

The Conditionality of Voter Decision-Making:
How Voter Sophistication Conditions Use of Valence and Ideological Proximity in
Party-Centric Systems

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Abstract: While voting studies have examined the role of ideological proximity and party valence on vote choice, we have less information about when valence and ideology matter, and to whom. Given the complexity involved in political decision-making, we should expect that different types of voters will use different considerations when making political decisions. Using the European Voter data set, I analyze individual level decision-making in Germany to demonstrate that reliance on ideological proximity and valence are conditioned by political sophistication. I find that while politically sophisticated voters rely much more heavily on policy proximity in their political decision-making, the use of valence is not conditioned by political sophistication. These findings demonstrate that studies of voting behavior and political representation must consider individual-level attributes of voters, rather than assuming that voters behave as a homogenous group.

I. Introduction

There is a general agreement within political science literature that policy position and ideological proximity affect vote choice. There is also growing consensus that performance politics and valence considerations — defined as those factors that reflect the competency, integrity and unity of party (Clarke 2009) — also influence voters’ decision-making. Since ideology and valence inform voters about different, if related, characteristics of parties, we should expect both factors to influence vote choice. However, empirically, we see variation in the weight voters place on valence and ideology. And while there is a clear trend in the voting literature towards analyzing both ideological proximity and valence considerations in informing voting decisions, there have been less consistent efforts to determine under what conditions voters will respond to either or both of these factors. Specifically, while reliance on ideological proximity has been examined through the lens of political sophistication, there has been little analysis of how sophistication affects voters’ reliance on valence considerations, especially in party-centric systems.

This paper theoretically and empirically examines whether political sophistication conditions the relative weights voters place ideological proximity versus valence. While ideology informs voters about the types of policies that parties will produce if elected into office, valence informs voters about the competency of a party, which is something that we should expect all voters to value, and, as such, we should expect voters to use both of these factors when making political decisions. However, I argue that the most sophisticated voters will differentially weigh these factors compared to less sophisticated voters. Specifically, sophisticated voters will weigh ideological proximity more heavily than uninformed voters, while valence will be equally weighted across all types of voters. Experimental and empirical

literature have demonstrated that political sophistication conditions the type of information that voters rely on when they make political decisions. Specifically, for most voters, recognizing and relying on solely ideological and policy position in evaluating parties is cognitively complex (Lau and Redlawsk 1997). Less interested voters are much more heavily on cognitive heuristics, such as party identification and endorsements, when making political decisions, rather than relying directly on ideology (Boudreau 2009; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Kam 2005). However, the most sophisticated voters are the most likely to have consistent and coherent ideological preferences (Converse 1964; Delli-Carpini and Keeter 1991), and as such, are likely to weigh ideology more heavily.

Valence factors, on the other hand, are accessible to most voters. Voters have direct experience with economic and political outcomes, and this direct experience both increases the salience and accessibility of valence factors for voters (Clarke et al. 2009). Voters are also accustomed to evaluating individuals or groups based on valence standards, and have consistent expectations about what valence factors are most preferred (A. H. Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986). Also, since increased valence is considered a universally preferred outcome (Stokes 1963; but see Buchler 2008), we should expect individuals to universally recognize and reward high valence. Simply stated, while ideology will matter more to politically sophisticated voters, valence considerations should be equally salient to the sophisticated and unsophisticated.

In order to empirically test my theory, I examine individual level survey data in Germany using the European Voter Data Project (Thomassen 2005). I examine five national elections in Germany from 1976 to 1998. Since most studies of valence and ideological proximity have focused on the United States (e.g. Stone and Buttice 2008), which has high levels of candidate voting and lower levels of party discipline, or Great Britain (Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, and

Whiteley 2009; Green 2007), which has a two-party system, it is important to understand how voters react to different types of information in a multi-party, party-centric system. Germany proves an interesting test case for my examination of valence and ideological factors due to its moderate party system size, high levels of voter sophistication, party-centric voting and governmental system. Examining the German case, I find strong support for my theory that use of ideological factors are conditioned by political sophistication, and the most politically sophisticated weigh ideological factors more than twice as much as unsophisticated voters when making political decisions. However, I find that valence is not conditioned by political sophistication, and both types of voter equally weigh this consideration.

These findings have important implications for theories of political representation and party strategy. If the politically sophisticated focus more heavily on parties' policy platforms and ideological positions, then parties have electoral incentives to target their platforms towards this group. Similar to expectations that the wealthy receive greater representation in the American context (Gilens 2005; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Bartels 2008b), we would expect that party platforms are more responsive to the interests of the politically sophisticated, and we see empirical evidence supporting this claim (Adams and Ezrow 2009). However, these findings should generally be interpreted optimistically, in that parties have an incentive to increase their valence factors for all voters, increasing the focus on producing positive political outcomes and engaging in good governance.

This paper proceeds as follows. I first outline my theory of voter decision making and describe how political sophistication conditions voter choice, and I offer two hypotheses. Then I provide empirical evidence demonstrating the robustness of my findings by examining vote choice in German elections from 1976 to 1998. I find that sophistication does increase the

reliance of voters on ideological proximity, but that valence is a universally relied upon.

Following this analysis, I discuss the implication of these findings and future extensions of this work.

II. Political Sophistication and Voter Decision Making

Voting is a complex process for most citizens. The complexity of voting means that any one factor that voters consider is unlikely to be deterministic of vote choice (Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005). Instead, voters consider several factors based on how they weigh different governmental outputs. The central question, then, is whether all types of voters respond to these different tradeoffs in the same manner. Based on the informational requirements of voting and the general complexity of the task, it useful to examine whether voters with different levels of political sophistication rely on different sources of information.

The decision calculus for voters is conditional on the level of sophistication of voters². Previous theoretical work has demonstrated, in general, that sophisticated voters act in very distinct ways from their unsophisticated counterparts (Bartels 1996); perhaps most importantly, sophisticated and unsophisticated voters access very different types of information when they make political decisions (e.g. Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Kam 2005; Boudreau 2009). As such, in order to understand how valence affects vote choice, it is important that we specify different decision rules for different types of voters.

Voters consider the tradeoffs between policy and political outcomes when they make their political decisions. As such, they consider two different measures for these types of considerations. For concerns about policy, they examine the ideological position of the parties.

¹² In this paper, I use the terms “sophistication” and “sophisticated voters” to refer to those voters with a maximal level of political information and interest, rather than referring to those voters who engage in strategic behavior.

This information provides voters with a belief about what type of policies parties are likely to implement across the spectrum of issues. However, since voters are not solely interested in policy, but are also interested in good governance and, especially, political outcomes, they also use a separate metric to evaluate overall party competence: that of valence. As such, ideology and valence capture two different voter preferences and should be measured separately.

Sophisticated voters are more aware of ideological and policy positions, and are more likely to be politically active and engaged (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). As such, they are more likely to care about the means governments take to reach certain political outcomes. In this way, sophisticated voters are more likely to act as a Downsian voter and heavily consider policy proximity (Downs 1957). Unsophisticated voters, on the other hand, are more likely to rely on cues to determine the relative positions of parties (Tomz and Sniderman, 2009), or to take party cues about their own preferred positions (Bartels 2008a). In the American context, we have seen that it has been the politically interested and sophisticated that have both noticed and reacted to party polarization (Hetherington 2001), indicating that ideology is more important for those who directly observe it. As such, we should expect that the politically sophisticated will place much greater weight on policy proximity than the politically unsophisticated.

H1) Politically sophisticated voters will place more weight on proximity than the less sophisticated.

Valence, however, should matter for both sophisticated and unsophisticated voters. Political outcomes directly affect all voters and, as such, we expect them to react to this information. We can consider valence accessible since voters have both direct experience with political outcomes (Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, and Whiteley 2009) and because voters have pre-existing beliefs about what good governance and competency is (Mondak and Huckfeldt 2006;

A. H. Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986). Moreover, soft media focuses disproportionately on issues such as competency and integrity, and, as such, even low interest voters would likely be exposed to the valence characteristics of parties (Baum 2005; Popkin 2006; Clark 2009)

Sophisticated voters rely on both ideological proximity and valence factors because they provide voters with different information about parties. Essentially, valence captures the ends of government and the ability of government to produce these ends. We can contrast that with ideological position, which tells voters about the means a party will take to produce governmental outcomes. As such, sophisticated voters also give weight to valence considerations, and not solely ideological positions, when they make voting decisions. Therefore, I expect that political sophistication will not condition the weight placed on valence by voters.

H2) Politically sophisticated and unsophisticated voters will place equal weight on valence factors.

Based on this theory, I describe the general voter decision calculation as:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Vote Choice} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ policy proximity} + \beta_2 \text{ valence characteristics} + & (1) \\
 & \beta_3 \text{ voter sophistication} + \beta_4 (\text{sophistication} * \text{policy proximity}) + \beta_5 (\text{sophistication} * \text{valence} \\
 & \text{characteristics}) + \varepsilon.
 \end{aligned}$$

This equation indicates that we should expect voter decision making to be conditioned by political sophistication. Generally, we should expect that both valence and proximity have independent effects on vote choice. However, political sophistication will condition the weight placed on these factors. My theoretical expectation is that β_4 , the interaction of proximity and

knowledge, should be strong and significant, but β_5 , the interaction of valence and knowledge, should be insignificant.

III. Research Design

A. Model Choice

In order to examine the effect of sophistication, valence, and ideological proximity on vote choice, I examine individual level decision-making based on survey research in Germany. I analyze a single state in order to maximize control and the availability of relevant questions. Germany is a strong test case for the development of theories of vote choice, since it has clearly identifiable parties while still requiring voters to make tradeoffs in their electoral selection.

Using the 1976-1998 German National Election Studies from the European Voter Data Set (Thomassen 2005), I examine the effect of valence, ideological proximity, and political sophistication on vote choice. Using a binomial logit, we compare the probability of voting for the SPD relative to the CDU. Using relative valence and proximity has been a common approach in the British context (e.g. Green 2007; Clarke et al. 2009) and is advantageous in that voters are likely to consider all parties in a system, rather than just focus on the characteristics of one party.

B. Dependent Variable

Vote Choice: The dependent variable of interest is a dummy variable of self-reported party choice between the SPD and the CDU on the second ballot³. The analysis focuses on the two largest parties in the system, the CDU and the SPD.

C. Independent Variables

³ Germany uses a mixed-member proportional system that allows individuals to cast a district level single member plurality vote on the first ballot and a state level proportional representation party vote on the second ballot. However, the PR element of the ballot, referred to as the second ballot, determines the actual distribution of seats in the *Bundestag* (Saalfeld 2005). Future analysis will examine how valence and proximity affect vote choice across the two ballots.

Ideological Proximity (+): Ideological proximity is measured as the relative proximity of the SPD to the respondent minus the relative proximity of the CDU to the respondent, scaled between -1 and 1. My main measure of ideological proximity uses the quadratic loss function of relative party proximity, and uses the mean placement of the party per election year. Using the quadratic loss function for proximity, based on spatial modeling convention (Erikson and Romero 1990; Adams 1999; Merrill and Grofman 1999) captures the importance of increased distance between a respondent and party that is potentially missing from using the absolute distance, and using the mean placement of the party by year decreases the bias in respondent’s party placements and increases the number of respondents in the sample.

$$Proximity_1 = \left(-(\text{mean}(SPD) - \text{self})^2 \right) - \left(-(\text{mean}(CDU) - \text{self})^2 \right) \quad (2)$$

However, in order to ensure the robustness of my proximity measure, I also use three alternative measures of ideological proximity. I present two measures that rely on quadratic loss, $Proximity_1$ and $Proximity_2$, and two measures that rely on the absolute value of distance between parties and respondents, $Proximity_3$ and $Proximity_4$. Quadratic loss helps to capture the fact that ideology encompasses multiple party positions, demonstrating that as a party moves away from a voter, a voter greatly loses his preferred policies. Absolute distance, on the other hand, argues that the policy loss should be viewed as a linear loss. There is mixed empirical evidence supporting both types of proximity considerations, so include both in my analyses (Merrill and Grofman 1999: appendix 4.2).

The alternative concern is the debate between using perceived party placement and average party placement. The advantage of perceived party placement is that it captures a voter’s perception about how close a party is to him, and his perceptions should drive his vote choice. The problem with using self-reported placement is the issue of bias and projection, in that survey

respondents have a general tendency to place parties closer to them than they actually are (see Kedar 2009 for a discussion). As such, I present two operationalizations using average party placement by year, $Proximity_1$ and $Proximity_3$, and two measures that use both perceived placement of the party, $Proximity_2$ and $Proximity_4$.

$$Proximity_2 = \left(-\left(SPD_{perceived} - self \right)^2 \right) - \left(-\left(CDU_{perceived} - self \right)^2 \right) \quad (3)$$

$$Proximity_3 = \left(-\left| mean(SPD) - self \right| \right) - \left(-\left| mean(CDU) - self \right| \right) \quad (4)$$

$$Proximity_4 = \left(-\left| SPD_{perceived} - self \right| \right) - \left(-\left| CDU_{perceived} - self \right| \right) \quad (5)$$

In general, I expect that the significance and direction of the effect of proximity on vote choice will remain positive and strong regardless of the measure employed. However, I expect that the magnitude of the effect will decline when using mean vote share, since by correcting for bias we are decreasing the potential importance of this measure for individuals.

Valence Differential (+): The valence differential takes an average of the three valence factors for each party: issue ownership, party leader sympathy and party sympathy, and is scaled between -1 and 1.

$$Valence_1 = SPD_{index} - CDU_{index} \quad (6)$$

The first factor of the index, issue ownership, is the factor traditionally associated with Stokes (1963) conception of valence. Valence issues, according to Stokes, are “those [issues] that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate,” rather than those issues that require voters to have well-defined preferences over a set of different issues (1963: p. 373). Under this definition, valence refers to the party considered most competent at achieving the ends desired by voters, commonly referred to as “valence outcomes” (Stokes 1963; Buchler 2008; Macdonald and Rabinowitz 1998). This

conception of valence is associated with issue ownership and issue competence. We can think of issue ownership as the attribution of competence or success of one particular issue to one particular party, such that, if voters value a particular policy outcome, they will always prefer that party, even if they have positional preferences for another party (Holian 2004; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, and Whiteley 2009).

My measure of issue competency takes the average of the competency of each party on 3 issues: law and order, environmental protection, and unemployment. These three competency evaluations cover a range of important policy issues that focus on political outcomes, as opposed to policy choices, thus making them excellent “valence issues” (Stokes 1963). These issues also appear across all five data points in the survey. Since the German National Election surveys ask for competency on a range of issues, rather than on the “most important problem” for the respondent, we have some confidence that no evaluation on a single issue is driving vote choice. Since voters use issue competency to evaluate party competency in general, I take the average competency rating for each party and use this as an overall measure of “issue competency.”

Secondly, to measure party leadership evaluation, I will take the leadership rating of the party leader for each party. Given the strength of party leaders in party-centric systems, it is unsurprising that voters would use these evaluations to shape their political decisions (Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, and Whiteley 2009; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). The charisma and success of a party leader can act as a cue to voters about the overall competency of a party (Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, and Whiteley 2009; Lupia and McCubbins 1998) and can have both “direct” and “indirect” effects in shaping vote choice (A. King 2002): p. 6). Beliefs about candidate competency and integrity are generally accessible to most voters and shape the opinions of both the politically sophisticated and unsophisticated (Mondak and Huckfeldt 2006). While there is

evidence that party leaders played a less central role in early post-war elections (Klingemann and Taylor 1978), the growth of American-style campaigning in Europe is also associated with a growing recognition of prime ministerial candidates and an increasing personalization of party-centric politics, thus increasing the influence of this type of valence over time (Schmitt and Ohr; van der Brug and Mughan 2007). I measure party leader competency using the sympathy rating of the leader of the SPD relative to the leader of the CDU.

Thirdly, for party organization evaluation, I will use the sympathy rating for each party. In party-centric systems, it is also important to consider the overall competency of the party itself. (Clark 2009) considers those valence features that affect both political elites within the party, such as corruption and incompetence, and those characteristics that indicate structural issues the group itself faces, such as party cohesion, and has found significantly strong effects for this type of valence. The importance of the strength of the party itself is vital in party-centric systems, where partisan infighting can lead to governmental collapse or even the collapse of the party system itself, which occurred in Italy in the 1990s. The general inefficiency of constant turnover or the inability to cooperate tends to produce important negative externalities and decreases the competency of the government in general (Tsebelis 2002). As such, party cohesion and competency play a key role in ensuring positive political outcomes. My measure takes the voters perceived sympathy with the SPD relative to the CDU. While this is not a perfect measure of party organization competency, it captures the general evaluation of a party and its general competency. I have tested this measure by comparing it to satisfaction with governmental competency for parties in government and have found that the measures correlate highly. I use party sympathy, however, both because the metric is consistent over time and

because it allows me to capture competency of non-governmental parties or parties out of government at the time of the election.

In general, I expect that valence will have a strong and significant effect on voter decision making. In order to ensure that no one of these variables drives voter evaluations, I have run each valence variable separately and have found that these variables do move together.

Knowledge (.): My measure of political sophistication is a dummy variable that divides the sample into high knowledge and low knowledge groups, with high knowledge being the top thirty percent of the sample. We have strong reasons to expect that it is the very high top stratum of voters that drive public opinion and shape party movement (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Adams and Ezrow 2009). In order to capture the top stratum of voters, I will use an additive index and take those respondents who have the highest level of education, political interest (a self-evaluation), and are able to correctly place the parties on the left-right scale (see Milazzo 2009; Stevenson 2009). I do not expect knowledge to have an independent effect on vote choice, since we have reasons to suspect that the highly knowledgeable and politically interested will support both parties.

D. Interaction Terms

Proximity x Knowledge (+): This interaction term separates the effect of proximity into high knowledge and low knowledge groups, with low knowledge being the referent group. In general, we should expect that this interaction term has a strong and significant effect on vote choice, since we expect sophisticated individuals to react to ideological proximity in a stronger and significantly different way than their less sophisticated counterparts.

Valence x Knowledge (.): This interaction term separates the effect of valence evaluations into high knowledge and low knowledge groups, with low knowledge being the referent group. I do

not expect this effect to be statistically significant, since I expect that both groups of voters will respond to valence to the same degree.

IV. Analysis

In order to answer the question of how policy proximity, valence and sophistication affect vote choice, we use a binomial logit model of all elections between 1976 and 1998.^{4,5} I examine the relative valence and ideological position of the two largest parties, the SPD and CDU. In this model, our dependent variable is a binary choice variable, with CDU vote as the base category. All variables of interest are the difference between the evaluation of the SPD and the CDU. I use an analysis of the two largest parties in the system so that I may determine the effect of relative valence and proximity on vote choice, since voters are unlikely to consider the absolute position and valence level of party. I have also run analyses using the FDP relative to the CDU and have found substantively similar results⁶.

{Insert Table 1 about here}

Examining Table 1, we see that both proximity and valence have a strong and statistically significant effect on vote choice. Examining proximity, we see that, while both high and low knowledge voters use proximity in their voting decisions, the most sophisticated voters weigh these considerations more heavily. In order to understand these results, it is useful to think of how change in proximity and valence levels affects a typical voter. For a low knowledge voter, holding valence at its mean value, a one standard deviation increase in the relative proximity from the mean proximity increases the probability of voting for the SPD by almost 12%⁷.

⁴ Since ideology questions were not asked in 1994, this year is excluded.

⁵ In order to address concerns that German Unification is driving my sophistication results, I run the analysis including and excluding East German respondents. Including East Germans does not significantly alter the effects.

⁶ The results of these analyses can be found on the author’s website.

⁷ These estimates are developed using the CLARIFY package in Stata (G. King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000)

However, for high knowledge voters, a standard deviation increase in proximity increases the probability of voting for the SPD by 25%; more than double that of low knowledge voters.

If we compare this to the impact of valence on vote choice, we notice that sophistication no longer has a significant effect. A low knowledge voter who places proximity at its mean value and increases his belief about the relative valence from the mean by a standard deviation is 36% more likely to vote for the SPD, while a high knowledge voter facing the same increase is only 4% more likely than an unsophisticated voter to vote for the SPD, which is not a statistically significant difference. What this indicates is that both the politically sophisticated and unsophisticated consider valence, but that the impact of proximity is highly conditioned by the sophistication of the voter. We can visually see this by examining the marginal effects of proximity and valence as conditioned by political sophistication, as seen in Figure 1. This figure demonstrates that while reliance on proximity is strongly conditioned by political sophistication, there is almost no difference between the politically sophisticated and unsophisticated in regards to the effect of valence on vote choice. In order to ensure that these findings are generalizable, I have also run a similar analysis in the Netherlands and have found remarkably similar results⁸.

{Insert Figure 1 about here}

In order to demonstrate that the effect of knowledge on proximity is not conditioned by proximity coding decisions, I present three additional codings of proximity, using both perceived party positions and absolute value differences. Model 1 presents my main model, using quadratic loss and mean party positions. Model 2 uses quadratic loss but uses respondent specific party placement. Models 3 and 4 use absolute value difference between parties, with Model 3 using mean party placement and Model 4 using perceived party placement. Examining

⁸ The results of the Netherlands analysis can be obtained by contacting the author

Table 2, we find exceptionally similar findings across the four models, indicating that we can be confident that the effect of proximity is not an artifact of coding decisions or based on individual bias.

{ Insert Table 3 }

Another significant concern is the effect of party identification on vote choice (Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005). Party identification may play an important role for voters in evaluating a party’s position and performance, along with building partisan attachment (Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005). Party identification can act as a cue for voters about the policy positions of parties and candidates (e.g. Kam 2005), and as such, we should expect that party identification should decrease the impact of proximity. Party identification may also be tied heavily to evaluations of party performance, as voters build their attachment through a “running tally” of party success (Fiorina 1981). However, party identification is also determined through long term attachment and affective evaluations (Campbell et al. 1960), and may influence beliefs about policy position and valence. As such, it is important to control for party identification. However, in the European context, party identification and vote choice are almost perfectly correlated, and it becomes difficult for other covariates to reach significance. As such, I use the party the respondent voted for in the previous election as a proxy for party identification (Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005).

Examining Model 5 in Table 2, which uses the *proximity1* measure of ideological proximity, we see that previous vote choice has a strong and statistically significant effect on vote choice and greatly increases the model fit⁹. However, while controlling for previous vote choice decreases the magnitude of the effects for proximity and valence, it does not change their

⁹ Since I only use those respondents who had voted for either the SPD or the CDU in the previous election, my N size decreases.

direction or significance, indicating that both proximity and valence influence voting decisions independent of party identification, and that voter sophistication still plays an important role in changing the weight placed on ideological proximity.

V. Implications and Extensions

This paper has important implications for democratic representation and party strategy. In general, the findings of this paper are fairly optimistic in regard to democratic representation. Voters do respond to both party position and valence characteristics, and do so in a fairly dramatic way, implying that parties are held especially accountable for their ability to produce positive political outcomes. As such, parties do have an incentive to ensure that they produce the types of outcomes that all voters prefer, such as a growing economy or clean environment.

However, my findings do not imply a universally positive story for representation. The politically knowledgeable are much more likely to make their political decisions based on ideological proximity than their less informed counterparts. This differential implies that parties should target their policy platforms towards the more politically informed and may lead to the overrepresentation of politically knowledgeable, similar to the wealthy in the American context (Gilens 2005; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Bartels 2008b). However, this is problematic only if the politically sophisticated have, like wealthy voters, significantly different policy preferences than the less informed, and parties are more responsive to their interests. This concern is tentatively confirmed by Adams and Ezrow (2009), who find that parties respond generally to opinion leaders, and that the mean position of these individuals is to the left of the median voter. In Figure 2, I present an analysis of the mean position of voters and their perceptions of the two major parties in Germany over my period of analysis. While I see a

similar left bias of the politically knowledgeable as that found by Adams and Ezrow, the difference appears to be substantively negligible.

While these findings have important normative implications, they also suggest a new theoretical understanding of representation. Since voter decision-making is conditioned by political sophistication, it may be misleading to consider only one form of representation. While the delegate model of political representation, which defines good representation as parties or candidates that reflect the policy preferences of their voters, has dominated our understanding of democratic representation, these findings indicate that it may be useful to re-examine Burke’s Trustee model, which argues that representatives should be, first and foremost, good stewards of government (W. E. Miller and Stokes 1963; Powell 2000). Generally, the politically sophisticated seem to act as if they prefer a political delegate who will ensure that the preferred policy of the voter is enacted. However, less sophisticated voters, who are less concerned by ideological position, may prefer a representative who is a good public servant, indicating that we may want to consider the trustee model of political representation. As such, just a different types of voters may vote differently based on their sophistication (Tomz and Van Houweling 2008), they may also have different preferences about political representation.

These findings also introduce the question of whether institutional determinates condition relative importance of valence and ideological position. Since institutions do affect both political engagement (Powell 1986; Jackman 1987) and the ability of voters to place parties on the left-right scale (Stevenson 1999), it may be useful to examine my model in different institutional contexts. While I have examined the Netherlands and found generally similar results, a

systematic test of different institutional considerations may help us to understand the precise mechanism that drives differences in voter decision-making¹⁰.

My results have also only examined large mainstream parties in a political system. However, we have theoretical reasons to expect that governmental parties and mainstream parties behave in significantly different ways than niche parties (Adams et al. 2006; Meguid 2005), and voters may use different metrics when evaluating these parties. While I have applied my model to the FDP, the small centrist Liberal Party, we may see significantly different behavior when voters consider other types of parties. Future analysis should examine these differences in order to identify systematic patterns of behavior.

One potential limitation of my findings is that, while I have corrected for bias in my proximity measures, I have not clearly done so for my valence measures. Future analysis should make use of exogenous measures of valence, such as Clarke (2009)’s measure of negative media reports, or economic growth, in order to test the importance of sophistication while addressing concerns of projection. In the next stage of my analysis, I intend to use mean valence levels of parties across states and elections, in order to eliminate some of the bias concerns and to examine aggregate level patterns of voter behavior and the effect of the tradeoff between valence and ideological proximity.

VI. Conclusion

Voting is a complex process and different types of voters have different levels of engagement and information, and different types of political preferences. As such, models of voting choice must consider the sophistication of voters in order to produce fully generalizable results. The

¹⁰ An obvious extension would be to examine the role of valence, proximity, and sophistication across the two ballots in the German electoral system. One potential issue with this is that we might expect the valence of the candidate on the first ballot to matter in voter decision-making. When data on evaluations of first ballot candidates becomes available, we can test both how individuals make decisions across different electoral systems and how individuals differentiate between party level and candidate level valence.

findings of my study support the idea that the level of interest and knowledge a voter has is strongly determinate of how he makes his political decisions. However, this difference between sophisticated and unsophisticated voters is not significant across all metrics that voters use to make political decisions. Voters use both ideological proximity to determine what means a government will use to produce governmental outputs, and valence to evaluate the outputs themselves. While reliance on ideological proximity is highly conditioned by political knowledge, all levels of voters are likely to use valence when they make their political decisions. In the end, theories of voting must be conditional on the type of voter making a political decision if we want to have a thorough understanding of vote choice, political representation, and party strategy in party-centric systems.

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VIII. Tables and Figures

Table 1: Logit Analysis of Vote Choice in Germany

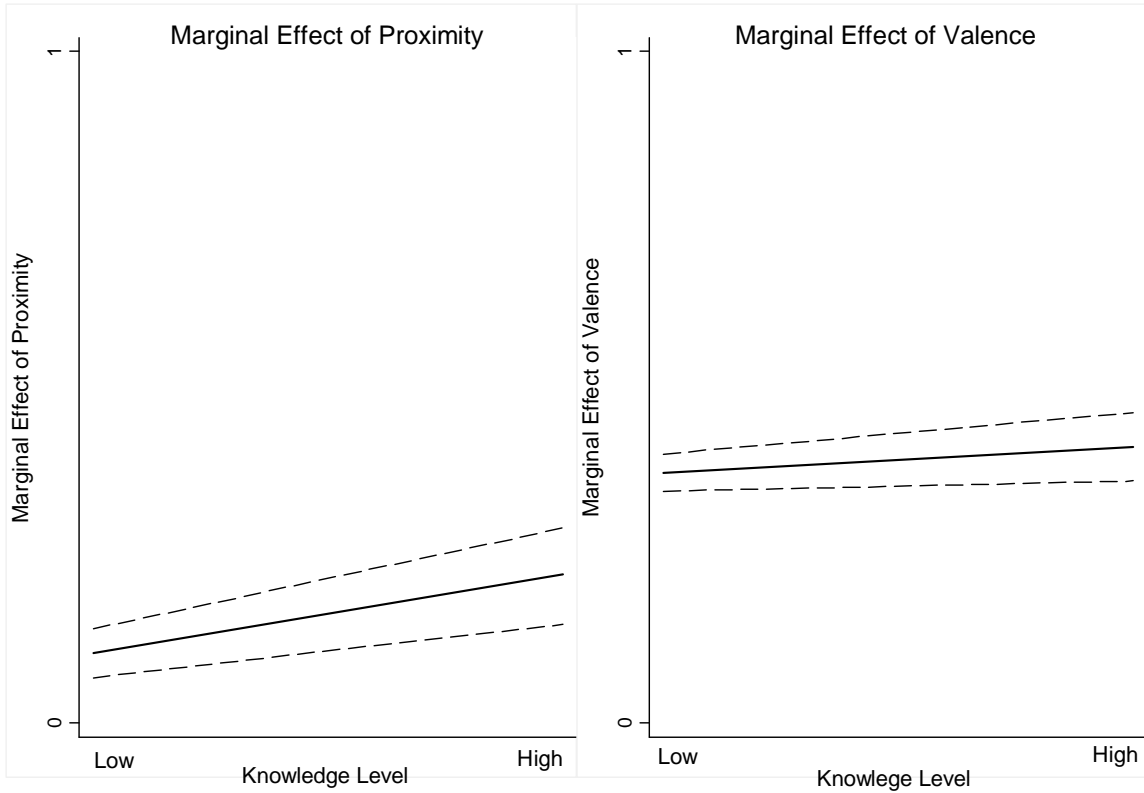
Covariates	Model 1 Vote Choice (SPD – CDU)
Proximity	2.789 ^{***} (0.658)
Valence	6.838 ^{***} (0.578)
Knowledge	-0.250 (0.175)
Proximity x Knowledge	3.756 ^{**} (1.266)
Valence x Knowledge	0.414 (0.928)
Constant	0.286 [*] (0.141)
<i>N</i>	2770

Standard errors in parentheses (Standard errors are clustered by year)

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

note: Model presents logit coefficients, where the dependent variable is a dichotomous variable measured as 1 if the respondent voted for the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and 0 if the respondent voted for the CDU (Christian Democratic Party). Proximity is measured using the *proximity 1* measure, which measures proximity as the quadratic distance between a respondent’s perceived self placement and the mean position of the SPD each year, subtracted from the quadratic distance of the respondent’s perceived self placement and the mean position of the CDU each year. Valence is measured as an average index of a respondent’s relative evaluation of the issue competency, political leader competency, and party competency of the SPD relative to the CDU. Political knowledge is a dummy variable separated into the top 30 and bottom 70% of the sample, and is calculated using an index of a respondent’s education, interest and correct party left right placement. The model pools all election results from 1976 to 1998)

Figure 1: Marginal Effects of Proximity and Valence by Knowledge



Note: Graph displays the marginal effects of proximity and valence, as conditioned by political sophistication, with 95% confidence intervals

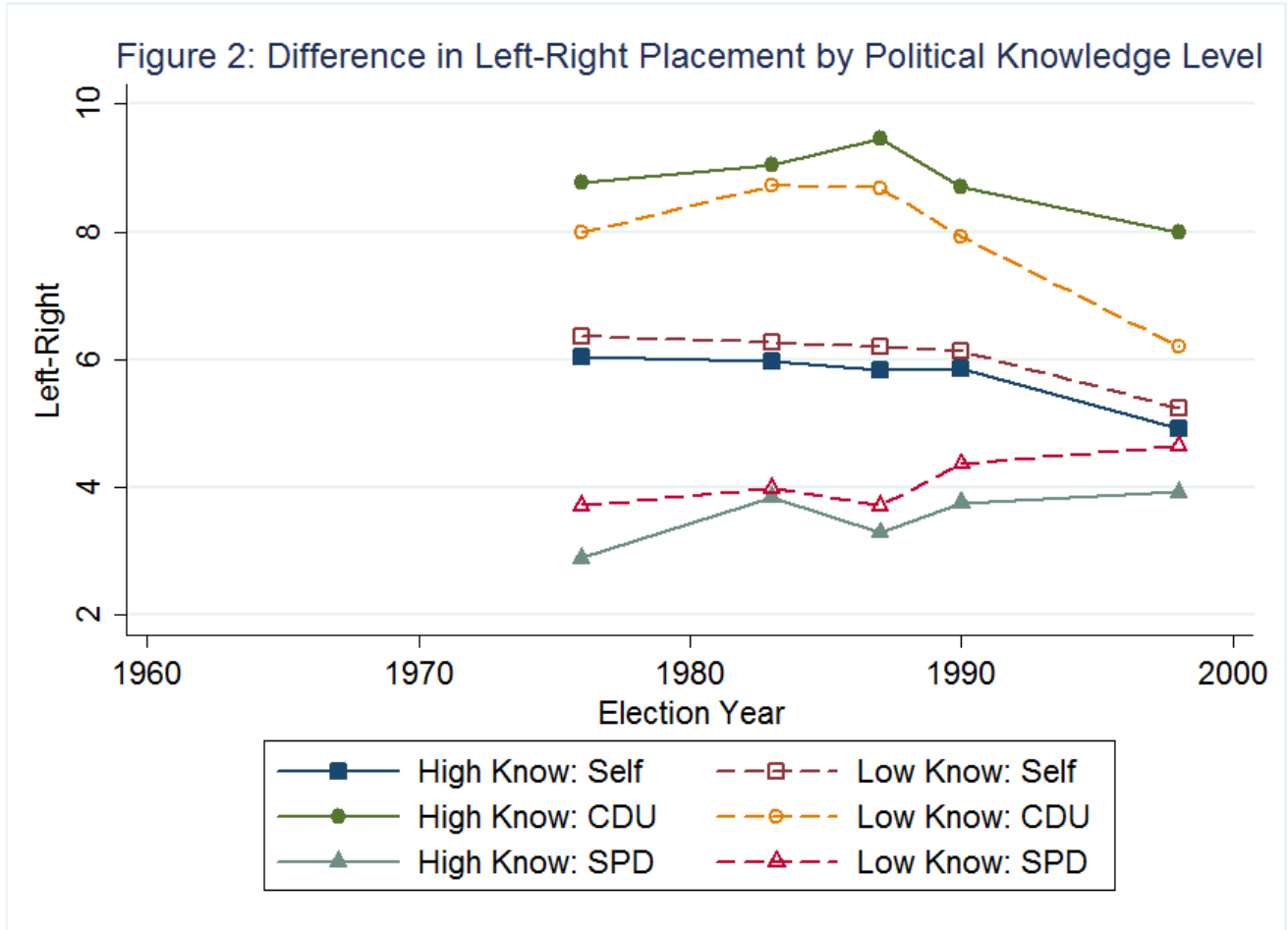
Table 2: Logit Analysis of Vote Choice in Germany with Alternative Measures of Proximity

	Model 1 <i>Proximity</i> ₁	Model 2 <i>Proximity</i> ₂	Model 3 <i>Proximity</i> ₃	Model 4 <i>Proximity</i> ₄	Model 5 Last Vote
Proximity	2.789** (0.658)	1.578** (0.544)	1.707** (0.346)	1.318** (0.459)	1.219* (0.561)
Valence	6.838** (0.578)	6.799** (0.582)	6.812** (0.558)	6.653** (0.587)	5.187** (0.428)
Knowledge	-0.250 (0.175)	-0.318+ (0.182)	-0.221 (0.161)	-0.319+ (0.183)	-0.203 (0.287)
Proximity x Knowledge	3.756** (1.266)	3.856** (1.212)	2.170** (0.634)	2.398** (0.491)	4.007* (1.974)
Valence x Knowledge	0.414 (0.928)	0.0107 (0.993)	0.340 (0.976)	-0.126 (1.055)	0.345 (1.305)
Vote in Last Election					2.477** (0.571)
Constant	0.286* (0.141)	0.302* (0.139)	0.271+ (0.140)	0.288* (0.132)	-1.250** (0.360)
<i>N</i>	2770	2770	2770	2770	1862
<i>BIC</i>	1381.1	1387.3	1374.9	1373.0	713.2

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

note: Model presents logit coefficients, where the dependent variable is a dichotomous variable measured as 1 if the respondent voted for the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and 0 if the respondent voted for the CDU (Christian Democratic Party). Model 1 presents the *proximity*₁, which measures proximity as the quadratic distance between a respondent's perceived self placement and the mean position of the SPD each year, subtracted from the quadratic distance of the respondent's perceived self placement and the mean position of the CDU each year. Model 2 presents the *proximity*₂, which measures proximity as the quadratic distance between a respondent's perceived self placement and his perceived placement of the SPD, subtracted from the quadratic distance of the respondent's perceived self placement and his perceived placement of CDU. Model 3 presents the *proximity*₃, which measures proximity as the absolute value distance between a respondent's perceived self placement and the mean position of the SPD each year, subtracted from the absolute value distance of the respondent's perceived self placement and the mean position of the CDU each year. Model 4 presents the *proximity*₄, which measures proximity as the absolute value distance between a respondent's perceived self placement and his perceived placement of the SPD, subtracted from the absolute value distance of the respondent's perceived self placement and his perceived placement of the CDU. Model 5 uses the *proximity*₁ measure. Valence is measured as an average index of a respondent's relative evaluation of the issue competency, political leader competency, and party competency of the SPD relative to the CDU. Political knowledge is a dummy variable separated into the top 30 and bottom 70% of the sample, and is calculated using an index of a respondent's education, interest and correct party left right placement. Vote in last election measures a respondent's self reported vote in the previous election. The model pools all election results from 1976 to 1998)



Note: Graph displays the mean placement of the SPD (Social Democratic Party), the CDU (the Christian Democratic Party), and the respondent by political knowledge level. In order to increase comparability over time, I exclude all East German respondents.