presumption is therefore considered provisional.
and \(0.486 + (0.038 \times 1) = 0.524\) for respondents who are one standard deviation older than the mean.\(^{88}\) The same procedure can be applied to any other interaction term reported in this book.

The change in model fit between the model reported in Table 4.1 and the base model of this book reported in Table 3.1 is only marginal. Adding moderating effects of voters' social background is almost irrelevant for the explanation at level 1 (individuals). Applying the decomposition of variances as proposed in Chapter 3, leads to a Pseudo \(R^2\) at the individual level that is identical to the one of the base model. This is hardly surprising when keeping in mind that the variance at the individual level contains foremost variance of the variable vote choice and to a lesser extent slope variation.\(^{89}\) The \(R^2\) measure at the contextual level, conversely, relates exclusively to slope variation, i.e. variation of the slopes of party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances across contexts. Individual level interactions, however, do not explain this contextual variation (level 2). This is the consequence of diminishing compositional variation in individual voter characteristics.\(^{90}\)

Individual traits were centred in each context. Thus, these variables vary within countries but are constant across contexts. Since (relative) individual level moderators do not vary across contexts, they also do not impinge on slope variation across contexts.

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\(^{88}\) To exemplify the moderating effect for unstandardised values consider data from the Dutch CSES sample: the mean age in this country-sample is 44.5 (party leaning effect = 0.486). Respondents one standard deviation younger than the mean are 28 years old (party leaning effect = 0.448) and respondents one standard deviation older than the mean are 61 years old (party leaning effect = 0.524).

\(^{89}\) For a discussion see Section 3.2 in Chapter 3.

\(^{90}\) Due to calibration problems of individual characteristics, their compositional variation is often uninterpretable. For a discussion see Chapter 2.
4.2 Political Awareness: Knowledge and Education

The reasoning of vote choice may arguably be expected to vary across voters that differ in terms of the amount of political information they hold. Citizens may vote for a party or candidate without much political information about it, or about available alternatives. One does not need, for instance, information about policy positions to decide how to vote. Other citizens may be equipped with lots of information and apply this to, for instance, weigh out pros and cons of parties' platforms on a number of issues when casting their vote. Before assessing the impact of individual awareness on the vote function it is necessary to first elaborate the information requirements of the three components of the vote function analysed in this book. In other words, does a reasoning based on party leanings, leader evaluations, or left-right distances require much or little political information?

Three scholarly traditions emphasise the importance of political information for voters' reasoning. First, several studies (e.g., Palfrey & Poole 1987; Sniderman et al. 1991; Saris 2003) link up with previous findings on the formation of opinions and the stability of attitudes (Converse 1964; Achen 1975; Markus & Converse 1979; Judd et al. 1981; Zaller 1992). Second, studies of a declining partisanship discuss the effects of increasing levels of cognitive mobilization for the role of party leanings in voters' reasoning (Campbell et al. 1954, 1960; Dalton et al. 1984). Third, within the rational choice paradigm the role of political information for the calculus of voting is discussed under the term of 'uncertainty' of decisions (Downs 1957; Simon 1957; Fuchs & Kühnel 1994).

First, in the period following Converse's (1964) conclusion that most citizens do not hold meaningful beliefs on central political issues, a number of studies tried to
investigate the processes that result in voters’ political attitudes, beliefs, and consequently their vote choice. This tradition has generated a large number of different models, two of which are of particular relevance here. Converse’s (1964) ‘black and white model’ states that uninformed voters have unstable beliefs and tend therefore to vote almost randomly. Consequently, if this model holds, all three components of the vote function I analyse should fail to explain vote choice for know-nothings (Palfrey & Pool 1987). Sniderman et al. (1991) on the other hand argue that uninformed voters will avoid information-intense bases of vote choice such as ideologies and policies by using a criterion of like-dislike instead. Following this argument, vote choices of uninformed respondents should be based particularly on likes and dislikes, which are mostly tapped by the leader sympathy variable.

Second, the traditional Michigan model conceptualises party identification as a helpful device for voters to orientate themselves in a complex political environment (Campbell et al. 1954, 1960). Loyalties to parties are seen as a political compass that requires less political information and attention than navigating on the basis of issue positions or candidate evaluations which change frequently between elections (Fiorina 1981; Huckfeldt et al. 1999). Such an interpretation of party leanings leads to the presumption that voting based on this orientation is particularly important for uninformed citizens. Knowledgeable voters, in contrast, can easily access short-term influences of the campaign, such as issues and candidate evaluations and use these in their vote choice.92

91 Saris (2003) lists eleven different models.
92 Studies of dealignment emphasise the effects of rising cognitive mobilization (due to educational expansion and the spread of mass communication) in recent decades as a cause for declining partisanship in Western democracies (e.g., Dalton & Wattenberg 2000). Bases of vote decision-making that require little information therefore become less important.
Third, since the early days of rational choice studies it has been noted that a definition of rationality that includes the presence of perfect information often does not hold empirically. An assumption of complete information regarding the choices and the constraints of a decision therefore seems unwarranted in many applications of the theory. Broader definitions of rationality that allow for incomplete information and uncertainty in decision-making processes appear more realistic (Downs 1957; Simon 1957). Applications of the rational choice approach in electoral studies point out that uncertainty is especially apparent in vote decisions (Downs 1957; Weisberg & Fiorina 1980; Himmelweit et al. 1985; Popkin 1991). To reduce this uncertainty, voters need additional information, but obtaining and processing extra information requires (limited) resources. The ‘low-information-rationality’ of citizens refers to mechanisms that reduce information costs and allow voters to make their vote decisions with a reasonable certainty (Popkin 1991). Among possible mechanism to reduce information costs, two are important with respect to the vote function investigated here. First, using general preferences instead of specific political evaluations. In this respect, all three elements of the vote function are generalisations of specific elements. Condensing issues to general policies (left-right) is such an information shortcut (Downs 1957; Fuchs & Kühnel 1994). Party leanings are most likely abridgements of specific party evaluations and liking’s of political leaders are generalisations of specific standards like competence, reliability, character, etc. Hence, the rational choice approach

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93 Simon (1957) uses the term of ‘bounded rationality’ in this respect.
94 Popkin (1991) describes the vote decision as an investment model in contrast to the consumption analogy used by Himmelweit et al. (1985). Characteristic of an investment is, that the outcome and consequences of choices are highly uncertain.
95 Chapter 2 discusses the general (or even generic) character of party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances compared to other bases of vote choice.
leads to the conclusion that party leanings, left-right distances, and leader sympathies are all three information shortcuts since they are generalisations of specific evaluations. A second mechanism to reduce information costs is the use of diffuse and affective qualities of political objects, here: parties, politicians, policies (Fuchs & Kühnel 1994). The most ‘affective’ consideration included in the vote function of this book is leader sympathy. Left-right distances and party leanings on the other hand are considerations that most likely rest on some political substance and require a relevant degree of political information. Sympathy for politicians, however, may be a generalisation of opinions regarding these leaders which may be apolitical. Voters may conceivably assess leaders without any political information.

In short, all of these three approaches emphasise the role of information for decision-making processes in elections with overlapping conclusions. All three approaches concede that specific bases of vote choice require more political information than others do. Hence, individuals’ reasoning of vote choice hinges to some extent upon the amount of political information they hold. Many studies confirm such expectations empirically, showing that educated and interested citizens more often rely on ideologies and issues in their vote decision (Pattie & Johnston 2001; van

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96 This implies that the more informed one is, the less one needs to rely on these imperfect generalisations. The importance of these three components (and the impact of specific orientations) would then be weak for informed citizens. This conjecture can, however, not be tested with the set-up of this study, which does not contain specific evaluations in the measurement of the vote function.

97 Several scholars argue accordingly that a personalisation of voting may be a strategy of simplification that is based on the easy available information of mass communication. Assessments of political leaders may be based on criterion from everyday experience (Kepplinger et al. 1994; Lass 1995; Vetter & Gabriel 1998). For instance, voters may form opinions about politicians on the basis of outward appearances without information about their policy positions, etc.
Wijnen 2001; van der Brug et al. 2002; Kroh 2003). Although all three elements of the given choice model—party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances—are to some extent ways to simplify a complex political environment, they can be ranked in terms of their implied information requirements. Vote decisions based on left-right distances presumably require the most political information, followed by party leanings, and last leader evaluations.  

Even though left-right distances are a generalisation of specific issues and are therefore a simplification, to connect parties’ stands and one’s own position on a policy scale requires a certain degree of political awareness. The same is true for party leanings. But given the fact that party leanings presumably contain an affective element, they require, I imagine, less political information. Because vote choice based on leader sympathies requires from citizens only that they consider whether they like or dislike certain politicians, I expect this consideration of vote choice to demand the least amount of political information.

Measuring political information is a task that is not straightforward, due to the complexity as well as the latent form of the construct (Converse 1964; Klingemann 1979; Luskin 1987). In the literature, different measures based on different indicators can be summarised under the general term ‘political information’. Converse (1975) distinguishes

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98 For a similar ranking see Saris (2003).

99 According to Converse’s (1964) idea of a black and white model, many citizens have random political opinions. If voters’ views on parties, politicians, and policies truly are to some extent random answers on survey questions, such orientations conceivably impact less systematically on vote choice. In other words, if voters hold unstable evaluations of parties, politicians, and policies, these considerations are unlikely to impact strongly on vote choice. As unsystematic political orientations are usually linked to unawareness, one may expect that political evaluations in general display less impact on vote choice among less informed citizens (see Palfrey & Pool 1987).

100 Specific examples of this class of measures are known as, for example, political knowledge, sophistication, conceptualisation, awareness, or
three sources of awareness: the capacity, the willingness, and the sophistication of citizens. The capacity encompasses the cognitive ability of respondents to process information in general. This dimension is mainly linked to the education and knowledge of respondents. The second dimension, willingness, denotes the degree to which respondents consciously collect political information and also their proclaimed interest in politics. The third dimension, political sophistication, describes the ability of respondents to link information to pre-existing political belief systems.

The political awareness of citizens is conceptualised in this book by respondents’ education and political knowledge, therefore measuring only the first dimension, the capacity.¹⁰¹ Both variables lack international comparability. Formal education was discussed in Chapter 2. It does not lend itself to comparative analysis across countries, as the structures of educational systems are very different. Political knowledge is measured in the country surveys of the CSES by a set of (three) factual questions that varies across countries. Moreover, the three available knowledge items

involvement. They are often based on indicators such as education, political interest, attention to political news, issue familiarity, the ability to place oneself and parties on ideological scales, factual political knowledge, consumption of political media, or the stability of opinions. Although different measures and different terms are used, they are often used interchangeably with regard to their supposed effects on voters’ reasoning.

¹⁰¹ For a detailed description of the construction of the variables see Appendix 3. Even though it would be possible to construct an indicator of political sophistication on the basis of respondents’ ‘correct’ party placements on the left-right scale, I refrain from doing so because of the potential problems of endogeneity between such an indicator and the left-right distances. Moreover, such a proxy for political sophistication may also be (too) closely linked to variables like polarisation of party systems or perceptual agreement between voters (both variables will be introduced in Chapter 5), which are also based on responses to the left-right scale. Alternative data regarding the willingness of respondents to collect political information are not included in CSES.
cannot be validly combined into a single knowledge scale in all surveys.\textsuperscript{102} Hence, knowledge scales differ between countries in their empirical foundation (dissimilar items) and in their distribution (dissimilar number of categories). In spite of these differences I assume that the resulting measure is functionally equivalent across countries.\textsuperscript{103} To remove unwarranted and uninterpretable compositional variation, education and political knowledge are transformed to a standard normal distribution in each country before the analysis.

The results of Table 4.2 confirm most of my expectations and are in line with empirical results from previous studies: highly educated and knowledgeable voters are more likely to vote according to left-right distances, which supposedly require a lot of political information (Pattie & Johnston 2001; van der Brug et al. 2002; Kroh 2003). A calculus of voting based on party orientations, on the other hand, occurs more often among less educated respondents. Interestingly, and unanticipated, it turns out that knowledgeable voters also weigh leadership evaluations more heavily in their vote choice. Clearly, the vote function is linked to the political awareness of citizens. Some vote calculi require more political awareness than others.

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\textsuperscript{102} Results of a country-specific Mokken-scale analysis are reported in Appendix 3. In seventeen contexts, the three available items form at least a weakly scalable four-point knowledge scale (H > 0.3). In seven contexts, one item fails weak scalability and I form a three-point knowledge scale with the remaining two items instead. In six contexts, no data on factual knowledge is available (Table A3.1, Appendix 3).

\textsuperscript{103} For a detailed discussion see Chapter 2.
Table 4.2 Political Awareness and Voters' Reasoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Party Leaning</th>
<th>Leader Evaluation</th>
<th>Left-Right Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed Effects, Level 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta_0$</td>
<td>0.665** (0.009)</td>
<td>0.915** (0.016)</td>
<td>-0.430** (0.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta$ Education</td>
<td>-0.025** (0.006)</td>
<td>0.023 (0.013)</td>
<td>-0.104** (0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta$ Political Knowledge</td>
<td>0.003 (0.007)</td>
<td>0.088** (0.014)</td>
<td>-0.102** (0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random Effects, Level 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma$ Party Leaning</td>
<td>0.015** (0.001)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma$ Leader Evaluation</td>
<td>-0.008** (0.001)</td>
<td>0.097** (0.001)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma$ Left-Right Distance</td>
<td>0.005 (0.006)</td>
<td>0.011** (0.003)</td>
<td>0.061** (0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Fit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Individuals</td>
<td>33968</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Contexts</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-26489.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$ Level 1, Vote Choice + Slopes</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$ Level 2, Random Slopes</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; standard errors in parentheses.

Data source. CSES.

The model reported in Table 4.2 has a higher variance reduction in terms of Log Likelihood than previous models. However, decomposing the variance between levels of analysis indicates that voters' awareness does not contribute very much to the explanation of vote choice or contextual variation in terms of $R^2$. Nevertheless, differences in education and political knowledge are quite relevant for voters' reasoning, as can be assessed by the variation in parameters across levels of the two moderating variables. These differences are largest for the effect of left-right distances. When comparing respondents who are one standard deviation below the mean of education and one standard deviation below the mean of political knowledge, the effect of left-right distances on vote choice is -0.224. For respondents who are high in education and knowledge (one

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104 In part this has practical reasons. In the first case this has to do with the basis of variance, which is vote choice and not the slope of party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances within contexts. In the latter case this is caused by centring variables in each context.
standard deviation above each average), the weight of left-right is \(-0.636\).\(^{105}\) In other words, for voters who combine formal education and political knowledge, left-right distances are almost three times as important in their reasoning of vote choice than for respondents who rank lower in both aspects.

Table 4.2 indicates that party leanings are a reasoning of the less educated. Voting for the most preferred leader and especially policy (in terms of left-right) appears to require a certain level of awareness. Unexpectedly, leadership effects are stronger for knowledgeable voters. This finding stands in opposition to many scholars who suggest that voting on the basis of considerations regarding political leadership is more likely to be found among ignorant voters (e.g., Kepplinger et al. 1994; Vetter & Gabriel 1998). Yet, what may explain this surprising finding is the pattern of incomplete information on politicians as reported in Chapter 2. Table 2.1 clearly illustrated that not all voters are familiar with the political elite of a political system. Voting for political leaders requires some knowledge of these politicians, which is evidently not always present.\(^{106}\) Apparently it is easier to state that one feels close to a party and to use such loyalty in reaching vote choice than to incorporate evaluations of politicians into vote decisions.\(^{107}\) Maybe stereotypes of the kind of voters who give much weight to leadership

\(^{105}\) Recall the procedure of predicting values of the moderated variable for different values of the moderating variable as discussed in Section 4.1. The predicted value of the effect of left-right distances for respondents who are less educated and less knowledgeable (mean minus one standard deviation) than the average respondent can be estimated as \(-0.430 + ((-1) \times (-0.104)) + ((-1) \times (-0.102)) = -0.224\). The predicted weight of policies in the vote function for well-educated and knowledgeable respondents follows as \(-0.430 + (1 \times (-0.104)) + (1 \times (-0.102)) = -0.636\).

\(^{106}\) See Table 2.1 in Chapter 2 on incomplete data on leader evaluations.

\(^{107}\) Possibly, because answering the survey question on party leanings requires a single evaluation, whereas leader orientations are asked for several politicians.
considerations have to be reconsidered. A personalisation of individual political behaviour may not always be indicative of a lack of involvement or even ignorance.

4.3 Individuals and the Calculus of Voting:
Summary of Findings

A brief summary of preliminary empirical findings without elaboration of their theoretical implications (which are discussed in Chapter 7) results in highlighting three major results: first, heterogeneity in voters’ reasoning can be located at the individual level within political systems. Citizens do not use party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances uniformly in their calculus of voting. Voters’ characteristics explain differences in the reasoning of vote choice to some extent.

The second point concerns the explanations of these differences. Two accounts of variation in voters’ reasoning have been emphasised: the social background and the political awareness of respondents. Approaches of the social background of citizens and their consequences for voting behaviour have less impact on individual variation in the applied vote function than education and political knowledge. Generally speaking, it is less important for the explanation of voters’ reasoning to identify who voters are than how much they know.

Third, examining results for each element of the vote function separately, the applicability of left-right distances turns out being most affected by characteristics of voters. Formal education ($t = 8.5$), political knowledge ($t = 7.8$), and urban residences ($t = 3.4$) moderate the weight of policy orientations for individual vote choice positively. Party leanings decline in relevance for young ($t = 6.6$) and well-

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$^{108}$ $t$-values are not reported in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.
educated \((t = 4.3)\) voters. Only political knowledge \((t = 6.4)\) is found to increase the importance of leader evaluations significantly.

Although leader evaluations have in Chapter 3 proven to be the component of the vote function that varies most across countries, individual-level determinants for such variation could hardly be found from the variables investigated here. This indicates that it may be the context of elections and not the character of the individual voter that promote or discourage personalised voting. An explanation of voters' reasoning therefore seems short sighted if the political environment and the traits of a society are not also taken into account. Chapter 5 will deal with such questions, analysing the relevance of contextual characteristics of elections for voters' reasoning.