Parties, politicians, and policies

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Chapter 5
Contextual Determinants of the Calculus of Voting

Chapter 3 showed that citizens weigh party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances differently in their individual calculus of voting. The analyses presented in Chapter 4 provided evidence that heterogeneity in voters’ reasoning can partly be ascribed to characteristics of voters. The success of individual level explanations turns out to be rather limited, however. For example, these analyses left almost unexplained under which circumstances voters do or do not apply leader evaluations in their calculus of voting. I expect that not only characteristics of voters but also contextual features of elections generate heterogeneity in the reasoning of vote choice. The central focus of this chapter is the specification of aspects of the context that matter for voters’ reasoning.

How does the context of an election affect individual behaviour? Although particular moderating effects will be explicited separately in the following sections, my general argument is that contextual settings shape the supply side of individual vote choice. This supply side entails more than the set of parties on offer, but also the characteristics of this set, such as its competitiveness, polarisation, etc.\footnote{Moreover, the context may provide incentives for specific vote choices. Duverger (1954) refers to this as the psychological effects of political systems. A contextual characteristic such as the electoral formula not only translates votes into seats, but also affects voters’ instrumental behaviour, because their knowledge of this mechanism allows them to}
that the context of elections moderates considerations of citizens can plausibly be expanded to the more general social or economic situation of a country. It is quite likely that, for example, vote choice in Peru is based on different considerations than in Switzerland, simply because both democracies are dealing with different challenges. Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2 illustrates how contextual effects are understood in this study. To recapitulate, context is conceptualised as a moderator between orientations towards political objects (party, leader, and policy) on the one hand and vote choice on the other hand.

One can think of numerous contextual factors that potentially affect the calculus of voting. The institutional system and the party system are often considered to be of great importance (e.g., Cox 1997; Wessels 1999; Klingemann and Wessels 2000). But competitive relations between parties, with their implications for the likelihood of single party governments or coalition governments, are also likely to do so. Beside the narrowly defined political sphere, communication about politics in mass media is often supposed to be relevant for the calculus of voting. Extensive scientific and public debate about the influence of television on electoral campaigns and voters’ reasoning alludes to this (cf. Radunski 1980). Although less closely related to voting than characteristics of the political or media system, the economy may also be seen as relevant for the question of how voters arrive at their vote choices. The economic climate varies across countries and thereby also the potential for economic conflict within polities. Voters’ reasoning may be sensitive to such differences. More specifically, societies occupied with reaching general welfare and income equality anticipate its effects, and to adapt their own behaviour (for a discussion of instrumental voting behaviour see e.g., Franklin et al. 1994). As Chapter 2 on the design of this study elaborates, I do not estimate such direct effects of contextual variables on vote choice.
may be characterised by more traditional\textsuperscript{110} voting behaviour than societies that solved these problems to a considerable degree (Franklin et al. 1992).

Potential contextual determinants as mentioned so far concern long-term characteristics of political systems, such as institutional settings, the availability of mass media, etc. It may, however, also be that short-term fluctuations within political systems, such as the closeness of an election race, affect voters' reasoning.\textsuperscript{111} In this study, however, I will focus exclusively on relatively stable and long-term features of political systems, thereby omitting short-term variabilities. The absence of well-established insights into the contextual sources of heterogeneity in voters' reasoning, and the resulting need for an exploratory approach, argue against overburdening this study, hence this restriction.\textsuperscript{112} It appears prudent to focus first of all on a set of stable contextual traits before engaging in short-term contextual traits of elections that potentially add a dynamic element to the analysis of voters' reasoning.

This chapter is structured as follows. A first section discusses and analyses to what extent political institutional settings shape the individual calculus of voting. A second section analyses the consequences of the nature of political supply and competition for voters' reasoning. This section focuses on characteristics that can be summarised as traits of party systems. The third section of this chapter deals with the impact of the media context and the fourth section with the economic climate of countries. All sections are organised in a

\textsuperscript{110} The term 'traditional' refers in this respect to voting behaviour that is closely related to cleavage loyalties.

\textsuperscript{111} See van Egemond (2003) for an argument as to how the closeness of an election race impacts on the reasoning of turnout.

\textsuperscript{112} There is also a limit to the number of contextual variables to be included in the analyses that derives from the number of analysed contextual units. In the study of this book I analyse thirty parliamentary elections. In order not to exhaust my degrees of freedom, I restrict myself to (only) ten contextual variables.
similar fashion. They start with a discussion of theoretical expectations. This is followed by a brief outline of the measurement of relevant variables, after which follows a report of the empirical findings.

5.1 The Distribution of Power: Institutional Settings

The contextual aspects of political systems that are probably the most closely related to the reasoning of vote choice are the legal settings that define the position of political power and that govern the transformation from votes into parliamentary seats. Of such characteristics, I expect two aspects in particular to generate important consequences for the calculus of voting. One of these is a derivate of the electoral system, namely the threshold for electoral representation. The other relates to the political importance of a parliament, which is partly determined by the relationship between legislative and executive powers. This aspect is captured by the distinction between parliamentary and presidential systems.

Electoral Threshold

The term 'electoral threshold' denotes the constraints of electoral systems for (small) parties to gain electoral representation. Such constraints are institutionalised in the forms of electoral formula, district magnitude, and legal thresholds.\(^{113}\) An electoral formula of plurality or majority,

\(^{113}\) It may be objected that a number of other characteristics of electoral systems are omitted. Lijphart (1984), for example, also distinguishes as important dimensions of electoral systems supplementary seats and ballot structure. The first is unlikely to substantially affect voters' considerations of vote choice. With regard to the ballot structure, the number of political systems in the dataset using forms of ballot casting other than categorical choice is simply too small to be analysed.
small electoral districts (few seats are allocated in one district), and high legal thresholds result in a high electoral threshold. One may also refer to the effective electoral threshold as the difference between majoritarian electoral systems and systems of proportional representation. This subsection provides two arguments as to why a low threshold of electoral representation (systems of proportional representation) may provide incentives for sincere voting behaviour. Klingemann and Wessels (2000: 1) define sincere voting "as the possibility to maximize individual utility without compromise." The model of a vote calculus that is analysed in this book includes three preference ratings: party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances. Choice is regarded as emanating from the 'best' combination of these three preference orders. This means for the given example that I expect effect parameters of party, politician, and policy orientations to be high for sincere voters.

The first reason why proportional representation may favour sincere voting derives from the weaker constraints on electoral representation of small parties in particular. According to Klingemann and Wessels (2000), restrictive electoral systems impede sincere voting behaviour. Voting for the most preferred option only makes sense if it is likely that this option can win parliamentary representation, i.e. that it can win at least one seat. This is not always the case as the most preferred party might be too small to gaining at least one seat. If characteristics of electoral systems limit the

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114 The term of majoritarian systems is used in this book to describe in a single term system characteristics of electoral formula (majority and plurality) and district magnitude (single member districts). In the literature on electoral systems the phrase of first-past-the-post-systems is used similarly. The term of 'systems of proportional representation' refers in contrast to PR electoral formula in multimember districts.

115 According to the paradox of turnout, casting a ballot is never sensible since a single vote will not decide the outcome of an election. Therefore, it should not make a difference to voters whether or not their most preferred party is likely to win any parliamentary seats. But reality shows
chances of parties or candidates to acquire representation, voting for a less preferred option that does have good chances for electoral representation is a sensible alternative to sincere voting (Cox, 1997; Klingemann & Wessels 2000). Clearly, majority and plurality formula, small electoral districts, and legal thresholds all impose limits on the chances of small parties to win seats in parliament. Proportional representation and the existence of large electoral districts, in contrast, make it possible even for small parties to win at least one seat and to acquire parliamentary representation. As supporters of parties with little electoral support anticipate such constraints, traits of majoritarian formulas in small electoral districts and the presence of legal thresholds should decrease sincere voting, hence, decrease the parameter estimates of party leanings, leader sympathy, and left-right distances.

that voters do not share this theoretical objection to the use of a rational choice perspective in the context of voting. Brennan and Lomasky (1993) suggest that voters’ utility of casting ballots derives not only from governmental activity but also from expressing their own political preferences. Franklin (2003) notes that purely individualistic views of the paradox of turnout disregard the instrumental benefits of voting, stemming from the collective character of elections. The argument that one ‘wastes’ votes when supporting a party that has no chance of winning seats may be considered as incorrect or at least problematic by many academics, yet many voters nonetheless accept it.

Black (1978), Cain (1978), Abramson et al. (1992), and Blais and Nadeau (1996) show under which conditions strategic voting occurs under majority formula and Gunther (1989) does the same for proportional representation. But to my knowledge, only Cox (1997) and Klingemann and Wessels (2000) compare both forms with each other. In the literature the term ‘sincere voting’ is often contrasted with strategic or tactical voting. Hence, the decision to vote for a second or third ranked option implies a strategic consideration. Blais et al. (2001: 344) define a strategic vote as “a vote for a party (candidate) that is not the preferred one, motivated by the intention to affect the outcome of the election.” A problem of the study of strategic or tactical voting in this book is that no direct measures for such motivations exist (see also Blais & Nadeau 1996, Alvarez & Nagler 2000, and Blais et al. 2001 on their
Comparatively high parameter estimates of party, leader, and policy orientations in systems with proportional representation may, however, also arise from a different mechanism. One of the foremost functions of parliamentary elections for political systems is the selection of political personnel. But which personnel is elected? Do voters in parliamentary elections select single candidates in their municipalities, do they decide over vote shares of candidates on party lists, or do they decide between some exposed national politicians on the question of who will govern a country? Each of these points probably holds in principle in all democracies, though, different settings of electoral systems lay emphasis on one or the other element.

Majoritarian democracies focus on the selection of individual members of parliament (in single member districts) from a local perspective. Voters in majoritarian democracies thus presumably evaluate local candidates as potential members of parliament when making their vote choice. This is reinforced by elected candidates comprehending their role not only as representative of their procedures of estimating strategic voting). There is usually no data on voters' expectations about the outcome of an election. One could, however, implicitly gauge the degree of strategic voting by means of two assumptions. The first assumption is that all voters maximise their preferences. Second, it may be assumed that unexplained variance in vote choice is (only) due to random error and strategic motivations. The latter assumption states that there are no other omitted aspects of evaluation that should have been included in the vote function. If voters hold preferences but do not vote accordingly, they do so because they try to affect the outcome of elections. This is of course a strong argument that is unlikely to hold in this form empirically. Though, it is also not utterly implausible. If voters hold preferences but do not vote according to these preferences it appears likely that there are tactical or strategic motivations for this. Since this argument is not without problems, I do not use the phrase tactical voting (which implies a specific motivation) in the main text but conclude more cautiously that voters most likely make some kind of concession (without implying any particular motivation) if they do not vote for their most preferred party, leader, or policy.
own party and its voters but particularly as representative of their home constituency (e.g., Searing 1985). In democracies of proportional representation, conversely, voters are in all likelihood focused on national parties, politicians, and policies and not on local representation. In such systems, also members of parliament see their role as being a representative of their party. In the Netherlands or in Israel, for example, where for all practical purposes only a single national constituency exists in which all seats are distributed, voters’ reasoning is presumably not occupied with local politics and single candidates but with national politics. Arguably, this difference has consequences for the vote function analysed in this book. Because the available data on party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances predominantly relate to the national political arena, one may expect them to be more relevant in the vote calculus in systems of proportional representation than in majoritarian democracies. Hence, the chosen vote function does not measure all possible considerations of vote choice in majoritarian democracies; it specifically misses evaluations of local party candidates. Therefore I expect party, leader, and policy

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118 In case of leader evaluations, for instance, respondents are explicitly asked to evaluate national party leaders.

119 Keep in mind the discussion on omitted variable bias in Chapter 2. The expectation in fact states that variables (evaluation of local party candidates) are omitted for certain countries (majoritarian democracies) and not for others (democracies of proportional representation). If this thesis holds it indicates a weakness of the estimated model. In all likelihood, however, evaluations of local party candidates are positively related to evaluations of their parties in the national arena. Therefore, the potential omitted variable bias overestimates the effect of (national) party, leader, and policy orientations in majoritarian systems but not in democracies of proportional representation (for gauging direction of omitted variable bias see King et al. (1994: 168-182)). Note, that I expect that (national) preference orders are more relevant under the latter and less relevant under the former institutional settings. Potential omitted variable bias most likely downplays expected differences. Any test of this
evaluations to have more impact on vote choice in countries that have an electoral system of large electoral districts and a formula of proportional representation than in majoritarian systems of single member districts.

So far two rivalling accounts have been presented leading to the same expectation, namely that parameter estimates of (national) party, leader, and policy preferences are likely to be higher in systems of proportional representation and lower in majoritarian democracies. If this expectation is borne out, which of these two arguments is true? In my view, both accounts probably hold to some extent. However, given the data and design of this study, it is not possible to disentangle any effects of constraints on representation (first account) or local considerations (second account).

A digression at this point relates to the discussion in the literature about the effects of specific institutional settings on the ‘personalisation’ of politics (Carey & Shugart 1995; Poguntke 2000; Curtice & Blais 2001). This question is sometimes discussed using the term ‘presidentialisation’ of effect is therefore biased towards the null-hypothesis. Rejecting $H_0$ can thus not be regarded as an artefact caused by omitted variables.

The argument at this stage of the thesis is based on a ceteris-paribus logic: what is the expected effect of the effective threshold on voters’ reasoning keeping all other factors constant. But effective thresholds are not unrelated to other potential determinants of the calculus of voting and effects of these other factors are therefore not constant. For instance, effective thresholds may affect the number of parties on offer (e.g., Duverger 1954). If that were true, the effect of effective threshold for voters’ reasoning may be a mediated one; mediated by the number of parties in a political system. Section 5.2 introduces a measure of the effective number of parties in a political system and elaborates what consequences the number of choice options arguably has for voters’ reasoning. Chapter 6 will analyse the moderating effects of electoral threshold and number of parties in a single model and therefore control for the interrelation between both variables. This analysis will show that the effect of electoral threshold is almost unchanged between a partial and a full model. Hence, the ceteris paribus logic seems to hold as far as electoral threshold is concerned.
politics. As Blais and Massicotte (1996: 62) stress, "plurality and majority systems result in the election of an individual, whereas in PR, seats are distributed". This notion, however, refers to local party candidates and not to the national party elite. As mentioned above, respondents' views on local party candidates have not been measured. It is therefore not possible with the given data to gauge whether politicians (sum of local and national politicians) in systems of plurality and majority have more impact on vote choice than politicians in systems of proportional representation.

121 The term 'personalisation' of politics is used in this book instead of the term ‘presidentialisation’ of politics. Presidentialisation refers initially to the style of government. Especially in Britain, but also in Germany and in other countries, observers of politics note a tendency in recent decades towards a presidential logic in parliamentary systems (Foley 1993; Döring 1991). With respect to voting, it is presumed that candidates for prime minister become increasingly more important for individual vote choice. Personalisation, in contrast, denotes a general tendency that favours politicians (and not only potential prime ministers) over parties. Hypotheses of a personalisation of individual voting behaviour find only mixed empirical support, however (Crewe & King 1994; Kaase 1994; Mughan 1993; Vetter & Gabriel 1998; Schmitt & Ohr 2000; Pappi & Shikano 2001).

122 This is another example for a potentially problematic ceteris paribus argument (see footnote 120). It is commonly suggested that majoritarian democracies are more affected by a presidentialisation of politics since "they tend to assign a comparatively strong role to the head of the government" (Poguntke 2000). It is further argued that elections in plurality and majority systems are a choice between two alternative prime ministers. A presidentialisation in these systems is therefore more likely than under proportional representation (Bean & Mughan 1989; Swanson & Mancini 1996). Hence, the effective number of governmental parties may in fact mediate the effect of majoritarian systems on voters' reasoning. The following Section 5.2 on the competition for governments contains a variable on the effective number of governmental parties in contexts and therefore provides a measure to analyse the effect of the structure of governments on voters' reasoning. Clearly, the electoral system determines to some extent the appearance of different governmental forms (Lijphart 1999; see also Appendix 4 for respective correlations). However, as both concepts are not deterministically related and thus not interchangeable, a discussion of contextual effects on voters'
Presidential versus Parliamentary Systems

The second aspect of political institutions to be analysed deals with the question whether voters' reasoning in parliamentary elections differs between presidential and parliamentary political systems, and if so, in which way? Again, two rival arguments can be thought of, which in this case lead to somewhat dissimilar expectations. The analyses later in this book therefore provide some indication which account holds in the light of empirical findings.

The first argument contends that parliamentary elections have different functions in presidential and parliamentary political systems. Parliamentary elections in parliamentary systems have the function of determining executive power whereas they do not have this function in presidential systems. More specifically, lower house elections in parliamentary systems decide not only the share of seats in parliament but subsequently also on future governments and prime ministers. In Britain, Germany, or the Netherlands, for instance, voters presumably also evaluate choice options in this light, for example, by considering qualities of potential candidates for prime minister when casting a ballot (cf. Anker 1992). In presidential systems, conversely, parliamentary elections decide on the share of seats in parliament but not on the head of the executive. The latter function is covered by the direct and popular election of the president. I expect this difference between parliamentary and presidential systems to have consequences for voters' reasoning. In parliamentary systems much more than in presidential ones, voters may express preferences on who

reasoning should try to disentangle different relationships. The interrelation between both variables is picked up in Chapter 6 again, which estimates the impact of both variables in a single model. This analysis will show that the effect of electoral threshold is stable across the separate and the full model. Moreover, electoral threshold and effective number of governmental parties have a unique impact on voters' reasoning.
should be the future leader of a country. Again, in presidential systems this consideration is relegated to presidential elections. I therefore expect that leadership effects in parliamentary elections are more evident in parliamentary systems than in presidential systems.\textsuperscript{123}

The second argument centres on the phenomenon of second order elections (Reif & Schmitt 1980). Voters tend to use elections that are perceived as less important (second order elections) to express preferences relating to a perceived more important political arena (first order arena). For instance, voters in European elections tend to express preferences on national politics in their vote choice (Reif & Schmitt 1980; van der Eijk et al. 1996) and voters in US congressional midterm elections sometimes seem to use their vote as a referendum on the president (e.g., Tufte 1975). Hence, citizens tend to articulate evaluations about the first-order political arena when casting a ballot in the second-order election (congressional elections and European elections). The example of the USA illustrates that in parliamentary elections of presidential systems, voters not only consider political aspects that relate to the political arena of the parliament but also consider aspects related to the presidency.\textsuperscript{124} Consequently, one may expect that the vote

\textsuperscript{123} Although parliamentary elections in parliamentary systems have consequences for the composition of the executive, systems vary greatly in the predictability for voters of the relationship between parliamentary composition and executive composition. Such predictability is arguably very high in political systems with single party governments (for example the UK) and low in countries with fragmented coalition governments (for example the Netherlands). In the latter case, not only elections but also coalition negotiations decide which of the possible coalition constellations materialises. As the following section on party systems contains a measure for such predictabilities (the effective number of parties in government), I will return to this question at that point.

\textsuperscript{124} The CSES data contains no information on how respondents in presidential systems evaluate the current presidency, how they regard the balance of power between parliament and president, etc. This results in omitted but potentially relevant variables. Such bias, however, makes it
function analysed in this book is more applicable to parliamentary systems than to presidential systems and that effect parameters of party, leader, and policy orientations are thereby higher in parliamentary and lower in presidential systems.

Measurement and Empirical Findings

Two variables were constructed to measure the characteristics of the institutional settings of political systems. Electoral formula, district magnitude, and legal thresholds are combined into a measure of effective thresholds. The effective threshold encompasses the share of votes that are necessary to win at least one seat in an electoral district and therefore summarises the effect of the number of seats allocated in one district and legal thresholds (Taagepera & Shugart 1989; Lijphart 1994). This indicator relates more directly to the logic underlying my expectations (see above) than each of its elements separately does.\(^{125}\) It also demonstrates that, at least in this report, the categorical distinction between majority and plurality formula and a formula of proportional representation does not suffice. Rather, political systems can be located on a continuum that ranges from a pure proportional representation democracy with a very low effective threshold to a pure majoritarian system.\(^{126}\) In my view, the measure of effective threshold

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\(^{125}\) Another argument not to analyse electoral formula, district magnitude, and legal threshold separately is their close interrelation. For example, the district magnitude in systems of plurality or majority is almost always one, and legal thresholds are only known in systems of proportional representation.

\(^{126}\) To illustrate this point, consider the case of Spain that has an electoral system of proportional representation. Spanish electoral districts vary in size between 3 and 34 seats per district. Even though in all districts seats are distributed according to a formula of proportional representation, in districts where only 3 seats are allocated, the electoral logic resembles
The second characteristic of institutional contexts is a binary variable that distinguishes between parliamentary and presidential systems. The expected moderating effects of traits of the two institutional characteristics for voters' reasoning are tested by means of cross-level interactions between voters' evaluations of parties, politicians, and policies on the one hand and these contextual characteristics on the other hand. The results of the analysis are reported in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 can be read in the same way as those in Chapter 4: the row denoted by $\beta_0$ includes information on the main effects of party, leader, and policy evaluations. The rows denoted by $\beta_{\text{Effective Threshold}}$ and $\beta_{\text{Presidential System}}$ contain the estimated moderating effects of these variables for party, leader, and policy orientations. Empirical findings demonstrate, first of all, that institutional settings are relevant for voters' reasoning. All six possible interaction terms are significant. A high effective threshold reduces, as expected, sincere voting by negatively moderating the impact of leader evaluations and left-right distances. Party leanings, however, gain slightly in importance. A reasoning of vote choice that is based on loyalty towards parties seems more pertinent under institutional settings that restrict electoral representation of minor parties. Party leanings are perhaps resistant against the

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127 As the district magnitude varies within political systems (see previous footnote), I estimate the effective threshold on the level of electoral districts. This implies that this contextual variable has more degrees of freedom than other contextual variables that relate to entire political systems. For more detailed information on the construction of the variable see Appendix 4.

128 Again, for more detailed information on the construction of the variable see Appendix 4.
possibility that the supported party may not find electoral representation. Whereas voters are willing to make concessions as far as leader or policy preferences are concerned, they seem more reluctant to act against party loyalties.¹²⁹

Table 5.1 Institutional Settings and Voters’ Reasoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Party Leaning</th>
<th>Leader Evaluation</th>
<th>Left-Right Distance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed Effects, Level 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>β₀</td>
<td>0.602** (0.007)</td>
<td>1.218** (0.014)</td>
<td>0.503** (0.014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β Effective Threshold</td>
<td>0.019** (0.006)</td>
<td>0.167** (0.012)</td>
<td>0.074** (0.011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β Presidential System</td>
<td>0.017* (0.007)</td>
<td>0.042** (0.014)</td>
<td>0.107** (0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random Effects, Level 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>σ Party Leaning</td>
<td>0.009** (0.001)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σ Leader Evaluation</td>
<td>0.013** (0.001)</td>
<td>0.129** (0.001)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σ Left-Right Distance</td>
<td>-0.003 (0.010)</td>
<td>-0.013** (0.004)</td>
<td>0.045** (0.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Fit</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N Individuals</td>
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<tr>
<td>N Contexts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
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<tr>
<td>R² Level 1, Vote Choice + Slopes</td>
<td>33,968</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R² Level 2, Random Slopes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

Data Source. CSES.

¹²⁹ As argued above, the second interpretation to the finding may be that voters in majoritarian systems are more occupied with local candidates than voters in PR systems, which may reduce the relevance of national party, politician, and policy concerns. In that case one could argue that party leanings more than leaders and policies relate to the national as well as to the local level and are therefore relatively more important in majoritarian democracies. In the main text, I emphasise the first interpretation of the finding that relates to constraints of electoral systems for minor parties and candidates since this argument is more frequently cited in the literature (e.g., Cox 1997; Klingemann & Wessels 2000). Note, however, that the second interpretation of the finding cannot be excluded empirically on the basis of data reported here.
The second contextual indicator, distinguishing presidential and parliamentary systems, generates similar patterns in voters' reasoning than effective thresholds. Leader and policy preferences are less relevant for vote choice in presidential than in parliamentary systems. This finding fits with the expectations that parliamentary elections in presidential systems may be related to evaluations of the presidency. The second expectation, that leader evaluations may lose relevance for vote choice when a major political office is elected directly by presidential elections, finds less support. The moderating effect is in the expected direction, however, leadership effects do not differ substantially between parliamentary and presidential systems as expected.\(^{130}\) Party leanings are, again, found to somewhat compensate for a lack of sincere voting for leaders and polices. It may be argued that party loyalties are more resistant against considerations external to the national parliament. Irrespective of evaluations of the president, partisan voters appear to follow their conviction. It has to be kept in mind, however, that these results are preliminary findings since I do not so far control for intervening effects. The full analysis in Chapter 6 will indicate whether or not these findings remain unaltered when controlling for other contextual effects.

Institutional characteristics of political systems contribute significantly to the explanation of heterogeneity in the calculus of voting. Almost 20% of the total variance of random parameters can be accounted for by the two moderating variables of effective threshold and presidential systems. The proportion of explained variance at the individual level, however, remains, as in all previous

\(^{130}\) As explanatory variables are standardised, the magnitude of moderating effects can be compared across variables. The moderating effect of presidential systems is larger for policy orientations (\(\beta_{\text{Presidential System}} = 0.107\)) than for leader evaluations (\(\beta_{\text{Presidential System}} = -0.042\)), which does not fit with the second expectation.
analyses, constant at 48%. In sum, the electoral system of a country appears highly relevant for the individual calculus of voting. Certain institutional settings provide incentives to rely on orientations towards certain political objects in a more pronounced way than on others. Party leanings are less affected by such constraints than leader evaluations and left-right distances.

5.2 Competition for Government: The Party System

Most of the literature on party systems suggests that the features of the supply side in elections are relevant for the process leading to vote choice (e.g., Klingemann & Wessels 2000). It seems reasonable to expect that the diversity of choice options or their relation to each other affect considerations of (any) choice process. This may hold, irrespective of whether such decision concerns voting for a party, purchasing a product, choosing a mode of transportation, etc. But, which are the main characteristics of party systems, or in other words, the characteristics of the political supply, voters are confronted with? Several classifications of party systems have been proposed in the literature. In early categorizations, the number of parties, the competitiveness of opposition parties, the existence of single-party governments, party strengths, and ideological distances

\[131\] To illustrate this point consider the example of choosing a mode of transportation. Suppose several persons have the choice between walking and bicycling in order to get from A to B. Suppose furthermore that a new bus line is introduced, which connects A and B. Hence, the number of choice options is increased. Not only the choice itself may be a different one since buses are available but also the reasoning of this decision. A new consideration of the choice situation could be the price of a bus ticket. Whereas the choice between walking and bicycling does probably not include monetary costs, the possibility of taking the bus introduces the question whether persons are willing to spend money on transportation.
are indicated as the most important aspects of party systems (Duverger 1954; Dahl 1966; Blondel 1968; Rokkan 1968; Sartori 1976). More recently, efforts are made to evaluate and summarize different approaches more systematically (Niedermayer 1996; Mair 1998; Lane & Ersson 2000).

I will discuss three characteristics of party systems, beginning with the possible effects of the variety of supply for voters’ reasoning. Does it make a difference, for instance, if voters are confronted with few party alternatives or with many and does it make a difference whether these parties are distinguishable in ideological terms? Second, the question is discussed whether it matters how clearly structured party systems are in ideological terms. Finally, I discuss the possible effects that coalition governments versus single party governments may have for the reasoning voters rely on in their vote choice.

Variety of Supply: Number of Parties and Polarisation

As Klingemann and Wessels (2000) demonstrate, a large diversity of vote options facilitates sincere voting. It is more likely that voters find their optimal choice in political systems with many choice options than that they will in countries where only a few parties are competing for government. In the latter case, voters may evaluate the relatively optimal party as not very favourable in absolute terms.\(^{132}\) The same argument may plausibly be expanded from sheer quantity to ideological diversity. If voters perceive parties as ideologically diverse, this may promote sincere voting since

\(^{132}\) The transportation example from the previous footnote may be used to illustrate this point, too. Suppose some commuters do not like physical activity and therefore consider the choice between walking and bicycling as the almost indistinguishable choice for the least of two evils. The introduction of a bus line not only changes the choice situation but also increases the likelihood that more persons find their optimal mode of transportation.
more voters are able to find their optimal choice.\textsuperscript{133} As a variety of supply—in terms of the number of parties as well as ideological diversity—facilitates voters to vote for their optimal choice, it can be expected to increase sincere voting.\textsuperscript{134} Hence, I expect that effect parameters of party leaning, leader evaluation, and left-right distances are positively related to the number of parties and the polarisation of party systems.

\textit{Clarity of Supply: Perceptual Agreement on Parties' Positions}

It is often assumed that the ideological stands of parties are losing their clarity in Western societies in recent decades since political demands (and as a result also supplies) are becoming more pluralistic (e.g., Wessels 1991). Parties' ideological stands may therefore be (perceived as) less coherent than in earlier times. Likewise, many transition democracies are supposed to have less developed party systems and therefore low clarity in parties' positions (cf. White et al. 1997; Miller & Klobucar 2001). Irrespective of

\textsuperscript{133} A related argument leads to the same expectation. It has been suggested that a high polarisation may threaten many voters. In a polarised context, they may fear to be governed by a party that proposes policies, highly conflicting to voters' own positions. As a consequence of this perceived threat, they may strongly 'stick' to their political views when casting ballots. In contexts where polarisation is low, conversely, the disparity between different possible governments is small and voters may not necessarily fear a government that does not maintain their own ideas, as alternatives are very similar. The trend of sticking to one's own views (sincere voting) gets stronger in polarised systems and tactical considerations gain importance in less polarised systems. This argument has been applied for the strength of party identifications across contexts: the strength of such attachments increases in polarised political situations (Bowler et al. 1994; Wessels & Klingemann 2001; Schmitt & Holmberg 1995).

\textsuperscript{134} This is irrespective of whether a variety of supply pleases voters (because it facilitates them to straightforwardly find their optimal choice) or threatens them (because they fear, for instance, being governed by a party they entirely dislike). See the previous footnote for the latter point.
the cause for unclear party positions, such lack of ideological clarity presumably has consequences for voters' reasoning. In both cases, scholars expect that respective party systems fail to integrate voters ideologically, and that ideological considerations thus become less important for vote choice. In general, one may expect vote choice to be less sincere when party systems lack comprehensible ideological clarity. If the political supply of party systems is perceived as incoherent by the electorate it will be very difficult for voters to develop consistent party, leader, and policy preferences and to base vote choice on such considerations. Two specifications to this general expectation appear plausible.

First, to the extent that party systems lack the ideological clarity (at least in the perception of the electorate), it becomes less likely that policy stands will be a reliable and commonly used orientation of vote choice. Hence, I expect —given the vote function of this book— that policy evaluations (as measured by left-right distances) lose importance if party systems lack ideological clarity.135

Second, Poguntke (2000) suggests that a decline in ideological cohesion of party systems offers opportunities for leadership effects to exert themselves. If voters do not know what parties stand for, they may switch to alternative bases of vote choice, such as the sympathy of party leaders. Sartori (1997: 37) likewise argues that voting for political leaders (notables or chieftains) may be more relevant when party systems are less structured, whereas voting for abstract party images goes along with well-established party systems. The lack of stable and coherent party systems is often seen as explanation why vote choice in transition democracies, such as Russia, depends so heavily on political leaders (e.g., White et al. 1997). That such a propensity for leadership exists in transition democracies was confirmed by the country-specific

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135 As Oppenhuis (1995) and van der Eijk et al. (1996) show, left-right voting becomes more important if electorates widely agree on the ideological positioning of parties.
descriptive analysis of voters’ reasoning in Chapter 3. Voting for the preferred party leader is particularly widespread in the Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Russia (see Figure 3.2). Hence, given this account one may expect that politician-oriented voting is not hampered (or possibly even promoted) when party systems lack ideological clarity.

**Coalition versus Single Party Governments**

Whereas the discussion above dealt with constraints and incentives that can be ascribed to the supply provided by party systems, I now turn to the prospective outcome of electoral competition. I expect that voters when casting a ballot take into consideration whether the future government will in all likelihood be a single party government or a coalition government. In some cases it will be difficult for voters to develop well-founded expectations in this regard, but in many cases it is likely that they will have no difficulty to do so. Voters in Britain, for example, can expect from many decades of experience that in all likelihood a single party government will come into office. Dutch voters on the other hand ‘know’ that executive power has to be shared between coalition partners. Irrespective of the actual situation of an election and simply based on past experience, voters may well have expectations about how fractionalised governments will be in a given political system. I assume that voters are aware of such prospects when casting a ballot. This assumption is not unrealistic in light of empirical findings on tactical voting: many voters are able to make a fairly accurate prediction on the chances of different parties to win seats or to predict who will form a government (Franklin et al. 1994; Alvarez & Nagler 2000; Blais et al. 2001). I will emphasise two points in this respect. First, the effect of the uncertainty of vote choices due to unpredictabilities that relate to the behaviour of single parties participating in coalition governments, and second, a personalisation of vote choices in case of single party governments.
The literature on economic voting provides some related insights on the question as to why coalition governments may generate uncertainties in voters’ reasoning. Several scholars of economic voting suggest that the extent to which credit and blame for economic performance is ascribed to incumbent parties differs between single party and coalition governments (Lewis-Beck 1988; Powell & Whitten 1993; Anderson 1995; van der Brug et al. 2001). Powell and Whitten (1993) find evidence in their cross-national analysis that single party governments are more strongly held accountable for their actions in office than the parties that are members of coalition governments. For the same reason that it becomes more difficult for voters to hold single parties accountable for their specific performance in coalition governments, it may also become more difficult for many voters to obtain distinct electoral preferences for single parties based on such performances. Conversely, clear responsibilities between single party government and oppositional parties may provide a more unambiguous electoral choice for voters.

A second type of uncertainty of vote choice in coalition government systems relates to prospective outcomes. To illustrate this point, suppose a voter strongly supports the proposed fiscal policy of party A. Suppose furthermore that this voter can expect from past electoral experience that the supported party will have to share political power with other parties in case it becomes part of a future government. Under such circumstances it is uncertain whether party A is able to implement its fiscal policy proposal, since it has to win support for this from the other members of the coalition. Even if voters have a clear preference for single parties, leaders, or policies, they have to consider that these preferences are only partially realized by
coalition cabinets. Moreover, highly fragmented governments may diminish for voters the predictability of the relationship between parliamentary composition and executive composition. In countries where a single election outcome allows several possibly coalition constellations, negotiations among parties decide on the future government. Again, this may discourage voters from using specific party evaluations in their reasoning of vote choice. Voters may disregard their first preference for a party and vote so as to maximise the chances for a preferred coalition constellation instead. Both forms of uncertainty, the one related to the evaluation of the performance of members of the previous coalition government and the other related to the composition and the policy of a future coalition may reduce sincere voting. I expect that, as a result, parliamentary elections that are likely to give rise to single party governments endorse voters to opt sincerely for the most preferred party, leader, and policy. In other words, I expect governmental fragmentation to negatively moderate effect parameters of party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances.

Several authors note that single party governments strengthen leadership effects (Bean & Mughan 1989; Swanson & Mancini 1996; Poguntke 2000; Curtice & Blais 2001). Political systems that predominantly have single party governments are supposed to exhibit more personalised political competition since elections in these systems tend to be a confrontation between two candidates for prime minister. This is also true for coalition governments with a single dominating party, a constellation that is often found,

136 Of course, voters in systems that know single party governments also have to consider that parties may break their pledges once they are in office.

137 In the German context, for example, many supporters of the two large parties, the social democratic SPD and the Christian democratic CSU/CSU, vote tactically by opting for possible coalition partners (B90/Grünen and FDP) to ensure that these smaller parties pass the electoral threshold of 5%.
for example, in Germany. Moreover, prime ministers of single party governments presumably have more power than their colleagues in coalition governments, which also would strengthen leadership effects in these systems (e.g., Poguntke 2000). I therefore expect that single party governments increase the relevance of political leadership for vote choice.

Measurement and Empirical Findings
Four variables describe the structure of party systems. First, the effective number of parties reflects the actual quantity of party supply. The calculation of the effective number of parties follows Laasko and Taagepera’s (1979) definition. Second, the polarisation of party systems indicates the ideological diversity of options. The measurement of polarisation is based on the perceived left-right positions of parties. Following Klingemann’s (2002) proposal, polarisation is measured as the weighted average distance between all pairs of parties on a left-right scale. Third, the clarity of party positions is measured by the inter-respondent agreement on parties’ perceived positions on the left-right scale.

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138 For more detailed information on the construction of the variable see Appendix 4. One might object that the absolute rather than the effective number of competing parties measures the quantity of supply more directly. In other words, what counts is the number of parties that appear on the ballot. Such a measure has a major drawback, however. In most parliamentary elections there are a number of parties (candidates) competing for seats in parliament that could be labelled as ‘obscure’ and that never receive more than a handful of votes. The vast majority of the electorate presumably does not consider these parties as viable options for vote choice. Moreover, most voters will not even be aware of the existence of these parties and candidates. In my opinion, the absolute number of parties across political systems measures to a large extent the amount of legal constraints for (obscure) parties to compete in elections and not the perceived number of truly viable options. The effective number of parties, in my opinion, accurately measures the quantity of options while accounting for their viability (party size).

139 See Appendix 4 for more information on the variable.
scale as proposed by van der Eijk (2001).\textsuperscript{140} High agreement implies that parties’ policy positions are sufficiently comprehensible to a large part of the electorate. It derives from a situation in which parties occupy a well-defined position on the left-right scale and are successful in communicating this to the electorate.\textsuperscript{141} The measure therefore indicates whether or not parties’ policy stands are sufficiently noticeable to voters. Taking this meaning of the agreement-measure across electorates, I interpret the variable as the perceived ideological clarity of party systems.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{140} The variable of perceptual agreement measures the unimodality of a frequency distribution on an ordered rating scale. If all respondents consent to placing a party on one value of the rating scale (here: left-right scale), perfect agreement is achieved. If half of the respondents place a party at one extreme end of the scale and the other half at the other end, perfect disagreement is apparent. For more information on the measure see Appendix 4.

\textsuperscript{141} That is, however, not the only possible way to interpret the measure. Perceptual agreement on party stands contains information on voters and parties. In the main text I only stress the relevance of the coherence of parties’ stands. Though, it may be that some electorates are more knowledgeable than others and therefore have a more precise idea where to place parties on the left-right scale.

\textsuperscript{142} A point of concern may be the possibility that the measure of structural agreement on party positions simply indicates the usage of the left-right scale for vote choice. This refers to a potential problem of endogeneity. It may be that structural agreement is the consequence and not the cause of frequently applied left-right distances across political systems. What one would at least expect —if there is truly endogeneity evident between measures of left-right distances and agreement on parties’ positions on the left-right— is that interactions between the agreement measure and attributes of the vote function (party, leader, and policy) exclusively increase the effect of left-right distances. Structural agreement, as reported in Table 5.2 and the full model in Table 6.1 is, however, not found to moderate only to left-right distances but to do so for all three elements of the vote function. Hence, the indicator appears to measure more than just the relevance of the left-right scale in a political system, but properties of party competition in general. A similar objection could be made for the indicator of polarisation, which is also based on the left-right scale. Polarisation also affects all three components of the vote function and not just the one based on the left-right scale, as the separate
Finally, the variable of the effective number of governmental parties measures the distinction between coalition governments and single party governments. The variable calculates the average effective number of parties in office in the twenty years prior to the analysed lower house election.\textsuperscript{143}

Table 5.2 below reports the results of a model of the calculus of voting including interaction terms between characteristics of countries’ party system and voters’ party, leader, and policy orientations. Traits of party systems are clearly relevant for voters’ reasoning of vote choice, especially for the application of left-right distances and leader evaluations. Ten out of twelve interaction terms significantly moderate the effect of the different considerations of vote choice. The model adds only marginally to the explained

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\end{center}

For more information on the construction of the variable see Appendix 4. Similar to the measure of the effective number of parties in a party system, also the effective number of governmental parties is calculated by taking into account the size (number of parliamentary seats) of parties in cabinets. Coalition governments can be very dissimilar in their appearance and their functioning. As a case in point, in the German case usually one of the two large parties forms a coalition with a much smaller party. This is currently the Social Democratic SPD and the Green Party B90/Die Grünen. At other times this was the Liberal Party FDP with either the Christian Democratic Party CDU/CSU or the Social Democratic Party. At the end of the 60s Germany was briefly governed by a grand coalition of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats. In all these cases the absolute number of governmental parties is two. However, only in the case of the grand coalition two equal parties shared power. In all other cases, one party is the predominant partner and the other party the junior partner. The appearance and functioning of the latter coalition form can be located somewhere between a single party government and a coalition of equal partners. Such differences between coalition governments are covered by the measure of the effective number of parties in government. The estimated value for Germany (value 1.33) fits with what is said before: German governments can usually be located between single party governments (value 1) and coalitions of two truly equal parties (value 2), with most leaning to the first type.
variance at the individual level. However, 30% of the contextual variation can be explained by characteristics of party systems, which is the highest Pseudo $R^2$ at the contextual level of all analyses so far.

Given the preliminary findings reported in Table 5.2, does a high variety of supply increase sincere voting? The expectation finds support when looking at the variable of the polarisation of party systems. A high polarisation increases in particular the weight of leader and policy orientations, but also, albeit less dramatically, the effect of party leaning. The quantity of supply (the effective number of parties) is, however, not found to increase sincere voting. It is apparently not the case that voters more often vote for their optimal choice only if there are enough valid alternatives.

The expectation that the perceived ideological clarity of party systems (perceptual agreement) provides ground for sincere voting behaviour is clearly supported by the empirical findings. Effect parameters of party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances are downwardly moderated if parties’ positions on the left-right scale are not recognisable to voters. Conversely, in political systems in which voters have a clear idea what parties stand for, and agree upon this, sincere voting for the preferred party, leader, and policy is widespread. Not only the effect of policy evaluations gains from party systems’ ideological clarity. More to the point, findings do not indicate that the importance of political leadership increases when ideological clarity is low, as has been suggested in the literature (Sartori 1997; Poguntke 2000).
### Table 5.2 Party Systems and Voters’ Reasoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Effects, Level 1</th>
<th>Party Leaning</th>
<th>Leader Evaluation</th>
<th>Left-Right Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( \beta_0 )</td>
<td>0.596**(0.006)</td>
<td>0.950**(0.015)</td>
<td>-0.498**(0.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \beta ) Effective Number of Parties</td>
<td>-0.010 (0.010)</td>
<td>-0.084**(0.019)</td>
<td>0.056* (0.024)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \beta ) Polarisation</td>
<td>0.031**(0.007)</td>
<td>0.125**(0.015)</td>
<td>-0.114**(0.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \beta ) Perceptual Agreement</td>
<td>0.014* (0.006)</td>
<td>0.106**(0.012)</td>
<td>-0.096**(0.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \beta ) Eff. Number of Gov. Parties</td>
<td>-0.014 (0.008)</td>
<td>-0.099**(0.016)</td>
<td>0.079**(0.018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random Effects, Level 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \sigma ) Party Leaning</td>
<td>0.014**(0.001)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \sigma ) Leader Evaluation</td>
<td>0.032** (0.002)</td>
<td>0.148**(0.011)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \sigma ) Left-Right Distance</td>
<td>-0.005* (0.002)</td>
<td>0.029**(0.006)</td>
<td>0.047**(0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Fit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( N ) Level 1, Individuals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( N ) Level 2, Contexts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-26,610.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 ) Level 1, Vote Choice + Slopes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. ** \( p < 0.01 \); * \( p < 0.05 \); standard errors in parentheses.*

The expectation that coalition governments introduce uncertainty in voters’ reasoning—and thereby generate less sincere voting behaviour—finds no support in the preliminary results. The existence of coalition governments does per se not induce an ambiguous choice situation for voters. The fragmentation of governments increases the weight of policy orientations and decreases the weight of leader orientations. The latter finding backs the expectation that contests for single party executives or governments with a single dominant coalition partner may promote a personalisation of voters’ reasoning. Because prime ministers in single party governments are more powerful than their colleagues in fragmented cabinets and because voters presumably comprehend a race for a single party government as a contest between two candidates for prime minister, they will give greater weight to the evaluation of political leaders in their calculus of voting.
In brief, this section focused on the consequences of the supply side of political systems for voters’ reasoning. Initial empirical findings indicate that voters noticeably consider the structure of competition for government when casting ballots. A highly sincere voting behaviour is, according to these preliminary results, pronounced in political systems where the supply of parties is distinct (polarised) and recognisable (high perceptual agreement). Personalisation of voting may be expected in systems with knowing single party governments.

5.3 Communication of Elections: The Availability of Mass Media

Does exposure to mass media affect vote choice? This is one of the questions of central interest in political communication research. Early empirical studies of the Columbia School refuted the hypothesis that persuasive media content directly affects vote choice (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Berelson 1954). More recently, several studies demonstrate that media information indirectly impacts on voters views on politics (Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Iyengar & Simon 1993; Krosnick & Brannon 1993; Goidel et al. 1997; Pan & Kosicki 1997; Miller & Krosnick 2000). Different criteria that citizens employ to evaluate a political stimulus are sometimes activated by media content, a phenomenon often referred to as ‘priming’. Priming affects the cognitions which will be available, accessible, and in the end applicable for the evaluation of a stimulus (cf. Peter 2002). As can be shown for the Netherlands, exposure to different media modes also ‘primes’ the reasoning of vote choice (Kroh 2003). Preferably one would like to test effects of mass media for voters’ reasoning using individual level data on media exposure.

144 See Chapter 1 for a brief discussion.
Since this information is not available in the CSES data, I look at the relevance of mass communication by aggregate indicators of the availability of media content to the citizens in a system.

There are basically two arguments as to why the availability of mass media contents in a society might be related to voting behaviour. First, as argued above, media exposure on the individual level has proven to be relevant for the reasoning of vote choice. It seems plausible to expect that such individual level effects are mirrored on the aggregate level of political systems.\textsuperscript{145} I therefore expect that the availability of different kinds of media influences the extent to which the different components of the vote function are relevant for an electorate.\textsuperscript{146} Second, an effect of aggregated media availability may reflect more than just the sum of individual level relationships. The consequences of mass media for politics are suggested to occur at several stages of the political process. Modern mass communication is supposed to affect democratic competition (von Alemann 1997; Sarcinelli 1998), inner-party democracy (Niedermayer 2000), and electoral campaigns (Bowler & Farrell 1992; Schmitt-Beck & Pfetsch 1994).\textsuperscript{147} The availability of newspapers and TV provides opportunities and constraints to

\textsuperscript{145} Schmitt-Beck (2000) shows that the impact of mass media on vote choice indeed differs across countries.
\textsuperscript{146} Availability of media information from different media does not imply necessarily that these media are used to acquire or expose oneself to political information, but I assume that these phenomena are positively related. Thus availability is a proxy for exposure and media consumption.
\textsuperscript{147} This implies that in all democracies analysed, media on average have similar effects. This would not be the case in countries where political information is monopolised, government-dominated, etc., hence, that do not have a free and competitive media system. However, as I focus on democratic systems only, it appears reasonable to assume that media potentially impact on voters’ reasoning in all contexts analysed in this book.
political actors.\textsuperscript{148} Thus, the availability of some medium may, above some threshold, affect not only voters exposed to this medium but an entire electorate via changes on the contextual level, for instance in campaign styles. A growing body of literature deals with the consequences for voting of the expansion of different media. In this book I distinguish two consequences for voters’ reasoning. These two effects relate, first, to the amount of political information provided by mass media and, second, to the ‘typical’ format of presentation used in different media.

\textit{Mass Media and Political Information}

Mass media provide the public with easily available political information. Societies in which mass media are extensively distributed therefore supply voters with extensive—or at least easily accessible—political information. Many empirical studies demonstrate that in general media exposure positively affects individuals’ knowledge about politics (Blumer & McQuail 1968; Schönbach 1983; Weaver 1996; Norris & Sanders 2002). This entails factual knowledge available about issues and familiarity with candidates (Patterson 1980), as well as providing information that helps voters link their own ideological stands with the positions of parties (Berelson et al. 1954; Blumer & McQuail 1968; Iyengar & Kinder 1987). Which mode of mass communication (TV, broadsheets, tabloids, etc) matters most for political knowledge is still a question of heated debate (Schönbach 1983, Mondak 1995; Graber 2001; Norris & Sanders 2002).

One may expect that the more mass media are available in a society, hence the more its voters will have political information and, moreover, that exposure to such information increases individuals’ political knowledge.

\textsuperscript{148} For an example see the second part of this section on ‘TV versus Newspaper’, which suggests that the expansion of TV may have altered the logic of electoral campaigns by increasing the focus on (personal) characteristics of political leaders (e.g., Schönbach 1993; Mughan 2000).
Political systems with widely accessible mass media allow voters to develop informed opinions on parties, politicians, and policies. I therefore expect that the accessibility of mass media in a country increases the effect of all three kinds of political orientations (here: party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances) for vote choice. This expectation has to be specified further, however.

Several scholars suggest that the development of modern mass media is partly responsible for declining partisanship. Party leanings are said to weaken when modern mass media become more widely accessible, because citizens do not have to rely (anymore) on party loyalties when casting a ballot. They are sufficiently informed to also take short-term elements of electoral campaigns like candidates and issues into account when voting (Dalton et al. 1984; Schmitt-Beck 1994). In line with this argument, the empirical findings of Chapter 4 indicated that party leanings are less relevant among highly informed (more specifically: highly educated) respondents. The findings reported in Chapter 4 also showed that policy voting and politician-oriented voting is stronger when respondents have more political knowledge. Hence, I expect —modifying the general expectation stated above— that policy voting in particular, and to a lesser extent also political leadership considerations, gain importance with mass media availability whereas the effect of party leanings in political systems may even decrease.

TV versus Daily Newspapers

Many scholars have suggested that the growing importance of television during the past decades has transformed the logic of political communication (e.g., Robinson 1976; Iyengar 1991; Pfetsch 1991; Holtz-Bacha 1994; Schmitt-Beck & Schrott 1994). This is said to be the effect of television news, which requires the visualisation of information, which is apparently less required of newspapers. Focusing on politicians instead of issues often enables the
visualisation of political information, i.e. party strategists adapt to these new circumstances by placing greater emphasis on the role of politicians than in the past (Radunski 1980; LeDuc 1996; Semetko 1996). TV based mass communication is therefore often suggested to have across-the-board effects on all voters and not only on those exposed to them (Couvet et al. 1995; van der Brug & van der Eijk 2000). This personalisation may lead voters to rely increasingly on politician orientations when casting ballots (Mughan 2000). Previous efforts to empirically test this proposition of increased personalisation of voting behaviour over time did not find compelling evidence to either refute or support it (Kaase 1994; Vetter & Gabriel 1998; Schmitt & Ohr 2000; Pappi & Shikano 2001). As TV based mass communication is often supposed to personalise individual voting behaviour (Farrell & Bowler 1992; Poguntke 2000), I expect that leader evaluations gain importance when television dominates mass communication. As press more than TV allows to communicate abstract information, such as issues and ideologies, I expect that policies (left-right distances) gain importance when newspapers dominate mass communication.

**Measurement and Empirical Findings**

I constructed two variables at the contextual level to investigate the relevance of availability of mass communication for voters’ reasoning. First, the mean number of daily newspapers per household in a country is used as a proxy for the accessibility of political information from newspapers. 149 Second, the mean number of TV sets per household in a country is taken to indicate to what extent television news is accessible in a political system. 150 Table

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149 The proxy is, of course, far from perfect. It does not, for instance, distinguish between newspapers of greatly different information values, such as tabloids or broadsheets.

150 For more detailed information on the construction and the data source of the variables see Appendix 4. Both indicators are indirect measures of
5.3 reports the moderating effects of these two variables for party, politician, and policy considerations. The interaction terms are highly significant, but explain less variance than the institutional characteristics and party system variables did (Sections 5.1 and 5.2). The variables of media accessibility account for (a limited) 8% of variance in the slopes of the components of the vote function, when these are allowed to vary between systems.

The results are only partly in accordance with the expectations. The expectations about differential effects of television and newspaper availability in particular lack empirical support. For both media, I find effects in the same direction, and not as was expected, in different directions. Larger availability of both mass media enhances the weight of party leanings and left-right distances, while reducing the impact of leader evaluations. The availability of mass media—both TV and newspapers—seems to be more important than he differences between different kinds of media.\textsuperscript{151}

\begin{footnotesize}
consumption of, or exposure to, political information (see footnote 146). I assume that the mean number of TV sets (daily newspapers) in one country indicates the degree to which TV news (newspapers) are used as source for political information. These are strong assumptions. It may be that, for example, television is widely accessible, yet, citizens rely solely on information from newspapers as far as politics is concerned. Firmer indicators on media exposure are necessary to validate the findings reported in this section. Thus, these findings stand under the reservation of sub-optimal operationalisation.

\textsuperscript{151} In line with the argument that is behind the expectation, newspapers have a stronger (negative) effect on leader evaluations than TV, and also have a stronger effect in the expected direction on policy considerations (left-right distances). However, the full model of Chapter 6 (which includes all individual and contextual moderating effects) will show that the effects of newspaper accessibility are weaker once I control for related effects.
\end{footnotesize}
Table 5.3 Availability of Mass Media 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>0.654** (0.007)</td>
<td>0.938** (0.014)</td>
<td>-0.644** (0.016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta$ TV Distribution</td>
<td>0.037** (0.006)</td>
<td>-0.222** (0.014)</td>
<td>-0.033* (0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta$ Newspaper Distribution</td>
<td>0.026** (0.007)</td>
<td>-0.449** (0.018)</td>
<td>0.081** (0.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random Effects, Level 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma$ Party Leaning</td>
<td>0.010** (0.001)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma$ Leader Evaluation</td>
<td>-0.016** (0.001)</td>
<td>0.125** (0.008)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma$ Left-Right Distance</td>
<td>-0.022** (0.002)</td>
<td>0.068** (0.006)</td>
<td>0.127** (0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Fit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Individuals</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Contexts</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Log Likelihood</td>
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</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>0.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Data Source. CSES.

The results reported in Table 5.3 also do not support the expectation that high media availability reduces the weight of partisanship in voters’ reasoning. On the contrary, voting behaviour in political systems with widely accessible media is more strongly determined by party attachments.

The findings suggest that widely available media promote a non-personalised vote choice. The negative interaction effect between media accessibility and the effect of political leadership is among the strongest of all partial analyses. In Chapter 7, I will discuss these findings in more detail.

5.4 Conflict within Polities: The Economic Context

The countries analysed in this book vary greatly in terms of their economic climate. For instance, the GDP per capita of these systems ranges from less than US$ 1,000 in the Ukraine
to more than US$ 35,000 in Norway and Japan.\textsuperscript{152} These figures imply that the Ukraine faces totally different economic and social conflicts than Norway and Japan. Numerous studies show that the economy is indeed relevant for the political competition between parties and candidates as well as for individual voters (cf. Jung 1982; Lewis-Beck 1988).\textsuperscript{153} But in which ways does the economic context of countries arguably moderate the importance of party, leader, and policies in the reasoning of vote choice? The literature on the calculus of voting does not provide an instant answer to this question. Studies of the realignment approach, however, make a related argument as to how (economic) changes over time within several Western democracies may be relevant for changes in voters’ reasoning (Franklin et al. 1992). I will make use of this argument to derive plausible expectations on the question in which ways the economic context between countries may arguably affect the calculus of voting. I concentrate on two aspects of the economic context, which I regard as particularly relevant: affluence and income inequality.

\textit{Affluence and Income Inequality}

As discussed in Chapter 4, the emergence of party systems at the aggregate level as well as cleavage loyalties at the individual level can be traced back to social cleavages in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century (Lipset & Rokkan 1967). With respect to the economic context, the socio-economic class cleavage is of particular importance. This cleavage is well known to many countries and relates, in simple terms, to the distribution of limited resources within societies. In Section 4.1, I refer to the argument that the relevance of social cleavages may decline due to an increasing individualisation.

\textsuperscript{152} These figures relate to the year 2000, see Table A4.4 in Appendix 4 for more information.

\textsuperscript{153} A well-known answer to the question what affects voting behaviour is “it’s the economy, stupid”.
and a diminishing social embeddedness in traditional social groups and networks, such as classes (e.g., Beck 1983; Dalton et al. 1984; Schnell & Kohler 1995). In section 4.2, I refer to a second argument that sees cognitive mobilisation as a source of the increasingly smaller impact of social background on vote choice (e.g., Dalton et al. 1984). A third argument, which is made to explain the decline of the relevance of, for instance, class membership for voting behaviour, does not relate to individual but to contextual changes: Franklin et al. (1992) argue that to the extent that conflicts underlying cleavages weaken, simply because conflicts are solved or appear less pressing, cleavage loyalties are less relevant for vote choice. In other words, to the extent to which established societies solved the problem underlying the class cleavage, which I defined in simplified terms as a conflict about the distribution of limited resources, socio-economic background has become less important for individuals’ calculus of voting. Returning to the example of the Ukraine and Norway, a GDP per capita of more than US$ 35,000 in Norway indicates that an economic cleavage is much weaker in this society than in the Ukraine where the GDP per capita is less than US$ 1,000. In the latter more than in the first case one may expect a conflict than concerns the distribution of limited resources, as these resources are more ‘limited’ in the Ukraine than in Norway.

The argument stated so far relates to the affluence of societies. It may, however, also be transferred to the degree of equality in an economic context. As the economic cleavage as defined above concerns the distribution of limited resources, one may expect a highly uneven division of income to increase the potential for economic conflict in a polity. Moreover, this should strengthen a voting behaviour that relates to socio-economic background variables. As noted before, this is a very simplified view of economic conflicts in different societies. For instance, equality as a normative concept is not equally shared by all societies, thus
it may be context-specific. A specific level of income equality may be considered too egalitarian in the USA and too unequal in welfare states like Sweden. But as inequality does not uniformly indicate socio-economic conflict within polities (cf. Lichbach 1989), neither does (the lack of) affluence. Again, affluence may not be regarded as a normative goal to the same extent in all societies. In this respect, Wessels (1991) writes about the erosion of the growth paradigm of industrial societies. As fewer citizens regard affluence or growth as a normative goal, such variables lose their function as proxies for (the lack of) socio-economic conflict. In sum, the simplified argument that affluence and equality are indicators for economic conflict in polities is a problematic one in the light of the complex nature of socio-economic cleavages in a cross-national perspective. However, I do make this argument to derive sensible expectations for the effect of economic contexts on voters’ reasoning, and I do not aspire to investigate socio-economic cleavages across contexts as such. Therefore, this simplification seems reasonable. Moreover, the objections raised before are of an empirical and not of a categorical nature: they can potentially be included in empirical models.155

As elaborated in Chapter 4, as consequences of weak cleavage loyalties for the reasoning of vote choice one may

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154 Moreover, the extent to which equality is considered a normative goal varies over time. Several scholars note that in Western societies since the 1980s, citizens increasingly regard equality as less important (Middendorp).

155 For instance, the objection that equality as a normative concept is not equally shared by all citizens and societies implies a moderating effect of individuals’ norms and values (towards equality) on the effect of the economic context (in terms of equality) on the degree of economic conflict in polities. Without including such moderating effects, the argument formulated in the main text refers to the average effect of affluence and equality on the degree of economic conflict across countries.
expect a decrease in the impact of social background variables on vote choice and an increase of short-term factors of elections, such as leader and policy orientations. Hence, I expect the affluence and income equality of societies to positively moderate the effect of leader evaluations and left-right distances in the vote function analysed.

**Measurement and Empirical Findings**

Two variables measure the economic context of a country: affluence is measured by the GDP per capita and the (in)equality of a society by the Gini-Index of income inequality.\(^\text{156}\)

### Table 5.4 Economic Context 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><strong>Fixed Effects, Level 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta_0$</td>
<td>0.494** (0.008)</td>
<td>1.146** (0.015)</td>
<td>-0.581** (0.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta_{\text{GDP per capita}}$</td>
<td>-0.025** (0.007)</td>
<td>-0.199** (0.016)</td>
<td>-0.117** (0.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta_{\text{Inequality (Gini Index)}}$</td>
<td>-0.040** (0.007)</td>
<td>-0.014 (0.015)</td>
<td>0.096** (0.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Random Effects, Level 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma_{\text{Party Leaning}}$</td>
<td>0.019** (0.002)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma_{\text{Leader Evaluation}}$</td>
<td>-0.008** (0.002)</td>
<td>0.159** (0.010)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma_{\text{Left-Right Distance}}$</td>
<td>0.006** (0.002)</td>
<td>-0.073** (0.006)</td>
<td>0.100** (0.010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Model Fit**

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Individuals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33,968</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>-26,590.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2_{\text{Level 1, Vote Choice + Slopes}}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2_{\text{Level 2, Random Slopes}}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

**Data Source.** CSES.

Preliminary findings reported in Table 5.4 suggest that the economic climate of a country has considerable impact on the individual calculus of voting. Five out of six interaction terms significantly moderate effects of the

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\(^{156}\) High values on the Gini-Index refer to high income inequality. For detailed information on the variables see Appendix 4.
components of the vote function. Whereas the goodness of fit remains unchanged at the individual level, these aspects of the economic context account for 11% of the contextual variation in the vote function applied.

As anticipated, affluence and income equality are found to enlarge the effect of policy voting (left-right distances) across contexts. Party leanings, for which I did not formulate any specific expectations, are more important in contexts with low GDP per capita and high income equality. Unanticipated is that the effect of leader evaluations is not positively moderated by affluence and equality. On the contrary, affluence reduces the relevance of political leadership as a consideration of vote choice. As in the previous section on the distribution of mass media in societies, empirical findings on political leadership challenge expectations: voting for the preferred politician is particularly commonplace in societies that are characterised by less accessible mass media and less affluence. This last point will be discussed in the concluding Chapter 7.

5.5 Contexts and the Calculus of Voting: Summary of Findings

The objective of this chapter was to describe to what extent the context of elections moderates the considerations individuals apply in their vote choice. The chapter focused on long-term and rather stable characteristics of political systems, such as institutional settings, the party system, the accessibility of mass media, and the economic climate of countries. The following three points briefly summarise the preliminary empirical findings of this chapter.

First, the major finding is that the context of elections does indeed affect the calculus of voting. Properties of political systems noticeably moderate a reasoning of vote
choice based on the evaluations of parties, political leaders, and policies.

Second, this chapter stresses two kinds of contextual variables. The first type concerns the political environment of democracies, such as institutional settings and the supply of party systems. The second form concerns the social and economic environment, which has political relevance but is not directly linked to the act of voting. The analysed traits of a society are the availability of mass media and the economic context. All such variables significantly affect the calculus of voting, however, the analyses show that in terms of the explained variance of random slopes at the contextual level, the political environment is more important for voters' reasoning than the state of the society.\footnote{157}

Third, contextual characteristics of elections seem to impact on the effect of leader evaluations more than on the effect of left-right distances and left-right distances appear more affected than party leanings. The three single most important moderating effects (in terms of $t$-values) of the (preliminary) partial analyses of leader evaluations are the availability of newspapers ($t=24.4$, as the following $t$-values not reported in Tables 5.1 to 5.4), the availability of TV sets ($t=15.9$), and effective thresholds ($t=14.2$). The most important moderating effects for left-right distances are the difference between presidential and parliamentary systems ($t=8.2$), GDP per capita ($t=7.9$), and effective thresholds ($t=7.8$). Finally, party leanings are most affected by the

\footnote{157 The partial analyses estimate a reduction in contextual slope variance of party leanings, leader evaluations, and left-right distances of $R^2 = 0.19$ for traits of institutional settings, $R^2 = 0.30$ for traits of party systems, $R^2 = 0.08$ for traits of media accessibility, and $R^2 = 0.11$ for traits of the economic context of societies. Categorising the first two clusters of variables as characteristics of the political environment and the latter two clusters of variables as characteristics of the social and economic environment, one has to conclude that the political environment is more relevant for contextual variation of individual voting behaviour.}
distribution of TV sets ($t=5.8$), income inequality ($t=5.6$), and polarisation of party systems ($t=4.4$).

As stated earlier, the findings of Chapters 4 and 5 are preliminary ones because the partial models omit relevant effects. As the correlation matrix of contextual characteristics in Appendix 4 shows, the party system of countries is highly related to the institutional settings and the accessibility of mass media to the affluence of countries. In order to take such interrelations into account, and thus to arrive at a better specified model, in Chapter 6 I will report a model in which all these variables are simultaneously analysed.