UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Parties, politicians, and policies

Kroh, M.

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (http://dare.uva.nl)
Chapter 7
Conclusions

In this concluding chapter I will briefly summarise major empirical findings of the research reported in this book. Following this account of what has been done and found, I will discuss some unexpected findings in the light of scholarly debates and offer tentative interpretations for these unanticipated results. In a third section, I will briefly discuss the practical implications of the research of this book. Finally, I will address the question what has not been done in this study but what appears to me relevant for future research on the calculus of voting.

7.1 What has been Done: Summary of the Study and Its Findings

The starting point of this study is the thesis that arriving at a vote choice is not a homogenous decision-making process across all voters. In accordance with empirical research in this field I suggest that individuals come to their vote choice by heterogeneously relying on different kinds of considerations (e.g., Rivers 1988; Glasgow 1999). Such considerations relate to generic political constructs such as parties, politicians, governments, ideologies, or policies (cf. Harrop & Miller 1987; Lau 1989). In other words, some voters may weigh parties more heavily in their individual vote function, others may rely more strongly on the evaluation of political leaders, and yet other ones may
emphasis policy considerations in their vote choice. Previous research suggests that such differences are not just random taste variation but systematically relate to characteristics of individual voters and to characteristics of the choice situation, the context of elections. In the literature on voters’ reasoning, political awareness, social background, political socialisation, and media exposure are probably the most frequently mentioned individual-level factors that generate variations in individuals’ calculus of voting. There is, however, also a growing body of literature that addresses the question of variation between contexts. Social change, the political environment, and election campaigns are contextual factors that affect the reasoning of vote choice. So far, no unified research tradition has emerged about the factors that lead to differences in voters’ reasoning. Rather bits and pieces of an emerging approach are scattered throughout the political science literature, often implicitly addressing questions concerning heterogeneity of the calculus of voting.

The analysis in this book focuses on three political objects that almost all most voters presumably take into consideration when casting a ballot: parties, politicians, and policies. This study investigates to what extent voters rely on orientations to these three objects, and how this varies between individuals and contexts. Methodologically, these questions are approached by a multilevel analysis (random slope model) of the impact of party, politician, and policy orientations on vote choice, using survey data about 30 democratic parliamentary elections around the world. Three indicators measure voters’ considerations related to these political objects: party leaning, leader sympathy, and left-right distance. Individual traits (age, education, etc.) and contextual characteristics (institutional settings, party system, etc.) are modelled as interactions that may moderate the weight of these orientations in determining vote choice.

Analyses of random effects as well as interaction models show that voters’ reasoning is in fact heterogeneous across as well as within political systems. A descriptive
analysis of country specific estimates of the calculus of voting suggests that differences between democracies are systematic and significant. Chapters 4 and 5 report detailed explorations into theoretically plausible determinants of variations in voters’ reasoning. These expectations are empirically investigated in partial models, each for one cluster of explanatory variables. In Chapter 4 the focus is on individual determinants of heterogeneity in voters’ reasoning (social background and political awareness) while Chapter 5 focuses on contextual determinants (institutional settings, party systems, media availability, economic contexts). These analyses are combined in a full model in Chapter 6.

The analyses of individual level characteristics reveal that the demographic background of respondents does not contribute much to variation in the calculus of voting. The only exception is that older voters rely more distinctly on party leanings when casting a ballot. More important for differences in the reasoning of vote choice is voters’ political awareness. Politically informed voters give more weight to policy and to leader preferences. Party leanings on the other hand are more important for low-information voters.

Contextual characteristics of political systems are much better able to explain heterogeneity in voters’ reasoning than individual traits. I distinguish characteristics of the political environment, i.e. institutional arrangements and party systems, and societal conditions, i.e. availability of mass media and the economic context. Both clusters of contextual variables are highly relevant as moderating variables in the calculus of voting.

The effect of party leaning is mostly moderated by the political environment. Party preferences are especially pertinent in political systems in which the effective number of parties is high, perceptual agreement on parties’ positions on a left-right scale is widespread, and the effective threshold for electoral representation restricts the success of small parties. Hence, if voters are confronted with a high number of alternatives that hold recognizable policy stands, voters are
inclined to draw on party leanings as consideration of vote choice. Party leanings appear to be resistant against incentives to vote tactically, which are implied in high effective thresholds for electoral representation. The two most important institutional variables that provide incentives to vote for politicians are the presence of a parliamentary system and single party government. If lower house elections not only decide on allocation of seats in parliament but also on selecting chief political personnel for future government (parliamentary versus presidential systems) voters put more emphasis on leader evaluations in their vote function. This is even more so when single party governments are dominant in a political system. Under such conditions, parliamentary elections acquire an aspect of choosing between candidates for prime minister. Finally, features of the political environment that strongly moderate the effect of policy evaluations are perceptual agreement on parties positions on to left-right scale and low effective thresholds for electoral representation. Hence, voting according the left-right orientations is hindered by restrictive institutional settings that may exclude minor parties from parliamentary representation and facilitated by recognisable ideological positions of parties.

The availability of mass media and the economic conditions have some impact on the effects of party leanings and left-right distances. The number of TV sets per household is found to significantly increase the weight of party leanings and left-right distances in voters’ reasoning. Policy voting is also stronger with greater income equality. Societal conditions are of particular importance for leadership effects. More specifically, where media information is comparatively inaccessible (low numbers of TV sets and newspapers per household) and in less affluent societies, voters are more inclined to vote according their leader preference.
7.2 Some Unexpected Findings and Their Theoretical Implications

Some of the results summarised in the previous section are in accordance with more or less established insights in the literature. Others are not. And for some of this is not entirely clear, were it only because existing controversies or debates have yet prevented the formation of 'established' insights. Irrespective which of these situations apply, the findings reported are to be regarded as part of an increasing pool of empirical insights that has to be taken into account when inferences are made about the factors that lead to heterogeneity in voters' reasoning. A few of the more general findings of this study are particularly surprising when compared with the existing literature or theoretical expectations. I will discuss these in more detail. They concern, first, the explanatory power of individual and contextual accounts for variations in voters' reasoning, second, the importance of party leanings for different kinds of voters and in different political systems, and third, variations in the strength of leadership effects in different countries.

*Individual versus Context*

According to results reported in Chapter 6, contextual characteristics are more important for explaining variations in voters' reasoning than individual characteristics.\(^{191}\) Differences in leadership effects particularly require a comparative perspective across political systems to be understood. This finding stands in contrast to the overwhelming attention in the scholarly communication for individual determinants of voters reasoning, and the relative neglect of contextual determinants. It also underscores the importance of cross-national data projects such as the

\(^{191}\) For some conditioning remarks to the statement that 'context matters more' see Chapter 6.
CSES.\textsuperscript{192} Moreover, my findings emphasise that a political perspective on voters' reasoning is more relevant than a sociological or psychological view. Political institutions and the supply offered by party systems are of much greater relevance for the reasoning of vote choice than differences between individuals.

The analysis of policy voting provides a particularly telling example of the benefits of a comparative analysis of voters' reasoning. Many scholars have pointed out that voting for the 'closest' party on an ideological or issue dimension, such as left-right, is highly demanding and that such behaviour can only be expected from politically informed and sophisticated voters (e.g., Campbell et al 1960; Stokes 1963; Pattie & Johnston 2001). The individual level analysis in Chapter 4 of this book is indeed in accordance with this: policy voting is more prevalent among educated and politically knowledgeable voters. The contextual analysis of Chapter 5 shows additionally that not only voter characteristics but also the political supply affects policy voting (as also demonstrated by Oppenhuis 1995; van der Eijk & Franklin 1996; Klingemann & Wessels 2000). A reasonably small party system (low effective number of parties), that is comprehensible to voters (high perceptual agreement on parties’ stands), and open to new parties (low effective threshold) provides an optimal environment for

\footnote{192 A comparative perspective on all contextual aspects of elections can, however, not yet be fully exploited with the current CSES data. Preferably one would like to analyse several elections per political system to be able to gauge how much variability in the calculus of voting is due to stable institutional settings, social and political change, and the short-term features of specific election campaigns. For a discussion of 'what has not been done in this study' see Section 7.4 of this chapter.}
CONCLUSIONS

voting according policy preferences. This finding points out that such voting is not just related to the capacities of citizens but that can be promoted or obstructed by political systems. A ‘rational’ public is as much the product of the system as it is of voters’ capacities.

The Motivational Foundation of Party Leanings

Party considerations have been operationalised in this study by party leanings, identified by a survey question that probes for “do you feel close to a party?” For reasons elaborated in Chapter 2, I do not refer to this as party identification, but as party leaning. Nevertheless, it is obvious that party leanings have a commonality with party identifications. The latter concept, incidentally, has increasingly acquired in the literature different ‘meanings’, varying from the original Michigan concept (Campbell et al 1960), to Fiorina’s (1981) notion of a ‘running tally’, to much weaker forms of ‘some kind of affinity other than policy or politicians’.

Most of these (usually implicit) conceptualisations, however, share a common core, as is the case with most centred concepts in political science (cf. van der Eijk 2001a: Chapter 1). Elements of this common core are a long-term stability and a basis in a person’s social background. In view of this common core, the findings from this study raise a number of serious concerns. First, party leanings are found to be especially relevant for vote choice in transition

\[193\] Interpreting the ‘why’ of these systematic conditions requires some notion of a ‘causal mechanism’ (cf. King et al 1994). For some of these conditions this is obvious. For instance, perceptual agreement on parties’ stands validates voters’ perceptions and thus increases their relevance. For other conditions, the causal mechanism may involve several links. A low effective threshold for electoral representation implies that party competition (on e.g. policy grounds) is not artificially restricted, which would diminish parties’ responsiveness to voters’ policy preferences. This, in turn, would diminish the rational incentive to vote on policy grounds.

\[194\] For the exact wording of the question see Appendix 2 or the CSES codebook (Sapiro & Shively 2002).
democracies as reported in Chapter 3. This is problematic for all conceptualisations of party leanings that emphasise their long-term stability. From this perspective, there just has not been sufficient time to develop long-term party leanings in democracies in which most parties date back to the early 1990s. Obviously, the survey question for party leanings that is used in the CSES data, taps also other attitudes towards parties than only those that develop (and endure) over long periods of time. Second, social characteristics of individuals with the exception of age do not explain whether voters rely on party leanings when casting ballots (Chapter 4). This is problematic for the concept to the extent that it presupposes the existence of roots in social affiliations that are politicised in democracies. More importantly yet, system characteristics were found to notably moderate the applicability of party leanings (Chapter 6). In virtually all kinds of conceptualisations of party identification/attachment/leaning, this concept is framed in terms of an individual-focussed theory. Yet, the empirical results of this study suggest a rational choice view of party leanings: they are important to vote choice if the context of elections provides incentives to make use of them. If party leanings do not measure the common core of a class of related concepts but reflect a general party evaluation it is not surprising that such general preferences are barely affected by individual traits or societal conditions. The universality of effects of party leanings implies that the concept is applicable anywhere where parties are a key reference point in the political process. Consequently, as political systems assign more or less

195 For these reasons it seems warranted to interpret the variable of party identification as general party orientation or leaning. Though, the consequent question may be addressed whether there are not more appropriate ways to measure such general (and possibly multiple) party preferences with a higher reliability and validity than this is possible with the somewhat vague (and categorical) formulation “do you feel close to a party”? 
political power to parties as political actors, the effects of party leanings on vote choice vary accordingly.

As digression, these findings are also relevant to the analyses of the decline of partisanship, most of which refer to social change as the driving factor behind this decline (e.g., Franklin et al 1992; Dalton & Wattenberg 2000). In the light of this debate it is interesting to note that, according to results of this study, individual and societal conditions account less for the effect of partisanship than the political environment. Consequently, one may ask whether it is not only social but also political change that accounts for declining relevance of partisanship for vote choice; an argument that has received little attention so far.

The Leadership Puzzle
As far as the effect of political leadership is concerned, the empirical findings of this book are in several respects unexpected. The prevailing wisdom in the literature is that voting based on preferences for politicians is an apolitical form of low information rationality. This kind of motivation allegedly becomes important when voters lack sufficient

---

196 Not all of these findings are surprising, however. Interaction effects between aspects of the political environment and leadership are widely in accordance with my expectations and with previous comparative research (Curtis & Blais 2001; Poguntke 2000; Carey & Shugart 1995). These findings suggest that leadership considerations are especially unimportant in presidential systems and in countries governed by coalition governments. Under the opposite constellation (single party governments in parliamentary systems) parliamentary elections acquire also an importance as race between candidates for prime minister, thus, a race for the de facto most important office in these democracies. In the literature, these traits are referred to as a basis for a presidentialisation of parliamentary elections. This term implies that only considerations about candidates for prime minister (and not those about other politicians) affect vote choice. This conjecture may be tested by means of higher order interactions between, first, the evaluation of politicians, second, governmental fragmentation (the binary distinction between parliamentary and presidential systems respectively), and third, a variable that indicates whether a politician is a candidate for prime minister.
information for more demanding considerations of vote choice, such as issue stands of parties, policy proposals, ideologies, etc. (cf. Lass 1995; Vetter & Gabriel 1998). Other frequent conjectures with regard to leadership motivation is that it is promoted by the exposure to television as a source of political information (e.g., Radunski 1980) or that the lack of clear ideological alternatives provided by party systems generates such propensity for politician oriented voting (e.g., Poguntke 2000).

The findings reported in sections 4.2 and 5.3 are, however, incompatible with several of these expectations: political knowledge increases the importance of leadership effects for vote choice\(^{197}\) and greater availability of television as a source of political information decreases the relevance of leadership.\(^{198}\) Moreover, the lack of affluence and the polarisation of party systems also strengthen politician oriented voting behaviour. I will offer three different interpretations for these apparently surprising findings. The question of which of these is most appropriate cannot be answered here. However, for each of these ideas I will derive testable implications.

Interpersonal Communication and Leadership

Leadership effects are weaker when TV information is more widely available in a society. Because of the alleged personalising nature of TV information, this is a somewhat surprising result. Yet, it is only surprising when variations in TV availability would exist in otherwise identical conditions. It is unlikely, however, that such ceteris paribus conditions exist. To the extent that mass media are less available, other forms of communication, such as newspapers and

\(^{197}\) Not all respondents appear sufficiently familiar with the political elite of a country (see Section 2.5). Party leanings rather than leader evaluations have proven to be tool of uninformed voters (see Section 4.2).

\(^{198}\) Note that the measures for media availability are based at the contextual level, as individual level information on media exposure was unavailable.
interpersonal communication presumably gain in importance as sources of political information. Particularly, interpersonal communication is likely to frame politics more in terms of a contest between few political leaders than in terms of differences between abstract issues and ideologies. If this would be the case, greater availability of means of mass communication would diminish voters reliance on informal and interpersonal communication, and thus also the effect of considerations about politicians. I am aware of the speculative nature of this interpretation, but I present it here as a suggestion for future research, not as a tested explanation.

Political (In)Stability and Leadership
Citizens in less prosperous democracies (with a highly polarised political competition) are found to weigh evaluations of politicians more heavily in their vote decision. Here too, differences in affluence (or polarisation) do not exist in otherwise identical conditions. Poorer (more polarised) societies are often also characterised greater social, economic, and political instability, which may give different connotations to leadership considerations for vote choice. Voters in stable post-industrial societies may follow a politician for different reasons than voters in unstable societies. In the former case, such support may be motivated by the desire to express personal liking and disliking, while such support may in the latter case be motivated by the desire for strong leadership to overcome instabilities of a society. Leadership considerations focus more than party and policy evaluations on the question who will be able to solve crucial social, economic, or political problems. Conceivably, this question gains in importance with increasingly difficult socio-economic problems.

Inglehart (2003) reports a related phenomenon on the basis of an analysis of the data from the World Value Study. Respondents in several countries were asked to indicate whether "having a strong leader who does not have to bother
with parliament and elections" is a good thing or not. The highest support rates (more than 50% of the sample) for the statement are found in Romania, the Ukraine, Mexico, and Russia, hence, countries that experienced unstable times in comparison to other countries analysed. At least Romania and Russia also show high levels of leader oriented voting behaviour as reported in Figure 3.2 of Chapter 3. An easy testable implication of the idea that strong leadership effects originate from social, economic, and political instability would be that such effects are more evident among citizens who perceive the stability of their polity as low and the seriousness of problems a country faces as high.

Post-Communist Democracies and Leadership
A third reason for the surprising findings related to leadership effects across countries may be found in the differences between former communist systems and other democracies. Seven of the ten political systems in the CSES data with a GDP per capita below US$ 10,000 are transition countries, namely the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, and the Ukraine (see Table A4.4, Appendix 4). These same countries also score comparatively low on TV and newspaper availability (see Table A4.3) and score relatively high on polarisation of party systems (see Table A4.2, Appendix 4). Hence, behind the effects on leadership of GDP per capita, of mass media availability, and of

---

199 Here I refer only to those countries reported by Inglehart (2003) that also have been analysed in this book. Twenty-three countries are included in both the World Value Study and in this book. Plotting the support rates of the quoted statement in these countries (Table 2, Inglehart (2003): 53) with the estimated leadership effect (see Figure 3.2) suggests a curvilinear relationship: very low (less than 20%) and very high support (more than 50%) of ‘strong leadership’ are associated with strong politician-oriented voting behaviour, whereas medium support for the statement (20% to 50% support) are associated with comparatively weak effects of politician considerations on vote choice. This may indicate that the estimated leadership effect in fact has different meanings for different democracies.
polarisation, may exist an omitted variable: whether or not a system is a post-communist society.\textsuperscript{200} All these countries developed democratic regimes in the fourth wave\textsuperscript{201} of democratisation between 1990 and 1994 (Huntington 1991; Doorenspleet 2001). But why should voters in these democracies vote more on the basis of leader preference than voters in other countries? There are two reasons for this. The first relates to patterns of political competition in many transition democracies. Several scholars note that the party systems of these countries may fail to integrate electorates ideologically. Political structures are not yet sufficiently established for voters to develop clear perspectives of parties and of what parties stand for (e.g., White et al 1997; Kitschelt et al 1999). New parties are formed frequently, existing ones easily shift their ideological position, or disappear again. High fragmentation and volatility and weak programmatic crystallisation of parties indicate that the electorates in these democracies are confronted with many instabilities and unpredictabilities. Under such conditions, it may be easier for

\textsuperscript{200} The contextual residuals of the full model specification as reported in Chapter 6 show that leadership is systematically underestimated in Eastern European democracies, with the exception of Poland and the Ukraine. In that respect, the discussion of Post-Communism as an omitted variable problem that accounts for the leadership-puzzle serves also as a tentative explanation for the underestimation of leadership effects in these countries.

\textsuperscript{201} Whether this wave is regarded as the third or the fourth wave of democratisation depends on the definition of these waves. Huntington (1991) defines three waves, the last one beginning in the mid 1970s. Doorenspleet (2001) argues for a different categorisation and distinguishes a separate, fourth, wave of democratisation between 1990 and 1994.
voters in transition countries to develop stable orientations towards politicians than to parties and policies.  

Several findings, however, do not fit with this explanation. To start, the account implies that parties and policies in transition countries are ineffective for vote choice and that leader evaluations are compensating for this. Yet, party leanings were found to be highly important for vote choice in post-communist democracies (see Figure 3.1). Although the effect of left-right on voting is somewhat smaller in post-communist democracies than elsewhere (see Figure 3.3), this does not account for the very high parameter estimate of political leadership. Moreover, the explanation implies that party positions are unclear in transition countries. Yet, perceptual agreement of party placements as reported in Table A4.2 of Appendix 4 is not particularly low in these countries, often it is even higher than in many established democracies, such as Canada, Germany, or the UK. Finally, the argument implies that lack of ideological clarity fosters leadership effects, thus politician oriented voting allegedly compensates for lack of ideological clarity. The empirical results in Chapters 5 and 6 contradict this argument, however. Perceptual agreement on party stands, as indicator for ideological clarity, is positively related to leadership. In other words, lack of ideological clarity decreases rather than fosters leadership effects. The findings of this book do not support an explanation for strong leadership in post-communist

---

202 A related argument has also been stated for established Western democracies. Poguntke (2000), for example, notes that increasingly pluralistic demands in advanced democracies may dilute ideological clarity of parties. This may be compensated by a personalisation of vote choice instead. So, established Western democracies may have lost what less established systems try to attain: stable party stands that lend themselves as reliable anchors of vote choice.

203 It is still possible that parties in transition democracies have an organisational deficit in terms of programmatic crystallisation as suggested by e.g. Kitschelt et al (1999). Voters in these countries, however, do not experience this as a lack of clarity of policy positions.
democracies that focuses on not-yet established party systems.

The second interpretation for the strong leadership effects in transition societies emphasises their political functioning during communism. In their study of post-communist democracies, Kitschelt et al (1999) stress the relevance of a communist legacy for the contemporary politics. This argument may plausibly be extended to voting behaviour as well. Since some communist regimes were highly personalised, with extensive personality cults around leaders such as Tito or Ceausescu, it may be that this experience still influences voters' reasoning today. Voters in transition countries who experienced (patrimonial) leadership still consider political leaders as the central element of their vote. This may, however, not only be true for what Kitschelt et al. (1999) call formerly patrimonial communist countries, but for post-communist countries in general. Political change in communist times was predominately change of political personnel but not of ideology or policies. This socialising experience may still be relevant in all formerly communist countries. A testable implication of this idea is that strong leader-effects should most profoundly be evident among older cohorts in Eastern Europe which were politically socialised by experiences under communism.

---

204 In Kitschelt's et al. (1999) view, communist rule can be divided in three forms: bureaucratic-authoritarian, national-accommodative, and patrimonial. The last form applies to Romania, Russia, and the Ukraine and is linked to a strong leaning towards personal leadership. According to Kitschelt et al. (1999) the legacy of patrimonial communism becomes evident in the mode of transition to democracy, the choice of institutional settings, and a weak programmatic crystallisation of contemporary party systems.
7.3 Practical Implications of Research on the Calculus of Voting

The preface of this book addresses the question whether research on the calculus of voting is of any interest beyond mere scientific curiosity. I raised two points as to why it is of practical relevance to know under which circumstances voters are more sensitive to, for example, political leadership and when they rely more heavily on other heuristics such as, parties and policies. First, institutional settings of political systems are in many democracies (transition democracies and established democracies alike) a bone of frequent contention between political actors. This is partly because parties and politicians presume that (manipulating) the institutional setting of countries affects voters’ reasoning and thereby election outcomes. The results presented in this book provide some insight into the potential effects of electoral engineering on individuals’ calculus of voting. Chapter 6 reports an example of such predictions. For the case of Israel, which institutionalised a direct election of the prime minister in 1992 and restored a purely parliamentary system in 2001, the consequences of these institutional changes for voters’ reasoning can be derived from the analyses reported in Chapters 5 and 6. I will focus here on such consequences for the effect of leadership considerations. From Table 6.1 we learn that the abolition of the elected office of the prime minister will lead to a considerably stronger effect of leadership factors in the 2003 Knesset election when comparing this with the 1996 election that was included in the data analysed in this dissertation. In Chapter 6 this increase was calculated to amount to a doubling of the strength of these considerations in the vote decision. In a similar way it is possible for other countries to estimate the effects on the calculus of voting of some of the institutional changes that are occasionally the topic of public debate. Obviously, changes in the calculus of voting do not
immediately predict changes in the vote shares of the various parties, but they do affect the opportunities and obstacles for the various parties to acquire votes.

A second point of extra-academic relevance of this study concerns the public debate in many Western democracies about alleged changes in the nature of voting behaviour (i.e., in the calculus of voting), such as a decline in partisanship (e.g., Dalton & Wattenberg 2000), alleged personalisation of politics (e.g., Lass 1995), and the end of ideology (Bell 1965). This book may be used as a source of critical reflection about some of these hypotheses. The comparative perspective may qualify some national debates as to how far these countries are affected by such alleged trends. For instance, many political observers and analysts depicted the 1998 German elections as very personalised. Yet in a comparative perspective this election turns out to have an average politician effect (see Figure 3.2). Although the analysis presented in this book does not employ an over-time perspective, differences between countries at one point in time may tentatively be seen as indicative for changes within one country at different points in time. The findings of this book may therefore be used to arrive at informed guesses about such trends. For instance, what if party systems in transition democracies are further consolidated? Consolidation may mean less fragmentation, higher perceptual agreement on parties’ policy positions, less polarisation, etc. Plugging the expected scores on these variables for transition democracies in the regression equation estimated in Chapter 6, predicts the expected consequences for voting behaviour.  

---

205 Such prediction is very tentative, however. It assumes that the models of this book are well specified and that variation between political systems at one point in time approximates variation at different points in time.
7.4 What has not been done: The Omitted Party Level

At a number of places this study was constrained by limitations of available data, existing measures, and software. Needless to say that I would have liked to have better data, better measures, better statistical methods, etc. I indicated at several points of the study where classes of variables are omitted. This concerns the construction of a comprehensive vote function (Chapter 2), individual determinants of the reasoning of vote choice (Chapter 4), and contextual determinants of the calculus of voting (Chapter 5). As more data will become available by the CSES project in the next years, some of these restrictions will at least partly be alleviated. To the extent that data are available for different points in time, one may be able to disentangle short-term factors of election campaigns from long-term factors of political systems and trends over time.

Apart from that, however, one analytical level of the study of voters' reasoning has not even been touched upon in this book. This study focuses on individual and contextual characteristics as moderating factors of the calculus of voting

---

206 The set up of the analysis contains individual and contextual variables that determine voters’ reasoning in a uniform way. In other words, I implicitly assume that an individual level interaction is the same in all political systems analysed and I implicitly assume that a contextual level interaction holds in that way for all individuals. This is of course a simplification that will probably not hold in this form empirically. As indicated at several points in this book, such a design omits possible three-way interactions between the effect of considerations of vote choice, individual characteristics of voters, and contextual characteristics of political systems. See footnote 169 for an example.
but ignores the third element to voters’ reasoning: parties.\textsuperscript{207} Not only is the party-level of interest per se, it may also help to clarify unexpected findings at the individual and contextual level. For instance, the findings of this book (as well as of many previous studies) are in part incompatible with the notion that party leanings as long-term determinant of vote choice are rooted in the social background of voters. The question “do you feel close to a party?” seems to tap different meanings for different respondents. Arguably, some of these responses correspond with the notion of party identifications (or attachments, or leanings) while others may derive from, for instance, temporary support for the policies of a party. Adding the party level to the analyse and thus incorporating information on the character of choice options may help to disentangle such differences in meaning.

\textsuperscript{207} For instance, voters will not necessarily support a single-issue party for the same reasons as a large governmental party. As Schmitt and Holmberg (1995: 118) put it: “the more extreme the ideological position taken by a party, the more likely it is to attract true believers rather than volatile pragmatists.” Anderson (1995) and van der Brug et al. (2001, 2003) show that large parties in government receive more credit and blame with regards to economic performance than smaller coalition partners do. Moreover, voting for large parties will also be linked more strongly to the evaluation of their political leadership since it is more likely that these politicians are potential candidates for prime minister (Curtis & Blais 2001).