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The Electoral Consequences of Ideological Party Polarization in Europe

A Dissertation in
Political Science

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Abstract

This study investigates how voters behave when politics is polarized, i.e. when there is great ideological disagreement and conflictuality among the political elites. While previous comparative studies tend to focus on the salience effect that a more diversified political supply has on policy or competence considerations, I discuss here two different mechanisms by which higher party polarization corresponds to a greater encapsulation of the electorate. First, I draw on spatial models of choice to investigate how larger ideological differences between parties correspond in the voters' minds to smaller choice sets, and therefore to reduced propensities to switch between different parties at different elections. Second, building on a view of polarization as political conflict, I argue that citizens of more polarized countries are more likely to develop a partisan attachment, and to evaluate parties on policy and competence grounds through the filter of their partisan affiliations. This reduces considerably the amount of substantive content of voters' considerations in more polarized systems, showing that the salience mechanism detected by previous research (both on positional and competence considerations) is largely moderated by partisanship. Evidence is provided by relying on a large dataset of European Election Studies, including up to 27 EU countries over a time span of 15 years, and on a case study about the Netherlands from 1986 to 2002. Results contribute to our understanding of how the political context can affect voting volatility and individual political judgments.

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Acknowledgments

This book is the outcome of a process that went far beyond the research work required to write a dissertation. In fact, the years spent working on my PhD have been teaching me so many things, about so many different aspects of life, that sometimes I feel like I am not the same person that I used to be. Of course, our life story is to a great extent the story of our relationships. So, when our networks change, and this can be due to a new job or a new residence, we will inevitably change too. Yet it is not so simple. Some times the new ties substitute the old ones, other times they just amass on each other and form different layers of identity. Here, the roots of the new layers are planted deep in the old ones, that is, in the contribution that they gave to make a person the way he is, and to give him the sense of stability that one needs to grow further. At the same time, the old layers are still there, alive and pulsating, providing their genuine first-hand contribution.

This quite abstract and slightly bayesian prelude serves one purpose: to let me apologize for the fact that it is not possible to mention here every one who helped, supported, or simply accompanied me during the process that led to getting this work done. The people that I will mention here are rather the tip of a giant iceberg, on which my feet have been resting all this time. Professor Hermann Schmitt gave me a job, agreed to supervise my dissertation, taught me a lot on both substantive and procedural grounds, and assisted me with great openness and flexibility every time my readings and my feelings led me away from the initial plans. I would not have had the opportunity to learn half of the things that I learned, if he had not believed in me in the first place. In a similar way, Professor Paolo Segatti encouraged me to apply to the position in Mannheim, letting me start all this, and kept on following my research and fueling my ideas with a lot of discussions about Italian politics. Together, these two men showed me that passion and curiosity, rather than ego and arrogance, are what distinguish real political scientists from *posers*. Some people contributed a lot to this work by making my life easier in Mannheim. Professor Thomas Bräuninger took care of my sustenance this last year by providing me first a

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[1] Some would argue that Sebi Popa was not really part of the ELECDEM project. Despite being true, this point is hardly relevant here.

Because of its good reputation, the University of Mannheim attracts a lot of students and scholars from all over the world. This gave me the chance to meet some great people. Among them, I will mention Mariyana Angelova, with whom I shared the challenges of the first year, David Fortunato, whose advice was of great help for refining the ideas that I have put into this work, Will Lowe, who is responsible for this thesis, and possibly my future papers, being written in LaTeX, and Michael Stoffel, whose "final rush" to get the dissertation done was of great motivation for me to do the same. Moreover, I thank the people who gave some sense to my free time here, in particular Franz Gerbig, Mostafa Lotfalipour, Philipp Zahn, Christian Schnaudt, Dragos Adascalitei and Stasya Ershova, Shaun Bevan, Zac Greene and Hollie Mcclintick, Yannis Theocharis, and Marta Castela. A special mention goes to the Italian economists at the Graduate School, i.e. Alessandra Donini, Claudio Baccianti and Giuseppe Corbisiero, with whom I shared moments of *expatriate's blues* and some bits of frustration while commenting (almost) every relevant election result in Italy since we met.

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Chapter 1

Introduction*

One of the most important achievements of the last decades of comparative political research is to have shown that, to fully understand the voters, we need first to look at the politicians. This is the take-home message of many recent large-scale comparative efforts, whether focused on institutions (see Klingemann, 2009) or on the citizens themselves (see Dalton and Anderson, 2011; Thomassen, 2005). However, this should not be regarded as the umpteenth neo-institutionalist claim. While nowadays few dare questioning that "institutions matter", to say that "*politics* matters" implies taking into account a wider range of cases where citizens can be influenced by the political context in which they act. In this conception, the political context is made by the multitude of actors, behaviors, rules, habits, customs, symbols, and pieces of information of any kind that citizens are exposed to as they turn their sight towards the political issues. To say that this matters implies assuming that citizens of the same country or political system have something in common, which can be explained only by looking at some features of the political system itself, rather than by speculating on the citizens' own interests.

The relevance of this difference is well known among people who find themselves discussing about politics of their home country with often disbelieving foreigners. However, this is even more crucial to political scientists who wish to disclouse patterns of behavior that can be generalized across geographical and temporal contexts. Moreover, to identify the mechanisms by which the context influences individual behaviors is essential for those who are in the position to evaluate, and possibly impact upon, the well-functioning of the democratic machines. To inform the decisions of policy-makers is a role that political science has been invested for long (see APSA, 1950). Yet, to rigorously assess which

*Excerpts of this chapter appear in the final report of the Work Package 6 – *European Electoral Democracy Under Stress* of the ELECDEM project, available online `here`.

components of individual behaviors are *innate* and which are driven by the *circumstances* is an endeavor made possible only in relative recent times, by the increased availability of comparative data on the one hand, and by some important advancements in the techniques for analizing them on the other. Thus, while part of political research is rightfully interested in explaining regularities in people's behavior and/or the sources of individual differences, another part of the discipline focuses on how different contexts can explain differences across *groups* of people that are assumed to be *similarly motivated* and *equally heterogeneous*.

This work belongs to the latter group of studies, as it investigates the consequences for the voters of the way in which parties or candidates conduct their competition, or in other words, of the way in which they *interact* with each other in the public arena. More specifically, I focus here on the consequences of *political polarization* on some specific types of citizens' behavior that are crucial for the good functioning of democratic politics. Political theory identifies in *accountability* and *responsiveness* two important elements of the full realization of the democratic purposes, i.e. to allow politics to bring objectively-valued positive effects to the society (see Bartolini, 1999; Dahl, 1971, 1989; Strøm, 1989). The first element reflects the possibility for the citizens to change who is in charge, and therefore the obligation for who is in charge to be *responsible* of his/her actions to the public. The second element is a further step towards the realization of a collective good through the political action, as it refers to those who are in charge being *receptive* of the public's demands and opinions. The principal way by which these two elements or values are fostered in a democratic system is through *party competition*. It is by competing with each other for the political power (whether it is represented by maximizing votes, office positions or the possibility to influence the policy-making) that parties are expected to produce a fully responsive and responsible government in representative democracies. However, different aspects of competition can be emphasized or restrained by different competitive strategies.

The concept of "competition" in political science has been often used to describe different phenomena, spanning from the "closeness of the race" between parties or candidates (e.g. Griffin, 2006; Grofman and Selb, 2009) to fully-multidimensional constructs (Bartolini, 1999; Strøm, 1989). In the most complete conceptual work on this topic, Bartolini (1999, 2000) distinguishes between four different dimensions of political competition.[1] *Contestability* refers

[1] A similar decomposition of the concept of political competition into different dimensions is made by Strøm (1989). However, while for some categories the two conceptualizations are rather close, I focus here on Bartolini (1999, 2000)'s scheme because of its wider conceptual scope.

to the degree of openness of the electoral market for actors who are interested in entering the competition. A minimum degree of contestability is also a necessary condition for a democratic system to be regarded as such, i.e. to allow the citizens to select peacefully their ruler at fixed time intervals (see Schumpeter, 1976). On the same line, *vulnerability* is what provides full realization to this aspect, as it refers to the extent to which an incumbent government can be replaced or modified in its composition. Because this aspect is strongly determined by the «visibility of the division line between government and opposition» (Bartolini, 2000, p. 54), the way in which these two dimensions of competition relate to each other refers to a well-known trade-off in political science. In fact, by setting a low treshold for new actors to enter into the electoral arena, high contestability can promote *fragmentation*, which in turn may blur the separation line between government and opposition. The degree by which political systems lie between perfect contestability and incumbent vulnerability ultimately determines the "clarity of responsibility" of their governments, whose impact on the voters has been subject of extensive research in the past decades (Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Powell, 2000).

However, other two dimensions of electoral competition are particularly relevant here, namely the *decidability* of the political offer and the voters' *availability* to switch their party choice. The former dimension refers to the distinctiveness of the political supply, or to put it differently, the extent to which the voters perceive the policy options to be actually *different* from one another. This dimension is crucial for electoral competition, as there is no point for the voters to choose among parties that offer the same thing. In other words, by being undifferentiated in their political offer, parties can avoid competing and favor other and more *collusive* types of interaction (Bartolini, 2000). On the other hand, parties can also defect from competing with each other when there is low electoral availability, i.e. when the voters are not *sensitive* to the appeals of the different parties. The portion of electorate that is open to change their allegiances depending on what parties do is in fact the "prize" of electoral competition. To avoid their defection is what ultimately motivates parties to be responsive to public opinion's demands. Thus, low electoral availability is as detrimental for the quality of democracy as too low decidability, as in both cases the ruling political elites have no incentive to do what the voters want.

In this work I argue that the degree of decidability of the political offer and the degree of availability of the electorate trade off against each other, and the relative prominence of both these elements is given by the degree of *party polarization*, or the perceived ideological *distance* between the parties running for an election. Studies that in the past have more or less explicitly linked polarization with competitiveness have privileged the first aspect, i.e. the differentiation

of the policy supply (Alvarez and Nagler, 2004; Dalton, 2008; Lachat, 2008, 2011). However, in this study I contend that there are reasons to believe that high party polarization affects electoral availability by decreasing the extent to which voters are open to change their party support, reducing parties' incentives to engage in a direct competition with each other. As we shall see in the next chapters, polarization is hypothesized to have both direct "mechanical effects" on electoral availability, by directly impacting on the distribution of voters' preferences, and indirect "salience effects" on the way in which voters evaluate parties. However, differently from other studies showing the moderating effect of polarization on the importance of issues and ideology (e.g. Alvarez and Nagler, 2004; Lachat, 2008), I argue here that polarization increases the impact of party *loyalties* on such types of evaluations. This expectation builds in part on a body of literature focused on the consequences of the increasing polarization of American politics (e.g. Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008; Hetherington, 2001; Iyengar et al., 2012; Levendusky, 2009b), and represents a novel view on the relationship between polarization and issue voting.

To be sure, other factors next to party polarization can reduce electoral availability by "freezing" the party electorates. The most obvious is the presence of highly-politicized *cleavage* lines, whose impact on the electorate has been widely investigated for decades in the context of West-European party systems since Lipset and Rokkan (1967). However, the stability of voting behaviors hypothesized by the theory of social cleavages was put into question right after the theory itself was developed, in the 1960s. On one front, starting from the 1970s, political scientists identified as a secular trend of social modernization a number of signs of an increased *individualization* of the reasons behind citizens' opinions and behaviors (see Dalton et al., 1984). On a second front, once the importance of the context has been taken into account, many types of voting patterns have been shown to be moderated by genuinely political factors, such as the behavior of the political elites (Thomassen, 2005)[2]. Thus, given the focus of this study on a time period that goes from the mid 1980s to the end of the 2000s, the encapsulation of the electorate that characterized Western European political systems in the cleavage era should be regarded as an exception that might possibily affect some sub-groups of voters, rather than the rule.

All in all, while previous research focused on the potential problems for competition related to low policy differentiation, I concentrate here on the opposite set of concerns, i.e. those that derive from an excessively-stable or partisan electorate. The resulting picture provides support to a narrative that pictures

[2]In this context, even an archetypal expression of cleavage politics such as class voting, has been shown to be moderated by party polarization (e.g. Evans and Tilley, 2012).

the relationship between polarization and the quality of democracy as "bell-shaped". However, differently from previous studies arguing about this type of relation (see Schmitt and Freire, 2012), this works discusses a set of micro-level mechanisms by which a contextual-level phenomenon such as party polarization can ultimately influence aggregate electoral competition passing through voters' individual behaviors. Thus, this work represents a substantial contribution both to the empirical literature focused on the ways in which the political context can impact on the public opinion's considerations and behaviors, and to the normative literature regarding the consequences of parties' conduct for the good functioning of democratic competition.

1.1 Polarized Politics

On the morning of June 7^{th}, 2012, the Greek private TV station *Antena* was live broadcasting a talk show hosting a group of people discussing around a table. The group included a man and two women, the first two sitting right next to each other on one side of the table, and the third a bit further, on the opposite side. During the show, in a scene doomed to get widely reported by media from all across Europe, the man stood up, and threw a glass of water at the woman sitting across him. Then, as the other woman reacted by getting out of her chair and trying to hit him with a newspaper, the man turned to her, and slapped her three times in the face. After a few seconds the show host moved to stop the scuffle, and the inevitable commercial broke in.

Although this type of scene may be a routine in some morning trash-TV shows, the episode grabbed the media attention because the three people involved in the altercation were all members of the brand-new elected Greek parliament. The lady to whom the water was targeted was Rena Dourou, from the left-wing coalition SYRIZA. The other woman, who had the less fortunate fate to get slapped, was Liana Kanelli, from the Greek Communist party KKE. Finally, the boisterous gentleman was Ilias Kasidiaris, spokesman of Golden Dawn, a radical right-wing party whose immigration policy slogan at the previous campaign was «Let's rid this country of the stench.»[3]

While this episode is surely a quite extreme case, it has two elements that recur in many narratives of political polarization across countries and political systems. One is the *ideological distance* between the positions that the actors stand for. The three MPs were there to represent three parties standing at the

[3]See Associated Press. (2012, May 6). Golden Dawn: leader of far-right party lashes out at Greece's 'traitors'. The Guardian. Retrieved from `http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/06/golden-dawn-far-right-greece`, July 25, 2013.

opposite extremes of the Greek political spectrum. On the left side, SYRIZA and KKE are two anti-capitalist entities that played during the last years a constant opposition to the more moderate Greek socialist party (PASOK). The first, whose name means "Coalition of the radical left", was born as a merger between several radical left-wing movements, and emphasizes both economic and post-materialist issues, such as «human rights, the social state, ecology and freedom of expression» (Kotzaivazoglou and Zotos, 2010, p. 132). The second is a more deep-rooted subcultural Marxist party, active since before the Second World War and strongly-reputed as an important actor of the resistance to the 1960s–1970s dictatorship (Magone, 2011, p. 450). On the right side, Golden Dawn self-defines its own ideology as "ultra-nationalist" (Tsatsanis, 2011) while its supporters are rather accused to be often leaning towards neo-nazism (Jones, 2012). Thus, given the actors' backgrounds, the fight on Antena TV looked like a physical escalation of a highly-symbolic ideological conflict.

One could argue that extremist political actors on both ideological sides are not uncommon in European polities. However, the three parties represented in the debate were quite important in the Greek political landscape in the moment when the fight on Antena TV happened. After the election of May 2012, Golden Dawn was holding 21 seats at the national parliament (about 7% of the seat share), the KKE 26 seats (8.5%), and SYRIZA 52 seats (16.8%).[4] In other words, the three fighting MPs were representing about one third of the Greek people.

A second element that is fairly common in stories of political polarization is the *hostility* between the actors. The fight happened in the middle of a discussion about the Greek 1967–1974 military regime. Tension escalated quickly as Kanelli and Kasidiaris started calling each other, respectively, "fascist" and "old commie". Eventually, it was Dourou's accusation of «bringing the country back 500 years» that triggered Kasidiaris' reaction, leading to the physical attack.[5]

[4]The following elections were held only ten days after the episode described here, on June 17^{th}, due to the unwillingness of the three major parties (including SYRIZA) to find an agreement for a majority government. In fact, legislative studies show that party polarization increases the likelihood to encounter a legislative gridlock, due to the unwillingness of different veto players to behave cooperatively (see Jones, 2001; Tsebelis, 2002). While the formation of a government is a rather different case, it is reasonable to assert that the incapacity to cooperate shown by the Greek parties after the election of May 2012 was in great part due to an interplay between an even distribution of votes and the high degree of ideological distance between the three winners. In the following parliamentary arrangement, Golden Dawn obtained 18 seats, the KKE 12 seats, and SYRIZA 71 seats. However this time the most-voted party, the conservative New Democracy, obtained enough seats to allow the formation of a unity government with PASOK and the smaller social-democratic party DIMAR.

[5]The scene can be retrieved on the internet, e.g. `http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3Ql8BzsxwU` (retrieved July 25, 2013)

Similar examples of political enmity, ending in more or less spectacular ways, often happen inside of the insitutional buildings. Hetherington (2009) describes the escalation of a diatribe between Republican and Democrat legislators taking place no less than at the House Committee on Ways and Means of the US Congress, where Representatives ended up calling each other names (see also Hetherington and Weiler, 2009, chap. 2). In a less solemn but arguably more entertaining way, pictures of scuffles inside parliamentary rooms appear from time to time in newspapers from all over the world. Italian pundits still mention what happened at the Senate in January 2008, when the speaker of the chamber read the vote count to the no-confidence motion that brough the center-left government led by PM Romano Prodi down. On that occasion, some opposition Senators reacted to the news by cheering, uncorking Champagne bottles, and even eating in an ostentive way some slices of "*mortadella*", a variety of ham after which Prodi was nicknamed. The scene was heavily reported by all TV news channels, and became a symbol of the deep enmity that characterized Italian politics in the Second Republic.[6].

To be sure, ideological distance and disrespectful or aggressive behaviors are two different things, and do not always go together. However, in the vast majority of the cases the latter are justified by the former. Scuffles of this kind between politicians or partisans often arise from substantive disputes, when one part accuses the other to lie or cheat, to report biased facts or to have nasty opinions, to act not in the interest of the citizenry, and so on. It is when opponents are in a condition of great divergence that they are more likely to engage into an open conflict. To be sure, politics can turn the hearts on. Political divergences are at the origin of violent outbreaks since the dawn of modern politics, and even the most harmless conversation about a recent government's play can lead to harsh words and bitterness. After all, political disputes are ultimately disputes over *power*. Thus, it should not come as a surprise if political conflicts are able to captivate many people.

Some times events of this kind happen during debates over particularly sensitive reforms (see e.g. the episode told by Hetherington, 2009) or during periods of great economic or social discontent, when politics is called to provide answers to a restless public opinion. This is the case of the situation in Greece in June 2012. The incumbent Prime Minister, George Papandreou, leader of the socialist PASOK, had stepped down in late 2011, after agreeing with the leader of the opposition and the president about the formation of a national

[6]The scene is also reported in some documentaries about Italian political history of the last decades, such as e.g. "Girlfriend in a Coma", by Annalisa Piras and Bill Emmott, or "Videocracy", by Erik Gandini. Besides these appearences, it can be easily retrieved on-line, see `http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Scz-P50exE` (retrieved July 25, 2013)

unity government that would aim to steer the country clear from the imminent danger of bankruptcy. Conflicts within the PASOK and against the opposition parties mainly came as a consequence of a series of austerity packages adopted by the Greek government in return for loans from other members of the eurozone, oriented to avoid the country's bankruptcy. The two Greek elections of 2012, in between which the episode on Antena TV happened, have been held in a context of deep social unrest, with the population being asked to choose whether to accept even harsher austerity measures or being ready to drop out of the eurozone.

Other times, the hostility towards the rival is part of the package that a political party offers. For instance in Hungary, the neat division between left-wing and right-wing coalitions, led respectively by the social-democrat MSZP and the national-conservative Fidesz, is not rooted in particularly deep economic cleavages, but it emerges rather from identitarian and socio-cultural divides (Kitschelt et al., 1999, chap. 8). These are in turn strongly determined by political elites, which since the fall of communism have been building «a steady division of the political spectrum into two camps that continuously produce themselves as a political unit through the construction of the other camp as their counterpart» (Palonen, 2009, p. 320). In Italy, pundits spoke of "anti-communism without communism", referring to the tactic used by former PM Silvio Berlusconi since his entrance into politics in 1994 to systematically call his left-wing and center rivals "communists" (Diamanti, 2009). Although the main left-wing party in the Italian political landscape was indeed until 1992 a communist party, this dialectical tool has been holding for almost two decades, in spite of the considerable moderation of the current main center-left party (Curini and Iacus, 2008).

All in all, political polarization presents itself in many varieties across countries, although some fixed points can be identified. The examples provided in this sections are not meant to form a complete list of the possible cases in which political polarization manifests itself, but they should rather provide a general idea of the elements that can be found in polarized polities. Among them, the two most common seem to be *ideological distance* and *mutual hostility*. Although these two factors do not have to occur together to make a political system polarized, they often do. However, to address the (potential) relationship between them requires a more general perspective than the reported cases brought as example in this section can provide. Thus, this point is tackled more explicitly in the next section.

1.2 Polarization: A Light Definition

The term "polarization" is used in social sciences to describe a number of phenomena. The most common use can be traced back to a synonym of "disagreement": two people are said to be polarized over a certain topic when their opinions are different from one another. In particular, being different here implies being *incompatible*, rather than multifaceted. In other words, polarization pictures a situation where the actors' positions are confronted *vis-a-vis* one another. This clarification is important, since polarization has been some times used as a synonym of "differentiation". However, while the concept of political differentiation covers a wider range of potential situations, including fragmentation of the interests into multiple areas or dimensions, the concept of political polarization indicates a more specific set of instances where the interests are *mutually exclusive*. This implies that a certain degree of satisfaction of a preference inevitably leads to an equal degree of dissatisfaction of the opposite preference. Thus, polarization *does* imply a form of opinion differentiation, but it refers in particular to a situation where the opinions are *antithetical*.[7]

The latter specification suggests a second layer of significance attached to the concept of polarization. In this sense, the term is some times used as a synonym of "conflict". In other words, the same word can be used to describe both a type of *arrangement* of the actors' preferences or opinions, and a type of *interaction* between the actors themselves. While disagreement is a property of how the opinions are distributed, conflict is a property of the relationship that we would expect to find between actors whose opinions diverge significantly. This view borrows from conflict studies, where polarization is conceived as a stage of conflict escalation where a win-win solution is no longer likely or desirable (Pruitt and Olczak, 1995). As defined above, a scenario where actors' preferences are polarized implies precisely a situation where the advantage of the one corresponds to the disadvantage of the other. Thus, a statement such as "two actors are polarized" implies that a solution that accommodates both actors' preferences is not viable.

One could argue that the occurrence of a conflictual relationship is not really implied in the concept of polarization but it is rather a consequence of it, and therefore, for the sake of conceptual clarity, the two aspects should stay separated. This is fully acceptable. However, if we accept a definition of polar-

[7] For instance, the Oxford English Dictionary defines polarization as «[t]he accentuation of a difference between two things or groups; division into two sharply contrasting groups or sets of beliefs or opinions; an instance of this.» See "polarization, n.". OED Online. March 2013. Oxford University Press. `http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/146757?redirectedFrom=polarization&` (retrieved July 25, 2013).

ization as a great distance between contrasting positions, then what other type of interaction that is not conflictual should we expect from polarized actors? In other words, in how many cases polarization leads to an outcome that is different from conflict? Theoretically, given their interest (or obligation) to deal with each other at all, an alternative type of interaction that the actors could establish is *cooperation*. In a condition of disagreement, to cooperate implies to focus on the source of the discordance, and try to solve it by finding a shared solution. By contrast, a conflictual relationship has no shared solution, as every win for one part implies a loss for the other. In this view, the difference between conflict and cooperation can be reframed as difference of *focus* of the actors' attention. In case of cooperation, the actors are focused on the matter of discontent, i.e. on the problem or issue that needs to find a shared solution. On the other hand, in case of conflict, the actors are focused on the actors themselves, on their own qualities and on the qualities of the opponents who will take advantage of their own losses, in a logic of "us against them"[8]. Thus, a reformulation of the question posited above would sound like: given a polarized arrangement of preferences, do we expect the actors to focus more on the *substantive topic* of disagreement, or on their own and others' *identities*?

To answer this question for the specific case of party polarization is one of the tasks of this study. However, what I argue from now is that the decision whether to focus on the topic of disagreement or on the actors is largely in the hands of the actors themselves, i.e. in the case of this study, the political elites. This does not change the nature of the phenomenon itself, which in any case is derived from a certain distribution of preferences or opinions. In fact, while in principle it is surely possible that political actors are willing to enter into open conflict without their preferences being divergent, the way in which modern democratic confrontations are structured will force them to adapt their substantive positions to justify a condition of conflict. Thus, while conflict can happen or not, a fixed point in the definition of a polarized political system is a divergent distribution of preferences. For this reason I propose here a "light" definition of polarization as *the degree of disagreement between the actors' opinions and preferences*. This represents a basic concept upon which, in the following chapters, specific claims and expectations will be built.

[8]This definition is directly attached to the concept of polarization by Pruitt and Olczak (1995), who define it as a stage of conflict escalation where stereotyped (negative) images of the enemy are formed.

1.3 Talking About the Causes: Polarization as an Elite-Driven Phenomenon

So far I have established the aim of this study, i.e. to assess the electoral consequences of ideological party polarization, and I have provided a general definition of the concept of polarization itself. In this section I will briefly discuss *what causes polarization*. In particular, I will use this section to define and defend one assumption that will be held constant throughout this book: that *polarization is largely a top-down phenomenon*.

The idea that many political phenomena are elite-driven has been supported by several prominent studies over the years (e.g. Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Zaller, 1992), and polarization is all but an exception (see Hetherington, 2001, 2009; Layman et al., 2006; McCarty et al., 2006; Poole and Rosenthal, 1984). However, especially when a comparative perspective is taken, the top-down view in the literature is often accompained by a second one, that sees polarization as a bottom-up process. According to this view, polarization is a mere political reflection of the level of conflict taking place within a society. In other words, party systems are assumed to *channel* the conflict and *express* it into the political arena, i.e. to convert it into a particular party configuration that can be, in fact, more or less polarized (Sani and Sartori, 1983; Sartori, 1976). This type of approach was conjugated in the most successful way by the theory of social *cleavages* (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967), and it set the ground for following theories that studied political phenomena through the lens of social modernization (Dalton et al., 1984). Yet, it was exactly the renewed interest for the context that motivated political scientists, in recent years, to challenge this view (Thomassen, 2005). The claim that "politics matters" is primarily based on the observation that national trajectories of political change are better understood when the behavior of political elites is considered. Thus, in this sense, the top-down perspective can be currently regarded as a rather shared view of political phenomena.

Yet, the full complexity of polarization can extend way beyond the top-down/bottom-up dichotomy. In particular, even assuming a top-down process, the motives of the "top" can come from the "bottom". In other words, if we assume that parties are *vote seekers* (a very common assumtpion in political science), than we should allow their positioning to have at least something to do with the voters and their preferences. Thus, the literature on the causes of party polarization can be rather seen as a long list of *incentives*, or of «conditions under which centrifugal incentives (i.e. factors that cause parties to take distinctly noncentrist positions) tend to dominate centripetal incentives (i.e. factors that

make parties converge toward the center of voter distribution)» (Curini and Hino, 2012, p. 461). These incentives could lie in different aspects of the political reality, such as the institutional make-up or the economy. However, I argue that the choice whether to take or not to take these chances is always in the parties' hands.

Among the institutional features that influence party polarization, literature has identified a number of factors, such as the number of parties (Cox, 1990) and its interplay with the expectations regarding coalition formation (Curini and Hino, 2012), or the number of veto players in the legislative process, including federalist institutions (Schmitt and Freire, 2012). However, some characteristics that should theoretically reduce polarization, such as a smaller number of parties and the presence of federalist veto player, did not prevent the Republican and Democrat elites in the US to grow increasingly polarized over the decades. In this respect, a factor that has been found to affect the degree of political polarization relates to the macro-economic context. American scholars have pointed out a strong inter-connection between economic inequalities and ideological divergence among the political elites (McCarty et al., 2006). Moreover, historical research on political systems of the past that are often taken as examples of high polarization, such as the Weimar Republic in Germany (see Sartori, 1976, pp. 131-173), suggests that the electoral fortunes of ideological extreme parties can be strongly related to the worsening of a country's economic conditions (King et al., 2008; Pelizzo and Babones, 2007). Yet again, the connection between these two phenomena seems to relate more to political elites taking opportunities for promoting more radical messages, rather than a mere representation of the social divisions. In fact, characteristics related to the strength of social cleavages have been found to have no effect on party polarization (Schmitt and Freire, 2012).

What all these studies show is a set of varying conditions. Yet the choice whether to compete in a centripetal or in a centrifugal way is largely made by the parties. In this sense, I argue that polarization should be intended as a feature of the *style of competition*. This view is coherent with much literature on parties' behavior, and its connection to the voters (Adams et al., 2005). This perspective will be kept throughout the book, as the electoral consequences of different aspects related to parties' behavior are studied.

1.4 Structure of the Book

This book is structured in five sections. Two of them explore the concept of polarization and its measurement, while the other three deal with the substan-

tive topic of this study, i.e. the impact of polarized party systems on voters' behavior. In the chapter right after this introduction, called "Parameters of Polarization", I dip deeper into the conceptualization of polarization by describing three elements, or parameters, that qualify the phenomenon. Given a general definition of polarization as "a number of actors taking diverging positions on a given substantive dimension", this chapter will decompose this concept among its three constitutive elements: the *positions* taken by the actors, the *dimension* on which the actors take their positions, and the *actors* themselves. For each of these parameters, some potential categories are discussed. For instance, the dimension of disagreement could be a single policy issue or a more encompassing ideological orientation, and the actors who take diverging positions can be citizens or parties. Different combination of these elements lead to different types of polarization that are of interest for political science.

In the third chapter, called "Measuring Party Polarization", I fix my focus on the type of polarization that this study investigates, i.e. between parties on the ideological left-right dimension, and I discuss the possible ways by which this can be measured. In this part I describe two different types of *indices of party polarization*, one proposed by van der Eijk et al. (2005) and one developed by Esteban and Ray (1994). These two indices aim to capture two different aspects of a party distribution, namely the degree of *dispersion* and the degree of reciprocal alienation between the parties, assessed as a sum of their *pairwise distances*. However, as I show in the chapter, when these indices are applied to party systems, they will end up performing in a very similar way. Moreover, results of some further analyses unveil a too-tight connection between the pairwise-distances-based index by Esteban and Ray (1994) and the number of parties in a party system, a property that does not affect the dispersion-based index by van der Eijk et al. (2005).

The fourth chapter, called "Mechanical Effects of Ideological Party Polarization", deals with a first type of mechanism by which high party polarization is expected to influence the voters. In particular, the chapter focuses on one aspect of voting behavior that is strongly connected to the concept of electoral *availability* introduced earlier in this chapter: the extent to which citizens are open to support more than one party. The general expectation is that voters in more polarized party systems should be less likely to change their party support for the simple fact that the positions that parties take are *too different* from each other, and therefore switching would be a too big of a change. To provide an empirical test for this expectation, I develop the chapter in two parts. In the first part, I introduce the concept of *preference certainty*, and I discuss a way to measure it using survey data by relying on "probability to vote" (PTV) scores, a type of party rating scales rather common in empirical research on voting behavior.

In this part I also provide a validation for the measure, showing that higher preference certainty is related to a lower probability to switch party across two consecutive elections, assessed by using panel data. Moreover, I provide some evidence for the empirical distinction between preference certainty and partisanship, by showing that citizens whose preferences are more certain are more likely to switch towards abstention than to vote for another party. This confirms that higher preference certainty is related to a smaller number of alternatives, rather than to a passionate support for a party. In the second part of the chapter I eventually show that preference certainty is influenced by how parties are arranged in a given context, an effect that I define "mechanical" because it is related to the mere party distribution, i.e. to the *spatial properties* of polarized party systems.

The fifth chapter is called "Salience Effects of Ideological Party Polarization", and it deals to a second type of mechanism by which polarized party systems are expected to impact on the voters. Here, what counts is not only the way in which parties are distributed, but what type of interaction we expect to observe between parties when polarization is high. Much of the previous research on the effects of party polarization focuses on this aspect. In this respect, two models of choice are known to be influenced by the level of party system polarization: spatial/ideological voting (e.g. Lachat, 2008) and valence/competence voting (e.g. Pardos-Prado, 2012). However, while the effects on the former are generally uncontroversial, investigations on the latter have recently led to counterintuitive results. The study in the chapter takes one step back, asking what are the effects of left-right polarization on the way in which voters deal with party evaluations. Building on a body of literature linking elite polarization to mass partisanship, I derive expectations about the impact of partisan loyalties on citizens' perceptions of ideological proximity and party competence, and how this should vary as a function of the degree of party polarization. The idea is that higher polarization is likely to imply greater partisan *conflict*. Thus, what is observed to be reliance on party ideological similarity or competence may be a sign of an evaluation bias driven by partisanship. These expectations are tested with multilevel logit models on a pooled dataset of European Election Studies from 1994 to 2009. Results show that partisans are more likely to view their preferred party as the most competent and ideologically close when the environment is polarized, while there is no such effect for non-partisans.

Finally, the last substantive chapter is called "Polarization and Electoral Competitiveness in Multiparty Systems: A Case Study about the Netherlands". As the title suggests, this chapter offers a single-country case study, while variation in party polarization is rather observed over time. The Dutch political system has been chosen for two reasons. First, single-country studies focused

on the implications of party polarization for electoral competitiveness have been limited to two-party systems, such as the US and the UK. In this respect, polarization in multiparty systems is conceptualized in a different, more complex way, and its implications are less straigthforward. Second, fomr 1986 to 2002 the Dutch party system has been through a steep process of elite depolarization, going hand by hand with a pattern of increasing electoral volatility. Thus, the Netherlands represent an ideal case where to find further evidence for the expectations discussed throughout this book. Findings show that changing degrees of party polarization influence voters' partisan ties, the certainty of their party preferences, and ultimately their voting stability. Moreover this chapter offers evidence that, in multiparty systems, the competition between ideologically similar parties can effectively moderate the impact of voters' individual motivation to switch party (measured using government satisfaction ratings) on the probability that they will eventually do it. All in all, this chapter proposes a further, robust, test for the theoretical expectations outlined in the book.

A final chapter provides a wrap-up discussion about my theoretical expectations, the findings, and their implications for the way in which polarization can be related to electoral competition. Moreover, the weak points of this study and its possible ramifications into further research are discussed.

Chapter 2

Parameters of Polarization

So far, polarization has been defined as a condition of disagreement. Yet in order to be operational, any definition of polarization requires some parameters to be specified, i.e. elements regarding the matter of discontent and the actors involved in it, that must be "plugged-in" to make it intelligible in the political reality. More specifically, these elements are the *positions* between which the distance is assessed, the *dimension* on which we want to determine the degree of polarization, and the *population* that we want to observe. Together, these three factors cover the full range of elements that build a polarized landscape. They will be discussed one by one in the following paragraphs.

2.1 The meaning of a position

The first and most simple step is to define the meaning of a position. Here I adopt the perspective assumed by most of the literature in political science, as well as by most of the people in their everyday conversations about politics: a position is a *preference*. To say that a person's position is against nuclear energy means that that person prefers not to use nuclear power plants to produce energy than to use them. As Benoit and Laver (2006) point out, to call "position" a preference on a political topic is not at all symptomatic of the use of some obscure political scientist jargon, but it is rather the norm in many public debates. «It is difficult if not impossible to have a serious discussion about the substance of real politics without referring to "where" key actors stand on substantive matters at issue.» (Benoit and Laver, 2006, p. 14). Nevertheless, the use of the word "position" in political science recalls almost automatically the Downsian spatial model. Here, the utility income deriving from voting for a certain party is related to the *benefits* that a person expects to derive from voting (Downs,

1957a, pp. 36-37). According to Downs, and even more according to those who developed an extensive spatial framework building on Downs' work (see Adams et al., 2005; Enelow and Hinich, 1982, 1984; Hinich and Munger, 1992, 1994; Merrill and Grofman, 1999), people have meaningful ideal positions on issues, and they use them as a benchmark to evaluate parties. Such positions are assumed to derive entirely from self-interest. The origin of the self-interest is not a matter of concern for spatial modelers: what is important (and indeed assumed) is that individual preferences are *identifiable*, and they are *exogenous*, i.e. they are not influenced by party evaluations themselves.

A different, although related, perspective is taken within social psychology literature, where a position is generally called *attitude*, «a general and enduring positive or negative feeling about some person, object or issue» (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981, p. 7). Here the assumption that an individual position emerges from a rational calculus of costs and benefits is rather unnecessary, as attitudes are much simpler constructs defined positionally by a *direction* (e.g. to be in favor or against same-sex marriages) and a certain degree of *extremity* (e.g. to be strongly against or moderately in favor of the use of nuclear power plants)[1]. The difference between this perspective and the Downsian framework lies primarily in what determines a person's position (a rather straightforward response to an object for the first, a meticulous calculus for the second) and, secondarily, by the fact that attitudes in psychology are defined essentially in a bipolar way, while for Downs positions taken by the actors are set on a continuum of infinite, identically meaningful and equally likely placements[2]. On the other hand, these two perspectives have in common the general assumption that ac-

[1] In fact, literature in political psychology points out to many other characteristics of attitudes that do not necessarily pertain their positional features (see Boninger et al., 1995; Krosnick et al., 1993; Krosnick and Petty, 1995). However, to discuss this in detail would go beyond the purposes of this section.

[2] The difference between these two conceptions of the issue space can be regarded as irrelevant, given the assumption that both of them should lead to the same prediction regarding people's choice mechanism. This view was questioned by Rabinowitz and MacDonald (1989)'s theory of *directional voting*. In its original enunciation, the directional model of voting was conceived as alternative to the Downsian proximity-based framework. The study published by Rabinowitz and MacDonald created a great debate that led to the production of an impressive amount of research (see e.g. Claassen, 2007; Lacy and Paolino, 2010; Lewis and King, 1999; MacDonald et al., 1991, 1998; Tomz and Van Houweling, 2008; Warwick, 2004; Westholm, 1997, and all the articles in the special issue dedicated to this topic by the Journal of Theoretical Politics, 1997, vol. 9, issue 1). This ultimately led some scholars to seek for a "unified model" of issue voting (see Merrill and Grofman, 1999) and others to focus on the contextual conditions that favor one model instead of another (see Pardos-Prado and Dinas, 2010; Fazekas and Méder, 2013, for the focus on the impact of system polarization on the predictive power of both models).

tors' positions are single-peaked, i.e. they can be identified by a single point on the space. This is not the only way to represent a person's preference on some certain topic (for example, Social Judgment Theory defines some latitudes of acceptance as segments or ranges on the issue space where people can find an acceptable compromise, see (Sherif and Hovland, 1961)) although it is generally considered a parsimonious and rather accurate way to synthesize people's will on political matters. Thus, in this work I will use the words "position", "attitude" and "preference" interchangeably, and will assume that a person's position is a valid synthetic description of his/her view on a certain topic.

2.2 Dimensions of political disagreement: issues and ideology

While it is not necessary to specify every time the meaning of a position when talking about polarization, it is essential to be explicit about the other two parameters, i.e. what is the *topic of the disagreement*, and among *which actors*. This is the case because, in spite of being always related to between-actors disagreement, polarization can indicate rather different phenomena when it is observed at the party system or at the mass public level, and the implications for our understanding of the type of conflict we are dealing with can vary tremendously depending on the type of dimension on which polarization is observed. Regarding this latter point, i.e. the matter of the disagreement, there are generally two different types of polarization that are interesting for political scientists. One is polarization over *issues*, or single policy domains, and the other is polarization over *ideological views*. The first concept is rather straightforward, and describes a situation where the actors are polarized on one specific political problem. Thus, if in a group of two actors one is strongly in favor of giving migrant workers the right vote at the local elections, and the other is strongly against it, there will be a situation of high polarization on the issues of the voting rights for labor immigrants. To be sure, polarization can be observed on a *multidimensional* issue space, i.e. on different issues at the same time. In this case, actors may be polarized over some issues and may agree on others, but the different domains will be kept essentially separated from one another. However, the disagreement may also be more generalized and regard, rather than single policy issues, entire ideological views. This type of polarization is the phenomenon that the present study is principally focused on. Given the ambiguity and the often controversial use of the terms "ideology" and "ideological", this section provides a discussion over such a concept, and its particular conjugation on the *left-right*

(or *liberal-conservative*) dimension[3].

The labels "left" and "right", as well as "liberal" and "conservative", are probably among the most widely used terms across modern democracies to qualify anything related to politics. One can use these categories to define a party or a candidate, but also a program, a reasoning or an idea. A certain legislation can be said to be left-wing or right-wing, and the fact that a politician votes for it would in turn qualify him/her as a left-wing or right-wing politician. Although several political systems throughout history have experienced the rise of movements that claimed their non-involvement with the distinction between left and right, it is hard to find in practice a political statement that can not be put into one of the two categories (Bobbio, 1997). This is mainly the case because these terms are associated to opposite sets of values that jointly define the nature of political contrasts among the vast majority of the democracies in the world.

Although many political scientists would agree on the fact that ideology is a multidimensional construct, i.e. it characterizes actors' positions on more than one single topic, the most of the times where such a construct is taken into account in empirical analyses, it is regarded as a single dimension. For instance, some people may call themselves "conservatives" or "right-wing" because they oppose same-sex marriages, while others may do it because they want a reduction of social services. However, while we are talking about two different issues, one in the domain of social policies and the other in the domain of economic policies, both these groups would end up being positioned on the right, were we asked to place them on the ideological dimension. This apparent paradox is made possible by the substantially abstract nature of ideological categories, that makes them flexible enough to cover a wide range of dimensions of political action. Downs, the first and most cited advocate of unidimensionality, defines ideology «as a verbal image of the good society and of the chief means of constructing such a society.» (Downs, 1957a, p. 96). In his view, ideology has the precise function of helping citizens making sense of party positions on a potentially high number of issue dimensions on the one hand, and helping parties

[3]It is common among scholars to use the term "ideological polarization" to describe a situation of diverging preferences over single political issues. This use of the term is justified by the fact that different positions over policy matters are assumed to stem directly from different ideological views. While this may be true (and we will see how below), I argue that having diverging preferences over policy issues does not necessarily mean that actors' ideological views are polarized. In fact, two actors may hold different positions over e.g. wealth redistribution or same-sex marriages, because of mere self-interest, i.e. their economic and social status would be personally affected by the implementation of some policies. This type of determinant of actors' issue preferences contrasts with the definition of ideology that I provide in this section. Thus, the term "ideological polarization" employed in this study refers exclusively to *polarization of the ideological views*.

maintaining their potential support as wide as possible in a constantly changing society on the other. Hence, a first definition of ideology is that it is a *short-cut device*, or a simplification that helps people understanding an otherwise too complex political reality (see Higgs, 1987; Hinich and Munger, 1994).

The "functional" definition of ideology provided in the previous paragraph is generally paired with a "substantial" definition, i.e. a description of *how* ideology can fulfill its summarizing function in a multidimensional policy conflict. In this respect, political ideologies are generally described as *belief systems*, i.e. as coherent sets of abstract values that guide people's policy preferences, but also cognitions, behaviors, goals and self-explanations of the reality. This definition builds on early conceptualizations of ideology, in particular on Converse (1964)'s highly influential work. According to Converse, a belief system is a «configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence» (Converse, 1964, p. 207). Here the emphasis is on the *constraint*, i.e. on the coherence between a person's attitudes towards different political topics. The logic driving this argument is that political ideologies organize political topics in citizens' minds by stating «what goes with what» (Converse, 1964, p. 212), or in other words, which position on one issue is coherent with which position on another. The potential reasons why ideologies are able to provide people with psychological constraint in their position-taking are several. Among the most relevant, Converse points out the importance of semi-logical associations stemming from abstract principles, or world views, that are mostly driven by political elites, or in general, make sense in the particular social and political context where some specific configurations are evaluated.

With some refinements, this conceptualization is still widely accepted by political scientists (see Feldman, 1988, 2003; Jacoby, 1995; Judd and Milburn, 1980; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985; Sniderman and Bullock, 2004; Stimson, 1975). However, while its biggest merit consists in introducing and elaborating the concept of constraint, the account of the reasons behind the regular appearance of some patterns of associations in different political contexts has been left aside. This point has become particularly relevant among scholars in the context of two distinct debates: the currently-outdated theoretical debate about the "end of ideology", and the more empirical one about the cross-country comparability of the ideological labels, in light of the ever-growing availability of comparative survey data. In both cases, to assess whether ideologies are disappeared and/or whether they have a comparable function in the most of the political contexts, requires scholars to address explicitly the issue of the meaning of the ideological labels. In this respect, three different perspective are generally taken.

One perspective assumes that the left-right has a fixed and stable *issue con-*

tent, whatever the context where it is observed (see Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006; Laver, 2001; Laver and Garry, 2000). This view, which has been applied mostly to the comparative study of party policy platforms, seeks to identify the "observable regularities" among issue positions of left and right parties. Thus, left-wing positions are assumed to emphasize economic planning and market regulations, protectionism, nationalization of the enterprises and expansion of the social services, together with a general positive attitude towards internationalization, peace and democracy, and a negative attitude towards the use of military force. On the other hand, right-wing positions are characterized by a general preference for pro-marked and anti-protectionist view, matched with emphasis on traditional morality, law and order and a positive attitude for military intervention (for an example, see the *RILE* code established by the Comparative Manifesto Project, Klingemann et al. (2006, p. 5)).

A second perspective taken to reach a general definition of the ideological divide is to recognize the relative "freedom" of the left-right from any absolute and invariant policy content, and regard it rather as a *super-issue*, i.e. a summary dimension of the relevant issue conflicts that take place in a certain political context at a certain time (Inglehart, 1984, 1990; Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976; Schmitt and van der Eijk, 2009; van der Eijk et al., 2005). In this view, the main providers of content to the ideological categories are still the parties, which use them to «label the most *important* issues of a given era.» (Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976, p. 244, emphasis in the original). Although this perspective and the previous one seem to be diametrically opposite to each other, in fact they are not. What makes them similar is the fact that they both focus almost exclusively on the *policy* content of the left-right. In doing so, while the "super-issue" perspective is agnostic regarding the mix of policy associations that can be observed in different contexts, the "invariant meaning" perspective simply adopts and assumes to be general the most common of these associations. However, while both views recognize the presence of an "ideological glue" keeping the policies together, none of them deals explicitly with the issue of identifying what this glue is made of.

This step is made by a third perspective, which aims to identify the abstract principles that stay at the *core* of the left-right (or liberal-conservative) ideological divide, providing in turn a source of orientation for people to evaluate the *peripheral*, context-specific issue dimensions. This endeavor has been undertaken to a great extent by social psychology, by studying people's individual need to hold some ideological belief instead of another. In general, studies on the core attitudes at the base of political ideologies seem to converge on identifying two relevant dimensions (see Jost et al., 2003; Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2009a). The first is between preference for more social and economic *equality*

on the one hand, and acceptance (or promotion) of *inequalities* on the other. The second is between acceptance of *social change* (and *tolerance* for the dissent from the status quo) on the one hand, and observance of the *tradition* (and *support of authority* to punish dissenters) on the other hand. The identification of these two dimensions is in line with other normative-based conceptualizations that investigate the meaning of the distinction between left and right from the very origins of the terms, at the times of the French revolution (Bobbio, 1997).

This latter conceptualization reduces the multi-dimensionality of many possible complex mixes of political issues to only two core value dimensions. It has the advantage of letting the relevance (and, occasionally, the direction) of specific policies free to vary from context to context without, at the same time, giving up with expectations about quasi-logical associations between them that are not purely context-specific. However, even such a simplified scenario looks too complex, if compared to the actual meaning that is attributed to the labels "left" ("liberal") and "right" ("conservative"). In fact, these two dimensions are almost never regarded as completely orthogonal to each other, but they present a quite regular pattern of association (which is not always regarded as valid, see for instance Bobbio (1997)). A left-wing position is generally associated with a positive attitude towards equality, social change and tolerance, and a right-wing position with a positive attitude towards inequality, tradition and respect for authority (see e.g. Erikson et al., 1988; McClosky and Zaller, 1984). In other words, even these two core values seem to be constrained to each other.

Studies that seek for possible explanations for this further connection, that would essentially bring the reduction of complexity assumed by so many spatial theorists to a substantive conclusion, are currently on the cutting edge of political research. For instance, System Justification Theory provides an explanation for right-wing or conservative preferences that takes into account the tendency to both justify inequalities and hold a general predilection for maintaining the status quo (Jost et al., 2009a). In this framework, *system justification* is defined as a cognitive bias that affects some people and makes them more likely to «defend, legitimize, and bolster the social and political systems on which [they] are psychologically dependent» (Jost et al., 2009b, p. 8), including all the social and economic inequalities that characterize their environment. Thus, the root of the core values that distinguish left-wing from right-wing people would consist in different cognitive styles, possibly implied by different types of personality and epistemic needs (see Gerber et al., 2010a; Jost et al., 2003). Other scholars pushed themselves even further in the study of the individual underpinnings of ideological preferences, arguing that the individual differences in terms of ideology are strongly influenced by people's genetic profiles (Alford et al., 2005) and their interaction with the social environment (see Hatemi et al., 2011; Smith

et al., 2012), as well as by different brain structures (Amodio et al., 2007) and physiological reactions to external stimuli, such as threat (Oxley et al., 2008).

While an accurate survey of the research that follows a genuinely psychological or biological approach to the study of ideology would lead too far away from the main topic of this work, we can draw at this point one first conclusion regarding the ideological left-right dimension. The studies discussed above suggest three important things. First, the ideological labels are related to *preferences for policies*. Thus, to know an actor's position on the ideological space will provide meaningful information about his/her position on a set of concrete political issues. Second, the transition from a multitude of more or less relevant issues to one single ideological dimension is made possible by the logical or semi-logical *constraint* that characterizes different preferences for policies under ideological thinking. Third, this constraint is provided by more abstract core dimensions, that reflect generic individual *value orientations*, and are likely to be product of fundamental needs and predispositions. Thus, while the concrete policy content of the ideological labels may vary from one political system to another, due to context-specific patterns of issue salience and even direction, their core bases should be more stable and generalizable, as they reflect more fundamental cleavages that tend to constantly emerge from different combinations of issues in different places and times.

The discussion of political ideologies presented so far was based on the assumption that divisions between left and right, or liberal and conservative positions, are directly translatable into diverging issue or policy preferences. Yet some studies have been challenging this view over the years, suggesting that the ideological labels may be made to a great extent by an *identitarian component*. The stream of research advocating such a radical change of perspective came as a rather direct consequence of Converse's conceptual work. In particular, Converse noted that the most of the American public seemed to hold "nonattitudes" rather than attitudes, i.e. their answers to political issue questions appeared to be made up on the spot, rather than coming from abstract ideological considerations. Moreover, while Converse noted the important role of political sophistication in defining citizens' ability in making sense of political issues, he too assessed that very few people are informed and/or sophisticated enough to qualify as ideologues (see Converse, 1964, 2000; Saris and Sniderman, 2004). Whereas these observations laid the foundations for a prolific body of research interested in political sophistication (e.g. Luskin, 1987), puzzling results coming from other studies showed that, while a substantial portion of the electorate was not able to identify the left and the right side of several policy issues (or even reversed the meaning of the two in open-ended questions), the ideological labels themselves had a strong predictive power on people's vote choice (Holm

and Robinson, 1978; Klingemann, 1979; Levitin and Miller, 1979).

In the most important study elaborating on these insights, Conover and Feldman (1981) provide a conceptual framework where to define the ideological labels and their potential independence from issue preferences. Building on the "symbolic politics" theory (see Edelman, 1964; Sears, 1993; Sears et al., 1979, 1980), the authors regard ideological labels as political *symbols*, i.e. as attitude objects that are able to «evoke and mobilize human emotions» (Sears, 1993, p. 113). According to the mechanism posited by this theory, people's responses to political symbols are assumed to be driven by long-lasting predispositions acquired in their childhood. Such predispositions persist throughout the adult life, and trigger people's affective responses as they encounter new symbols that resemble those that their first emotional responses are associated to (Sears et al., 1979). What is central in this framework, compared to other conceptualizations of the antecedents of attitude strength (see e.g. Krosnick and Petty, 1995), is the fact that here individuals will respond positively to a symbol if and only if such a symbol is positively related to their long-lasting predispositions. In other words, symbolic politics theory predicts a great stability in people's attitudes, and excludes any role of self-interest in influencing them, leaving everything in the hands of *affect* (Kinder and Sears, 1981; Sears et al., 1980).

Conover and Feldman (1981) partially integrate this view in their conceptualization. To them, people's ideological self-categorizations (namely, people's self-placement on the ideological dimension) are supposed to be influenced in part by a *cognitive component*, (the substantive policy information that they associate to the ideological labels), and in part by an *evaluative component* (their affect towards the social groups that the labels define, e.g. the "liberals" and the "conservatives")[4]. Here policy issues are expected to have both a direct effect, by defining the cognitive content of the ideological labels, and an indirect effect, by providing further associations that will influence people's evaluations. For instance, people may evaluate the "liberals" more positively, if they associate them to an issue position that they like (Conover and Feldman, 1981, p. 622). Thus, people's self-definition should come after their evaluation of the groups, not before. In other words, when individuals are supposed to describe themselves as "liberal" ("left-wing") or "conservative" ("right-wing") they will do it according to which one of the two groups they like better. This leads to a definition of ideological self-placement as a form of *group attachment*. Hence in this view, when an actor defines herself as e.g. a "leftist" or "liberal", she is not

[4]Notice that Conover and Feldman (1981)'s description is closer to the early conceptualization of symbolic politics proposed by Edelman (1964), while later works employing the definition of symbolic politics (see e.g. the works coauthored by David Sears cited in this chapter) ignore explicitly the self-interest related part of Edelman's argumentation.

necessarily providing information regarding her policy preferences, but rather she is voicing her membership to a specific social group[5].

A criticism that could be moved against this conceptualization of ideology is that it is too much centered on American politics, in particular on the definition of *party identification* emerging from the very early Michigan studies on American citizens' voting habits (Campbell et al., 1960). In this respect, these findings would simply reflect an *overlap* between partisan identification and ideology. Such a tendency is possibly helped by the two-party nature of the American political landscape, and thus by the fact that, for each ideological side, American voters can refer to only one party (a similar argument regarding the difference of partisanship between American and European politics can be found in Schmitt, 2009a). However, this suspect is dismissed by the empirical assessment of the independent effect of ideological and partisan identification (Holm and Robinson, 1978; Levitin and Miller, 1979). Moreover, in a rare comparative study of ideology based on qualitative evidence, Klingemann (1979) shows that the tendency to define "left" and "right" in terms of political parties or social groups is even more marked in European countries such as the Netherlands, Britain, Germany and Austria (three of which are characterized by multiparty systems), while in the US such labels seem to be more related to affective definitions, such as "good" or "bad". Although the hypothesis of a correlation between ideology and partisanship is not at all overruled, especially in the context of American politics and with an important role played by party polarization (see Levendusky, 2009b), such an interpretation is not what this literature emphasizes. The important contribution provided by this perspective is rather that ideological self-identifications can follow group-related considerations, and thus have a strong identitarian component, next to their well-documented relation to policy issues.

In spite of conceptualizing ideological self-identifications as being mainly an evaluative process, rather than cognitive, this view presents some points of overlap with the one defining ideologies as belief systems. The first, and most obvious, is that the symbols that are associated to being "liberal" and "conservative" are substantively very similar to the core values previously discussed as the root of left and right policy preferences. The authors state explicitly that «the major symbolic referents» of the labels are «the reformist and radical left for liberals, and capitalism, social control and the status quo for conservatives»

[5]Another rather important point stressed in Conover and Feldman (1981)'s study is the non-polar nature of the ideological space, i.e. the two labels would not refer to opposite poles of the same dimension, but to completely different sets of values and interest. However, the authors' findings on this respect have been questioned on the basis of further evidence taking measurement error into account (Green, 1988).

(Conover and Feldman, 1981, p. 643). Second, the authors admit a certain degree of variation in the symbolic content, that would keep the labels updated with the political conflicts of the day. As they argue, «at any point in time the major symbols of change and progress become associated with evaluations of liberals, while the symbols associated with the preservation of traditional values determine evaluations of conservatives,» and thus «liberal/conservative identifications should always reflect in symbolic terms the dominant cleavages in society» (Conover and Feldman, 1981, p. 643). This view resembles the "left-right as a super-issue" perspective adopted by much comparative literature.

These final remarks leave us with a number of summarizing conclusions regarding the nature of the left-right or liberal-conservative ideology. These conclusions are based on a review of the most important studies interested in defining the concept of ideology conducted over the past fifty years, and will serve as foundations for a definition of ideological polarization. First, ideological labels are *flexible* constructs, that are able to capture in the great majority of the cases the most relevant constellations of contrasts that ultimately define the political alternatives over which an election is disputed. This implies that, although the arguments of the debates between left and right actors in Germany in the 1970s are surely different than those in Spain or Italy in the 2000s, they should be regarded as equally representative of the political disputes taking place at their time and in their place. Second, however varying is the mix of issues, it should be possible in the most of the cases to track opposing policy preferences back to opposing worldviews, possibly regarding themes such as *equality* and *social change*. Thus, if issue preferences are based on ideological considerations at all (and not on, for instance, pure self-interest or chance), they will present some form of coherent pattern revolving around core values that are stable and comparable between different contexts. Finally, literature suggests that actors' ideological considerations derive in part from *policy-related information* and in part from *evaluations of the political objects*. Thus, while on the one hand actors' ideological perceptions of the self and the others can be expected to come from what they know about the issues, on the other hand they are argued to reflect the extent to which actors "like" or "dislike" the symbolic content that the labels convey.

It can be argued that the relative balance of the two components varies from actor to actor, and from context to context, in a similar fashion as single policy issues can be more or less salient for defining actors' perceptions of ideological distinctions. However, this is no more than speculation. In fact, I contend that for the purposes of the present study this does not make a difference. Insofar as ideological labels can be connected in a comparable way to actors' political decisions, the question whether they stem from informed beliefs on policy issues

or more primitive reactions to the labels associated to political objects is not relevant. What is more important for the purposes of this study is to find a definition of ideological polarization that accommodates all the valid descriptions of ideology that have been proposed.

In light of the topics discussed in this section, I argue that polarization over ideology should be regarded as an expression of *political conflict*. This definition is based on two considerations. First, assuming a substantively-rich view of ideology, a population of actors whose ideological views are polarized will hold dramatically different preferences over the most important policies. This will make any agreement between the actors more difficult to reach. Moreover, given the constraining nature of ideology, disagreement between the actors will be in such a case rather overarching, and therefore reduce the space of common interest between the opposing groups to virtually none. Second, assuming a group-based view of ideology, higher polarization will reflect the tendency of actors to evaluate very positively one label or group, and very negatively the other. In such a case, again, a common ground of cooperation between the two groups will be unlikely. Rather, the relationship between actors holding different ideological views in a polarized setting will be more easily characterized by feelings of enmity. To sum up, whatever is the mix of components concurring to an actor's ideological self-definition, an increase of the degree of ideological polarization should always increase conflictuality.

This definition qualifies ideological polarization, or polarization over ideological views, as something fundamentally different from, and much more important than, polarization over any single policy dimension. More specifically, whatever the definition of ideology that one would accept, actors' issue positions are expected to *reflect* their ideological preferences, rather than entering in direct competition with them. Thus, while different issue dimensions can counterbalance each other with respect of actors' disagreement, when the disagreement is ideological it should necessarily extend across all the relevant issues discussed within a certain context. This also implies that, while actors can be polarized over one or more specific policy issues without at the same time holding polarized ideological views, the opposite case will be much less likely, and should affect only the most marginal issues, those on which actors' preferences are not (yet) influenced by their ideological considerations. Thus, polarization over ideologies is an indicator of a generalized political conflict, that can extend over issues and political groups, and ultimately defines the degree of mutual exclusiveness between the actors' political preferences.

2.3 Political actors and varieties of polarization: the mass public and the parties

The third parameter of polarization discussed in this chapter aims to answer the question: *polarization between whom?* The general term "political polarization", often employed by scholars and pundits, tends to refer to two distinct phenomena, namely polarization among a generic *public*, such as a nation's citizens and polarization among more specific *political actors*. However, even this distinction seems rather fuzzy, given the potential presence of middle categories and further ramifications. In this respect, the political characteristics of the context under investigation play an important role in defining the shortlist of actors whose polarization can be an interesting topic of investigation. For instance, American scholars may be interested in identifying different patterns of polarization between political elites, partisan groups among the citizens and party activists (see Layman et al., 2006), or rather be focused on the whole mass public (see Fiorina and Abrams, 2008). Moreover, the political elites under investigation may be elected representatives at national or local institutions (e.g. state or regional), and the focus may be put on the behavior of parties as unitary actors or on individual candidates. Given the comparative perspective of this study, and the particular focus on European political systems, I identify two types of actors that are of general relevance here: the *citizens* and the *political parties*. Whereas the phenomenon under the spotlight of this study is *party polarization*, I provide in this section a brief discussion of the ways in which both groups of actors can be regarded as polarized. As I will argue, there are important differences between these two categories of actors, which imply for each of them to identify the most proper way or ways to conceptualize polarization. Thus, the aim of this review is also to show how the word "polarization" can describe a multitude of phenomena, not all of them being necessarily symptomatic of the same structure of interaction between the actors.

A first population for which social scientists are usually interested in assessing the degree of polarization is made by the common citizens. Here the phenomenon under study is often called "public opinion polarization", "mass polarization", "popular polarization", or "social polarization". Independently from the dimension under consideration, the first important characteristic of this type of polarization, compared to the one between parties, is that it involves a *large number* of actors. This point is not trivial, as it requires being explicit about what a polarized crowd means. For instance, one could define as polarized a scenario in which N people hold N different positions, but also one in which half of them hold one position and half of them hold another.

Both scenarios picture a situation of disagreement, and they both lead to potentially interesting social consequences. However, while in the first scenario the actors' preferences are dispersed, in the second they look rather entrenched. The need for a further specification does not emerge from any standard definition of "polarization as disagreement". However, it does when we realize that disagreement can take different shapes, and impact in different ways on the individuals who belong to the population. This implies that one should take into account the reasons why she wants to study mass polarization in the process of defining polarization itself. If fact, given the multiple potential implications of a polarized society, and the different perspectives taken over the years by researchers interested in studying it, mass polarization has been conceptualized and measured in different ways.

In one of the most influential works on this topic, DiMaggio et al. (1996) are focused on mass polarization as a potential trigger of *social conflict*. The authors define four different dimensions, two being functions of the distribution of issue preferences among the population, and two of the relationships between such distributions. Together, the four constructs are meant to capture the conditions under which differences among citizens' preferences are likely to lead to political mobilization. In this respect, two dimensions are focused on some properties of the population as a whole, such as the "dispersion" and the "bimodality" of people's preferences. The first simply refers to the overall disagreement or «the extent to which any two randomly selected respondents are likely to differ in their opinions» (DiMaggio et al., 1996, p. 694). With the second dimension the authors go one step further towards assessing the potential for conflict, looking for the presence of *clusters* of opinion within the population. In this logic, people's views over a topic are more polarized the more clearly we can identify the presence of two independent groups. The more the two modes are far from each other, the more the preferences of the two groups are distant, and thus the conflict to accommodate them should be of more difficult resolution (see also Fiorina and Abrams, 2008).

This type of interpretation is formally elaborated by Esteban and Ray (1994) in the so-called "identity-alienation framework". According to this conceptualization, there are two aspects that need to be considered if one wants to assess whether, and to what extent, a society is polarized: the relative *size* of the groups in which the population is clustered, and the *distance* between them. These two structural properties are supposed to affect the individuals in two complementary ways. First, a greater homogeneity among members' characteristics should increase the salience of any shared identity, and therefore the level of *identification* of a group's members with each other and with the group itself. This implies that a population divided in a few large groups, is more polarized

than a population made of many small groups. Second, a greater dissimilarity between members of different groups should increase the sense of *alienation*, or diversity, that members of one group feel when they are confronted to members of another group (Esteban and Ray, 1994, p. 830). These two properties are supposed to work interactively, as «polarization is related to the alienation that individuals and groups feel from one another, *but such alienation is fuelled by notions of within-group identity.*» (Duclos et al., 2004, p. 1737, emphasis in the original). In other words, it is only when disagreement builds around critical masses that the potential for conflict in a society is relevant. As Esteban and Ray (1994) emphasize, this interpretation of polarization can be traced back to the very first studies of modern social conflicts, such as e.g. Marx's account of the class struggle. «As the struggle proceeds, 'the whole society breaks up more and more into two hostile camps, two great, directly antagonistic classes: bourgeoisie and proletariat.' The classes *polarize*, so that they become internally more homogeneous and more and more sharply distinguished from one another in wealth and power» (Deutsch, 1971, p. 44, emphasis in the original). In other words, it is when the conflicting parts are self-conscious and self-confident enough to start a fight that the tension will rise. Thus, if the aim of studying mass polarization as a property of citizens' preferences is to assess the potential for conflict within the population, then a meaningful way to assess it is to look for the presence of clusters. This is necessary given the large number of actors considered, and therefore the need for some sort of organization of the diverging opinion among alternative camps. In this view, group size and internal homogeneity express the likelihood of organization and mobilization, while the distance between the groups expresses the likelihood that they will have reasons to be into conflict at all.

An important assumption in much literature interested in mass polarization on political issues is that the number of groups that are expected to form among the population should be two. DiMaggio et al. (1996) admit that the number of clusters could theoretically be three or more. However, the authors do not find evidence of such a set-up in their empirical investigation, and they also argue that the "contemporary rhetoric" on polarization suggests a division into two camps and no more. The latter point could, again, arouse some suspects regarding the American-centrism of such a *bimodal assumption* of issue conflict. The traditional two-party arrangement of the American political system, and therefore the presence of two main advocates within the American public discussion, could have over the centuries "flattened out" the structure of disagreement into only two possible camps. However, such a constraint in the number of actors is not present in many European multiparty systems, making this assumption quite difficult to "travel" across different political systems. While this criticism

is founded on a reasonable expectation, ideological conflict is often based on bimodal preferences in many European countries too. Traces of a dyadic structure of disagreement can be found among the core values as the basis of ideological considerations, as discussed above, as well as in the epistemic nature of the left-right itself, as argued by Bobbio (1997). Thus, given the historical importance of the left-right dialectics in the most of the European democracies, European public should be regarded as familiar with a bimodal view of the conflict too, at least in principle. Moreover, in other contexts, the issue space may rather be *multidimensional*, and therefore characterized by different combinations of actors disagreeing and agreeing with each other over different issues. Indeed, in such a case, the overall structure of conflict could be hardly regarded as dyadic. However, even in this situation, if the bundle could be disentangled and the single issue dimensions isolated from one another, it is reasonable to expect that each of them would present *two* main alternative positions. Moreover, as also argued by DiMaggio and colleagues, in a completely multidimensional set-up issues will not be correlated to each other. Thus, even in case of high polarization on each and every dimension, the constellation of oppositions that will result will be impossible to organize, and the danger of organized conflict will be still low. On the contrary, if the conflict is organized along the lines of ideological divisions, with the well-known consequences that ideological thinking has on issue constraint (Converse, 1964), then the bimodal structure will emerge again, with the clusters being localized around diverging core values. This implies that the bimodal assumption is still reasonable when the dimension of disagreement under consideration is the general ideological space, and/or when the focus is on one particular issue. The problem with multidimensionality is also discussed by the authors as they describe another dimension, which they qualify as a «necessary but insufficient condition» (DiMaggio et al., 1996, p. 697) of mass polarization, i.e. *constraint*. In their view, a strong correlation between the different dimensions of disagreement is not indicative of polarization itself, but it does provide an essential foundation for polarization to lead to social conflict. Thus, given this condition, if one's interest is for nothing more than a purely multidimensional space, then neither bimodality nor polarization will be likely to occur.

A second perspective taken by scholars studying mass polarization can be regarded as a logic consequence of the group-centered approach formalized by Esteban and Ray (1994). Essentially, rather than seeking to identify clusters in the distribution of preferences among the whole population, the groups of actors can be defined exogenously by relying on some relevant individual parameters, such as socio-demographic characteristics or other types of self-identifications. What results is basically an assessment of the degree of *correlation* between

actors' group memberships and their preferences. This conceptualization is discussed in a general way by DiMaggio et al. (1996) with their fourth dimension of polarization, i.e. *consolidation*, and in a more particular conjugation by political scientists interested in assessing the overlap between issue preferences and partisan identification, called *partisan sorting* (see Fiorina and Abrams, 2008). The general definition builds on Blau (1977)'s conceptualization of the social structure. Here individual characteristics, or *parameters* (Blau, 1974), are regarded as single dimensions on a multidimensional space where each actor has an own position, and can be *intersecting* or *consolidated*. In the first case, actors who are different from one another in respect to one parameter (e.g. age) will be similar in respect to another (i.e. race), and so forth across all the possible dimensions that are salient in defining actors' social position. The more the parameter dimensions intersect each other, the lower will be the degree of consolidation of the social structure. On the contrary, in the case of high consolidation, the structural parameters overlap to the point that differences and similarities between actors will run along the very same lines, i.e. social groups will be segregated. Assuming that people prefer to build ties with those who are more alike, it follows that in a low consolidated structure actors will have more between-group interactions than in a highly consolidated one, whereas in the latter case the most of the interactions will be instead between people belonging to the same group. The consequences of a highly consolidated society are in general negative, and lead even in this case to a higher likelihood of strong group identification and potential mobilization (Blau, 1974, 1977).

To be sure, both social parameters and issue preferences are arranged much more according to a multidimensional structure than this theory posits. For instance, people may emphasize different issues when discussing with different people, leading to an increased perception of within-group homogeneity and between-group distance, while in fact this will involve different and non-overlapping issue dimensions (see Baldassarri and Bearman, 2007). However, these insights can be applied in a much simpler way to observe whether different groups defined by some relevant individual characteristics are in fact polarized. This has been done quite extensively by political scientists, using as grouping parameter citizens' partisan identification, and leading to the concept of *party sorting*. Simply put, party sorting can be defined as the alignment between an actors' ideological position and her party identification (see Levendusky, 2009b). This phenomenon is at the center of a passionate discussion among scholars interested in American politics, often opposed to party polarization (Fiorina and Abrams, 2008; Fiorina et al., 2008) and often assimilated to it (Abramowitz and Saunders, 1998, 2008). Such a conceptual overlap does not come as a surprise, considering that even DiMaggio and colleagues men-

tion consolidation as an instance of mass polarization. On the other hand, as Levendusky (2009b, chap. 1) notes, a sorted electorate does not necessarily imply that the difference between the groups' modal preferences is too big, a condition that, as we discussed above, is rather important for defining polarization. Thus, and again, there are two important aspects that concur in defining a polarized group of actors: the difference between preferences of members of different groups, and the homogeneity among preferences of the members of the same group. The concept of partisan sorting, as implied in the most of the cases (Fiorina and Abrams, 2008), is mainly focused on the second aspect. Nevertheless, this phenomenon should be regarded as an instance of public opinion consolidation, as argued by DiMaggio and colleagues, which is in turn can be regarded as a specific case of the identification-alienation framework discussed above.

To sum up, mass polarization can be defined in an extremely general way as polarization among a *large number of actors*. Given the potential asymptotic nature of such a phenomenon, social scientists have been defining it via distributional properties. In this framework, two main features are generally considered: the degree of *dispersion*, and the presence of *clusters* within the full population. The first feature is a function of the general disagreement, as as such it defines a situation in which diverging opinions are rather sparse and disorganized. The second feature aims to capture to what extent the diverging opinions are likely to be organized into common group identities, which are likely to mobilize the more the preferences of members of different groups are distant from one another. All in all, the definition of polarization as a function of the disagreement between the political actors provided at the beginning of this chapter still holds. However, for very large numbers of actors, focusing on groups, rather than individuals, seems to be a more appropriate choice.

On the opposite end of the table where the political game is played we have the *political elites*. I use term "elites" here to refer in particular to those political actors who occupy or seek to occupy any position in the institutional structure that grants or would grant them an influence on public policy making and policy execution. Because the focus of this study is on democratic systems, the positions of political power that are discussed require, in order to be reached, some sort of legitimization deriving from an expression of the popular will through the vote. However, my definition of elites extends to both the elected officials and those who present themselves as candidates and are eligible to run for office. This includes all the competitors within the electoral arena, whether they are incumbent or not. Moreover, the definition includes individual actors, such as e.g. local or national candidates, members of parliament, council members or ministers, and collective entities, such as *political parties*. The latter is the type

of political elites that this present work focuses on. Following a very common assumption among scholars of electoral politics, I regard political parties as *unitary actors*. To be sure, this assumption does not imply that party positions on issues or ideological considerations are always expected to be punctual (i.e. to occupy a precise and recognizable geometrical point). Indeed, party positions can present some variation due to an intrinsic policy uncertainty, as already posited by Downs (1957a). In this view, parties ought not focus on a single social group (e.g. workers or managers) but rather keep their ideological view open to the interest of several different groups. Because citizens do not hold a perfect knowledge of every aspect of party policies, this strategy allows parties to diversify their appeal to reach a wider variety actors characterized by different interests, arguably within a given ideological range. Moreover, because parties are uncertain themselves about what the majority of the voters want, to avoid occupying one exact position would avoid the effort to relate each possible move to voters' reaction, reducing the costs of decision-making (Downs, 1957a, chap. 7). Thus, the assumption that parties act as unitary actors does not relate to the question whether their positions are assessed with more or less certainty, which is surely a property of their political communication, and thus to a certain extent of the similarity of the statements of their members, but also of the informational environment and the citizens' cognitive capabilities.

When it gets to assess party polarization, scholars are usually confronted with a number of issues to be considered. The first is how to assess *party positions*. Even focusing on a general ideological dimension, party preferences are much more abstract and elusive constructs than those of the ordinary people. Party positions can be captured by observing the legislative voting behavior of their members, by analyzing the content of their electoral programs, by asking to party candidates and party members themselves, by relying on experts' evaluations, or by recording citizens' perceptions. Each of these techniques focuses on a particular aspect of what makes a party position meaningful. Thus, legislators' behavior is meant to capture the concrete policy choices of party elites, which will take into account their real preferences and their tactical considerations, including their bargaining with other party members. On the other hand, party programs often include promises that are hardly kept, because of the necessary negotiations with other parties, and some times cover policy aspects that are not particularly salient to the parties, but are there because they must be mentioned somehow. Assessing party preferences via surveys can hide another set of potential problems. Most of all, while a spatial terminology is rather well understood by the most of the people, to actually translate a set of ideas to a spatial position could lead to a considerable amount of error. While much of this error can be regarded as random, people will tend in some cases to rationalize

the way in which they perceive parties to make it congruent with the way in which they perceive themselves. In other words, people could *project* their own position on the ones of other political actors, leading to a biased perception of party preferences. These effects are assumed to be weaker when using expert assessments, although such an assumption is rather arbitrary. Given the variety of pros and contras associated to each type of measure, the most proper way to assess party positions always depends on what one wants to do with that. In this respect, if one is interested in the impact of party positions (including their polarization) on the citizens, the most accurate way to assess them should take into consideration how the citizens perceive them.

A second issue that arises when trying to assess party polarization regards the *number* of parties acting in a political system. Here, the main distinction is between two-party and multiparty systems. The first case is also the simpler, and can be summarized as follows: in two-party systems, polarization corresponds to the difference between the preferences of the two parties. This theoretically ties the degree of polarization of a political system to the behavior of one single party. In the US, if the Republican party moves towards the right, the overall systemic polarization increases. McCarty et al. (2006) offer a more structured definition of polarization in the American context, that can be easily applied to every two-party system. According to their conceptualization, which appears rather similar to the one of partisan sorting discussed a few paragraphs ago, party polarization is a function of the ideological *distance* between the members of the two parties, and of the ideological *homogeneity* among members of the same party. To be sure, this definition is partially dependent on the way in which McCarty and colleagues measure party position, that is by scaling the voting behavior in Congress of the Democrat and the Republican elected representatives (see Poole and Rosenthal, 1997). Thus, in this case, the "unitary actor" assumption is turned into a variable, with the level of "unitariness" being used as an indicator of polarization. However, it is important to notice that such a way to conceptualize polarization emphasizes the *reduction of the overlapping space* between the two actors' preferences, regardless of whether this is achieved primarily through actual distancing or rather through internal homogenization. The logic is that, the smaller the common ideological ground, the fewer the chances that parties can reach a compromise. This view fits with the general definition, according to which a highly polarized two-party system is nothing more than a scenario where the preferences of two actors are mutually exclusive.

As the number of parties increases, so does the number of ways in which polarization can be conceived. In a simplistic way, multiparty systems can be regarded as a "standard" population of actors with more than two elements.

Thus, in theory, the same concepts that have been discussed in regard to mass polarization should apply to this case too. However, a very large population, such as the one represented by the citizens of a country, is still different from a middle-sized population. More specifically, in a middle-sized population the difference among the actors' *weight* becomes more important than in a large population. To give an example, let us imagine that we have a population of four people, two adults and two children, who need to decide about what to do on a Sunday afternoon. If one of the two grown-ups and one of the two children want to go to the cinema, and the other two want to go to the park, the group may engage in a discussion, where the supporters of one position will try to convince the supporters of the other position about doing what they prefer, and the other way round. However, if the two adults want to go to the cinema, and the two children want to go to the park, it is much more likely that the group will end up at the cinema, following the two adults' will. Why so? Because in that particular group, the two adults have more resources than the two children, or more in general they have more *power*. For instance, they can drive a car, while the children can not. They have money to pay for the cinema, while the children do not. In other words, in the collective bargaining process within our group of four, the preferences of two grown-ups have a higher weight. However, in a population of one thousand people, the relations of power would be set in a different way. Even imagining a situation where five hundred adults and five hundred children are entrenched into two opposite positions, in such a big population it will be the group's *size* that determines the relevance of a position. This is the rationale behind the importance of identification in Esteban and Ray (1994)'s work, and one of the reasons to regard bimodality as a superior indicator of polarization than a measure of dispersion in DiMaggio et al. (1996)'s study.

All in all, the importance of the actors' weights emerges in middle-sized populations, such as multiparty systems, while it is irrelevant in two-party systems and it becomes a property of the subgroups in very large populations. That being said, scholars who studied polarization in multiparty systems over the years did so moved by different normative interests. This in turn led them to emphasize different aspects of the phenomenon, and to measure it accordingly. In general, one can identify three ways in which polarization has been conceptualized: as a function of the *range* of preferences within the population, as a function of the degree of *extremity* of the actors' preferences, or as a function of the *isolation* of the actors from one another. The first approach seeks to assess the portion of ideological space that is covered by the population of parties. Here polarization increases the more the range covered by the party system becomes large. This view builds on Sartori (1976)'s concept of *space elasticity*,

and is based on one main assumption: that each party "controls", factually or potentially, a certain range of ideological or policy space, and therefore the area captured within the range of the party system is expected to be completely covered by the parties. Scholars who adopt this view of polarization are generally interested in assessing how diversified is the ideological or policy supply that voters face at an election (e.g. Wessels and Schmitt, 2008). Thus, the aspect of polarization that is emphasized in this view is how *diverse* the actors' positions can be. Of course, this way to assess party polarization considers all the parties to be equally important, a property that, as we discussed above, is not desirable given the type of population considered. This is especially problematic in a population such as multiparty systems, where some very small parties can take particularly extreme positions, and precisely for their extremity be systematically ignored in case of coalition bargaining or other practices of power-sharing where small parties can play a role. In such a case, using a range measure the party system may end up looking extremely polarized, while in fact the main competition is fought among moderate parties. A strategy adopted in some cases to solve this issue is to establish a rule to select only the *relevant parties* that is based on qualitative criteria. For instance, a quite popular criteria is proposed by Sartori and qualifies as relevant those parties that are able to enter coalitions and/or to influence the other parties' behavior thanks to their blackmail potential (see Sartori, 1976, p. 131).

Other strategies to assess polarization in multiparty systems generally take into account party relevance by relying on the vote share that parties have obtained at a certain election (as a proxy of their importance among the voters), or the share of seats that they hold at the parliament (as a proxy of their legislative strength), or possibly both. The first type of weight is the most comparable across political systems, as it is not directly sensitive to the specific type of electoral rule used to convert votes into seats, while the second is often used when comparisons are made between different elections in the same political system. In this framework, the most common way to conceive polarization is as a function of actors' *extremity* on a given dimension. The logic here is straightforward: a party system should be regarded as more polarized the more the relevant parties take opposite extreme positions. Hence, polarization here is conceptualized as a *weighted standard deviation*. Differently from the standard measure of dispersion that can be applied to large populations of actors, as discussed earlier in this section, the weighted standard deviation applied to middle-sized populations has the property to capture systemic tendencies towards bimodality, and reaches the theoretical maximum when the population consists in two equally sizable groups (i.e. clusters of parties or single parties) positioned at the opposite extremities of the dimension under consideration. In other words, this

approach takes into account both the range of the overall distribution of actors, and the relative positioning of the most important actors. If the range is wide, but the most heavily-weighting actors are concentrated around the center, the distribution of opinions is to be considered *dispersed*, rather than polarized. In a population arranged in this way there may be some actors having extreme preferences, but the most important ones, i.e. the actors with a greater decisional power, will be more likely to agree with each other. To be sure, this approach requires to define what is the *center*, and what does a central position mean. Conceptualizing polarization as a function of the actors' extremity relies more or less implicitly on the assumption that the center does not represent a pole itself, but rather a *compromise* position between the poles. In other words, the preferences of an actor positioned at the center are assumed not to be *alternative* to those of the actors on the left and on the right, but rather to include *both*. This view masks again a "dyadic" concept of politics (see e.g. Bobbio, 1997, chap. 1), where the structure of disagreement is essentially bipolar, and clashes to a certain extent with Sartori's conceptualization, according to which polarization in multiparty systems would actually be a consequence of *multipolar disagreement*, more specifically of bilateral oppositions to a strong center (Sartori, 1976, p. 134). In fact, Hazan (1995) shows that systems where center parties are strong may still be characterized by high polarization, but only when this implies that moderate parties are very small (and thus the the relevant positions are only around the center and the extreme poles) or that they move towards the extremes. However, strong center parties do not directly imply that the center is mutually-exclusive with the other polar positions. Moreover, in some political systems center parties may actually represent one of the two poles (such as e.g. the Italian First Republic, where the two main competing parties were one on the center and one on the left). This suggests that the center, conceived as the compromise position, is to be assessed empirically, rather than arbitrarily. In this respect, party weights are also often used to obtain the weighted mean among all parties' positions, and thus empirically determine the position where the actors' preferences converge. All in all, this type of approach to conceptualize and measure party polarization is based on reasonable assumptions regarding which type of arrangement is to be regarded indicative of a high degree of disagreement, and it is flexible enough to extend to different types of middle-sized populations (in fact it can also be applied to two-party systems, becoming equivalent to a simple measure of distance between the two parties). For these reasons, it is by far the most widely used method by scholars interested in assessing party polarization in a comparative perspective (e.g. Dalton, 2008; Hazan, 1995; Lachat, 2008; Sigelman and Yough, 1978; Taylor and Herman, 1971; van der Eijk et al., 2005, See Alvarez and Nagler (2004)

for a similar measure where also citizens' dispersion is taken into account). A third approach to conceive polarization in multiparty systems views the phenomenon as a function of the relative *isolation* of the actors from one another. This approach is conceptually very close to Esteban and Ray (1994) framework, as it is based on assessing *pairwise distances* between parties, weighted somehow by their size. While this perspective seems to be rather different from the one that sees polarization as a function of parties' extremity, measures obtained using formulas derived by these methods end up returning very similar values. This is mainly the case because, in middle-sized populations such as multiparty systems, an actor's extremity is in the most of the cases tantamount to its isolation. Nevertheless, measures of polarization derived from pairwise distances between parties appear some times in the literature (see Gross and Sigelman, 1984; Indridason, 2011; Rehm and Reilly, 2010).

To sum up, in this section I identified two different populations of actors that are relevant for studying political polarization in a comparative perspective. One population, i.e. the mass public, is generally characterized by a large number of actors. In this case, polarization is considered as a function of the existence of big and homogeneous groups that hold preferences that are very different from one another. A second population, i.e. the political parties, generally consists in middle-sized populations, and can consist in one particular case in only two actors. For this types of population, a general strategy to assess the degree of polarization is to take in to account the actors' distribution, but also their relative importance within the population. All in all, we have all the components that we need to conceptualize and possibly derive empirically polarization over different types of populations and over dimensions of smaller or greater level of generality. In the next chapter these components will be eventually assembled into a measure of ideological polarization of party systems.

Chapter 3

Measuring Party Polarization

In the previous chapter I discussed some theoretical issues related to polarization, namely the meaning of a position in a spatial language, the concept of ideology and ideological disagreement, and how can different populations be regarded as polarized. While theoretical specifications are always important when the aim is to work with "fuzzy" concepts, polarization remains in fact a genuinely empirical phenomenon. Thus, in this chapter I provide a discussion over measurement issues, with the aim to identify a valid way to assess polarization empirically and to apply it to party ideological positions in a wide array of countries.

3.1 Party position and importance

The discussion in the previous chapter highlights the relevance of two elements that concur in defining the degree of polarization in a multiparty system. One is the parties' *positions*, and the other is their relative *importance*. While the first element is what really determines polarization, the second has to be taken into account in case polarization is to be assessed on a middle-sized population, where shares of power across individuals indicate whose preferences are most likely to be followed. If the most important parties agree, the presence of some small parties taking extreme positions will not make a system polarized. In such a case, the advocates of the most extreme solutions may be vocal in expressing their dissent, but they will be most likely given scarce attention by the main actors in the bargain. On the other hand, if the most important parties are standing at the opposite extremes of an issue space, then to reach an agreement at all will be less likely, even though standing between them there could be some small parties taking moderate stands. To be sure, this does not mean

that a measure of polarization that takes into account party importance can not be applied to two-party systems as well. In this type of systems, party importance is simply assumed to be equal among both parties. However, to attribute importance weights to parties when assessing polarization can only *increase* the generalizability of the measure, rather than a decrease it. Thus, a desirable property for a measure of polarization that is comparable across different political systems implies that it takes into account both party positions and their relative weight.

Party positions can be measured at different levels. They can be assessed by party programs, by what their members say or by their legislative behavior. In this work I rely exclusively on *voters' perceptions* of party ideological stands. This choice is justified by two reasons. First, perceptions of party positions among the citizens are the closest level of measurement to the mass public's decisions and behaviors. Even if we assume that parties *do* hold identifiable ideological positions, an assumption that Downs himself had problems making (see Downs, 1957a, chap. 7), it would be much harder to postulate that they can communicate them perfectly to the citizens. As I discussed in the previous section, ideological arguments are based on very abstract concepts, that require a certain degree of sophistication to be accurately captured. Yet the vast majority of citizens are able to position the parties on a given ideological scale. This implies that the political discourse, as captured and reported by the media or emerging from everyday talk to other people, allows the citizens to have a more or less accurate idea of how parties are arranged ideologically. To be sure, the picture that voters have in their mind may not correspond exactly to the actual course of action that party members follow when they make legislative choices or when they participate to public debates. On the other hand, those courses of action are themselves imperfect representations of parties' actual preferences, as they are influenced by strategic considerations and several other factors that only emerge in the very contingencies when choices are made. There are several "true positions" that parties can be attributed, and all of them have equal right to be regarded as valid expressions of their preferences. When scholars have to assess party behavior, they usually rely on the positions that are taken within the context of interaction that the research is focused on. As this work focuses on the interaction between parties and citizens, the most accurate estimate of party preferences is therefore how citizens themselves perceive those preferences to be.

A second reason to use voters' perceptions to assess party positions is that this measure does not require any assumption regarding the substantive content of the left-right. As I discussed in the previous chapter, ideological considerations can be based on rather complex set of policy preferences, as well as on

evaluations of the political objects. The balance between these elements may vary from person to person, and from context to context. While the first source of variation can be assumed to be randomly distributed around some stable "pillars" given by parties' historical identities, the second depends on context-specific factors that are there for all the citizens of a given country at the time of a given election. Because party polarization is a contextual property, to rely on measures of party positions that capture only some of the aspects of ideology (such as e.g. economic policy preferences in party programs) may systematically bias the assessment of polarization in some countries more than in others. Thus, citizens' perceptions of party positions also help reducing the bias given by the different balance of cognitive and evaluative components within the ideological narrative of a given country, and by the different mix of policies that are relevant in defining ideological differences.

To observe party positions, respondents to public opinion surveys are generally given batteries of questions where they are asked to place themselves and the relevant parties on a left-right scale. The type of scale varies from five or seven-point, with every category being labeled (most common in US surveys) to ten or eleven-point scales, where only the extreme "left" and "right" categories are labeled. To give an example, the surveys conducted within European Election Studies ask the following type of question to their respondents[1]:

> *In political matters people talk of "the left" and "the right". What is your position? Please indicate your views using any number on a 10-point-scale. On this scale, where 1 means "left" and 10 means "right," which number best describes your position? You may use any number between 1 and 10 to specify your views.*
>
> *And about where would you place the following parties on this scale?*

To obtain unique election-level assessments of party positions a measure of central tendency is applied to such responses. The resulting positions are estimates of how the public perceives parties to be placed on the left-right.

The second element commonly used to assess party polarization in multiparty systems is a set of weights that capture parties' relative importance at a certain election. As I discussed in the previous chapter, there are two types of weights that are generally used by scholars. One is the share of seats held by a party at the (National or European) parliament, and the other is the share of valid votes obtained at a certain election, usually the same under investigation

[1]Question wording taken from the 1999 questionnaire, reported in van der Eijk et al. (2002).

or the previous one. Here, too, the best choice strongly depends on the aims of the researcher and the type of research design. For cross-country comparative research, the vote shares are generally preferred to the seat shares, as the former are less influenced by national-specific rules to convert votes into seats. To be sure, a source of indirect influence of the electoral law is the one that leads voters to behave strategically, for instance by concentrating on bigger parties in order not to waste their vote in countries ruled by majoritarian electoral systems (see Blais and Carty, 1991). However, vote shares are surely less influenced by electoral rules than seat shares, and thus they are still to be regarded as more accurate pictures of parties' importance. A further criticism that could be moved against this type of weight is that party vote shares are known to the voters only after the election, and therefore they should not be used to compute measures that are introduced in statistical models aimed to predict people's behavior at the time of the election. I argue that this problem is indeed relevant when the aim is to study electoral contexts where opinion polls are not as widely used and reported by the media as they have been for the last decades in modern democracies. Fortunately, this study is focused on a historical time and a set of countries where quite accurate information regarding parties' likely success at the election are widely known to the public opinion before the election.

In this work, I will use vote shares when I analyze comparative data in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, and a mix between vote and seat shares when I use single-country data from the Netherlands in Chapter 6. The latter choice is justified by the full proportionality of the Dutch electoral system, and of course by the fact that parties are observed across time within the same country. Thus, in that case I will build party weights using both the vote shares obtained at the present election observed, and the seat shares held by the parties at the moment of the election, i.e. the weights produced by the previous electoral verdict. This will allow me to assess both the legislative importance of a party, and its popularity among the public when the election is held.

3.2 Two measures of polarization

In Chapter 2 I identify two types of measure in the literature that take into account both party positions and their relative importance. One emphasizes parties' extremity, and therefore is assessed by means of a measure of dispersion such as the standard deviation. The other emphasizes parties' distance, or alienation, from one another, and thus it is assessed by calculating pairwise distances between parties. In this section I apply these two concepts to the empirical reality by presenting two different indices to measure polarization, and

discussing their strengths and potential shortcomings.[2]

Polarization indices based on measures of party dispersion are very common in the literature. They are all based on the same procedure, that can be summarized in three steps. The first consists in identifying the center, the second in measuring party absolute distances from it, and the third in normalizing the index by weighting the distances and, possibly, applying some scaling parameter. In this part I discuss the measure proposed by van der Eijk et al. (2005), that I will also use for the empirical analyses conducted in the following chapters. The index (from now on *vdE*) maintains all the properties of other dispersion-based measures of polarization (see Dalton, 2008; Hazan, 1995; Taylor and Herman, 1971), but in addition it has the advantage of being scaled using a theoretical maximum, i.e. the degree of polarization measured in a system where two equally strong parties stand at the opposite extremes of the scale used to assess party positions. The resulting measure is a value included between zero and one, that can be directly interpreted keeping in mind that zero means that all the parties hold the same position, and one indicates the highest possible degree of polarization. This is a particularly desirable property when the index is computed on different data sources, that may employ different scales to measure party positions. However, even when scales are the same, the vdE index represent a rather easy-to-interpret measure of party polarization, and therefore it is preferred to other measures that do not apply any scaling parameter. For a population of N parties, the index is computed using the following formula:

$$\text{Pol}_{(vdE)} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N} \mid \overline{x} - x_i \mid w_i}{\text{Pmax}}, \tag{3.1}$$

where $\overline{x}$ is the ideological center of the party system, calculated as the weighted mean of each party i's position x, w are the weights attached to the parties, and *Pmax* is the theoretical maximum value of the index. Here each party's extremity is assessed using absolute distances from the center, rather than squared

[2] I exclude from the discussion in this chapter the range-based measures of polarization, i.e. those measures that assess polarization as a function of the absolute distance between the two parties (usually the two most extremes or the two biggest in a party system). The main reason for this choice is that the measure does not take into account party importance, and therefore can lead to some wrong assessments of polarization in situations where, for instance, two very small parties are positioned at the opposite extremes of the ideological space, but the most important parties are actually moderate. This problem affecting range-based measures of polarization is tackled by Sartori (1976), who suggests a counting rule to select relevant parties. However, the measure remains imprecise if compared with others using some sort of party-weighting. In this sense, dispersion-based measures of polarization can be regarded as a generalization of range-based measures, as they also regard polarization as a function of parties' extremity, but take into account also whether parties are more or less important.

distances (as e.g. in Hazan, 1995), a choice that would make the measure look more like a variance than a standard deviation. This makes the distribution of the index much less skewed, and therefore more symmetric, than in case squared distances were used. Moreover the weights are used twice, once to compute $\overline{x}$, and once to assign each party its degree of importance in contributing to the overall system polarization. For a population of N parties, $\overline{x}$, namely the center of the party system, is obtained via the following formula:

$$\overline{x} = \sum_{i=1}^{N} x_i w_i. \tag{3.2}$$

The choice of using weights to determine the center keeps us from observing degrees of polarization that are artificially inflated when the ideological arrangement of the party system is unbalanced, for instance due to the presence of one very strong party placed on the left or the right. The implicit assumption here is that party weights also contribute in determining the center, i.e. the likely compromise position reached by the parties. This is rather intuitive if we consider that, in a process of negotiation, stronger actors are generally expected to concede less than weaker actors, and therefore be willing to deviate within a smaller range from their ideal point. To give an example of how the index works, a measure of polarization is estimated on the European Election data used for the empirical analyses in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. The data come from four waves of the European Election Study collected after the elections for the European parliament in 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009 (see, respectively, Schmitt et al., 1996; van der Eijk et al., 2002; Schmitt et al., 2009; van Egmond et al., 2010). These waves have been chosen because they contain all the variables needed in this study, and keep a common format of measurement, as we shall see in the following chapters. The total number of elections considered here is 82. At each wave, left-right positions of the relevant parties running for the election in each country have been measured.[3] In the waves of 1994, 1999 and 2004, party positions are observed on a ten-point scale going from 1 to 10, while in 2009 they are observed on an eleven-point scale going from 0 to 10. However, for this study the observations coming from the latter wave have been rescaled to go from 1 to 10 as well.[4] The weights are given by the vote shares obtained by the parties at the elections under investigation, and are normalized to sum up to the unit given the parties observed in each country.

[3] A complete list of countries, parties and variables used from the EES study can be found in Appendix B

[4] On a scale from 1 to 10, Pmax = 4.5.

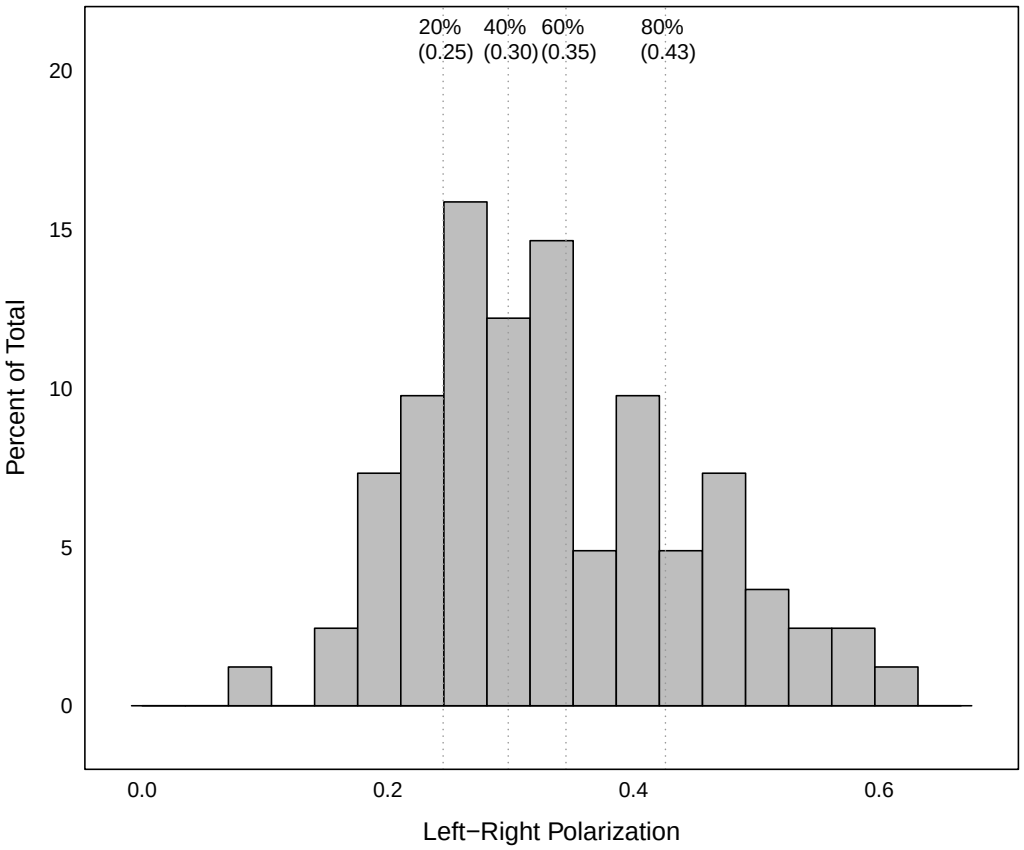

Figure 3.1: Distribution of party system polarization (van der Eijk et al. (2005)'s index) in Europe, 1994-2009. Data: EES.

Figure 3.1 is a simple histogram of the values of the indices measured for these elections. As the figure shows, 60% of the observations fall within a range between 0.25 and 0.43, i.e. a rather low degree of polarization given the theoretical maximum being set at 1. This means that the most of the EU countries in the period of time considered are not even halfway to the theorized maximum level of polarization. Moreover, even the most polarized cases have values around 0.6, a rather high level but still quite far from the maximum. The mean of the distribution is about 0.33, with a standard deviation of 0.11, and the median is of 0.32. This indicates that the index is distributed quite symmetrically. To be sure, the distribution in Figure 3.1 does no look exactly as normal, but we should take into account that the histogram is based on eighty-two cases only, where there seem to be no outliers.

The second type of polarization index examined in this chapter is based on the measurement of pairwise distances between parties. Such a measure is much less common in the literature, and this is in part due to "logistical" reasons. In fact, the computation and the interpretation of this type of indices are slightly more complex and less intuitive than for the dispersion-based ones. However, measures of polarization based on parties' alienation from one another are becoming increasingly popular among political scientists in recent years, due to the rediscovery of Esteban and Ray (1994) work. As the most commonly used measure of this type, the Esteban & Ray (from now on *E&R*) index has been applied to party ideological positions in political studies focused on different questions, going from representation to legislative behavior (Indridason, 2011; Oosterwaal and Torenvlied, 2010; Rehm and Reilly, 2010; Schneider, 2006). The reason why this index is becoming increasingly popular among political scientists lies in the conceptual framework developed by Esteban and Ray around its operational form. Differently from other studies interested in party polarization, which often refer to it as a synonym of party *differentiation*, works that employ the E&R index tend to frame polarization quite explicitly as an instance of party *conflict*. This is a consequence of the fact that the index has been developed as an alternative to more common measures of fractionalization or inequality within a stream of research focused on the conflict potential of economic and ethnic differences (Duclos et al., 2004; Esteban and Ray, 1999, 2011; Esteban et al., 2012; Esteban and Schneider, 2008; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2005; Østby, 2008). To mark the distinctiveness of polarization from conceptually-similar phenomena, the main message delivered by these studies follows the mantra heard more in detail in the previous chapter: in a society, polarization is related to the *clusterization* of individuals into groups. The set of theoretical assumptions that provide the structure for this conceptualization is called "identification-alienation framework" (Duclos et al., 2004). When a

population of actors is divided into a small number of large groups, which are highly homogeneous and very different (or distant) from each other on a given relevant dimension (e.g. economic resources, ethnicity, ideology), the sense of group-identity of the group members will be accentuated, together with their perception of difference from the members of other groups. In such a situation, conflict is more likely to happen. In other words, following a similar view to DiMaggio et al. (1996), scholars who study polarization under this perspective are interested in two things: one is conflict, and the other is the set of distributional properties that are likely to produce it.

The E&R index of polarization is based on four axioms derived from the identification-alienation framework.[5] The first three summarize the necessary elements for the index to follow the theoretical assumptions: global divergence from the center and local convergence of the groups both increase the level of polarization. Thus, just as in the case of the vdE index, the ideal maximum level of the E&R index is empirically represented by two equally-sized groups placed at the two extremes of the distribution. The fourth axiom states that the disappearance of very small extreme parties should not decrease the level of polarization. By the authors' admission, this axiom is less restrictive than the previous three. When the index is used to measure party system polarization, the groups are replaced by the parties. For a population of N parties, the E&R index is obtained through the following formula:[6]

$$\text{Pol}_{(E\&R)} = K \sum_{i=1}^{N} \sum_{j=1}^{N} w_i^{1+\alpha} w_j \mid x_i - x_j \mid, \tag{3.3}$$

where w is the relative size of each party i, x refers to the position of the parties on the ideological dimension, α is the parameter that sets the degree of sensitivity of the index to the group size, i.e. the level of identification, and K is an optional scaling parameter.[7] The index' focus on pairwise distances is

[5] For a formalization of the axioms and the properties of the index, see Esteban and Ray (1994).

[6] Note that the formula reported in Esteban and Ray (1994) uses a slightly different notation. However, to make it directly comparable to the one of the vdE index reported above, I unified the notation by identifying the same parameters with the same symbols.

[7] This parameter is a constant, and does not influence the relative ordering of the cases on which the measure is applied. Thus, its presence in the equation is not necessary, and accordingly some other publications do not report it. However, in the empirical analyses conducted in this chapter, I scale the E&R index to go from 0 to 1 and therefore be directly comparable with the vdE index. Hence, I set the scaling parameter to be

$$K = \frac{1}{\text{Pmax}} \tag{3.4}$$

made clear by the presence of the two summation operators, which loop around each pair of parties and produce N party-level sub-measures. These are made by three components: the distance of party j from party i, j's size, and i's size. In this way, the distance between two small parties (as e.g. two opposite radical niche parties) will contribute less to the overall polarization than the distance between two big parties. This property is measured essentially in the same way as in the vdE index. Finally, an additional feature of the E&R index is given by the parameter α, which is a constant used to further weigh i's size, w_i. This parameter represents the emphasis put on the identification component when assessing the overall polarization, i.e. how much being a member of a strong group is expected to make the distance from other groups salient to the eyes of an actor.

The fourth axiom postulated by Esteban & Ray (1994) constrains α in a range between 1 and 1.6. As mentioned above, the function of this axiom is to state the non-importance of small groups, that with a great value of α will end up giving a negligible contribution to the index. Moreover, according to the authors, a value bigger than zero of the parameter α also differentiates substantially the E&R polarization index from measures of inequality of the Gini type. In other words, the fourth axiom is supposed to be only relevant insofar as the measure of polarization aims to differ from the one of inequality precisely for its strong emphasis on the clusterization of the actors. Although the identity component is an important element of the Esteban and Ray (1994)'s conceptualization, its reliance on the parameter α has been criticized for the cases when the index is applied to party systems. In this context, the most relevant problem is that higher values of α make the index increasingly more correlated to the *number of parties* selected to assess polarization in a system (Maoz and Somer-Topcu, 2010). This problem is not trivial, given the conceptual distinction between these two properties of the political context, and the independence of their influence on the mass public (Dalton 2008).

The latter point highlights an issue that arises when scholars apply the E&R index to party systems, namely that the index is originally conceived to be applied on *groups of actors*, while in fact parties acting in party systems are *individual actors*. In their discussion, Esteban and Ray describe a situation in which many small groups merge into two large groups as an instance of increasing polarization (Esteban and Ray, 1994, p. 824-825). This makes sense if we consider that, in its original formulation, the E&R index is applied to *continuous distributions*, where clusters are defined by arbitrary cut points. In such a case, the

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where *Pmax* is defined in the same way as for the vdE index, although here it depends on the value of α.

presence of big groups indicates an agglomeration of individuals around some restricted areas of the distribution, which substantively denote specific common characteristics. For this reason, group sizes are used as proxies for measuring groups' *homogeneity*, that is what ultimately stimulates actors' group identity in the identification-alienation framework. However, even assuming that parties represent groups of voters, the same logic can not be applied when the index is used to assess polarization in multiparty systems, for two reasons. One is that the implicit assumption regarding the nature of group membership made by Esteban and Ray does not apply for party supporters or partisans. What the authors presume is that group membership is a consequence of the actors' position on the observed dimension. In other words, individual actors do not move in order to join a group, but they find themselves in a group because of their position, which is assumed to be exogenous.[8] Given this premise, it follows that the cut points defining empirically the groups are fixed, and the actors are expected to move across them. Hence, both the number of groups and their location is endogenous to the distribution of the actors. On the other hand, when we compare degrees of polarization among different party systems using vote shares as weights, we allow both the number of groups and their position to change for reasons that are not exclusively a function on the distribution of the voters. For instance, the presence of only two parties does not necessarily mean that voters are clustered around two ideological poles, but it could also be due to the fact that the electoral system is highly disproportional, and the citizens can only choose meaningfully among the two most important parties. This point is related to a second reason why applying the E&R index to party system is problematic, namely that parties *do not merge by proximity*. Differently from the process of clusterization conceptualized by Esteban and Ray, two parties that get very close to each other do not turn into one single party. The independence between parties' position and their identity is what sets the bound between the degree of polarization in a party system and the number of parties. However, when applied to parties as they were groups, the E&R index fails to account for this bound, because it assumes that the number of clusters is a property of the distribution, while in fact it just refers to the size of the population. To be sure, studies on spatial competition argue from the very beginning that the number of parties in a system and the degree of their dispersion are correlated (Cox,

[8] A clear example is represented by *income polarization*, that is what Esteban & Ray are focused on in the most of their studies. Here it appears obvious that people do not choose their income because they want to become members of a certain group. On the contrary, when exogenous economic processes that determine income distributions favor the formation of big clusters of individuals with the same income, the rise of a sense of class identity among actors standing on the same segment is more likely to occur.

1990; Downs, 1957a). Yet a correlation between two phenomena is different from a conceptualization where one phenomenon is a constituent part of the other. That is to say, although the data generating processes that lead to the formation in a system of a certain number of parties on the one hand, and their relative positioning on the other, may be in part influenced by the same factors, the logic behind the E&R index is that the process is one for both.

3.3 Comparing the vdE and the E&R indices

While the theoretical issues tackled in the previous section are important in order to understand the points of convergence and divergence in the foundations upon which the E&R and the van der Eijk et al. (2005)'s index are built, empirically the two measures can perform in a very similar way. To provide a first-hand inspection of this, Figure 3.2 shows the degree of polarization among EU political systems from 1994 to 2009 as measured by the two indices. The figure combines information regarding both the distributions of the indices, in the legend above each level-plot, and the range of values where every single observation falls. The five degrees of gray represent five quintiles of each distribution, with brighter colors indicating lower polarization, and darker colors higher polarization.

The plot atthe top is based on the same values plotted in Figure 3.1, but it goes in closer detail in respect to the single political systems. The other two plots show two versions of the E&R index, the one at the center calculated with α equal to 0 (called from now on *E&R 0*), and the one at the bottom with α equal to 1.3 (called from now on *E&R 1.3*). The two values of α have been chosen to provide a clear picture of the effect of the parameter. While the fourth axiom postulated by Esteban and Ray suggests a value of α between 1 and 1.6, as discussed in the previous section, the authors themselves concede it not be too prescriptive. In fact, the index does not lose its value as a valid measure of polarization based on pairwise distances between parties when α is equal to 0. The only thing that is missing in the latter case is the strong emphasis on the identification component, which, as we have seen above, is rather problematic when the index is applied to party systems. However, to show how the index performs at full power, the plot at the bottom draws the E&R measure across political systems when α equals to 1.3. This value is exactly in the middle of the range proposed by Esteban and Ray, and therefore it is meant to represent a 'median' performance of the index.[9].

[9]The index is scaled from 0 to 1 in both examples, and therefore it is directly comparable

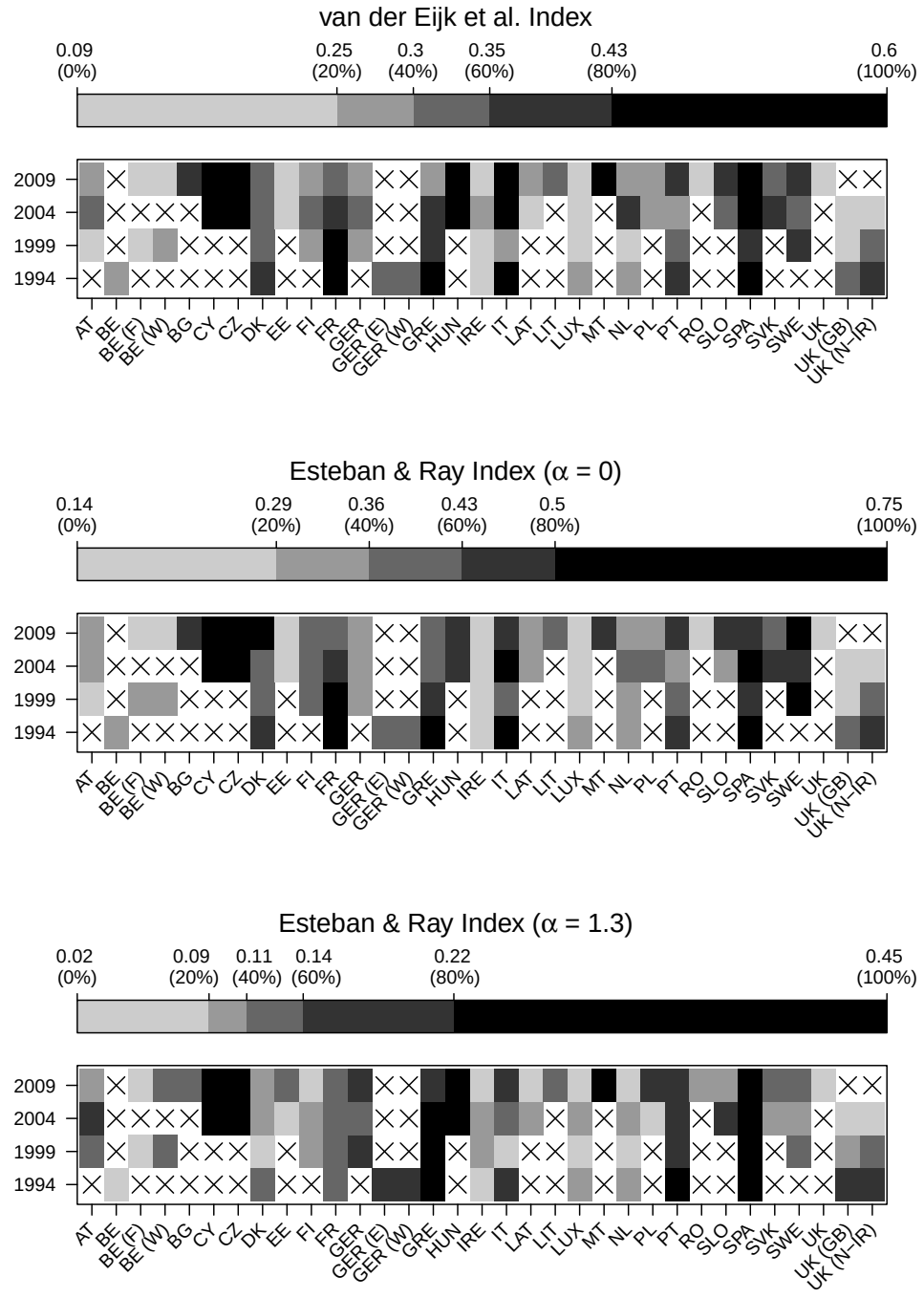

Figure 3.2: Three measures of polarization in Europe, 1994-2009. Data: EES.

The first thing to be noted from Figure 3.2 comes from the legends next to each of the three plots. The legends are in fact the necessary key for interpreting the values displayed in the level charts. While different cases within the same plot are directly comparable to each other, cases coming from different figures can be compared to one another only keeping in mind that they are on different scales. To understand such scales is thus the first step in the interpretation of the plots. While the vdE and the E&R 0 measures are both distributed quite symmetrically, the E&R 1.3 measure looks dramatically skewed on the right. While the bottom 80% of the observations fall within a range of polarization going from 0.02 to 0.22, the remaining 20% at the top is spread over an even larger range, from 0.22 to 0.45. This is due to the exponentiation of the weight w_i for the parameter α repeated for each party, as visible in the formula discussed in the previous section, that ends up 'stretching' the distribution as polarization increases.

However, ignoring the relative distributions, when it gets to characterize political systems by their degree of party polarization the three indices offer very similar pictures. Some countries, such as Cyprus, Czech Republic, to some extent Hungary, Italy and Malta, and for some years Spain and Greece, appear always as polarized, regardless the index that has been employed to calculate it. A similar story applies for some countries characterized by low degrees of polarization, such as Ireland, Luxembourg, Estonia and, in more recent years, the UK. Even some within-country patterns remain relatively untouched, as for instance the process of depolarization visible in the UK and in Greece. However, for some political systems Figure 3.2 shows some clear differences between the indices, in particular between the E&R 1.3 one and the other two. This is for example the case in France, where the system looks much more polarized when using the vdE and the E&R 0 indices, or Germany, where the E&R 1.3 shows a relatively high and persistent polarization that seems instead to be decreasing when measured with the other two indices. Finally, in some cases, within-country patterns reverse when going from one index to another, such as in Slovenia, Slovakia, and to a certain extent Italy, where the vdE and the E&R 0 indices agree much more with each other than they do with the E&R 1.3 measure. All in all, Figure 3.2 shows an overall resemblance among the stories told by the two types of measure, which is somehow reduced the more the parameter α in the E&R index grows.

Moving to a more substantive interpretation of what is shown in the figure, the vast majority of the most polarized political systems in the EU is found

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with the vdE measure. Given the formula reported in the previous section, for a 1–10 scale Pmax equals 4.5 when $\alpha = 0$, and 1.827568 when $\alpha = 1.3$.

among Southern European and Central-Eastern European countries. In the first group Cyprus, Malta, Spain, Italy, and despite a decreasing trend, France and Greece, all place themselves in the most of the years within the two highest polarized quintiles of the distributions for both the vdE and the E&R 0 indices. Portugal shows a more irregular pattern, although its degree of polarization is rather high in the most recent observation. Two observations deviating from apparent trends are Greece in 2009, and Italy in 1999. Interestingly, while Greece shows a trend of depolarization during the time span observed, the recent rise of ideologically radical parties on the left and on the right, such as SYRIZA and Golden Dawn, could probably be reflecting a brand new process of re-polarization following the crisis in the Eurozone. Moving to the Central-Eastern European systems, Hungary and Czech Republic surely own the most polarized political systems, though Bulgaria and Slovenia seem to be catching up. Finally, among Northern European countries, only Sweden and, in less recent times, Denmark score relatively high in polarization.

A more direct comparison between the two measures is shown in Figure 3.3. What the figure shows is equivalent to a correlation matrix between the three indices, but the graphic visualization allows to identify the possible presence of outliers (which could artificially inflate the measure of correlation between the indices) and, in general, to assess to what extent the relationship between each pair of measures is to be regarded as linear. The three panels plot pairwise associations between the vdE, the E&R 0 and the E&R 1.3 indices. The diagonal line in each plot does not represent an empirical regression line, but it is there to provide a benchmark for evaluating the association between the indices. The ranges of the plots always span from 0 to 1, i.e. from the minimum to the maximum possible values of the indices, and thus the figure also allows to directly compare the variances of the measures. Finally, values of the Pearson's *r* correlation index are reported within each panel.

The most evident thing shown in Figure 3.3 is the strong, almost-perfect correlation between the vdE and the E&R 0 measures. While the E&R 0 index returns in general higher values, given the theoretical minimum and maximum of the distributions, the cloud of points in the upper panel of the figure runs parallel to the diagonal line. Substantively, this means that the vdE and the E&R 0 indices measure the same thing. However, the distributions become much more spread when we correlate the two measures with the E&R 1.3 index. Interestingly, the vdE is even *more* correlated with the E&R 1.3 index than the E&R 0 one. This is due to the smaller variance of the vdE index in respect to the E&R 0 one, which, due to its position at the denominator in the formula of the

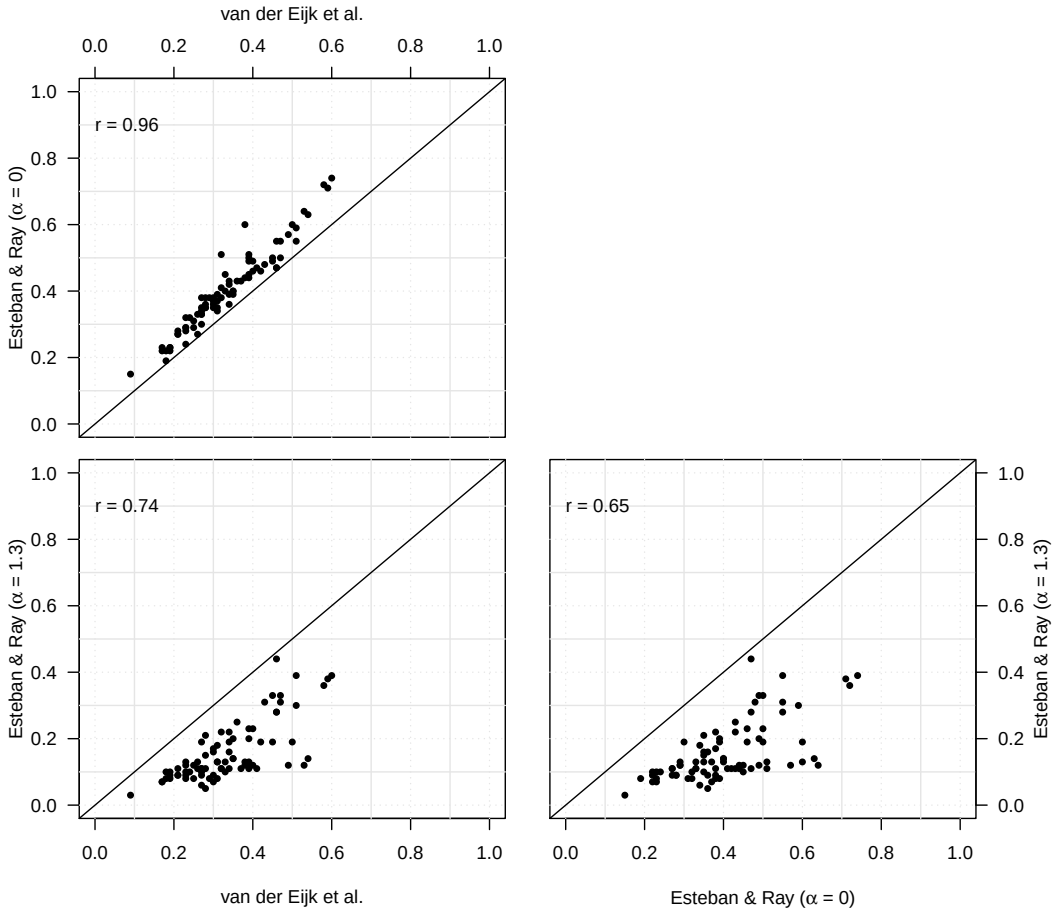

Figure 3.3: Scatter plots of three measures of polarization in Europe, 1994-2009. Data: EES.

Pearson's correlation index, reduces to a considerable extent its size.[10].

Focusing on the relation between the vdE and the E&R 1.3 measures, the most evident thing that appears from the bottom-left panel in Figure 3.3 is that the discrepancy between the two increases as a function of polarization itself. Thus, technically, the relationship between the two indices is to be regarded as heteroskedastic. While for low levels of polarization the observations in the cloud are rather close to each other, the dispersion increases the greater the values of polarization. Figure 3.4 provides a closer inspection of this relationship, focusing only on the observations from the 2009 wave.

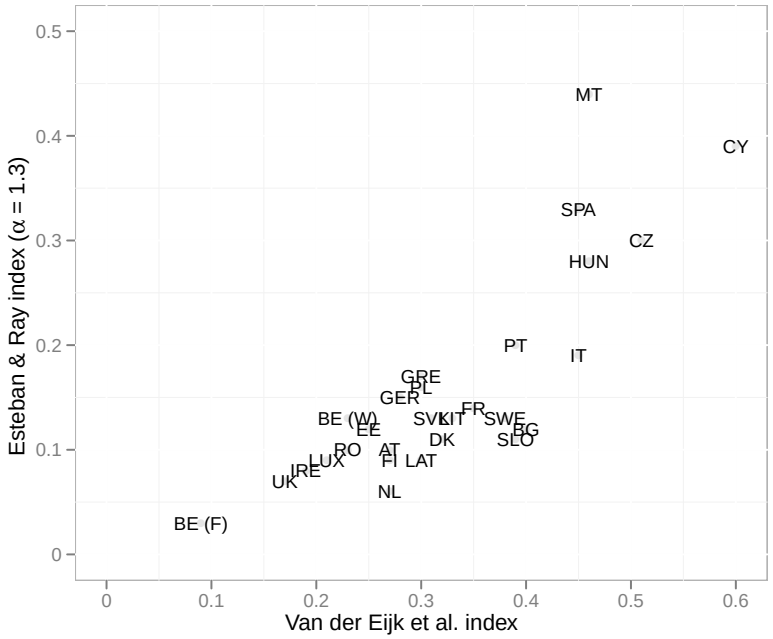

Figure 3.4: Scatter plot of vdE and E&R 1.3 polarization indices in Europe, detail for 2009. Data: EES.

As the figure shows, there are *two* most polarized political systems in 2009, depending on the type of measurement employed. The relevant information here is not the absolute value reported by one index or the other, but rather how the two indices order the observations in respect to their degree of polar-

[10]In fact, when the covariances are observed, the connection between the E&R 0 and the E&R 1.3 measures looks slightly tighter than the one between the vdE and the E&R 1.3 indexed. The covariances between the three measures are: Cov(vdE; E&R 0)=0.01305; Cov(vdE; E&R 1.3)=0.00727; Cov(E&R 0; E&R 1.3)=0.00734.

ization. For the vdE index, the most polarized country is Cyprus, while for the E&R 1.3 index that country is Malta. Spain and Czech Republic are positioned rather close to each other, although the E&R 1.3 index seem to give greater recognition to the former, while the vdE index to the latter. Hungary, which according to the vdE index is as polarized as Malta and Spain, is slightly below them when the sorting is set by the E&R 1.3 measure. The remaining systems are gathered quite tight to each other, with Belgium-Flanders being by far the less polarized political system according to both indices. A closer look to how parties are positioned among EU political systems in 2009 could help us understanding more clearly which types of distribution the two measures regard as more polarized, and which types as less. This job is done by Figure 3.5.

Figure 3.5 shows effectively how both indices work. For instance, while in Austria or Finland parties occupy a relatively wide ideological range, their polarization scores are much lower than in Spain or Malta, where two very large parties are positioned quite far from each other and the remaining ones can be hardly considered as relevant. Because the ideological center used to compute the vdE index is calculated taking into account the size weights, some systems that look rather polarized due to the relatively extreme position of the main left or right parties do not score particularly high in the index. This is the case for instance of Greece or Poland, where the center is leaning toward the right. In both of these countries, the two main competitors are placed on the right of the metric center on the scale, with the space on the left occupied by only relatively small parties. This makes the system asymmetric, rather than polarized, and the index behaves accordingly, putting both countries around the middle of the distribution of both indices. In this respect, the vdE and the E&R 1.3 measures behave exactly in the same way.

An interesting pattern appears among countries characterized by higher degrees of polarization. In the most of them, the center is either empty or occupied by very small parties, and the biggest portion of the weight is shared between two very large parties. This happens in Cyprus, with the left-wing AKEL and the conservative DISY, in Spain, with the socialist PSOE and the popular PP, in Italy, with the Democratic Party on the center-left and the PDL on the right, in Hungary, with the socialist MSZP and the Fidesz, and of course in Malta, with the Labour Party on the left and the Nationalist Party on the right. One exception is represented by the Czech Republic, where the left pole is kept by the post-communist KSCM and the more moderate social democrats of the CSSD together. To a certain extent, Hungary in 2009 is affected by the same issue, as the radical right-wing Jobbik is a rather important actor occupying the ideological space on the right next to the Fidesz. Although these few cases can not provide any solid ground for generalization, it seems that most of the highly-polarized

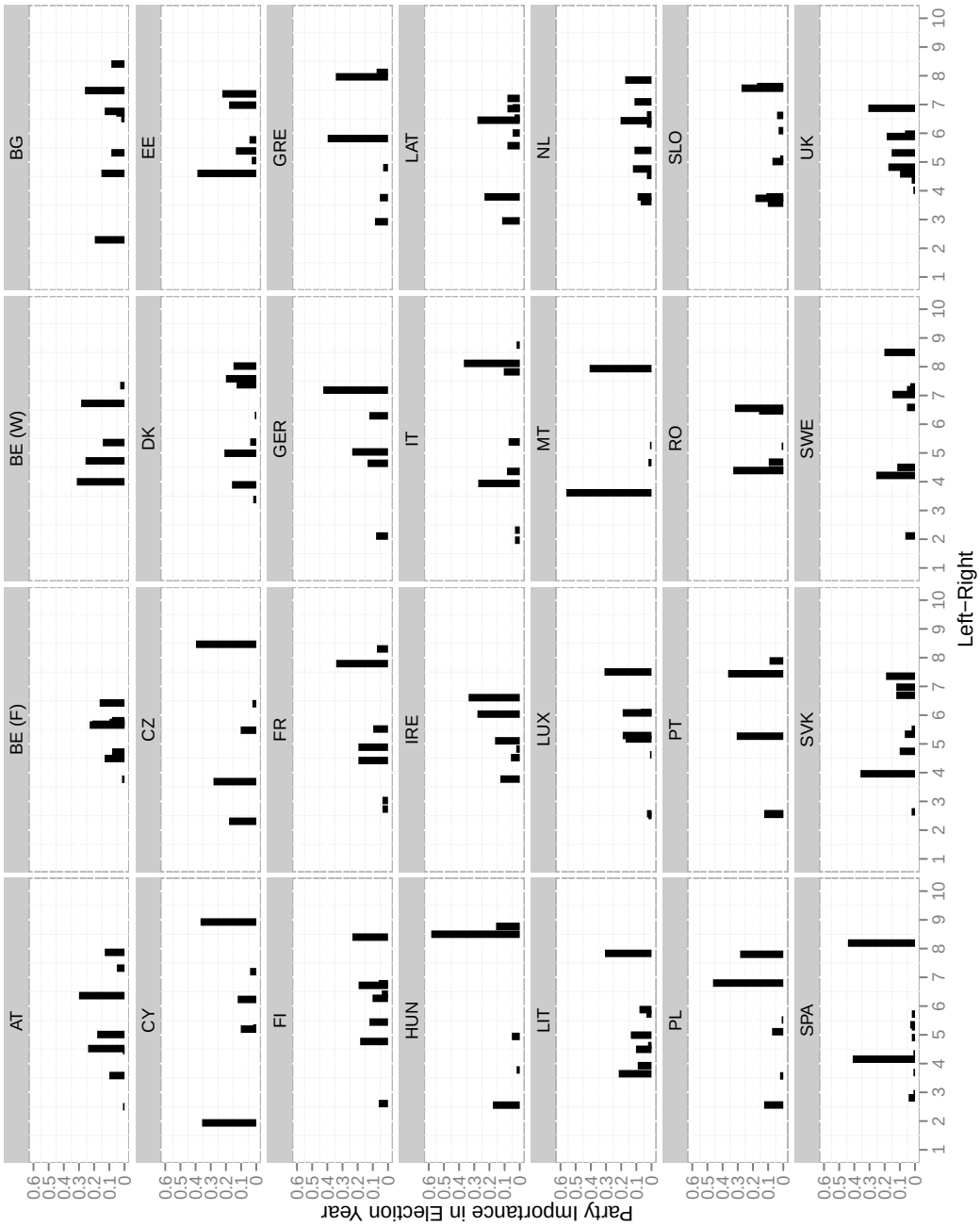

Figure 3.5: Left-right positions and importance of parties in Europe, 2009. Data: EES.

political systems among EU countries in 2009 are actually *bipolarized*. This feature is captured quite effectively by both measures. However, the E&R 1.3 index gives additional emphasis on the concentration of power among a few parties, which ends up prevailing over the ideological distance between them, due to the parameter α used to exponentiate size weights. As a result, the measure rewards Malta, where the four-points range between the two main parties is essentially empty, over Cyprus, where the range is three points larger, but there are two middle-sized parties standing in between them, namely the centrist DIKO and the social democratic EDEK. The same pattern can be noticed comparing Czech Republic and Spain. While the former system seems to be much more fragmented, in the second the battlefield is shared among essentially two parties and a number of small 'subordinates'.

All in all, both the vdE and the E&R 1.3 measures succeed in recording party systems' degree of polarization, rather than their fragmentation. Thus, one theoretical argument that is often brought up to claim the superiority of the Esteban and Ray's index over range-based or dispersion-based measures of polarization (see e.g. Indridason 2011; Oosterwaal and Torenvlied 2010), namely that such measures ignore the concentration of power, falls short when the two indices are compared on empirical grounds. In fact, party system polarization often co-occurs with high concentration of power among two main parties, and this property is measured in a similar way by both indices. What the E&R measure actually does, when α increases, is to overemphasize concentration of power, ending up treating a small number of parties as an instance of polarization. I argue that this is due to a misinterpretation of the concept of group as employed in the identification-alienation framework, upon which the E&R index is built. More specifically, the critical point of departure between the two applications of the index is that parties are not groups, their identities can remain independent from each other even when they are very close on issue or ideological stands, and the process that determines their formation is, at least in part, exogenous to their distribution. This issue, namely the relation between polarization and the number of parties, is addressed in the next section.

3.4 On polarization and the number of parties

The case of Hungary 2009 allows for a useful demonstration of the influence of the number of parties on the two polarization measures discussed in this chapter. As Figure 3.5 shows, in between points 8 and 9 of the horizontal scale, that is quite on the right of the ideological spectrum, two parties lie next to each other. One, the Fidesz, is by far larger than all the others (actually the

one attributed the greatest weight among all European parties in 2009), and the following year would break the bank at the Hungarian parliamentary election, taking almost 53% of the valid vote share. The other party, the Jobbik, is much smaller, but in the population of Hungarian parties running for the 2009 European election is the third largest, after the socialist MSZP, positioned between points 2 and 3 on the scale. To be sure, the two parties are actually not so similar in terms of policy stands. In spite of being often described as rather extreme, the Fidesz remains a mainstream right-wing party. On the other hand, the Jobbik is regarded as a far-right party for its appeals on nationalism, authoritarianism and anti-Roma sentiments (Tóka and Popa, 2013). Nevertheless, as discussed previously, ideological perceptions are made of different considerations, which do not always coincide with pure policy assessments. Thus, what the data shows is that those parties are perceived by the Hungarian citizens to be very close to each other, precisely on 8.5 the Fidesz and on 8.77 the Jobbik.

Following the logic behind the identification-alienation framework, this situation should be regarded as very highly polarized, as the concentration of power between the points 8 and 9 of the scale is tremendous, and the distance between the second largest party is extremely wide. The weight assigned to the Fidesz is of 0.583, equivalent to the 58% of the vote share (normalized from the actual vote share of 56.36%), and the one assigned to the Jobbik is 0.156. This means that in a range of 0.27 points there should be one group worth about 74% of the total population. Given the great distance from the MSZP, which is positioned on 2.55 and has a weight of 0.177, the E&R index for Hungary should report a very high value. However, Figure 3.4 shows that the E&R 1.3 index puts Hungary beyond Spain and Czech Republic, the latter being considerably more fractionalized. This may be due to the fact that the MSZP is too small, and therefore relatively insignificant for the overall system polarization. However, it could also be because the two parties positioned between points 8 and 9 are in fact two different actors, and thus the index fails in recognizing them as one single cluster. If this was the case, given the extreme closeness between these two relatively large parties, the index may be actually deflated by the fact that two such close groups are kept separated.

To check whether this is the case, I divide the Hungarian ideological space into nine groups using ten cut points, following the method used by Esteban and Ray (1994) in the first place, and regard everything between each two cut points as one single group. The cut points are set arbitrarily on the 'round' numbers on the 1-10 scale. For each group, I use as position the mean of the range between the two cut points, and as weight the sum of all the parties caught in the range. Thus, for instance, as both the Fidesz and the Jobbik fall between 8 and 9, the new arrangement will have one party positioned on

8.5 as large as 0.74, i.e. the sum of the two parties' weights. Using this new set of positions and weights I calculate both the vdE and the E&R 1.3 indices of polarization, and I compare them with the two measures calculated on the actual party positions in the data. If the E&R index measures party polarization as concentration of parties around two poles, the new arrangement should be slightly more polarized than the one in the data, as the change in concentration is minimal. On the other hand, if the index is sensitive to the number of parties, the new arrangement should be significantly more polarized than the one in the data, as one party is missing. The new party arrangement is plotted in the bottom panel of Figure 3.6, together with the actual distribution (the same as in Figure 3.5) plotted in the top panel, and the values of the two indices calculated for both.

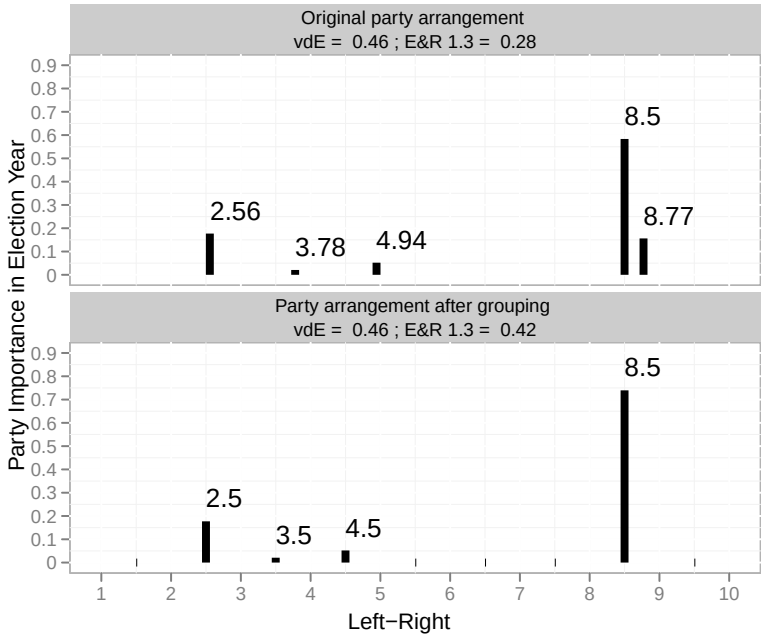

Figure 3.6: Effect of number of parties on the E&R polarization index and comparison with the vdE index in Hungary, 2009. Data: EES.

Because the Fidesz and the Jobbik are very close to each other, in the bottom panel they end up falling within the same group, which is positioned exactly where the Fidesz would be. All the other parties fall into separate groups, and the adjustment to their positions due to the grouping is minimal. The MSZP maintains essentially the same location, while the liberal SZDSZ and the conser-

vative MDF both move slightly on the left. These slight moves counterbalance the disappearance of Jobbik on the right of Fidesz, and therefore the vdE index measures exactly the same degree of polarization among the two arrangements, namely 0.46. However, the E&R 1.3 index shows an impressive increment, from 0.28 to 0.42. To give an idea, Malta, which is by far the most polarized system in the whole 1994-2009 EES data set, according to the the E&R 1.3 index, measures 0.44. In other words, if the Fidesz and the Jobbik were regarded as one single group, Hungary would look more polarized than Czech Republic, Spain and Cyprus in 2009. This would not be due to party distancing, extremization or repositioning of any sort, but only to the collapse of two parties into one. At the same time, this issue seems not to affect the vdE index, which remains stable regardless the change in number of parties. This is due to the fact that, by calculating independently each party's distance from the center and weighting it by its relative share, the vdE measure does not treat parties as groups but as individual observations that are allowed to contribute differently to the overall measure. This result has one main implication for the use of the E&R index to measure party polarization, namely that the apparently innocuous conceptual stretching that appears when parties are regarded as groups becomes quite problematic when systems with different numbers of parties are compared.

A final examination of the connection between measures of polarization and number of parties consists in directly relating these phenomena to each other, and observe possible patterns of covariation. To do so, for each system I compute a measure of the "Effective Number of Parties" (Laasko and Taagepera, 1979). The measure is essentially a sum of the parties included in a party system, weighting each of them for a quantity that represents their relevance. Because I use the same normalized vote shares that I employ to compute ideological polarization, this type of measure is generally called the *Effective Number of Electoral Parties* (ENEP).[11] This quantity is plotted against the vdE, E&R 0 and E&R 1.3 indices in Figure 3.7. The lines are the fitted values of a polynomial regression, with 95% confidence intervals included.

Figure 3.7 shows quite effectively the problem that arises with the E&R index when the value of the parameter α increases. However, at the same time, the figure also shows that the vdE index and the E&R index when α is kept at zero are not affected by this problem. The right panel of the figure shows a clear

[11] See Laasko and Taagepera (1979) for a discussion of the measure. A table reporting the ENEP for each political system and election is found in Appendix X. The formula used to obtain the measure is

$$\text{ENEP} = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^{N} w_i^2} \tag{3.5}$$

where w_i refers to the normalized vote shares used also for the indices of polarization.

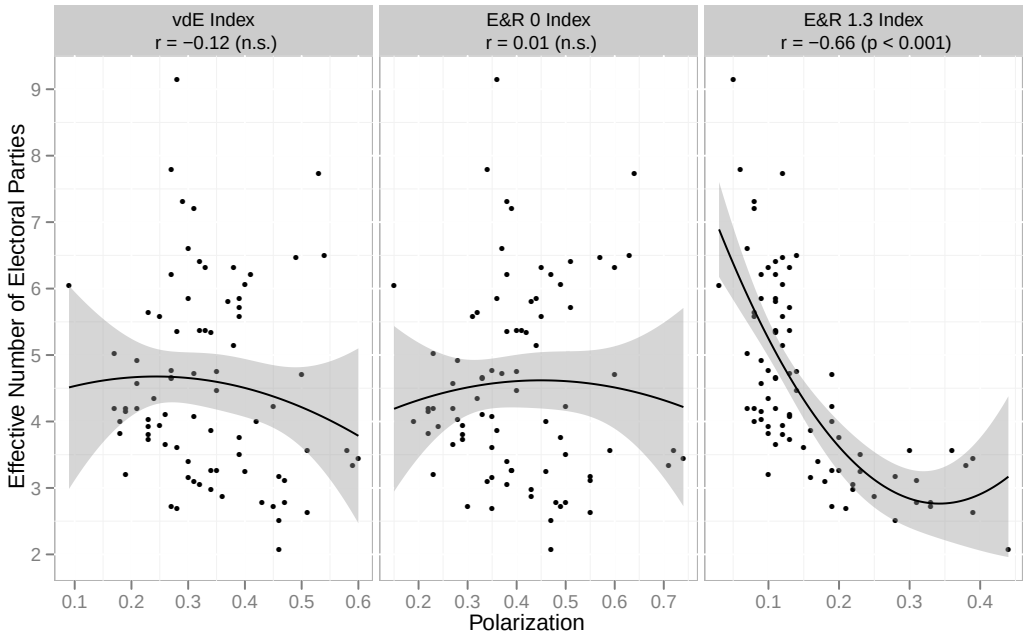

Figure 3.7: Polarization and Effective Number of Electoral Parties in Europe, 1994-2009. Data: EES.

and rather strong negative correlation between polarization and the number of parties. This is also detected by correlating the two measures using the Pearson's correlation index, which reports a strong and statistically significant negative association (r = -0.66, p $<$ 0.001). However, the figure also shows that the relationship between the two variable is highly non-linear, with the turning point being located around 0.25. Looking back at Figure 3.2, it seems that the relationship does not hold for the most polarized 20% of cases as measured by the E&R1.3 index. This may be explained, in part, by the natural lower bound of a measure such as the Effective Number of Parties, which can not be less than two, and in part by the fact that, when reached a certain threshold, the distances between parties become the really discriminant point. From the EES data, it seems that such threshold is around 3.5 parties. However, this feature maybe also due to the type of data utilized here.

The plot in Figure 3.7 also offers a good proof for the independence between polarization as measured by the vdE index and the number of parties, at least at the measurement level. To be sure, there can be a substantive interconnection between these two elements, especially in high proportional party systems, where the gate to access to the electoral arena is relatively easy to pass. In this respect, the way in which parties are arranged may create ideological *gaps*, i.e. policy areas where the demands of the public are not satisfied by any party. These gaps may become in turn target of some political entrepreneurs or grassroots movements, which could eventually produce new parties. One instance of this type of process will be seen in the example about the Netherlands in Chapter 6. However, at least in the cross-country comparison, there is no evidence of a correlation between the number of parties and their degree of polarization, at least when the latter is assessed using a dispersion-based measure such as the vdE index. This piece of evidence further highlights, if it was still necessary, the independence between two important characteristics of the political supply that the voters are offered in times of elections, namely the number of options and their differentiation.

3.5 Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to offer an overview on the possible ways to measure party system polarization, and to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. In this respect, I first discuss the possible ways to assess party positions, and I defend my choice to use citizens' perceptions of party ideological placements. Secondly, I discuss two different measures of polarization that can be applied to party systems, one based on parties' *extremity* and one based on *pairwise-*

distances. The first type of measure is rather common and well-established in the literature, while the second has become more relevant in recent years due to the discovery among political scientists of the work by Esteban and Ray (1994). One particular reason for the popularity of Esteban and Ray's measure is that, in their theory, the authors link explicitly the concept of polarization with social conflict. More specifically, in its original conception, the Esteban and Ray's index has been created to investigate those distributional characteristics of large-n populations that are likely to breed social conflict. According to the identification-alienation framework developed by the authors, conflict is a product of a society divided in groups that are internally homogeneous and very different from each others. Given this premise, the Esteban and Ray's polarization index seeks to capture the presence of big clusters among the observations, and to assess the distance between them. This concept has been applied in some cases to party systems, under the assumption that a measure of party polarization based on the Esteban & Ray's framework performs better than alternative measures in capturing political conflict. However, in this chapter I demonstrate that applying to individual parties a measure that is originally conceived to work on groups can have an undesired side effect, namely that party system's polarization becomes extremely sensitive to the number of parties considered. This is an undesirable property, given that polarization is compared in the most of the cases (including this present work) among political systems of different countries, that are ruled by different electoral laws that in turn produce more or less 'crowded' party systems. Although the number of actors in a population has surely an influence on their arrangement, a measure that mistakes one characteristic by another could produce results that do not represent the actual state of the things.

On the other side of the coin, measures of polarization based on assessing party distances from the center, combined with some weights to determine each party's importance within the system, are both theoretically and empirically less dependent on the number of parties considered. Here I demonstrate that one measure of this type, the index suggested by van der Eijk et al. (2005), correlates quite strongly with the Esteban and Ray's measure, but at the same time is not affected by variations in the effective number of parties. The fact that dispersion-based measured of polarization are often used in studies that are focused on mere party differentiation, and so ignoring the conflictual aspects of the phenomenon, has possibly led some political scientists to look for new alternative measurements of party polarization. However, in the statistics reported in this chapter I show that a pure dispersion-based measure, such as the van der Eijk et al.'s index, correlates quite strongly with a measure built explicitly to capture group conflict, such as the Esteban and Ray's index. Thus, this leads me

to conclude that dispersion-based measures, when assessed carefully enough to weight parties for their sizes, are not at all missing important aspects of polarization. In the next chapters I will discuss some important implications of party polarization for the voters, and doing so I will explicitly consider both the implications of party differentiation as the ones of party conflict. By doing so, I will rely on the van der Eijk et al. (2005)'s index, computed and distributed in the way shown in this chapter.

Chapter 4

Mechanical Effects of Ideological Party Polarization*

In Chapter 1 I mentioned electoral *availability* as a property of the mass public that has important consequences for party competition. Available voters represent the portion of electorate that is open to change their party allegiance in case other options turn out to be more appealing on policy grounds or any other relevant evaluative criteria. Voters of this kind are crucial for democracies, as they determine «through their 'potential' defection the anticipated reactions of the elite and therefore their responsiveness to public opinion orientation» (Bartolini, 1999, p. 461). Moreover, available voters are those that parties seek as they aim to enlarge their supporting base. If no or only a few voters are sensitive to party appeals, parties will have no incentives to directly compete with each other, i.e. to try to convince the same voters. This may open the door to collusive behaviors at the level of policy-making (Bartolini, 1999) and, possibly, to a growing dissatisfaction at the level of the public opinion.

This chapter deals with the *mechanical effects* of polarized party systems on voters' availability. The concept of "mechanical effect" refers here to the direct impact that a certain distribution of parties will have on the way in which these parties are evaluated. By referring to the pure distributional properties of the political supply, this definition is very similar to other, better-known, examples in the literature. For Duverger (1951), electoral laws exert a constraining effect on the number of legislative parties that is to a great extent *mechanical* because it comes from the strict application of the law itself (see Benoit, 2002; Taagepera

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and Shugart, 1993). For Sartori (1976), the format of a party system can contain *mechanical predispositions*, as the dynamics of party competition are largely influenced by the number of parties competing. Here the idea is that, before formulating any expectation regarding the type of interaction that we expect to have between the parties, polarized systems should bear some consequences on people's voting behavior, just for the way in which parties are arranged on the ideological space. In other words, this part of the study investigates how we expect voters to behave in polarized political elections if we assume that their evaluations are moved by *pure spatial considerations*.

Polarization is, before anything else, a matter of *distance*. As I discussed in the previous chapters, the most simple way to see polarization is as a situation where the actors' preferences diverge. Of course great distance, especially when it regards ideological views, is likely to mask a certain pattern of *interaction*, as I will discuss in Chapter 5. However, the first and most obvious routine that systematically characterizes polarized elections is that voters are called to choose among policy options that are considerably different from one another. This implies that, on average, to switch from one party to another will signify taking a far greater leap, compared to a scenario where party stances are more similar. Given this premise, the chapter asks whether this simple rule can affect voters' willingness to make a leap at all. To be sure, there are several reasons why voters may want to switch from one party to another, and they are not necessarily related to how parties are arranged. For instance, voters could remain loyal to the same party simply because they are constantly satisfied by the way they are represented by it, and not because the alternatives are way too different. For this reason, the task here is rather to assess voters' *potential* switching, or to put it differently, their *openness* to consider voting for more than one party. In other words, this chapter treats polarization as a structural condition that could influence electoral availability and, by extension, the competitiveness of a certain electoral context.

The chapter develops essentially in three steps. First, I provide a general framework to interpret voting behavior, where the vote choice is described as the final step of an individual decisional process. In this context, I discuss a measurable construct, i.e. the "certainty" of the party preferences, that can be used as an indicator of the potential elasticity of a person's behavior, i.e. an individual measure of electoral availability. Then, I offer a validation of this construct by comparing it with the actual voting behavior when repeated observations are available. More precisely, I prove that greater preference certainty is strongly associated with a lower tendency to switch from one party to another over time, even when the alternative is to switch towards abstention. Furthermore, I show that preference certainty has an impact on voting behavior both

in the long and in the short-term, suggesting that the construct is not a product of pure long-term partisan loyalties but it is also updated taking into account electon-time considerations. Finally, I estimate the impact of party polarization on voters' certainty in a large sample of elections using the European Election Study (EES) pooled data set. The latter analysis is focused on two types of effects, namely those at the "global" level (the overall degree of polarization of the party system) and those at the "local" level (the arrangement of the parties that are immediately close to the voters, depending on their own self-positioning).

Results show that polarization has an overall impact on voters' certainty (i.e. in more polarized countries voters are on average more certain about their first preference), and that the distance between the two most proximate parties plays an important role too. These findings demonstrate that, first, electoral availability is a construct that can be effectively measured at the individual level, and second, pure spatial considerations (i.e. factors related to the simple party distribution) have a relevant impact on it. This contributes to highlight the presence and the extent of the impact that the simple structure of party systems has on voters' behavior.

4.1 Preferences and Choice: A Model of Voting Behavior

In political research, the act of voting is often conceptualized as the final step of a more or less complex chain of causality, where considerations made at different steps converge to a final, observable outcome. Probably, the most famous and widely employed example is the Michigan school's "funnel of causality". Here long-term loyalties, learned in the early stages of a person's political socialization, work as underlying organizing factors for the subsequent evaluation of shorter-term stimuli provided by the electoral campaigns, such as a candidate's characteristics, or parties' position over the issue of the day (Campbell et al., 1960). Following this logic, long-term predispositions always exert a significant influence over short-term evaluations. For instance, feelings of group membership such as partisan loyalties (Green et al., 2002), or normative core values such as ideology (Jost, 2006), can impact on the way in which people reason upon new information by providing a set of expectations and pre-ordered evaluations regarding what is acceptable, what is desirable, and even what is true (e.g. Taber and Lodge, 2006). In this view, to fully understand the decisional process that leads to the vote choice, it is necessary to take into account the influence that decisional steps happening earlier in the funnel exert on more

recent evaluations.

Other models conceive voting as a process involving different steps without necessarily distinguishing between long-term and short-term influences, but rather separating the actual choice from the considerations that led to it. An example is the Downsian model (Downs, 1957a). Here, as a first step, voters evaluate parties or candidates in order to assess how much they can profit from them being in a position of power. This quantity, i.e. the amount of potential satisfaction expected from a party's rule, is called in this literature "party *utility*". After assessing independent utilities for each party, in a second step, voters are ready to make a choice. In the Downsian specification, this is simply assumed to fall on the party being judged as the one yielding the highest utility[1]:

> «Each citizen estimates the utility income from government action he expects each party would provide him if it were in power in the forthcoming election period, that is, he first estimates the utility income Party A would provide him, then the income Party B would provide, and so on. He votes for whatever party he believes would provide him with the highest utility income from government action.» (Downs, 1957b, p. 138)

Models of voting based on this framework have evolved in the last decades to cover aspects of the process of preference-making on the one hand, and of the conversion of the preferences into actual choices on the other, that are neglected in the first formulation made by Downs (1957a,b). In the first domain, i.e. the determinants of party preferences, recent accounts have expanded the so-called "policy-only" Downsian model to include also "non-policy" factors, such as e.g. partisanship, demographic characteristics, evaluations of candidate's past performances, and so on. In this case, the utility prodiced by voting for a party does not come from pure policy or ideological considerations, but also from other sources of potential satisfaction, such as e.g. having the own favorite party to win against the others, or rewarding a party that delivered a good performance in the past (see Adams et al., 2005). In the second domain, i.e. how preferences are converted into votes, more sophisticated models have relaxed the

[1]In the literature on voting behavior the term "utility" is often employed as a synonym of "preference". Yet, adopting a strict acceptation, the two words would have slightly different meanings. In fact, while following the usage in economics "party utility" would be defined as the degree of *satisfaction* that a person expects from a party to win the election, "party preference" rather refers to the *motivation* to vote for it (see Tillie, 1995). Thus, in a hypothetical causal chain, the former event would come somewhat before the latter. However, provided that the discussion conducted in these pages will not venture into territories where this difference is relevant, I will use the terms "party utilities" and "party preferences" interchangeably, although favoring the latter for its slightly more overarching significance.

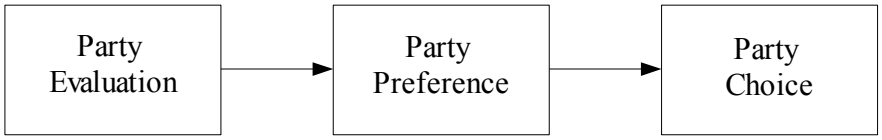

Figure 4.1: A Model of Vote Choice

assumption that the vote choice falls deterministically upon the most preferred party, introducing an error term between the preference and the choice. Such a model is called "probabilistic voting" as it takes into account the uncertainty that citizens and parties have regarding each other's actual preferences.

While the latter specification is often disregarded[2], the first point, i.e. the inclusion of both policy and non-policy related considerations into the process of preference-building, helps defining a quite important assumption regarding how the process of vote choice is to be conceived. In particular, what is relevant to note is that *every consideration*, be it long or short-term, be it based on ideology or any other type of assessments, has to "pass by" party preferences before turning into a party choice. In other words, as summarized in Figure 4.1, party preferences are a *snapshot* of all the considerations that contribute to a person's evaluation of the political options, and provide the *motivational drive* for people to make a political choice.[3] To be sure, the emphasis on party preferences as the product of different types of considerations, and not only policy-related ones, serves mainly to distinguish the concept adopted here from the strict policy-driven concept of utility employed by many Downsian modelers. However, this is not to deny the importance of policy factors or more abstract ideological characterizations for the voters. In fact, as we shall see in the next section, these are meant to play a primary role in this chapter.

The conceptualization of voting as a process that necessarily passes through the formation of party preferences has led some scholars towards the idea to distinguish empirically between the explanation of party choice and the explanation of preferences themselves (Tillie, 1995). The reason is easy to guess: if

[2]For instance, Adams et al. (2005, p. 20) note that models of probabilistic voting are «only marginally more realistic» than the deterministic model.

[3]In fact the full chain of psychological steps that lead to the vote choice can be more complex than this (see e.g. Rosema, 2004, 2006). However, to build a fully comprehensive model of vote choice is not in the scope of this work. For the focus here is on identifying the ways in which party polarization impacts on citizens' political behavior, a parsimonious yet widely-accepted model of voting as the one presented in this section is in fact a more desirable foundation than a complex solution.

preferences are assumed to be the most direct consequence of a person's evaluations, then observing the impact of some variables on party preferences should be equally valid as doing it for party choices. Moreover, the direct observations of party preferences provides a considerably bigger amount of information respect to the single party choice. This is because, while the vote choice is an *ipsative* measure, and therefore it only provides information about the *first option*, a person can have in fact more or less nuanced preferences for the several options under consideration (van der Eijk et al., 2006).

The way in which preferences are distributed across the options *within* a person's mind can vary tremendously *between* individuals. A person can be equally motivated to vote for two parties, and eventually pick one because on the way to the polling station he/she has seen its logo printed on a poster. Although this vote counts as much as the vote of a hard-line partisan, nobody would doubt that the reason that produced such a choice is much more fragile. In principle, it is possible to have a better glance of the "rootedness" of a person's choice by observing the repeated voting behavior. In such a case, the hard-line partisan, or the self-reflective ideological voter, should behave less volatile than the random-decider (assuming a minimum degree of stability on the parties' side). However, observing how party preferences are distributed in a person's mind can provide the same type of information, without the need of repeated observations.

All in all, to directly observe voters' preferences can help assessing in a rather efficient way their expected "elasticity", or, to go back to our normative premise, their *availability*. Indeed, this point is recognized by Bartolini (1999) himself, who notices that a voter «can be 'at stake' in the sense of being available to to change his/her partisan choice even if in the end s/he will record the vote for the same party as before» (Bartolini, 1999, p. 467). In this framework, the first question to be asked is: how are preferences of stable voters (or, by extension, switchers) likely to be distributed? This question becomes particularly important as the aim is to explain how different party arrangements are reflected within voters' minds by different distributions of preferences. To provide an answer to the question, I propose one single construct that can effectively provide a synthetic description of the distribution of a person's party preferences and therefore should be directly connected to individual volatility: the certainty of the party preferences.

4.2 The Certainty of Party Preferences

Certainty is defined here as the differential between a person's first and second preferences. In the everyday use, the concept refers to the recognition of something as well-established, not subject of further discussion or rethink. A researcher is certain about her findings when the margin of error is small enough to exclude other explanations, including the possibility that they are due to mere chance. A voter is certain about her party choice when she is confident that additional thought or information-gathering about political matters will not change her mind. In other words, greater certainty is generally associated with a *reduction of the alternatives*. In this view, certainty about party preferences is observed when voting for any other party but one is completely out of question.

When preferences are allowed to be nuanced, and not only "yes/no" options, certainty becomes an indicator of "how big of a difference" it makes for a voter to switch from one party to another. In other words, if we allow preferences to be *non-ipsative* (van der Eijk et al., 2006), it follows that the level of certainty is equivalent to *the difference in magnitude between the highest and second highest preference*. Of course, in the most of the real-life situations, people are called to choose between more than just two options. In the context of political choices, this becomes obious when multiparty systems are concerned. However, even when the choice options are many, a person's certainty can still be captured by the difference between her two largest preferences, as the lower-ranked alternatives do not directly threat the hold of the best option. This is because, in the most of the cases, the act of voting implies that people are asked to cast *one single preference*. Thus, to assess a voter's certainty, it will be enough to determine how much *that* preference is given, or, in other words, to what extent it is not susceptible to new events that could affect her evaluation.

Other studies have been discussing similar concepts before. For instance, Rosema (2006) focuses on the characteristics that make the link between preferences and choice tighter, and proposes a similar operationalization for his "strength of the party preference". In this framework, the word "strength" seems to convey the most accurate definition, as it recalls the idea of "strength of prediction". In a rather pragmatic way, Kroh et al. (2007) refer to the "potential for vote switching". While the way in which they operationalize the concept diverges from the one adopted here, the definition proposed by the authors reflects a similar intent:

> «When the most preferred parties differ only little in the electoral utility they would yield, small changes in preferences can lead to vote switching. If, on the other hand, there is a wide gap between

> the preferences for the highest and the second highest ranked parties, it requires very large change in preference to make a voter alter his or her choice.» (Kroh et al., 2007, p. 212)

According to this definition, a party whose electors are very certain will have more room to behave irresponsibly or disappointing, without running the risk that they will switch to another party. This reflects the idea of "potential defection" that Bartolini (1999) puts at the base of party responsiveness when electoral availability is discussed.

In general, there are reasons to expect certainty to be stable over time, and reasons to expect it to be relatively volatile. The first set of reasons refers to individual processes or traits that contribute in maintaining people's beliefs and attitudes *consistent*, while the second refers to external, possibly election-specific, stimuli that concur in changing them. Although the concept of preference has been defined here as the extent to which someone is motivated to vote for a certain party, this construct is necessarily related to a person's *attitude* towards it, i.e. «a general and enduring positive or negative feeling» about a party (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981, p. 7). Given the nature of certainty as a compounded measure, obtained by observing the independent assessment of preferences for each party, it can be argued that more certain voters are also those who are more extreme in their positive or negative attitudes towards parties. Political psychology has been pointing out for long a relationship between attitude extremity and resistance to change, due to a selective exposure to new information (Krosnick et al., 1993; Krosnick and Petty, 1995; Taber and Lodge, 2006). Thus, to the extent that party evaluations are influenced by people's attitudes towards them, preference certainty should be rather stable.

Moreover, despite the focus on spatial considerations of this chapter, it would be naive to ignore that for many people party evaluations are influenced to a great extent by their partisan loyalty. In the original conception of the Michigan school, party identification has been portrayed as a form of group identification (Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al., 2002), paralleling the connection between social group membership and vote choice made in the European context by the cleavage theory (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Given the important role played by party or group identification for political considerations (as we shall see in Chapter 5), it is reasonable to expect voters who feel attached to a party to keep some degree of certainty about their preferences over time.

On the other hand, events that occur before an election can also undermine or strengthen voters' certainty, increasing or decreasing the attractiveness of alternative options, and therefore making vote intention more or less resistant. For instance, a party that was considered unattractive to some voters for long,

can suddenly become attractive due to a recent repositioning on some issues, or the entry of a particularly charismatic leader. Moreover, some voters may find themselves in the condition to reconsider their preferences in case their favorite party is involved in a political scandal, or delivers a very poor performance in office. All in all, people's certainty should be, to a great extent, a function of what they are offered at the moment when preferences are assessed. The tension between long and short-term determinants of preference certainty is something to be settled empirically, rather than theoretically. However, it is reasonable to expect that both types of factors share equal importance in influencing voters' elasticity.

4.3 Certainty and Party Positions

As discussed previously, spatial models of vote choice describe party preferences largely as a product of the utility that a person expects from a certain party being in government, or, more generally, in the condition to exert influence on the policy-making. In this view, party preferences are a function of the proximity between a person's own ideological preferences and the ideological positions taken by the parties running for office (Downs, 1957a; Enelow and Hinich, 1984). Given this premise, preference certainty should be affected by the number of attractive options that a voter is surrounded by, i.e. the number of parties holding similar, or at least acceptable, ideological views. To put it differently, given a fixed number of parties, the closer each of them will be positioned to a voter (and, by extension, to each other), the lower should be her certainty.

Figure 4.2 provides a visual example of the impact of party positioning on voters' certainty. The figure shows one hypothetical voter (V) and two parties (P_1 and P_2) arranged in two different ways. In both scenarios, V is positioned on 2, i.e. rather on the left on a 0–10 scale, and P_1 is always the party placed closest to V, once slightly more extreme (1.5, in the top scenario) and once slightly less (2.5, in the bottom scenario). V's maximum preference, i.e. her *ideal point*, is obviously on her own position, and it had a value of 10. The *proximity function*, i.e. how much V's preference decreases the more a hypothetical party position itself far from V's ideal point, is set in this example as a linear function of the distance, and it is represented by the continuous black line[4]. While none of the

[4]This type of function is based on the linear absolute distance (also called "city block") between the voter and each party, and it is calculated with the following equation:

$$U_{ij} = 10 - \left|V_i - P_j\right| \tag{4.1}$$

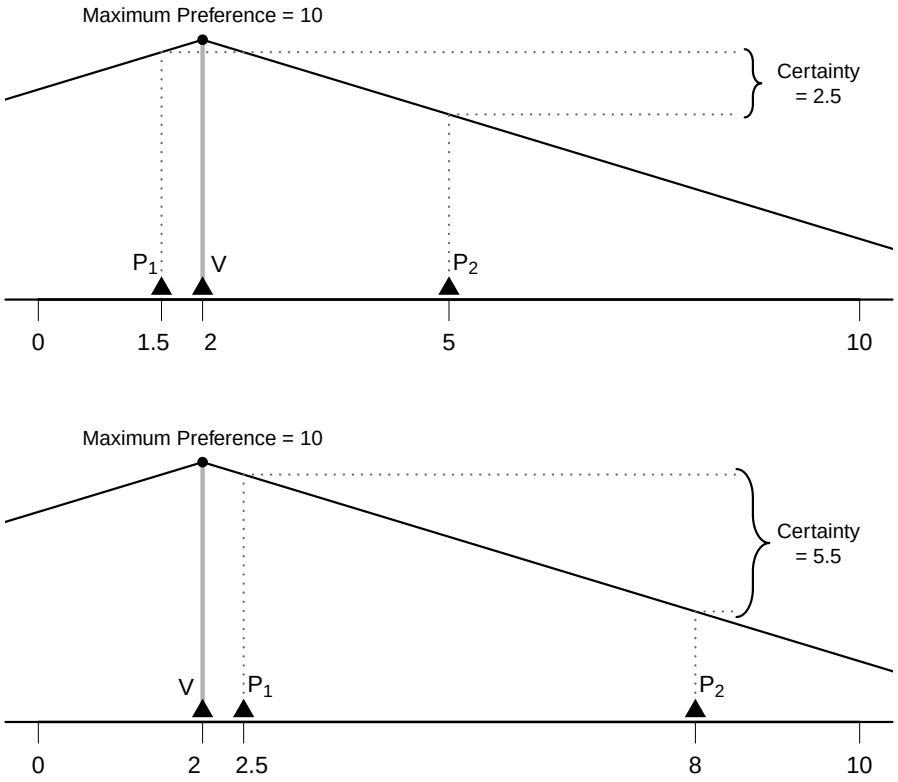

Figure 4.2: Party Positioning and Voter's Preference Certainty

two parties in both scenarios is standing exactly on V's ideal point, P_1 is always placed 0.5 points away from it, producing in both cases a preference of 10 – 0.5 = **9.5**. What changes between the two scenarios is the position of P_2, that places itself on the center (5) in the top scenario, and further on the right (8) in the bottom scenario.

While the position of V does not change, and neither does the distance from V's first preference P_1, it is the distance between the two parties that makes the difference. In the top panel, P_2 is a center party, positioned only 3 points away from V, and thus V, with a preference of 10 – 3 = **7**, is moderately attracted by

Where U_{ij} is the utility of Voter i for Party j. Some other scholars of spatial voting rather model the utility loss by using the squared Euclidean distance between the voter and the party. However, the two options are conceptually similar (see e.g. Lewis and King, 1999). Next to the abstract nature of the example, and the fact that Figure 4.2 represents *preferences* and not *utilities*, the discussion at this point is based on linear distances for simplicity of presentation.

it. In the bottom panel the situation is rather different, as P_2 is positioned fairly on the right, i.e. 6 points away from V, and therefore V is not much attracted by it, with a preference of $10 - 6 = \mathbf{4}$. As a consequence, in the scenario at the top V will be less certain about her preference for P_1 than in the scenario at the bottom. More specifically, V's certainty will be $9.5 - 7 = \mathbf{2.5}$ in the former case, and $9.5 - 4 = \mathbf{5.5}$ in the latter.

This example in Figure 4.2 shows how the difference in distance between the closest and the second closest party is converted into a larger difference between the first and the second preferences, and therefore into a higher certainty. This simple rule will hold as long as we assume that preferences are purely determined by positional considerations. Moreover, this should apply even when the number of options to be evaluated is larger than two. This is because the shape of the proximity function implies that any other party that is positioned further apart from the second closest option will fall out of the "window of consideration". This point is strictly related to the degree of party polarization, as in polarized systems the distance between every two parties is, on average, larger. In general, the main effect of polarization on voters' certainty hypothesized on the assumption that only party positions matter, is mainly *local*, i.e. related to the arrangement of the parties that are immediately close to a voter. In other words, depending on their own ideological views (i.e. the self-positioning on the ideological scale), voters are confronted with different constellations of parties. This implies that, in the same electoral context, voters placed in different ideological areas will be more or less certain, depending on the configuration of parties surrounding them. However, these local effects should aggregate at the *global* level, i.e. at the macro level of the electoral context, into an average higher certainty in more polarized systems.

Even though we assume that voters build their preferences based on pure spatial considerations, one important factor to be taken into account, especially in multiparty systems, is the relative *size* of the parties. If we think realistically about the possible factors influencing party preferences, we would admit that not all the parties holding a certain general ideological view (e.g. the "left-wing" or "right-wing" parties) are equally attractive for their segment of electorate. As van der Brug et al. (2000) point out, a rational vote follows the wish to influence public policy-making. In this sense, especially in multiparty systems, ideological vote can be seen as a choice focused on the "indication" that one wishes to give to public policy. However, parties start with different "baseline probabilities" to impact on public policy, depending on their political power or, to put it more simply, their size. Thus, voting for a very proximate party that is virtually insignificant can be seen as a less rational move than choosing a slightly more distant one that is very likely to have an impact. Moreover, the

importance of party strength for voters' evaluations is not necessarily limited to strategic considerations. A very small party can generate low attractiveness simply because citizens do not have much information about it. Especially in cases where the political debate is led by a few big parties, people may not consider to vote for the smaller ones simply because they know a little about their policy position and their competence, or because there is no way to assess the quality of their past performance in government.

Apart from single-issue parties, which compete for specific subsets of the electorate, issue ownership may be also less effective if a party's credibility is eclipsed by its weakness compared to other competitors. Tillie (1995) defines two ideal-types of voters, based on the role played by parties' relative power in influencing their preferences: the "idealistic" voters, who are moved only by ideological (or spatial) considerations, and the "pragmatic" voters, who are attracted entirely by political power. While the most of the people actually fall in a middle, mixed category, Tillie admits that the relevance of these two aspects can be also influenced by characteristics of the parties themselves: «if size is relatively constant, that is, in the comparison of two large or two small parties, party utility is predominantly determined by the perceived ideological distance between voter and party» (Tillie, 1995, p. 115). This point suggests that, even when the focus is on determining how certainty varies as a function of pure spatial considerations, voters' certainty should vary as a function of how the closest parties are arranged, and how power is distributed across them.

4.4 The Effect of Certainty on Voting Behavior

So far I discussed the way in which voters' certainty can be influenced by party positioning. However, a property such as "preference certainty" can be rather elusive, or at least, not easy to capture. Survey research offers some potentially helpful tools to capture the degree of respondent's certainty at the individual level (as we shall see), although the face validity of these tools has never been directly assessed. Thus, in this section I deal with this issue by directly assessing the impact of preference certainty on the actual (self-reported) behavior, i.e. the probability to stick to the same party against the probability to switch to another party. Moreover, the empirical test proposed here allows to observe whether, and to what extent, certainty is a stable trait that has a constant effect on an individual's lifetime voting behavior (because, for instance, it is determined by individual response styles), or whether its further updates can influence behavior too. The argument made in this study is based on the assumption that certainty depends to a large extent on the party evaluations made

at the moment of the election. Thus, to assess the validity of the construct and its measurement, certainty should reduce the probability to switch to another party, *and* its impact should hold even when controlled for its lagged effect.

This type of test requires a design where respondents are observed at different points in time. The Dutch Parliament Election Study (DPES) has been conducting over the years a number of panel investigations where the same respondents were interviewed two or more times at consecutive elections. Three of these studies contain all the necessary variables[5]. These data are particularly important for the purposes of this study because, at the moment when this research is conducted, they are the only available panel studies containing the measure of party preferences that will be used in this chapter, i.e. the so-called "*probability to vote*" (PTV) scores. These rating scales, together with the "feeling thermometers" made popular by the American National Election Studies, and the "like-dislike" scales observed in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, are among the most commonly employed variables in studies of voting behavior in comparative European electoral research (see, for instance, Lachat, 2008; Pardos-Prado and Dinas, 2010; van der Brug et al., 2000, 2007; van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996).

What makes PTV scales particularly suitable to measure party preferences (in the way they have been conceptualized in this study) is their focus on the *propensity to vote* for a party, rather than on a sense of "sympathy" or "warmth" sought by other measures. In other words, what differentiates the PTVs from other rating scales employed in electoral surveys is their explicit reference to the act of voting. Moreover, rather than limiting the assessment to the present election, respondents are asked their propensity to *ever* vote for a party. Because of the focus on a *possible* future choice, PTVs are supposed to capture how people evaluate the parties without at the same time forcing the response into one single vote choice, therefore maintaining the measurement non-ipsative (Tillie, 1995; van der Eijk et al., 2006). Although over the years the question format for the PTV scales has passed through some slight changes, the wording shows rather clearly the intent to observe respondents' preferences while keeping them as free as possible from a constrained choice:

Some people are quite certain that they will always vote for the same

[5]The first panel, going from 1981 to 1986, covers three elections (1981, 1982 and 1986), although the relevant variables are available only for 1982 and 1986. The other two panels cover two elections each, i.e. from 1986 to 1989, and from 1989 to 1994. The three panels were conducted independently from each other, and therefore the cases are different in each wave (for instance, none of the observations from the wave 1986-1989 are also present in the wave 1982-1986). For the documentation of the three studies see, respectively, van der Eijk et al. (1988), van der Eijk et al. (1990) and Anker and Oppenhuis (1995).

> *party. Others reconsider in each case to which party they will give their vote. I shall mention a number of parties.*
>
> *Would you indicate for each party how probable it is that you will ever vote for that party?*[6]

As van der Eijk and Marsh (2007) show, this property allows PTVs to perform better than other scales in predicting the first and the second vote choice in electoral contexts where voters are allowed to express ordered preferences (e.g. Ireland). Thus, given their close adherence to the actual vote choice, PTVs can be regarded as a valid tool to observe individual distributions of party preferences.

As I discussed previously, the operationalization of preference certainty employed here is straightforward: an individual is more certain the bigger is the difference between the highest and the second-highest among her expressed party preferences, measured by the means of PTV scores[7]. As discussed previously, this operationalization is conceptually similar to Kroh et al. (2007)'s "potential vote switching" and Rosema (2006)'s "preference strength". However, there are some important differences. In the first case, the authors use a dummy measure indicating whether the difference between the first and the second PTVs is equal or smaller than one point, while in the second case the measurement is based on sympathy scores, and thus it captures a construct that is less closely related to the propensity to vote. In order to assess the validity of preference certainty as a product of the current party evaluations, and thus not entirely driven by other long-term predispositions (e.g. party identification or individual tendency to hold extreme attitudes) the variable will be included in the model as observed both at the present time (t_0) and at the time of the previous election (t_{-1}). In this way, it will be possible to assess the impact of evaluations made at the election time (which this study aims to capture) while limiting as much as possible the interference other confounders that could be captured by the measurement adopted here. The correlation between the variable measured at t_0 and at t_{-1} is not particularly high ($r = 0.42$), indicating a relatively high degree of variability. This is a good news, as a too stable distribution of preferences would suggest that the capacity of PTVs to capture current-time evaluation is rather limited. Being a compounded measure, certainty is strongly dependent on one of the two indicators used to build it, namely the highest preference. In fact, as a basic rule, the larger the maximum PTV, the greater the range of possible values that certainty can have. This does

[6] From van der Eijk et al. (2006, p. 432)

[7] See Appendix B for a list of parties for which the PTVs have been considered.

not necessarily a problem here, as long as the maximum PTV is included in the model as a control. In this way, the effect of certainty on vote switching will be cleaned from the effect of the maximum PTV alone. The correlation of the two variables is not particularly strong ($r = 0.33$ for the variables measured at t_0, $r = 0.31$ for the variables measured at t_{-1}), indicating that issues of potential multicollinearity are avoided.

The dependent variable is computed using the actual past and present vote choice of the respondents who are present in both waves of each panel. Given the past vote for a certain party, respondents are basically given three alternatives at every election: to *vote for the same party*, to *switch to another party*, or to *switch to abstention*[8]. Although the focus of this study is mainly on the effect that certainty has on the probability to stick to the same party against the probability to switch, including the possibility to abstain at t_0 (a behavior called "*differential abstention*") allows to test for the effective empirical separation between certainty and partisan identification. In fact, when it gets to predict stability versus change of party choice, the expected effect of both higher certainty and higher party identification point to the same direction. This is because partisan identifiers should be loyal to their own party in their voting behavior, as well as highly certain voters, who do not evaluate any other option worth a change. On the other hand, given the mobilizing impact of partisan loyalty, being an identifier should be also positively correlated with the probability to turnout (Franklin, 2004). This is not the case for certainty, as in its ideal form, the construct should be an expression of the *attractiveness of the alternatives*, rather than of the motivational push to support the most preferred option. In this view, a voter scoring high in certainty would be more likely to abstain, in case she is not fully convinced about the first option, rather than voting for another one. Thus, to observe that certainty has a positive effect on the probability to switch to abstention (against the probability to switch to another party) would reinforce the belief that the measurement employed here provides a valid assessment of preference certainty.

Control variables include age (measured in classes and only t_{-1}, due to the harmonization between the three studies), level of education, a dummy indicating whether the respondent defines herself as a member of the working class (to control for potential social-structural effects), the strength of party attachment (also observed only at t_{-1} for reasons of data availability), and the respondent's ideological extremity, observed both at t_0 and at t_{-1}. The latter two

[8] Other two logical possibility, not included in the analysis, regard non-voters at t_{-1} who vote for a party or abstain at t_0. Besides the fact that these observations represent a negligible quota of the sample, those voters are also uninteresting for the analysis of vote-switching included here.

variables are included mainly to control for the individual tendency to provide extreme response, that could be reflected into a higher certainty. Finally, year fixed effects (1989 and 1994) are included to control for specific wave effects[9]. The dependent variable was modeled with a multinomial logit function, using *switching to another party* as the baseline outcome.

Table 4.1: Multinomial Logit Model of Vote Switching. Data: DPES.

	Base Outcome: Switch Party	
	Predicted Outcome:	
	Vote for the Same Party	Switch to Abstention
Certainty t_0	1.907^{***}	2.141^{***}
	(0.367)	(0.652)
Certainty t_{-1}	1.472^{***}	1.601^{***}
	(0.312)	(0.573)
Strength t_0	3.089^{***}	-0.984
	(0.567)	(0.956)
Strength t_{-1}	-0.161	0.778
	(0.571)	(0.311)
Age (t_{-1})	0.051^{**}	-0.044
	(0.023)	(0.048)
Education	0.004	0.057
	(0.038)	(0.077)
Working Class	-0.577^{***}	-0.028
	(0.164)	(0.326)
Strength Party ID (t_{-1})	1.071^{***}	-0.899^{**}
	(0.207)	(0.453)
Left-Right Extremity t_0	-0.014	-0.145
	(0.061)	(0.129)
Left-Right Extremity t_{-1}	-0.063	-0.074
	(0.067)	(0.142)
Constant	-3.001^{***}	-1.487
	(0.706)	(1.342)
Observations	1,590	
Log likelihood	-1010.431	
McFadden R-Square	0.133	
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table 4.1 shows the results of the multinomial regression model. As a starting point, observing the coefficients of the control variables could provide a

[9]The coefficients of the fixed effects are suppressed from the table. See Table A.1 in Appendix A for the full model output.

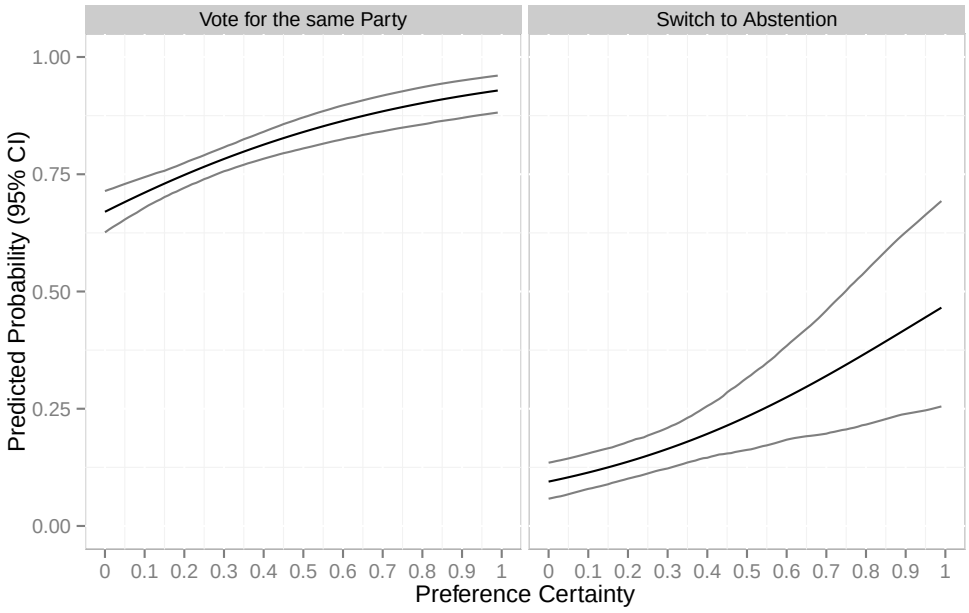

Figure 4.3: Preference Certainty and Vots Switching. Data: DPES.

first assessment of the validity of the results. The only controls that have a significant impact on vote switching are age, the fact of being a member of the working class, and the strength of party attachment. For all these variables, the direction of the effect is plausible. Older people are more likely to stick to the same party, and less likely (although not in a significant way) to switch to abstention. On the other hand, members of the working class are more likely to switch. This could be a consequence of a general dealignment of the social groups from the traditional cleavage parties ("pillars" in Dutch politics) taking place in the Netherlands from the 1960s (Andeweg and Irwin, 2002) as well as of the process of depolarization of the Dutch parties starting from the mid 1980s (see the discussion in Chapter 6). Finally, party identification has a positive effect on the probability to stick to the same party, as well as a negative effect on the probability to switch to abstension. As expected, the mobilizing impact of partisanship makes people less likely to abstain, even when the alternative is to switch to another party.

The effect of preference certainty goes in the expected direction in both models, and the coefficients are significant for both the t_0 and the t_{-1} measures. The coefficients at t_0 are larger, indicating that current distribution of preferences have a strong and independent impact from how preferences were arranged in

the past on the decision to switch. However, the strong effect of the lagged certainty suggests a considerable *friction* of preference updating among the respondents. Preference strength has a very strong effect only on the probability to stay, and only at the present time. To have a clearer idea of the magnitude of the effect of certainty on voting behavior, Figure 4.3 plots the predicted probability to vote for the same party as before (left panel) and to switch to abstention (right panel) against the probability to switch to another party across all the range of preference certainty (observed at t_0). As the variable goes from its minimum to its maximum value, the probability to vote for the same party (against the probability to switch) increases of more than 25%, going from about 67% to about 93%. The effect on the probability to switch to abstention is stronger in magnitude, although the confidence interval is considerably bigger (due to the few observations falling in the category, i.e. about the 4% of the sample). Here, the probability to abstain goes from about 9% to about 46%, although the 95% confidence interval covers a range from 24% to 69%. Thus, while the effect is significantly different from zero, its magnitude is more difficult to judge. All in all, Figure 4.3 confirms the expected effects: higher preference certainty is associated with a lower probability to switch party from the previous election, and with a higher probability to vote for the same party and to switch to abstension. Moreover, the effect is independent from the variable measured at the previous election, indicating that preference certainty is related to a great extent to current evaluations (and it is not only due to an idiosyncratic way to evaluate parties such as, for instance, through the lens of partisan loyalty). These findings demonstrate that certainty is a valid construct to describe the individual tendency to consider voting for more than one party or, to put it in another way, to assess the *availability* of individual voters. Furthermore, the results show that the way to operationalize preference certainty proposed here, i.e. the difference between the highest and the second highest PTV scores, produces a valid assessment of the construct. Thus, in the next section, certainty will be used as a dependent variable in a more extended cross-context data set.

4.5 Predicting Preference Certainty

The aim of this section is to test the hypothesis that voters' preference certainty is influenced by the arrangement of the parties surrounding them. More specifically, as shown in Figure 4.2, the expectation is that certainty will be higher the larger the difference in distance between the closest and the second closest parties. This should be related to the degree of party polarization, as in more polarized contexts the distance between every two parties is larger on average.

Thus, two main expectations are tested in this section. First, higher party system polarization, as measured using the *vdE index*, will have a positive impact on voters' preference certainty. Second, a larger distance difference between the two closest parties will have the same effect. The latter expectation is based on the assumption that voters' preferences are influenced by ideological spatial considerations. Bringing this assumption to its extreme (i.e. assuming that voters' preferences are determined *solely* by spatial considerations) will lead to the expectation that, once information regarding the parties positioned immediately close to the voter are added to the model, the effect of polarization should disappear. Thus, the test conducted in this section allows for an assessment of the extent to which the impact of party polarization on citizens' preferences is to be regarded as purely *mechanical*.

Besides the vdE index of party polarization, two central variables discussed in this chapter are the respondent's *distance* from the closest party, and the *distance difference* between the first and the second closest parties. While the latter is the relevant factor for the purposes of this investigation, the function of the former is to control for voters' relative isolation from the party system. However, under the assumption that preferences are determined as a linear (or "city-block") function of the distance between the voter and the party, as depicted in Figure 4.2, the distance from the closest party should not make any difference for voters' certainty. Both distances are calculated using respondents' individual *self-placements* on the left-right as reference point, and taking parties' *mean perceived positions* to calculate voter–party distances. This should ensure that the individual assessed distances are as clear as possible from perceptual biases due to rationalization, such as "projection" or "persuasion" effects (Brody and Page, 1972)[10].

One implication of calculating distances holding party positions constant is that it is possible to observe how voters' certainty *should* be distributed, given their self-placement along the left-right continuum, in every country. This is because, for each point of the left-right scale, there will be only one "most proximate party", and one "second most proximate party", for all the voters positioned there. Thus, by calculating the distance difference between the two, it is possible to obtain predictions regarding voters' certainty at each point, and compare it with the positions of the parties. Moreover, it is possible to observe to what extent the actual, empirical distribution of voters' certainty is congruent with the prediction made based on the theory. This excercise can be accomplished by a simple visual inspection.

[10]The relationship between polarization and these biases, including perceptions of ideological proximity, will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Figure 4.4 provides an example of how the predicted and the observed certainty covary, together with the party positions. For ease of display, the example is based on twenty-eight political systems only, i.e. all the countries included in the European Election Study (EES) of 2009[11]. However, the rest of the empirical evidence provided in this section will be based on the pooled dataset of the European Election Study, already introduced in Chapter 3[12]. The fact that the elections for the European Parliament are considered to be *second-order* elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980) should not represent a problem here, because of the "timeless" nature of the PTV variables. As discussed above, the formulation of the PTV questions does not refer to the vote at the election when the study is conducted, but rather to a more generic probability to *ever* vote for a party. While the principal aim of this formulation is to relax as much as possible the ipsativity of the vote choice (van der Eijk et al., 2006), a side effect of it is that it essentially unbinds the respondent's evaluation from any election-specific considerations[13]. Thus, as pointed out by van der Brug et al. (2005, p. 550) European elections can be simply regarded as «an opportune moment for collecting data about national political party support in comparable terms across a large number of countries.»

Figure 4.4 shows three distinct pieces of information. The black bars represent the parties, i.e. their left-right position on the x-axis, and their relative size on the y-axis. For this part, what the figure shows is the same as Figure 3.5 in Chapter 3. However, there are other two pices of information that are combined here. The red dots represent the *predicted certainty*, i.e. the spatial utility differential between the closest and the second closest party, given by the difference in distance between each point of the scale and the two most proximate parties to that point[14]. Finally, the blue line represents the mean *observed certainty* of the respondents across the left-right scale, obtained by a LOESS smoothing function, with the estimated 95% confidence interval.

This first thing to be noticed from the figure is that voters' certainty as pre-

[11]The European Election of 2009 was conducted in all the EU 27 countries. However, Belgium has been split in two distinct political systems, i.e. the Flanders and Wallonia.

[12]While the full pooled EES dataset includes 82 elections, Luxembourg 2004 will be excluded for the analyses in this chapter for the lack of some relevant variables.

[13]The only wave of the study since the introduction of the PTV variables where the batteries are repeated separately for the vote at the National and at the European elections is 1989. For this reason, the wave has been excluded from the analyses.

[14]The range of both certainty and party size are is scaled from 0 to 1, and therefore the values of the y-axis are interpretable in the same way for the two variables. In order to constrain the predicted certainty on the same scale, the distance difference has been divided for the figure by its theoretical maximum, that is, the distance between two parties positioned at the opposite extremes of the left-right scale. On a scale from 1 to 10 this value is equal to 9.

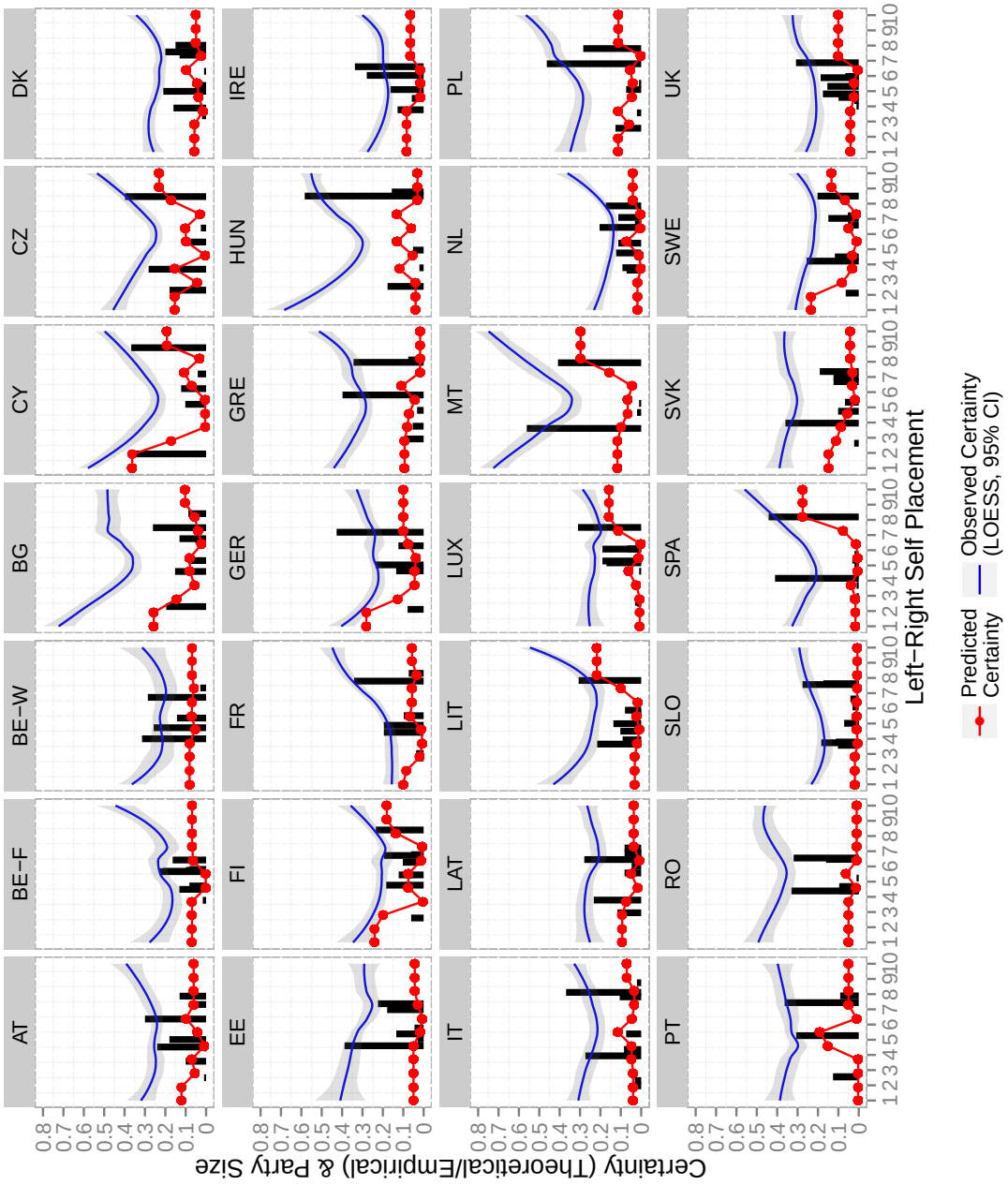

Figure 4.4: Party positions, utility differential and preference certainty in 2009. Data: EES.

dicted by the spatial theory is, on average, rather low in all the political systems observed. This is due to the fact that in none of these systems parties are excessively far from one another. Of course, this may be due to the fact that the theoretical maximum by which differences are divided is fairly unrealistic. However, in general, there are a very few situations where the distance between the two closest parties is noticeably large. Having said that, the figure shows that, for some voters in some countries, the predicted certainty can increase to a considerable extent. This is the case, for instance, of extreme left-wing voters in Bulgaria, Cyprus and Germany, or extreme right-wing voters in Malta, Spain and, somewhat less, Lithuania and Luxembourg. For some countries, such as Cyprus and Finland, and to a minor extent Czech Republic and Sweden, the predicted certainty grows symmetricaly for the extreme voters on both sides of the ideological space. In other systems more certain voters are expected to be found rather around the center, such as in Denmark, Hungary, Italy or Portugal.

All in all, judging from Figure 4.4 the theoretically-predicted certainty does not seem to follow any systematic pattern related to polarization. The political systems just mentioned, where relatively larger values are observed, are not systematically more polarized than the systems where the distribution of predicted certainty looks more flat. For instance, higher certainty at the extremes is observed in Malta ($Pol_{(vdE)} = 0.46$), Cyprus (0.60) and Spain (0.45), i.e. three among the most polarized countries[15], but also in countries where polarization is not particularly high, such as Germany (0.28), Lithuania (0.33) and even Luxembourg (0.21). On the other hand, in some other quite polarized countries, such as Hungary (0.46) and Italy (0.45), the predicted certainty is distributed in a rather flat manner along the left-right. Such a dealignment between the values of polarization as captured by the vdE index, and the actual presence of large "gaps" in the party distribution (that is what essentially determines large utility differentials) is due to the importance of party sizes for assessing polarization. As the black bars show, Hungary *is* indeed rather polarized, while Luxembourg and Germany much less. While this discrepancy may diminish once a fully-specified model including other characteristics of the closest parties, such as the sizes, is taken into account, for the moment it casts some doubts regarding the purely-spatial (or mechanical) nature of the effect of polarization on voters' certainty.

This point becomes even more evident when predicted and observed certainties are compared. As Figure 4.4 shows, the actual level of voters' certainty is always considerably higher than the predicted one, with no exception. The only cases when the two distributions approximate each other, the red dots

[15]Recall that the vdE index goes from 0 to 1.

merely touch the confidence interval around the blue line. Moreover, the observed certainty seems to follow a pattern that is more coherent with the party distributions when also sizes are taken into account. Thus, for instance, certainty follows a U-shaped curve along the left-right in several countries. This is particularly true for some countries where the level of polarization is influenced by the presence of two big parties diverging towards the ideological extremes, such as Malta or Cyprus. Also in this case, the level of certainty can also grow asymmetrically on one of the two sides more than the other.

This pattern is quite visible in Bulgaria, France, Hungary and Spain. In some of these cases, the side where certainty increases more sharply is also the one where the main party faces no or little local competition from other parties. For instance, in Spain, the Popular Party seem to be the main undisputed option for the right-wing voters, positioned three points away from the metric center, while the main party of the left-wing, the socialist PSOE, is surrounded by a number of smaller competitors, many of them being regional parties. In Hungary the situation is reversed. Here the main left-wing party, the socialist MSZP, faces essentially no competition on the left[16]. The two closest parties are the liberal SZDSZ, the rather conservative MDF, which in the figure are both positioned around the center, but are ideologically rather different from the socialists. On the other hand, the main party on the right-wing, the Fidesz, is positioned very close to the radical nationalist Jobbik which, at the moment of the European election in 2009 was gaining more and more importance to the point of becoming the third largest Hungarian party. Although the Fidesz and the Jobbik support quite different platforms, their co-presence in such a small, extreme portion of the ideological continuum may be the reason for the lower average certainty of the right-wing Hungarian electorate (compared to the voters on the left-wing side). Interestingly enough, a very similar situation that nevertheless leads to a different outcome is the one in France. Here, the main right-wing party is the UMP and the far-right competitor is the Front National. However, the right-wing French electorate shows a high level of certainty, especially compared to the left side, where the relative atomization of the party supply goes together with a lower average certainty. This can indicate, essentially, that the UMP and the FN address two different types of electorate, and therefore the extent to which they directly compete with each other is rather limited. Finally, in Bulgaria, the coalition led by the Socialist party, called Coalition for Bulgaria (KB) is the only relevant option proposing a left-wing platform.

[16] A left-wing party that is not considered in the figure is the Hungarian Communist Workers Party (MKM). Its exile from the plot is mainy due to the fact that its relevance is so weak (1% of the vote share at the 2009 European election) that it does not even represent an option for the most of the left-wing voters.

To sum up, Figure 4.4 shows, first, a general discrepancy in terms of absolute values between predicted and observed certainty and, second, a less clear relationship between the two when it gets to the within-country variation along the ideological continuum. In some cases, such as Bulgaria or Cyprus, the two distributions look strikingly similar, while in others, such as France and Hungary, differences are quite remarkable. All in all, these findings suggest a more complex relationship between polarization and voters' preference certainty than a simple mechanical effect. Thus, the next step will be to test for this association in a multivariate setting.

The second piece of empirical evidence provided in this section is based on three multilevel linear models, with preference certainty as dependent variable. The first model (Model 4.1) will include only individual-level predictors, the second (Model 4.2) will introduce context-level variables (with the *election* being the relevant context), and the third (Model 4.3) will finally include information regarding the two parties that are most proximate to the respondents' positions. The variables introduced in Model 4.3 will be, as discussed above, the distance from the closest party and the distance difference between the first and the second closest parties. However, given the importance of parties' relative electoral strength, two important controls mirroring the two spatial variables will be also included: the *size* of the closest party, and the *size difference* between the two closest parties. Following Tillie (1995)'s finding that political power plays an important role for citizens' party evaluations, a general expectation is that preference certainty will be higher for the voters who are positioned close to a big party, and when the size difference between the two most proximate parties is larger.

Individual-level predictors include some social-structural indicators, such as gender and age, and some controls that should impact voters' certainty, such as political interest, a dummy indicating whether the respondent is a partisan, and the individual extremity on the left-right. Although there are no specific hypotheses regarding the effect of these predictors, the general expectation is that all of them will be associated to positive coefficients. People who are more interested in politics should be more likely to evaluate parties based on larger amounts of information than people who are less interested. Thus, their first preference will be more "robust", or at least less susceptible to random events, simply because it should be more self-reflected than the one of less informed voters. Partisans should simply have a larger difference between the preference for their own party and the one for *any* other party. This should be reflected in a more "sharply-peaked" preference distribution. Finally, as Figure 4.4 shows, left-right extremity should correlate positively with certainty, no matter the relative positioning of the parties.

One individual-level control that requires particular attention is the *strength* of the first preference. As discussed in the previous section, certainty is a *compounded measure*, and therefore its value is dependent on the magnitude of the highest preference expressed by the respondents. Because of this dependency, some individual characteristics that can cause respondents to give a higher value for the first preference will directly affect the dependent variable. For instance, some respondents could have more "intense" preferences, due to an extreme response style. This could be reflected also by a more extreme self-placement on the left-right. Thus, to include preference strength as a predictor will prevent spurious effects of other variables to be observed.

Contextual predictors include polarization, measured with the vdE index, the effective number of electoral party (ENEP), already introduced in Chapter 3, and a dummy for Central-Eastern European (CEE) countries. Besides polarization, of which the expected effect is rather clear at this point, the other variables are meant to capture different characteristics of the context that may impact on voters' certainty. The number of party simply refers to the number of options requiring evaluation that a voter is exposed to in a given political context. This variable should have a straightforward effect on certainty, as in systems with more parties the chance to encounter an interesting options is simply higher. Thus, the larger the number of parties running at a given election, the lower should be the average voters' certainty. The CEE dummy aims to capture the level of consolidation of the party system. Previous research shows that, in Central and Eastern European countries, impatient political elites' behavior lies at the base of greater electoral volatility (Tavits, 2008). This type of behavior should be reflected by a lower certainty among the voters in those countries.

As discussed above, European Elections are generally regarded as a *snapshot* of the state of political competition and voters' preference distributions in a large number of contexts. The only potential source of concern here is represented by the fact that European Parliament elections fall in different countries at different points of the electoral cycle (see Reif and Schmitt, 1980). This implies that, for instance, European elections that are held further apart in time from first order elections are subject of a less intensive electoral campaign, and possibly a weaker media coverage, than those happening closer to national-level appointments. The relative proximity to first order elections may be reflected by party evaluations, that should be, other things being equal, more or less accurate because based on different baseline-levels of information availability. This should be captured by a lower average certainty when the European election is held further away from the closest national election. Thus, to control for possible electoral cycle effects, a variable indicating the distance in months of the European election from the closest national election will be included in the

model specification. A general expectation is that, the further apart a European election from a first order election, the lower will be the certainty of the voters, due to less intensive campaign and more limited availability of party-related information.

Table 4.2 reports the results of the three models. Because the dependent variable goes from zero to one, the coefficients can be expressed in a straigthforward way as percentages. In spite of being based on individual-level predictors only, Model 4.1 provides the first interesting finding. While the effect of both left-right extremity and partisanship goes in the expected (positive) direction, political interest has a negative and highly significant impact on certainty, which holds throughout the other two model specifications. This contradicts the first expectation regarding the impact of thisvariable, i.e. that more interested voters are also more informed and self-reflective about their party evaluations, and thus they should be more certain. A possible explanation for the negative coefficient is that citizens that are more interested in politics are also more *open* to consider voting for different parties. In this sense, these voters could employ the amount of information that they collect in a more critical way, challenging their prior beliefs and listening to what all parties say, without being particularly attached to one of them. Besides political interest, the effect of the predictors in Model 4.1, including preference strength, is hardly a surprise. Notably, female voters are slightly less certain than male, for about 1%.

Moving to Model 4.2, the first thing to be noticed is that, adding the election level predictors, the model fit does not improve, but it rather becomes worse. This is reflected in the values of both the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), which slightly increase between the models 4.1 and 4.2. However, almost all the contextual predictors have a significant effect on voters' certainty. Starting from the obvious, as the effective number of parties increases, the number of potentially attractive options do too, and voters become less certain about their preferences. In particular, for every one point increase in the variable, voters' preference certainty drops on average of about 3%. To have an idea of the magnitude of the effect, in a system with seven "effective" parties (such as e.g. the Netherlands in 2009, or Italy before 2008) voters' preferences are on average 15% less certain than in a two-party system. The effect of the time distance (in months) from the closest first-order election has a negative effect, although only significant when $p<0.1$. This suggests that, the more a European election is distant from the national election, the lower the average voters' certainty. although the effect is rather weak. Another counterintuitive finding comes from the effect of the CEE dummy. According to the model results, citizens of Central and Eastern European countries are, on average, 5% more certain in their party preferences than

Table 4.2: Multilevel Linear Models for Preference Certainty. Data: EES.

	Dependent variable:		
	Preference Certainty		
	(Model 4.1)	(Model 4.2)	(Model 4.3)
Preference Strength	0.552^{***}	0.552^{***}	0.553^{***}
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Political Interest	-0.032^{***}	-0.032^{***}	-0.030^{***}
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Gender (Female)	-0.010^{***}	-0.010^{***}	-0.010^{***}
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Age	0.002^{***}	0.002^{***}	0.002^{***}
	(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Left-Right Extremity	0.006^{***}	0.006^{***}	-0.008^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Is a Partisan	0.056^{***}	0.056^{***}	0.056^{***}
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Polarization		0.172^{**}	0.164^{**}
		(0.078)	(0.071)
ENEP		-0.033^{***}	-0.028^{***}
		(0.006)	(0.005)
Time Dist. from Nat. Elec.		-0.002^{*}	-0.002^{*}
		(0.001)	(0.001)
CEE Country		0.049^{**}	0.050^{***}
		(0.021)	(0.019)
Distance Closest Party			0.026^{***}
			(0.002)
Dist. Difference 2 Closest Parties			0.036^{***}
			(0.002)
Size Closest Party			0.004^{***}
			(0.002)
Size Difference 2 Closest Parties			0.001
			(0.001)
Constant	-0.238^{***}	-0.142^{***}	-0.185^{***}
	(0.016)	(0.040)	(0.037)
Var Intercept (Election):	0.004	0.004	0.004
Var Intercept (Country):	0.004	0.000	0.000
Var Residual:	0.064	0.064	0.063
Observations	58,475	58,475	58,475
Groups (Election)	81	81	81
Groups (Country)	27	27	27
AIC	5,476	5,484	5,134
BIC	5,566	5,610	5,295
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

citizens in West Europe. This goes against the prior expectations, motivated by

the lower consolidation of party systems in post-communist countries. However, in spite of a less stable political supply, voters in CEE countries are found here to be less cross-pressured in their vote choice than other European citizens. Finally, the effect of polarization is positive and significant. Because the range of the vdE index goes from zero to one, the increase of about 17% shown by the coefficient is to be expected when polarization goes from the minimum to the maximum value. While the range of values among the party systems considered here is rather narrower, some country comparisons could give a clearer idea of the impact of the variable. Going back to the 2009 example, the preferences of an Italian voter are about 3% more certain than those of a German voter, and the preferences of a voter in Cyprus are almost 7% more certain than in Luxembourg. All in all, along the full range of polarization from the least to the most polarized party system in the pooled EES data used here, preference certainty varies of about 9%. This confirms one hypothesized effect, i.e. that in more polarized systems voters' preferences are more certain.

Finally, Model 4.3 shows the impact on voters' preference certainty of the relative positioning and size of the two parties that are most ideologically proximate to them. The results reveals a number of interesting findings. First of all, the model fit increases considerably compared to both Model 4.1 and Model 4.2. This indicates that the inclusion of the spatial variables in the model significantly helps to explain the variance of the dependent variable. Secondly, the effect of all the predictors already included in the previous two models remains essentially untouched, with one exception: the coefficient of left-right extremity is now reversed. This contradicts what is shown by the LOESS predictions in almost all the countries in Figure 4.4, i.e. that voters' preference certainty tends to *grow* as a function of individual extremity. Moreover, this result is also rather implausible, as more ideologically extreme voters should be less likely to be cross-pressured in their party evaluations than voters who take central or moderate positions. In fact, this result could be an artifact given by high multicollinearity.

A thing that needs to be taken into account is that, in most of the countries, the voters who are more *isolated* from the party system (i.e. those for whom the distance from the closest party is larger) are also the most extreme ones. As a brief look at Figure 4.4 can confirm (for 2009), there are very few situations where the parties are arranged such that voters positioned around the center are far enough from the closest party. In the figure, this is the case of Cyprus, Hungary or Italy, i.e. countries with a rather large empty space in the middle of the left-right continuum. This regularity is confirmed by a particularly high correlation ($r = 0.69$) between the two variables. Moreover, this correlation should vary as a function of polarization too, as the more extreme the parties

are placed, the less individual extremity will imply for a voter to be isolated from the party system. Thus, the negative coefficient for individual extremity in this context can not be considered reliable[17].

The coefficients of the variables related to the party sizes essentially confirm the expectation that larger parties produce more utility (Tillie, 1995). However, rather than the size difference between the two closest parties, it is the absolute size of the closest one that makes voters more or less certain. In other words, voters who gravitate around larger parties will hold more certain preferences, regardless how smaller (or larger) other proximate parties are. The magnitude of the effect is not particularly strong, as the variable is coded in a way such that every single point increase corresponds to 10% of (relative) vote share more. To give an example, the preferences of a voter close to a party as big as 40% will be only 1.2% more certain than those of a voter lying next to a 10% big party.

The effect of the distance difference between the closest and the second closest party is positive and significant, confirming the second expectation stated before in this section. However, the magnitude of the effect is not particularly large, if we take into account that, for every distance point difference (on a 1–10 scale), voters' preference certainty raises more than 3%. Thus, since the range of the variable is 3.26 points, the preferences of the voters positioned in a way such that the distance between the two closest parties is the larger will be between 10% and 12% more certain than those of the voters placed equally distant from two parties.

Notably, the coefficient of the distance from the closer party is positive and significant (and the effect is rather robust even then left-right extremity is excluded by the model, as Table A.2 in Appendix A shows). This indicates that, the more isolated is a voter from the party system, the more he/she will hold certain preferences. However, according to the basics of spatial theory, of which Figure 4.2 provided a summary, the only thing that matters for preference certainty should be the distance difference between the two closest parties. One possible explanation for this effect relates to the way in which voters assess

[17] In fact, as Figure A.1 in Appendix A shows, in less polarized systems the correlation between the two variables is rather dramatic, often approaching the perfect collinearity. However, the coefficient of left-right extremity is the only one changing the sign when the other variable is included. As Model 4.3b in Table A.2 shows, the coefficient of the distance from the closest party decreases slightly in magnitude, but keeps the same sign, when extremity is excluded from the model. On the other hand, as it is reported in Model 4.3c, once distance is excluded, left-right extremity goes back to positive. Moreover, among the two models, the one where left-right extremity is excluded has a rather small fit drop compared to Model 4.3 (for instance, the AIC increases from 5,134 to 5,169, while in Model 4.3c it has a value of 5,252). Finally, in Model 4.3c the effect of polarization is rather deflated, to the point that its coefficient becomes significant only with $p<0.1$.

party preferences based on spatial ideological considerations. In fact, the finding that preference certainty increases as a function of the distance from the closest party is consistent with a conceptualization of voters' proximity function as *non-linear*.

As briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, many scholars model voters' utility as a negative function of the quadratic Euclidean distance between a voter and a party, instead of the absolute or "city-block" distance, on which the example in Figure 4.2 is based. Generally, these two ways to conceive the proximity function are regarded as equivalent, and discussions on which one should be used tend to focus on pragmatic considerations (see Lewis and King, 1999; Westholm, 1997). However, in this case, the positive coefficient of the distance from the closest party may indicate that people weight the differences between the parties more heavily the more they are distant from them. To argue that voters' preferences drop as a quadratic function of the distance from their ideal point is equivalent to say that people tend to discount more easily parties that are not in their immediate proximity. This has virtually no implications when the utility differential produced by the varying distance between two parties is concerned (besides a difference in the predicted magnitude). However this implies that, holding constant the distance between the parties, the perceived differential will be larger the further apart the voter is positioned from them. This phenomenon is described in Figure 4.5.

The logic of the example in the figure is the same as in Figure 4.2. However, this time the voter's utility loss is modeled as a function of the quadratic distances from the two parties[18]. In the first scenario at the top, V is one point away from P_1 and two points away from P_2. This implies a preference difference, and thus a certainty, of $2^2 - 1 = \mathbf{3}$. Moving to the scenario in the middle, now P_2 is two points away from P_1, and three from V, and thus the differential is larger, i.e. $3^2 - 1 = \mathbf{8}$. Finally, in the scenario at the bottom, the distance between P_1 and P_2 is again of one single point, but both parties are one point further from V. Here, due to the steeper utility drop given by the quadratic function, the preference differential is of $3^2 - 2^2 = \mathbf{5}$, i.e. larger than in the first scenario, although the distance between the two parties is the same. Given that in Model 4.3 the distance between the two parties is held constant, the positive effect of the distance between the voter and the closest party may indicate that, when positioned far away from the party system, voters put more weight

[18]The function is obtained with the following equation:

$$U_{ij} = 10 - \left(V_i - P_j\right)^2 \tag{4.2}$$

Where U_{ij} is the utility of Voter i to vote for Party j.

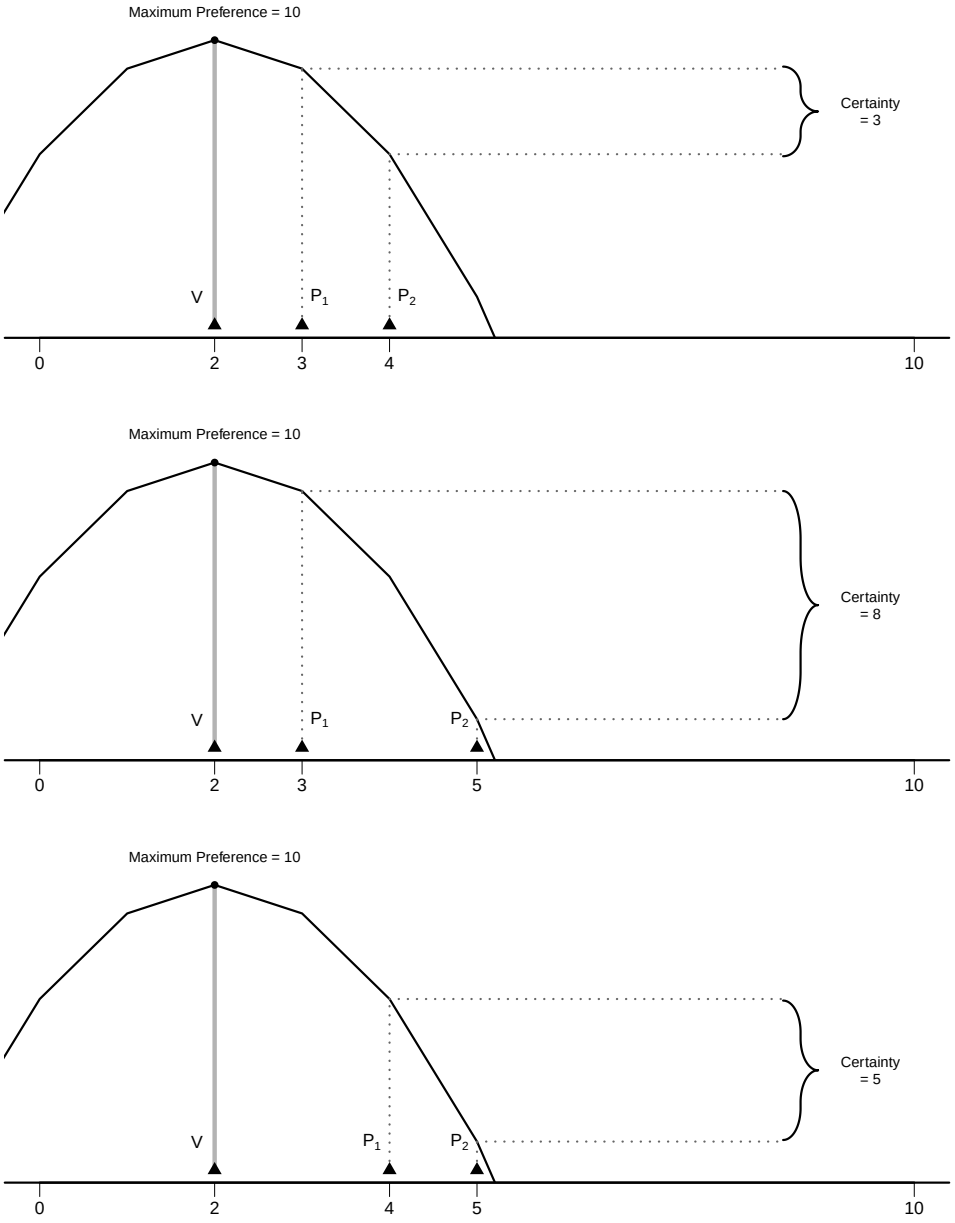

Figure 4.5: Party Positioning and Voter's Preference Certainty with Non-Linear Utility Loss

on the relative differences between the parties. This may suggest that voters' *alienation* and *indifference*, two factors that are often considered in parallel in studies of turnout (see e.g. Adams et al., 2006; Thurner and Eymann, 2000), may be inversely related to each other.

However, this is only one possible account for this finding. Other alternative explanations could be based on factors that are not related to pure spatial considerations. For instance, voters whose position is more peripheral in respect to the party system may be relatively insensitive to ideological appeals, and thus their evaluations may be more heavily influenced by non-spatial considerations. In general, these results show that spatial considerations play a relevant role in influencing voters' preference distributions, but they are not the whole story. This consideration comes in part from observing the impact of party polarization. While, on average, voters hold more certain preferences in more polarized countries, the reasons why it happens are not necessarily related to the mere way in which parties are arranged. However this topic, i.e. what polarization implies for the voters beyond the parties' distribution, will be left for the following chapters.

4.6 Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter deals with the impact of party system polarization on citizens' *openness* to consider voting for different parties, an individual feature that is strictly related to the aggregate concept of "electoral availability" introduced by Bartolini (1999). To do so, in the first part of the chapter, I propose a way to assess the extent to which voters are available by observing how their party preferences are distributed. In particular, I rely on an indicator called *preference certainty*, that captures how much the first preference of each voter is "outstanding" when compared to the others, or, in other words, how much of a change it requires for the second best option to challenge the first.

In the first set of empirical analyses, I validate this indicator by showing that higher preference certainty is associated with a lower probability to switch from a party to another between two elections, and with a higer probability to either keep on voting for the same party, or even switch towards abstention. Then, in the second part of the chapter, I discuss the relationship between preference certainty and party polarization. In particular I hypothesize a mechanism by which party polarization can influence voters' certainty, a mechanism that I regard here to be purely *mechanical*. The idea is that, before making any assumption regarding the type of interaction that we expect between parties in polarized contexts, the simple fact that the ideological differences between parties are

large should reduce the range of options that voters find appealing. This imples that preference certainty should change on average *between* electoral contexts, as a function of party polarization, but also between voters *within* the same context, as a function of the arrangement of the parties immediately proximate to them. In the last part of this chapter I provide an empirical test of these expectations on a large cross-national set of survey data.

Taken as an independent study, this chapter makes a number of contributions to the literature on the impact of contextual characteristics on voting behavior. First, this study represents the first effort in validating the construct "preference certainty" and its measurement by the means of the PTV scales. As it has been discussed in the chapter, other studies before had the intuition to employ rating scales in order to capture citizens' openness towards the political supply (Kroh et al., 2007; Rosema, 2006). However, besides some differences in operationalization, these studies have always *assumed* a connection between measures of preference certainty (or propensity to switch, or strength of the preferences) and the type of behavior that this construct is expected to be related to. Of course, at least in the case of the study relying on the PTV scales (Kroh et al., 2007), this assumption was not arbitrary, but it built on previous efforts to validate the scales themselves (i.e. Tillie, 1995; van der Eijk et al., 2006). However, the possibility to match within-individual preference distributions with the actual (self-reported) behavior was never taken seriously before. Here this connection has been tested *empirically* using the most appropriate type of data for the purpose of observing individual vote change.

Moreover, rather than providing a mere confirmation of already-assumed associations, the validation conducted in this chapter brought a number of novel insights. In particular, the choice of testing the impact of preference certainty on *two* different types of behavior, i.e. vote switching and differential abstention, provided a number of insights regarding the qualities of the measurement itself, and the cosequences that greater individual certainty will have on the actual behavior. The findings show that higher preference certainty incrases the probability to both stick to the same party over two elections and to switch to abstention, against the probability to switch to another party.

In terms of measurement evaluation, the empirical findings in this chapter provide solid ground to differentiate between preference certainty and *partisanship*, and individual trait that is indeed tightly related, but that also predicts a different behavior when it gets to abstention. While the very idea of partisan loyalty yields the expectation that voters will turnout to support their own party (Franklin, 2004), the concept of high preference certainty implies that voters have *no alternatives*, and thus it is perfectly plausible that they will decide to abstain rather than voting for a different party than their first preference. In

terms of theoretical implications, this finding suggests that voters whose preferences are highly certain are extremely *closed* towards the electoral market. When people prefer not to vote, rather than voting for something else than their favorite option, the expected consequences for electoral competition are not encouraging. More specifically, this situation resembles quite tightly what Bartolini (1999) calls "encapsulation", i.e. the opposite of electoral "availability". When brought to the extreme consequences, such a situation is supposed to provide no incentives for the parties to actually differentiate their product, or in general, to reach a policy equilibrium towards *collusion*, rather than competition.

That being said, and to keep up with the market metaphor, the second contribution of this chapter is that it shows that a situation of reduced electoral availability might occur when the differentiation is *too much*. The idea that party polarization can be conceived as equivalent to the product differentiation on a market has been proposed by some studies before (e.g. Dalton, 2008; Wessels and Schmitt, 2008). However, while previous research has ben mainly focused on *salience effects* of party polarization, i.e. on which evaluative criteria become more important for the voters when parties are differentiated (a phenomenon that will be investigated in Chapter 5), this chapter deals with a pure *mechanical effect*, i.e. how the differentiation itself is reflected by voters' sets of preferences. This is based on a frequently-made, yet rather restrictive, assumtpion, namely that voters' preferences are based on spatial ideological considerations only. Thus, to reiterate, if we assume that voters' preferences vary as a function of their *distance* from the parties, how do we expect such preferences to look like when the distances between parties are large? In this respect, spatial theory provides a straightforward prediction: the utility differential yielded by two parties will increase as a function of the difference in distance between them and the voter. Applying such a framework to the context of this chapter leads to the expectation that voters' preference certainty will increase in more polarized party systems, as the distance between two parties will be, on average, larger. However, because in a comparative setting the number of parties and their relative arrangements are supposed to vary considerably, a more accurate expectation regards the "local" disposition of parties, i.e. the positioning of the two parties that are most proximate to every voter.

The findings of the second part of this chapter suggest that greater party polarization is indeed associated with a higher average preference certainty among the voters. However, the extent to which the connection between the two should be regarded as purely mechanical is less straightforward. While, on the one hand, the disposition of the parties that are immediately close to a voter has the predicted effect on his/her preference certainty, the magnitude of this

effect on the other hand is not particularly large. Moreover, other unpredicted findings (such as a positive and highly-significant effect of the distance from the closest party on preference certainty) cast some doubts on the fact that spatial considerations should be regarded as the only relevant ones for the voters. For the time being this is not a problem, as this chapter represents just a first step towards assessing the full range of consequences of party polarization on voters' behavior. Thus, the expectation that polarization has a mechanical effect on voters' prefernce distribution is to be regarded as confirmed by the data, although the magnitude of this effect is not particularly impressive.

All in all, this chapter provides a number of insights regarding how voters' preferences in polarized contexts are likely to look like, and what impact this will have on their behavior. Although the magnitude of the effect may be considered relatively small, this nevertheless proves that different party distributions are reflected by different degrees of voters' certainty, a characteristic that is strongly associated with their openness to vote for different parties. Thus, while large ideological differentiation may not produce excessively high encapsulation *per se*, it will definitely contribute to it. Moreover, this finding pictures only *one* of the possible ways by which polarization can impact on voters' behavior. The next chapter will deal with the other side of the coin, i.e. with the type of *interaction* that we expect to observe between parties when polarization is high, and the consequences of it for the voters.

Chapter 5

Salience Effects of Ideological Party Polarization*

As discussed in Chapter 1, the basic concept of polarization lies in the divergence between actors' positions. If we stop here, i.e. if we do not make any hypotheses regarding the way in which actors relate to each other when their preferences diverge, then the expected consequences of higher party polarization are purely "mechanical". This means that the only thing that counts is the *distance* between the parties. This type of mechanism has been discussed in Chapter 4, where it has been also showed that in more polarized systems voters are, on average, more reluctant to switch their party support because of a larger distance between the alternatives. However, in order to fully understand the impact of party polarization on voting behavior, a second step to be made is to discuss what type of *interaction* corresponds to a greater divergence of preferences. This means, to use a language that is more familiar to the context of electoral research, understanding how parties *compete* when polarization is high, and how this influences the way in which voters make decisions.

This is where the concept of "salience effect" is introduced. In political science, the term "salience" is most often used to refer to the *importance* of an issue or some other matters of debate. This concept refers primarily to the focus of the attention. An issue is salient when it plays an important role in determining voters' evaluations, i.e. when voters *think about it* as they outline the pros and

*A similar version of this chapter is currently under consideration for publication under the working title "From Political Conflict to Partisan Evaluations: How Citizens Assess Party Ideology and Competence in Polarized Elections". Moreover, a preliminary version of the chapter appears in the final report of the Work Package 6 – *European Electoral Democracy Under Stress* of the ELECDEM project, available online `here`, under the title "Proximity, Valence, or just Partisanship? On the effects of ideological polarization on voters' evaluation of parties".

the cons of a party's (potential) rule. Thus, to study the salience effects of party polarization means essentially to assess which elements of the political scenario become more relevant for the voters as polarization increases. However, I argue that this necessarily implies taking into consideration the type of interaction, or competition, that it is likely to be found in polarized elections.

As discussed in Section 1.2, a pattern of interaction that can emerge from polarized contexts is *conflict*. This is because the more the actors' preferences diverge, the less likely it is for them to find a win-win solution (Pruitt and Olczak, 1995). However, even in case of great divergence, the actors can choose to *cooperate*. In such a case, the focus of their attention will be on the problem to be solved, i.e. the source of the discordance. On the other hand, in case of conflict, the actors will be focused on the actors themselves, on their own qualities and on the qualities of the opponents who may take advantage of their losses, following a logic of "us against them". Thus, the question of what becomes more or less relevant for the voters as party polarization varies, relates to a great extent to the way in which parties interact. When polarization corresponds to a conflictual relationship, party identities should play an important role in guiding voters' judgments. This chapter takes the cue from an empirical puzzle originated in the literature on polarization and voting behavior to suggest that this could be the case.

In recent years, scholars have been detecting a correlation between the degree of party polarization and the impact of party *ideological positions* and *competence* on voters' preferences. However, there is not much agreement about the direction of this correlation. While higher polarization has been found to make policies and ideology more important for the voters (Alvarez and Nagler, 2004; Dalton, 2008; Lachat, 2008, 2011; van der Eijk et al., 2005), evidence of its impact on competence assessments has been so far controversial. On the one hand, following the original conception of "valence issues" proposed by Stokes (1963, 1992), greater ideological consensus has been argued to increase the importance of competence assessments for party evaluations (Green, 2007; Green and Hobolt, 2008). On the other hand, further empirical research has found the opposite effect (Clark and Leiter, 2013; Pardos-Prado, 2012).

Understanding the logic behind these controversial findings is important for two reasons. First, accepting different explanations of the impact of polarization on the relevance of competence considerations for the citizens implies drawing different substantial conclusions regarding the way in which voters evaluate parties in polarized elections. A stronger effect of competence attributions on the vote is interpreted in the valence framework as an indicator of the fact that there is agreement over the policy goals to be pursued (Green, 2007; Sanders et al., 2011). Thus, to observe this association growing stronger as a function of

party polarization can lead to the conclusion that there can be "valence beyond consensus" (Pardos-Prado, 2012) or, more generally, that polarized elections make voters more likely to reward or punish parties based on their performance. If this is coupled with the greater importance of ideology and policy-based considerations documented by other studies (Lachat, 2008, 2011), the final message that can be read from this body of research is that proper "responsible electorates" emerge from polarized political environments.

A second reason for dealing with this controversy is that it raises the suspect that the heightened relevance of both ideology and competence in polarized elections could be in part explained by an increased importance of party identification. I argue that accounting for partisanship in this context is very important for two major reasons. First, partisan cues have been repeatedly shown to induce a significant bias in the way in which people perceive and evaluate political objects, including party performance and ideologies (Bartels, 2002, 2008; Carsey and Layman, 2006; Evans and Andersen, 2004, 2006; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011). Second, some single-country and comparative studies show that polarized elections are associated with greater mass partisanship (Hetherington, 2001; Schmitt, 2009b; Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995). Given these premises, it is argued here that the more a system is polarized, the higher the impact of partisanship on perceptions of party ideology and competence. This leads to opposite implications, in respect to those discussed above, regarding how voters evaluate parties in polarized elections, and it ultimately qualifies polarization as a situation of increased partisan *conflict*.

This chapter proceeds as follows: in the next two sections I first discuss the literature that links party polarization to valence voting, with the puzzling findings that show a positive association between the two, and secondly, I report a mirror discussion about the literature on polarization and issue/ideological voting. In the following two sections, I first revise literature on the meaning of ideological labels and discuss the implications of these definitions for our understanding of ideological polarization, then I link polarization with party identification. Finally, I provide evidence based on the pooled EES data set to support my expectations.

Results show that higher polarization is positively associated with the probability that citizens have a party identification, and, for those who have it, that the party perceived as most ideologically proximate and most competent will be the same that they identify with. Moreover, in more polarized elections, the probability that the perceived most competent party is also the ideologically closest is significantly higher for partisans, but not for non-partisans.

These findings suggest that in polarized elections citizens have higher incentives to rely on partisan cues as they evaluate parties, both on ideological and

on valence-based grounds. This has two major substantive implications for our understanding of how voters evaluate parties in polarized elections: first, for the scholars interested in the dispute between valence and positional voting, it suggests that to observe bigger effect of competence is not necessarily related to the fact that parties are competing in a valence, or non-partisan way, but quite the opposite. Second, it suggests that in more conflictual political environments even the presence of a largely rational behavior such as policy voting can be confounded with an expression of partisanship.

5.1 Valence with or without consensus?

The term "valence" is used in psychology to indicate a set of positive or negative emotions attached to a certain object (Frijda, 1986, p. 207). When Stokes introduced it in political science, the intent was to provide a definition of issues that emphasized the difference from the positional approach that was in style after Downs' formalization (Downs, 1957a; Stokes, 1963, 1992). The strength of the term "valence" lies in its clear reference to a vertical distinction between positive and negative evaluations, opposed to the conception of a horizontal space where parties take more or less different positions that are attractive to different portions of the electorate. Stokes' first definition describes valence issues as issues that «merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate» (Stokes, 1963, p. 373). Positive valence is associated with good past performance and with the ability to bring positive conditions in the future, i.e. with *competence*. Negative valence is associated with negative evaluations of past performance, and negative perceptions of competence. In Stokes' argument, the same issues can be positional or valence, depending on whether they offer alternative positions or not. The extent to which they belong to a type or another depends on the type of competition, and has to be settled empirically. Thus, to sum up, the take-home messages that subsequent research built on were essentially two. First, for issues to be considered valence, there needs to be ideological agreement. Second, when voters evaluate parties on valence issues, present or past competence assessments are the relevant points.

Following research has been investigating the evaluations of parties and candidates on two fronts. The first and more prolific one studies the electoral effects of policy-related valence factors. These are the type of factors considered in this present study as well. The second front is interested in nonpolicy-related components, e.g. leader or candidate attributes such as honesty and integrity. These traits are generally referred to as as character-based valence factors (Clark,

2009; Clark and Leiter, 2013). Both these factors have been proven to exert a significant influence on voters' choices, although in both cases the moderating effect of party polarization leads to contradicting results.

The assumption that competence attributions become more important as party ideological positions converge is also derived formally by Green (2007) and empirically tested for the UK by Green and Hobolt (2008).[1] Here the growing importance of competence evaluations observed over time is accounted "by difference" with the decreasing effect of spatial considerations on the vote, due to the ideological convergence of the major parties since the rise of the New Labour. The model essentially shows that, as parties converge towards a similar position, the within-individual variation in distance from all the parties decreases, and therefore the parameter associated with ideological proximity weakens (Green, 2007). Substantially this implies that when party positions become more and more similar, citizens find it increasingly difficult to choose between them based on positional considerations. Thus, «when policy distances between parties are modest, we can expect vote choice to be largely determined on the basis of which party is best trusted to deliver on this particular issue dimension» (Green and Hobolt, 2008, p. 463).

This mechanism is based on the assumption that ideology and competence are a zero-sum game (Pardos-Prado, 2012). While this assumption builds in part on Stokes' claim that issues can occur in both valence and positional form, depending on how controversial they are, the model ignores the fact that competence may still be taken into consideration when parties' ideological stands diverge. As Pardos-Prado points out, party polarization «can increase voters' and media interest in all aspects of political competition, including party competence» (Pardos-Prado, 2012, p. 344). In fact, comparative evidence shows that competence evaluations have a stronger impact on party preferences in *more* polarized elections, and their effect even correlates positively with the impact of ideological proximities (Pardos-Prado, 2012). Moreover, Sanders et al. (2011) show that people's perceptions of competence are in turn influenced by positional policy considerations. This suggests that voters may evaluate a party as more competent *because of its position*. These findings put into question the

[1] Policy-related valence factors are generally studied in the framework of the "issue ownership" theory. This is the body of literature where Green (2007)'s and Green and Hobolt (2008)'s studies are placed. The two important elements of valence in this model are *issue salience* and *competence attributions*. Parties are assumed to compete by increasing the salience of the issues on which they have a competitive advantage (i.e. the issues on which they are perceived as most competent). Voters are assumed to seek for the most competent party in handling the issues that they find more important. For more on this see e.g. Budge and Farlie (1983); Petrocik (1996); van der Brug (2004).

hypothesized advantage that competence considerations should have as party policy differences become less relevant, and, ultimately, the independence between these two types of evaluations.

Similarly contrasting results are found by scholars interested in character-based valence factors. Buttice and Stone (2012) show that in, US Congressional elections, the effect of candidates' character qualities is strong when their ideological differences are minimal, and reduces when the ideological differences grow. On the other hand, results of Clark and Leiter (2013)'s cross-country study show the opposite, i.e. the more dispersed parties' ideological positions, the stronger the effect of party competence, integrity and unity.

These controversial findings leave an open question when it gets to ultimately define the effects of party polarization on competence voting. While theoretical reasons why these two phenomena should be inversely related to one another are based on the very nature of valence issues (Green, 2007; Stokes, 1963), explanations for the opposite effect are lacking. Results of empirical analyses do not, admittedly, follow the hypothesized direction (Clark and Leiter, 2013) or they are taken as support for the argument against the assumption of a zero-sum game between ideology and competence (Pardos-Prado, 2012). However, even allowing for a persistent importance of competence when parties diverge positionally, none of these accounts explain why in more polarized elections the effect of valence considerations should be systematically stronger. In fact, this relationship resembles the one, more established in the literature, between party polarization and the importance of positional issue or ideological considerations.

5.2 Issue Differentiation and Issue Salience: An Uncontroversial Story?

The model of party convergence and competence voting formulated by Green (2007) is the mirror image of a more widely investigated "salience effect" relating party polarization with issue or ideological voting. This mechanism builds on the Downsian spatial proximity model (Downs, 1957a), and in particular on the importance of the *utility differential* that voters perceive from two or more parties holding policy positions that are rather different from one another (see the discussion about preference certainty in Chapter 4). In this view, the more the parties' positions diverge over a given topic, the more the topic is likely to become salient for the voters. In other words, when parties are polarized on some issue or ideological dispute, odds are that such a dispute will stand out

among the criteria used by the citizens to evaluate parties and get to their vote choice.

There are two types of argument in the literature linking party ideological dispersion and policy voting. They both share this rationale, but they focus on different aspects of polarization. The first focuses on the level of differentiation of the policy supply. If the parties or candidates running for an election do not offer meaningful alternatives, i.e. if the electoral success of one or another would not lead to a different expected policy outcome, it is no use for the voters to take their policy preferences into account as they choose for a party. Thus, in case of party convergence, voters will mostly ignore policies and concentrate on other characteristics. Conversely, when the party options convey different policy directions, voters will make a choice based on which policy alternative they prefer (Dalton, 2008; Wessels and Schmitt, 2008).

The second argument is more of a cognitive type, and focuses on the informational environment in which voters evaluate parties. This body of research has been looking for the contextual factors that make policy voting easier. As parties differentiate themselves from the others following vote-maximizing strategies, they will also emphasize such differences during the campaign, referring more often to policies in their communication. This will increase the availability of policy-related information in the voters' mind, that they will use to evaluate parties (Alvarez and Nagler, 2004; Hellwig, 2011; Kroh, 2009; Lachat, 2008, 2011). Both the arguments presented in this section point to a "salience effect" of polarization on policy voting: when parties take different positions over a certain issue, that issue is more likely to become important to the citizens.

Both these explanations ideally refer to a between-issue comparison, where different policy dimensions are used as counterfactuals for different levels of party differentiation. Yet many studies interested in the effects of polarization in a comparative perspective measure it on a single general left-right scale (see e.g. Dalton, 2008; Kroh, 2009; Lachat, 2008; van der Eijk et al., 2005). This is also the case of the two comparative studies that find a positive effect of polarization on valence voting (Clark and Leiter, 2013; Pardos-Prado, 2012). While this may be the only way to effectively compare party positions across countries, literature on the meaning and the function of left-right ideologies suggest that the observed levels of left-right polarization may reflect something more than pure policy differentiation.

5.3 The Implications of Left-Right Polarization: More Than Policy Differences?

I maintain in this section that party polarization, as measured on the left-right, is rather a measure of political *conflict*. To be sure, policy differentiation implies unavoidable contrast between supporters of the different sides. However, the claim here is rather that high left-right polarization implies a situation where conflict spans across issue domains, affecting party images by providing them with strong ideological profiles and identities. This view builds on a body of research focused on the meaning of ideology and the function of ideological labels, and can provide a key to read the observed effects of ideological polarization on citizens' behavior.

The substantive content of the labels "left" and "right" has been found to be rather variable (Schmitt and van der Eijk, 2009). While the most common use in modern political discourse relates them to different preferences regarding the role of the state in the economy, the semantic emptiness of these labels makes the left-right a rather flexible construct (Sartori, 1976). This view is endorsed by many comparative studies, which generally assume that the left-right is a "super-issue", which reflects what ever is the political conflict taking place at a given election (Inglehart, 1990).

Other studies have been interested in conceptualizing the ideological labels from a psychological point of view. One perspective sees ideologies as *belief systems*, i.e. as coherent sets of core values that provide an underlying structure for people's attitudes and preferences (see Converse, 1964; Jost, 2006, and the discussion in Section 2.2). Another perspective argues that ideological labels are better understood as *self-identifications*, i.e. as a form of group identity driven by the evaluation of the major political objects (Conover and Feldman, 1981; Levitin and Miller, 1979; Malka and Lelkes, 2010). Here, being "left", or "liberal", implies defining the self as a part of a specific social group. When the group identity is salient, it can influence the way in which people evaluate political objects, such as issues, parties or candidates, introducing a set of cognitive biases. These will include a tendency to evaluate more positively objects related to the in-group, and more negatively objects related to the out-group (see Iyengar et al., 2012; Turner et al., 1994).

Both accounts imply reading left-right polarization as a more encompassing phenomenon than a mere expression of issue differences. If ideologies are defined as belief systems, then ideological polarization should imply a type of political conflict that spans across issue domains, where the sum is more important than the parts. As Baldassarri and Gelman point out, polarization «constitutes

a threat to the extent that it induces alignment along multiple lines of political conflict and organizes individuals and groups around exclusive identities, thus crystallizing interests into opposite factions» Baldassarri and Gelman (2008, p. 409). In other words, while the issue salience effect discussed in the previous section drives people's attention from the policy domains where parties agree towards those where parties disagree, ideological polarization may rather consolidate the structure of issue preferences into proper identities.

The second view suggests that, for polarization to be an indicator of political conflict, the left-right does not even need to have a strong substantive content. While people are not always aware of their meanings, ideological labels have nevertheless a strong impact on their evaluations and behaviors (Levitin and Miller, 1979). Thus, parties can be perceived as polarized not necessarily because of their policy positions, but because of a particularly hostile tone of the debate, or because in their discourse they appeal more often to ideological identities (for a description of this process in Hungary, see Palonen, 2009).

5.4 From Left-Right Polarization to Partisanship

Both ways to conceptualize the left-right discussed above lead to a definition of polarization as a situation in which politics is essentially perceived as an "adversary enterprise" (Schmitt, 2009b). This should have some implications for the way in which voters in more polarized contexts deal with politics. In particular, polarized political environments should motivate citizens to confront politics in a more *partisan* way. This implies *taking a side*, i.e. stating one's partisan attachment to a political actor, and responding to every implicit or explicit call for evaluation of political objects according to a *partisan logic*. The latter should be reflected, among other things, by perceiving the party that one is attached to as the ideologically closest and the most competent.

The first phenomenon has been studied by scholars of US politics, assuming a top-down mechanism from the elites to the public opinion (Zaller, 1992). As Hetherington argues, «[b]ecause greater ideological differences between the parties on the elite level should produce a more partisan information stream, elite polarization should produce a more partisan mass response» (Hetherington, 2001, p. 622). Besides ideological distance, other explanations linking party polarization to partisanship in the US look into conflict extension across issue domains (Layman and Carsey, 2002) and a bigger ideological cohesion among the elites (Brewer, 2005).

To be sure, the capability of party identification to capture political identities may vary considerably between the US and other European contexts. For

instance, in West Europe, encompassing political identities are more often associated with other group-related characteristics, such as social class or religion, while party identities are often said to play a weaker role (Shively, 1979). However, feelings of partisan attachment can also be fueled by relatively short-term factors, such as a particularly intense type of competition. As Schmitt contends «[t]he more ideological conflict there is between parties, the more politicized and mobilized a society will be and the more partisanship we expect to find» (Schmitt, 2009b, p. 76). The general idea is that, as elites set the tones of the political debate, citizens will confront political stimuli in a way that resembles their representatives' behavior. In fact, the few comparative studies relating polarization to partisanship show a connection between the two (Berglund et al., 2005; Schmitt, 2009b; Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995). This suggests that the way in which parties compete plays a relevant role in influencing people's tendency to feel attached to a particular party. This expectation leads to the first hypothesis:

> *H1: In elections characterized by higher degrees of party left-right polarization, citizens are more likely to state their attachment to a political party.*

This hypothesis is the first step in the discussion of the impact of polarization on citizens' political behavior. A further step is to assess whether party polarization is also related to the extent to which partisan attachment influences citizens' perceptions of ideological proximity and feelings of party competence. For what concerns the former, past research shows a considerable impact of party identification on people's perceptions of party policy stances, both in the US and in European contexts (see Carsey and Layman, 2006; Evans and Andersen, 2004; Milazzo et al., 2012). When it gets to assess whether this connection is moderated by polarization, evidence is lacking. US scholars provide evidence that the amount of partisan "sorting", i.e. the correlation between ideological self-placement and party identification, increases as a function of party polarization (Levendusky, 2009b). On the other hand, scholarly literature did not produce so far any comparative evidence supporting the same phenomenon.

I argue here that the same reasons why polarization should increase partisan attachments across political contexts should account also for a stronger presence of a partisan perceptual bias. If a higher conflictual political context given by polarization mobilizes the voters to the point to trigger their feelings of partisan attachment, this should also make them more confident in relying on *partisan cues* at the same time. Thus, as a consequence of H1, we should expect the association between partisanship and ideological proximity to be higher in more polarized contexts:

> *H2: In elections characterized by higher degrees of party ideological polarization, partisans are more likely to perceive the party they support as the most proximate on the left-right.*

Perceptions of party competence should display a similar pattern. Literature on partisanship provides abundant documentation of the cognitive mechanisms and the situations in which partisan cues induce biases in people's evaluation of party or government performances (Bartels, 2002, 2008; Evans and Andersen, 2006; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011). If such cues are more relevant when parties are more polarized, we should expect the association between partisanship and perception of competence to be stronger in more polarized elections:

> *H3: In elections characterized by higher degrees of party ideological polarization, partisans are more likely to attribute competence to the party they support.*

If the hypotheses H2 and H3 are correct, in more polarized elections, partisans should end up evaluating party ideology and competence in the same way, i.e. the party perceived to be the ideologically closest and the one perceived as the most competent should be essentially the same. However, to make sure that the effect of polarization on voters' evaluations is effectively moderated by their partisan attachment, we need to take into account also the *counterfactual* situation, namely those citizens who are not attached to any party. If the hypothesized mechanism is correct, for non-identifiers the chance that ideological and competence evaluations lead to the same party should remain essentially constant, regardless of the level of polarization. Thus, the last hypothesis states the effect of polarization on voters' perceptions of ideological proximity and competence to be moderated by partisanship:

> *H4: In elections characterized by higher degrees of party ideological polarization, partisans are more likely to attribute competence to the most proximate parties on the left-right. The same effect should not apply to non-partisans.*

Figure 5.1 summarizes the theoretical expectations outlined in this section, and compares them with what has been found by previous literature. While previous studies mainly focused of the moderating effect of polarization on the determinants of the vote, this studies focuses on the prior step, i.e. on how the observed effects can reflect an increased partisan bias in more polarized elections. The next section provides comparative empirical evidence to quantify the extent of this phenomenon.

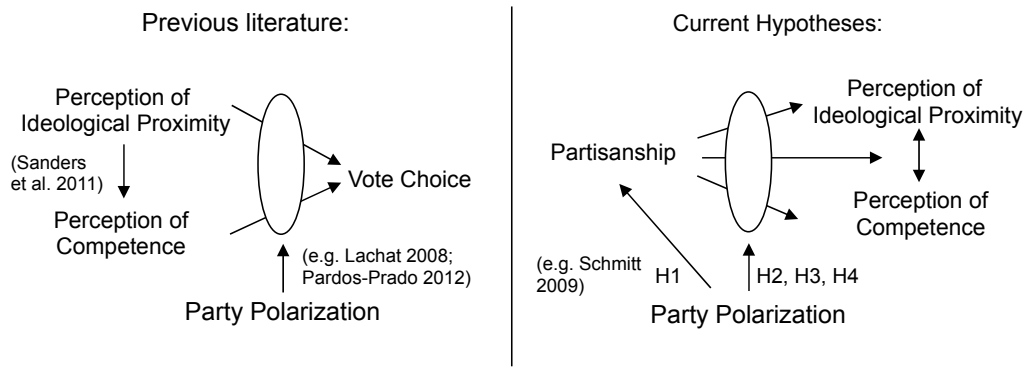

Figure 5.1: Previous findings and current theoretical expectations

5.5 Data, model specification, and results

The evidence provided in this chapter is based on the pooled EES sample covering European elections from 1994 to 2009[2]. The three main concepts on which this study is based are *partisan attachment*, *competence attribution* and *ideological proximity*. The first consists in two pieces of information: a simple dummy indicating whether the respondent states that he/she feels "close to a particular party" (used to test H1) and, in case of affirmative answer, a further variable indicating which one[3]. Competence attribution is measured in a similar way: first, the respondent is asked about what he/she thinks is the most important problem facing the country at the moment of the interview, then a following question asks which party is the most competent in dealing with it. This information is used to compute a dummy variable telling whether the party indicated is the same that the respondent feels attached to (to test H3)[4]. Finally,

[2]Cyprus (2009) and Northern Ireland (1999) are excluded from the analyses with perceptions of party competence because of missing variables.

[3]In some studies, a follow up question is asked to try to retrieve some respondents who either answer negatively or do not know. However, because such question is not present in all the EES waves, it was ignored in this operationalization. For a similar reason, i.e. the non comparability of the scales used across different waves, the analyses performed here can not account for the variation in strength of partisanship.

[4]The 1994 study has a slightly different question wording, i.e. the first question asks for the most important issue. Although some studies have been pointing this out as an important difference (see Jennings and Wlezien, 2011), the main concern regards the comparability of the information about the problems/issues themselves, rather than the follow-up question about the most competent party. However, to make sure that this difference does not bias the results, I ran all the models that include competence assessments without including 1994, obtaining similar

ideological proximity combines information about respondents' self-positioning and perceived positions of the relevant parties on a left-right scale. These measures are used to calculate individual distances between the respondents and, first, the party that they indicate as the one they feel attached to (if any) and, second, the one they indicate as the most competent (if any). Two dummies tell whether each of the two distances correspond to the smallest individual distance from a party. Such indicators are used to test, respectively, H2 (i.e. whether the closest party on the left-right is the same that the respondent feels attached to) and H4 (i.e. whether the closest party on the left-right is the same that the respondent attributes competence to)[5].

Figure 5.2 plots polarization (measured with the *vdE index*) with the election-level frequencies of the four dependent variables analyzed in this chapter. Because all four measures are dichotomous, the *y-axes* of the figure report the percentage within each election cluster of respondents who score one. The plots are to be regarded as a first, rough, piece of evidence reinforcing the expectation that the relationship between polarization and each of the four variables is indeed positive. However, the figure also shows the presence of some rather severe outliers which could potentially drive the results. The most evident case is Belgium-Flanders in 2009, where a very low degree of polarization (in fact, the lowest value of the vdE index in our sample) is associated with almost 85% of respondents stating their attachment for a party. Other cases, such as Slovenia, France and Germany (all 2004) fall in the middle of the distribution of polarization, and therefore are less problematic for the estimation of the effect of polarization at level-2. More specifically, the presence of these outliers is likely to bias the *intercept*, rather than the slope of the independent variable at the context level. Yet, to make sure that none of these cases drives the coefficients of the relevant predictors in the multivariate models, they are be controlled for in the models by adding a set of dummy variables identifying them[6].

Although the relevant context discussed this study is the election, the presence of several elections for some countries requires that the individual-level analyses are specified with a hierarchical structure set on three levels. Thus, in-

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results.

[5]An alternative operationalization would imply recalculating the distances using "objective" party positions, i.e. using for each party the sample mean placement. This type of operationalization should reduce some known perception biases in individual and party positions, such as projection or persuasion effects (see Brody and Page, 1972). However, rather than biases, such misperceptions are part of the effect hypothesized in this study. Interestingly, all the analyses lead to substantially similar effects if rerun with variables computed using objective distances.

[6]Alternative models estimated without including the dummy variables lead to similar effects, but also to considerably reduced model fits.

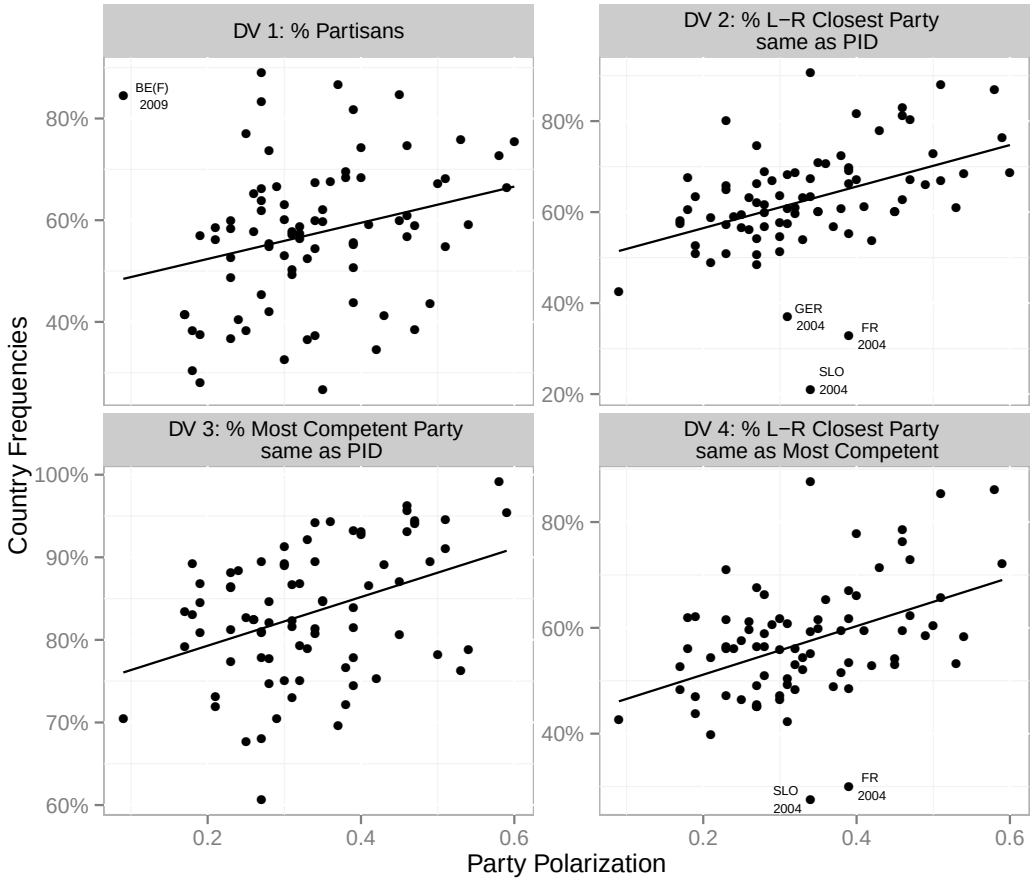

Figure 5.2: Election-level Scatter Plots of Polarization with the Frequencies of the Four Dependent Variables. Data: EES.

dividual respondents are nested within elections that in turn are nested within countries. While the predictors included in the models are mostly at the individual or at the election level, the choice to add an additional level is made to control for the non-independence between observations belonging to the same country, which may be affected by common sources of correlation that go beyond the single electoral context. This implies accounting not only for the presence of multiple surveys for the same nation, but also for those cases where different samples (e.g. East and West Germany in 1994) or different political systems (e.g. Belgian Flanders and Wallonia) belong to the same county[7].

Hypothesis 1 refers to the individual probability that respondents state their attachment to a certain party, and therefore is tested on the full sample. On the contrary, Hypotheses 2 and 3 are tested only on the sub-sample of respondents who score 1 on the partisanship dummy. For each of the first three models, the focus is on the main effect of polarization, which is expected to be positive. Thus, in all three cases the equation specified is for a simple random-intercept model. Hypothesis 4 requires a slightly more complex specification, as the effect of polarization on the overlap between the most competent and the closest party is expected to be positive for partisans and null for non-partisans. In this case, the main effect of partisanship is expected to vary across elections as a function of the degree of polarization. This requires specifying a random-slopes model, where the slope for partisanship is set free to vary across elections. Because the four dependent variables are dummies, all the models are specified as logit.

Controls at the individual level include age and interest for politics, which may both affect the individual propensity to be a partisan. Given the unavoidable association between party polarization and voters' dispersion, individual left-right extremity is included to control for sample composition. Controls at the election level include the effective number of parties, and the distance in time from the closest national election. Finally, to control for the presence of less established party systems that may have systematically fewer partisans, a country-level dummy identifying post-communist countries is included[8]. The results of the four models are reported in Table 5.1[9].

[7]Note that this type of specification, which by estimating different country intercepts controls for correlation within country units, leads to the most conservative results. The analyses were replicated using several other model specifications, including nesting only at the election level and only at the country level (both rather usual practices in many published comparative articles), and always produced similar results, some times with even smaller standard errors. However, the specification reported here is the one producing the best fit in the most of the models.

[8]See Appendix B for some descriptive statistics for the variables.

[9]The output reported in the text does not include the coefficients for the fixed effects. For the sull output, see Table A.3 in Appendix A

Several findings appear in Table 5.1. I focus on the interpretation of the effects related to my hypotheses, i.e. the main effect of polarization in the first three models and its interaction with partisan attachment in the fourth model. Model 5.1 shows that the effect of party polarization on the probability that citizens feel attached to a party is positive and significant ($p < 0.01$).

To have a clear idea of the substantive relation between the two, Figure 5.3 shows how the predicted probability simulated using the model coefficients varies when party polarization goes from the minimum to the maximum value, holding other predictors constant at their mean value. The probability that citizens state their party attachment increases on average by 25%, going from about 50% in elections with the lowest party polarization to 75% in highly-polarized contexts.

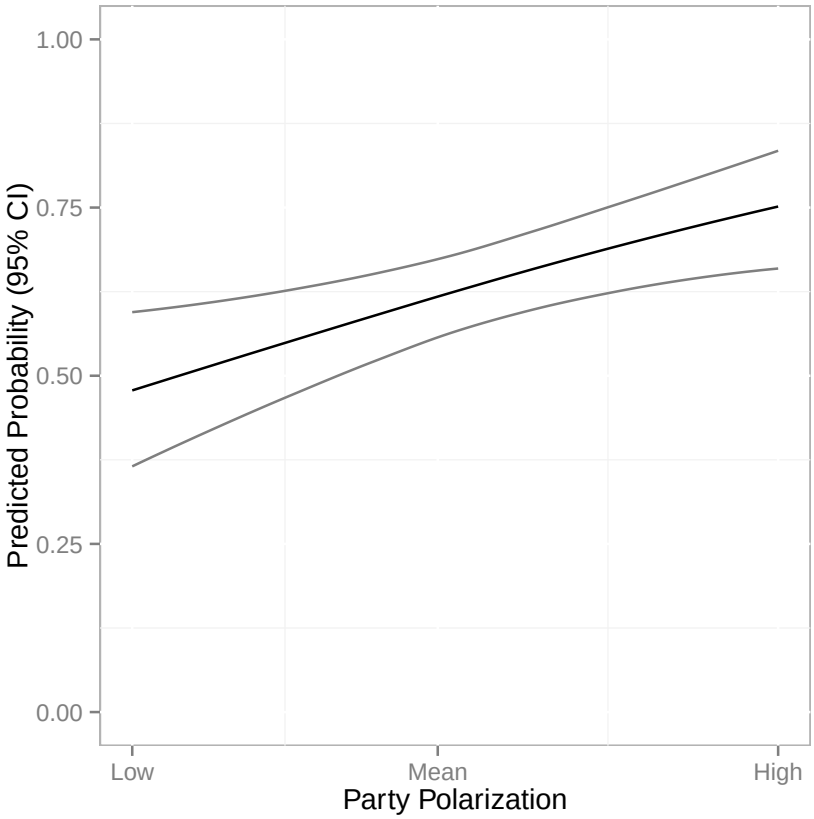

Figure 5.3: Predicted Probability to Be Partisan by Polarization. Data: EES.

Models 5.2 and 5.3 tell a similar story, as polarization has a positive and

Table 5.1: Multilevel Logit Models For Partisanship and Party Evaluations. Data: EES

	Dependent variable:			
	Partisan Attachment	L-R Closest Party same as PID	Most Competent Party same as PID	L-R Closest Party same as Most Competent
	(Model 5.1)	(Model 5.2)	(Model 5.3)	(Model 5.4)
Political Interest	1.833***	0.113***	0.130**	0.086**
	(0.035)	(0.043)	(0.064)	(0.044)
Gender (Female)	0.003	−0.028	0.025	−0.022
	(0.018)	(0.023)	(0.033)	(0.023)
Age	0.013***	0.001	0.003***	0.002**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Left-Right Extremity	0.315***	0.303***	0.082***	0.269***
	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.009)
Is a Partisan				−0.098
				(0.116)
Polarization	2.339***	1.657***	2.113***	0.567
	(0.795)	(0.410)	(0.589)	(0.395)
ENEP	0.054	−0.089***	−0.153***	−0.118***
	(0.054)	(0.029)	(0.038)	(0.026)
Distance from National Elections	−0.009	−0.012**	0.006	−0.008
	(0.009)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)
CEE Country	−0.369	−0.271**	0.283	−0.137
	(0.231)	(0.110)	(0.177)	(0.099)
Polarization*Partisan				1.252***
				(0.340)
Constant	−0.806**	0.188	1.448***	0.171
	(0.396)	(0.207)	(0.290)	(0.190)
Var Intercept (Election):	0.234	0.125	0.082	0.077
Var (Partisan):				0.031
Var Intercept (Country):	0.192	0.000	0.120	0.000
Observations	63,630	36,806	26,200	35,191
Groups (Election)	81	81	79	79
Groups (Country)	27	27	27	27
AIC	71,765	45,598	24,239	45,419
BIC	71,874	45,726	24,337	45,572

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

significant ($p < 0.01$) effect on both the probability that partisans perceived the party they support as the ideologically closest and the probability that they indicate it as the most competent. The coefficient of polarization is surprisingly similar among the two models, although slightly stronger in Model 5.3. Taken together, results of Model 5.1 and Models 5.2 and 5.3 confirm, first, what found by previous studies regarding the main effect of a polarized electoral context on citizens' propensity to be partisan, and second, the hypotheses formulated here about the increased likelihood, in more polarized elections, that ideological and competence evaluations are performed following a partisan logic, i.e. indicating the party that the citizens feel attached to as the most ideologically similar to

their own position and as the most competent.

Drawing general conclusions from the coefficients of Models 5.2 and 5.3 as they are is rather difficult, because, next to the problem of interpreting the rough values of the linear predictor in logit models, they refer to a specific subsample of the population, i.e. the partisans. This represents a problem insofar as the size of the partisan share of the population varies as a function of polarization as well, as the results of Model 5.1 show. Thus, a meaningful summary of the conclusions should take into account, first, the effect of polarization on the probability to be a partisan and, second, the probability that the party supported overlaps with ideological perceptions and competence assessments.

To provide such a summary I combine Model 5.1 with, respectively, Model 5.2 and 5.3 using statistical simulation. The procedure takes three steps. First, it predicts the probability to be a partisan using the coefficients of Model 5.1. Second, it uses the predicted probability to draw a single random trial from a binomial distribution. Third, if the number drawn is 0 (meaning that the observation is predicted to be a non-partisan) the probability is saved as it is. Conversely, if the number drawn is 1, there will be a further random draw, using this time the predicted probabilities obtained, respectively, from Models 5.2 and 5.3. The procedure is repeated a large number of times. At every round, a new predicted probability is simulated from the three models, using both the coefficients and the standard errors to take into account the uncertainty of the estimate. This routine is embedded in a further loop that repeats it for several levels of polarization, holding every thing else constant at the mean. The resulting plots are shown in Figure 5.4[10].

[10]Because Model 5.3 is based on 79 elections instead of 81, the conditional probabilities simulated for Model 5.3 are based on a version of Model 5.1 which includes exactly the same elections. This implies that the substantive results shown on the right plot of Figure 5.4 do not involve Cyprus (2009) and Northern Ireland (1999).

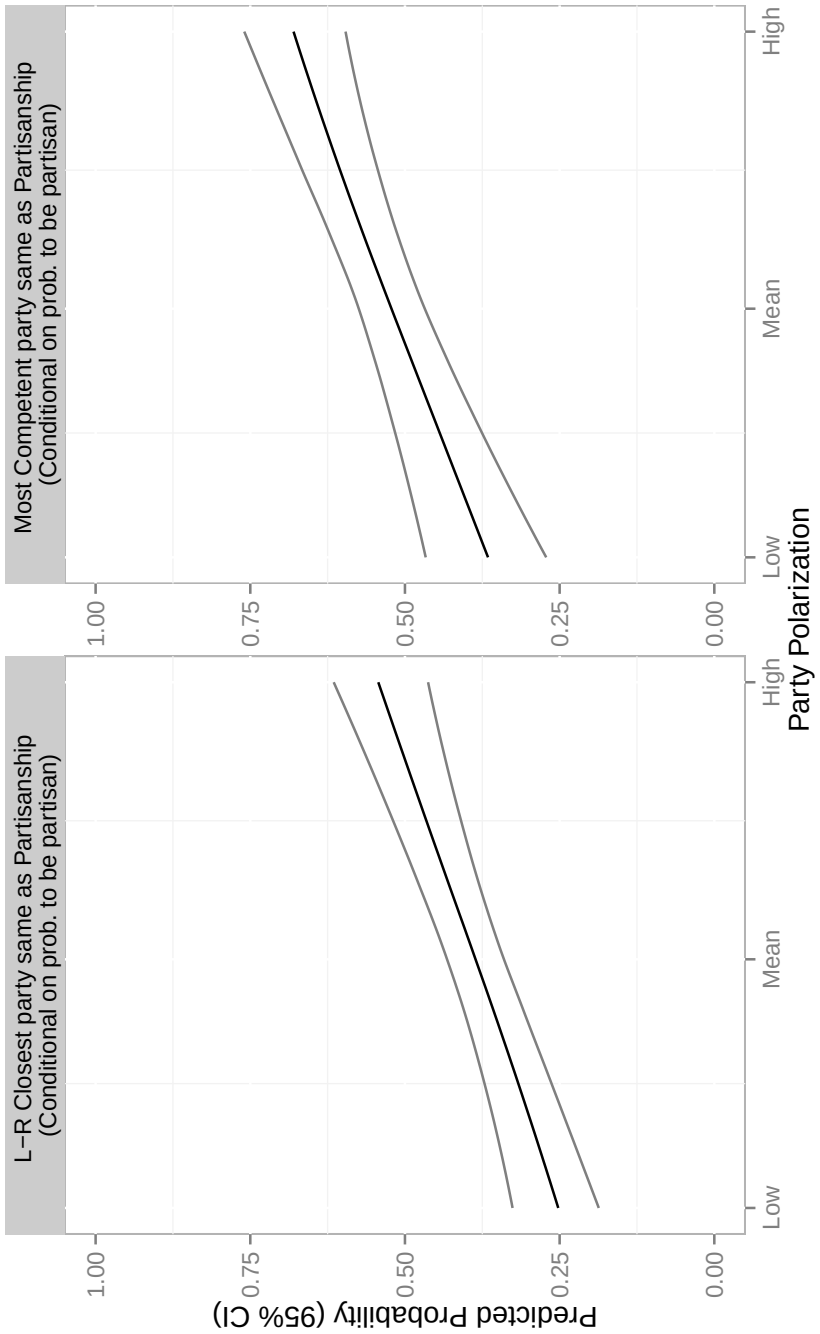

Figure 5.4: Conditional Predicted Probabilities of Partisan Evaluation of Ideological Proximity and Competence by Polarization. Data: EES.

The interpretation of the two plots in Figure 5.4 is straightforward. The left chart shows that, for an average citizen, the party perceived as the ideologically closest is the same he/she is partisan of in 30% of the cases in systems characterized by low polarization, and in 50% of the cases in highly-polarized systems. This implies that, in very polarized elections, the half of the times we observe a citizen voting ideologically, we can not really distinguish it from partisan voting. The situation gets somehow worse for what concerns competence assessments. As Figure 5.4 shows, the party indicated as the most competent to deal with the most important problem in the country, is in almost 70% of the cases, the same one a citizen is partisan of in highly-polarized elections. This percentages drops to 40% in elections where polarization is low. This finding has implications for both the evaluation of valence models based on competence voting and for the interpretation of aggregate perceptions of competence, used to assess which parties "own" what issues (see e.g. Petrocik, 1996).

Before passing to a more detailed discussion of these results, an inspection of the coefficients of Model 5.4 confirms both the expectations formulated in Hypothesis 4. Here the dependent variable is the probability that the party mentioned as the most competent *and* the ideologically closest are the same. According to the hypothesis, the effect of polarization on the overlap between these two types of perceptions is meant to be moderated by whether citizens are partisan or not. Figure 5.5 shows the distribution of predicted probabilities for partisans and non-partisans.

As the figure shows, the probability that competence and ideological perceptions overlap for non-partisans is always around 50%, regardless the level of party polarization. However, for partisans this grows to 70% in highly-polarized elections. Moreover, the difference between partisans and non-partisans is not significant for lower levels of polarization, indicating that in those contexts partisans and non-partisans evaluate parties essentially in the same way. To sum up, all four the effects hypothesized in the previous section find empirical support. Party polarization has a positive impact on citizens' propensity to state a partisan attachment, and on partisans' propensity to perceive the supported party as the ideologically closest and most competent. Moreover, Model 5.4 shows no effect for non-partisans, confirming that the mechanism by which polarization influences citizens' evaluations is through their partisan attachment.

5.6 Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter proposes one simple message: when party polarization is high, the interaction that it is likely to be found among the political actors is of the

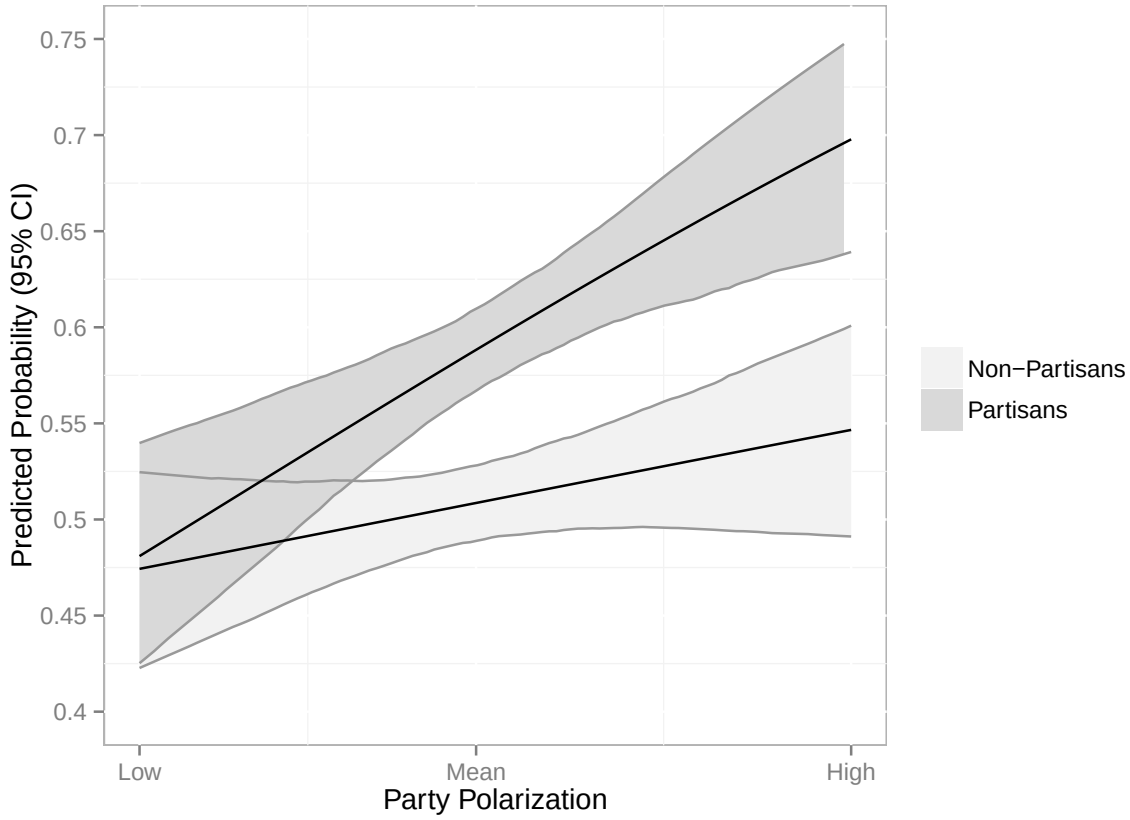

Figure 5.5: Overlap between Ideological and Competence Perceptions for Partisans and Non-partisans. Data: EES.

conflictual type. As a consequence, when polarization increases, citizens are supposed to rely more heavily on partisancues when they evaluate parties on positional and competence-based grounds. This study takes the cue from some puzzling findings emerging from the literature on "valence" voting and party polarization (Pardos-Prado, 2012; Clark and Leiter, 2013) and asks what is the role played by partisanship in the association between the two. Thus, while previous literature has been focused on the impact of the context on the association between different types of evaluation and vote choice, this study investigates how context can influence party evaluations themselves.

Previous literature provides evidence that elite polarization is associated with higher degrees of mass partisanship (Hetherington, 2001; Schmitt, 2009b; Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995). This study builds on these pieces of work and argues that the theoretical reasons that make citizens more likely to develop a partisan attachment in more polarized systems can account for their tendency to evaluate political parties according to a partisan logic. Empirical findings show that polarization is positively associated with, first, the probability that citizens state their attachment for a political party and, second, with partisans' likelihood to evaluate as most ideologically proximate and most competent the same party that they are attached to. Combined together these results show that, in highly-polarized systems, partisanship predicts the same party preference as ideological proximity in 50% of the cases, and the same as issue competence assessment in the 70%. Finally, further analyses show that the probability that the party perceived to be the most competent is actually the same as the one perceived to be the ideologically closest grows as a function of polarization for partisans, but not for non-partisans. This indicates that the effect of party polarization on citizens' party evaluations is necessarily moderated by their partisan attachment.

These findings contribute to two bodies of literature. The first is for the scholars interested in the "dispute" between valence and positional voting, and their covariation with characteristics of the political context. This study suggests that observing bigger effect of competence may not necessarily be due to the fact that parties are competing in a valence, or non-partisan way, but quite the opposite. On the other hand, also the increased effect of ideological proximity may point to the same direction. This does not imply, of course, that the issue salience mechanism is put into question. Rather, I argue that a major source of misreading of both effects in cross-country comparisons may come from the choice of using the left-right as a general "super issue" dimension.

The finding that the left-right has a strong substantive policy component is supported by several empirical studies, and not challenged here. However, ignoring the degree of "conflict extension" (i.e. the extent to which the di-

mensions of issue conflict overlap) and the social-identity component (whose presence has found empirical support by other studies) may lead to wrong expectations about what high levels of political polarization imply for the voters. Here I mainly refer to the competence voting models formalized in the valence framework. The expectation that competence assessments become more important to the citizens as party positions converge, theorized by Stokes (1963) and recently formalized by Green (2007), is all but questioned here. However, competence evaluations can be also endogenous to partisan loyalties. Thus, if polarization increases the amount of partisan conflict, we will end up observing higher competence voting, but for opposite reasons than the valence framework theorizes.

The second stream of research that this study contributes to is more directly concerned with the effects of polarization on voters' behavior. This is a particularly relevant point in current US politics, but also in several other European countries, such as Greece, Hungary or Italy. What this study shows is that, as political conflict increases, it becomes increasingly more difficult to disentangle policy and competence-based evaluations from partisan considerations. This suggests that some normative implications, mainly drawn from the assumption that higher policy differentiation encourages citizens to behave more rationally, should be at least revised. While the findings shown here do not allow to say the last word about the direction of causality, several studies show that partisanship comes before competence evaluations (Evans and Andersen, 2006; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011) and, to a certain extent, policy preferences (Carsey and Layman, 2006; Levendusky, 2009b,a). It will be a task of further research to ultimately show how citizens make political decisions when the context forces them more or less implicitly to take a side and, perhaps more importantly, what impact this can have on their willingness to seek for new information in order to make meaningful decisions at all.

A final implication of these findings is more normative, and regards the evaluation of the consequences of party polarization for the quality of electoral democracy. The claim here is that, probably, a very loud, conflictual and partisan behavior of the political elites' side, does not help citizens to evaluate and choose peacefully what is better for them. If the tones of the political confrontation force people to choose an advocate to be loyal to, and to be provided a lens through which to evaluate the political environment, this may lead people to approach politics in a more stressed way, and perhaps eventually to lose trust in the whole democratic system just because they lost trust in "their" party. In other words, given the party elites' relative freedom to confront each other in more consensual terms, a polarized competition may pay off in terms of having strong and less movable supporters, but it is probably not the best if we consider

citizens making meaningful choices a desirable outcome.

Chapter 6

Polarization and Electoral Competitiveness in Multiparty Systems. The Case of the Netherlands 1986–2002*

The interest for the effects of political polarization on the citizens and their political behaviors has been growing among scholars in the last decade. In the United States, the concern is justified by a growing ideological division between the Republican and Democrat elites (Hetherington, 2001; Hetherington and Weiler, 2009; Layman et al., 2006; McCarty et al., 2006) and its controversial extension to the attitudes and the behaviors of the mass public (Abramowitz and Saunders, 1998, 2008; Fiorina et al., 2005, 2008). An opposite pattern is observed in Britain, where both the Labour and the Conservative party have been converging toward the center from the beginning of the 1990s, the first following a deliberate re-branding strategy and the second being torn by internal divisions (Adams et al., 2012b,c). In both countries, some mechanisms by which these changes have impacted on the citizens have been documented. In the US, the extended elite conflict has substantially triggered the partisan feelings of the mass public (Brewer, 2005; Hetherington, 2001) and contributed to an increased correlation between ideology and partisanship (Levendusky, 2009b).

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In the UK, the loosening of the ideological distinctions has led citizens to attribute more importance to party and leader competence (Green, 2007; Green and Hobolt, 2008). Similarly, the Netherlands have experienced a tremendous process of party depolarization starting in the mid 1980s until the early 2000s (Adams et al., 2012a). This has been going hand-by-hand with a pattern of increasing electoral volatility, which has reached the peak in the election of 2002 (Mair, 2008).

This study focuses on the latter case to discuss a more general phenomenon, i.e. the association between party polarization and electoral competitiveness in multiparty systems. Among the factors that influence people's voting decisions, a prominent role is played by the characteristics of the choice set that they are offered (Wessels and Schmitt, 2008). If a person is attracted by many alternatives, then he/she will be more likely to switch from one to another in case the most preferred one is disappointing or not feasible. In more polarized systems, the number of attractive alternatives that a citizen is offered is reduced. A leftist citizen will find it harder to switch to a right-wing party if its position is particularly extreme on the right. Thus, in a hypothetical situation with no other alternatives, the leftist party will face no competition from its right-wing opponent. Moreover, high degrees of elite polarization contribute in emphasizing party identities in the electoral competition, intensifying feelings of partisan attachment among the mass public (Hetherington, 2001). Because party identifiers are generally stable voters, a polarized party competition would end up freezing the voters by appealing to their partisan loyalties (Dalton et al., 2000; Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995). If these expectations are correct, an important implication would be that, when parties are polarized, voters' motivation to switch is strongly reduced. This means that, for example, former supporters of an incumbent party who evaluate negatively the performance of the government, or former supporters of an opposition party who have a positive idea of it, will nevertheless find alternative parties to be too different from what they want. In a situation of such low competition between alternative options, the government would be more free to act inefficiently, or will have no interest in representing the interests of the median voter. In the long run, this is expected to undermine citizens' political confidence and satisfaction with democracy.

The Netherlands are an ideal yet challenging case where to test these expectations. Ideal because, as previous studies show, a pattern of marked depolarization and one of increased volatility have been co-occurring during the same lapse of time (see respectively Adams et al., 2012a; Mair, 2008). Although literature has been hinting at a correlation between the two phenomena, an individual-level link between the ideological configuration of the choice set offered to the citizens and the individual motivations of "movers" and "stayers" is

still missing. By covering the five national elections between 1986 and 2002, this chapter provides a micro-level study focusing explicitly on the period where the biggest changes have occurred. However, to analyze the effects of polarization in a context like the Netherlands is also a particularly challenging task. Due to the high proportionality of the Dutch electoral system, its party supply is characterized by a multitude of alternatives. While in cases such as the US or the UK the overall level of system polarization is essentially set by the ideological distance between two (main) parties, in the Netherlands some parties can be more or less polarized than others, depending on their relative position. This implies that the Dutch electoral competition is fought, rather than in one big arena, on different sub-fields (van der Meer et al., 2012). Thus, an accurate assessment of the hypothesized mechanisms should take into account not only the overall degree of systemic polarization, but also the degrees of relative isolation of the options that different sub-groups of voters are offered, depending on their own ideological orientations. This task is accomplished here by focusing explicitly on the "*local competition*", i.e. the contest between ideologically similar parties for the votes of sub-groups of citizens who share akin ideological views, such as e.g. moderates or left-wing voters. By focusing on parties' repositioning between two elections, and its effect on party voters' stability, this study offers a way to investigate how parties can hold their voters back from switching to close competitors. This allows for a decomposition of the overall degree of ideological competition at the "*global*" level, providing a novel way to assess both theoretically and empirically the implications of polarization for the voters in multiparty systems.

The chapter develops in four sections. In the first one I briefly review the changes in the Dutch electoral landscape in the period of time considered, showing how such changes were perceived by the citizens as a pattern of progressive depolarization. In the second section I discuss the implications that this had on voters' openness to consider many party options, on their propensity to feel attached to a party, and to the (in)stability of their individual behaviors, providing some pieces of evidence to support my expectations. In the third section I discuss how the overall system changes can have impacted differently on different subgroups of former party voters, correcting my focus from the "global" party competition to the "local" competitions between ideologically similar parties. In this part I test whether some party-level dynamics related to polarization, such as distancing from the closest alternative and radicalization, impact on parties' ability to hold their voters, even when they are motivated to switch. Finally, in the last section I briefly discuss the implications of the observed effects.

Results show that (1) a pattern of consistent ideological depolarization at the level of the party system corresponds to an increasing openness of the voters to

support other parties, (2) a reduced propensity among voters to develop partisan ties and ultimately to (3) an increased individual propensity to switch party over time. Moreover, further findings show that, (4) by distancing themselves from their closest alternative, parties can decrease the probability that their former voters will switch to another party, (5) even when they should be motivated to do so. These findings have important implications for our evaluation of the effects of party polarization on electoral competitiveness, and ultimately on government accountability.

6.1 Elections in the Netherlands, 1986-2002: party depolarization and voting volatility

The Dutch party system has experienced a consistent pattern of depolarization on the left-right issues during the last two decades of the 20th century (Adams et al., 2012a; Thomassen, 2005). At the same time, the electoral behavior of the Dutch electorate has shown a growing level of instability (Aarts and Thomassen, 2008; Mair, 2008; van der Meer et al., 2012). This has been explained by the disappearance of the cleavage structure that kept the electorate loyal to their political representatives (Mair, 2008) and by the emergence of new issue dimensions that 'shuffled' the patterns of volatility between traditional and new parties (Aarts and Thomassen, 2008).

The importance of cleavage-based explanations of Dutch voters' behavior follows a classic definition of the Netherlands as a *pillarized* society. The term refers to the traditional segmentation of the Dutch society into religious (Catholic or Protestant) and secular (Social Democrat or Liberal) subcultures, which displayed an impressing stability over time (Andeweg and Irwin, 2002). Each of these "pillars" has been for long represented in the political arena by one single party, and thus party choice was almost a natural consequence of the group membership (see Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). This situation started changing in the 1960s, when traditional social divisions became less salient and party support less stable. By the 1970s, in parallel with a general trend of dealignment that involved several western democracies (Dalton, 1984; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Franklin et al., 1992), many of the indicators used to define the level of pillarization of Dutch politics had weakened (Andeweg and Irwin, 2002, pp. 34-38). Nevertheless, the major Dutch parties kept on being fairly polarized on left-right issues until the second half of the 1980s. Then the two biggest parties, the social-democrat PvdA and the Christian-democrat CDA, engaged in a process of significant ideological convergence. On the right, the CDA moder-

ated its position in terms of welfare policies, while though still remaining fairly conservative on moral issues such as euthanasia. On the left, the PvdA dramatically corrected its ideological stand toward the center, eventually entering into a coalition with the "historical adversary", the liberal VVD, in 1994 (Adams et al., 2012a).

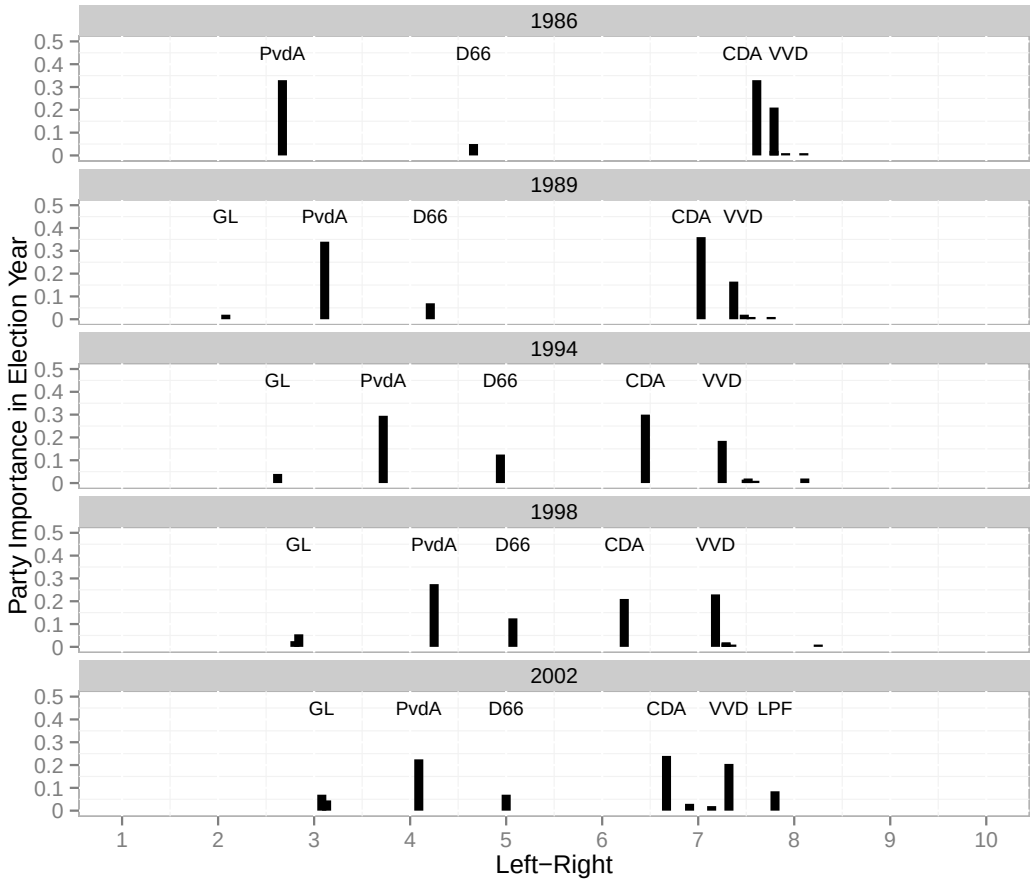

Figure 6.1: Ideological positions of the Dutch parties, 1986-2002. Data: DPES.

Figure 6.1 shows the pattern of depolarization of the main Dutch parties from 1986 to 2002. Party positions on the horizontal axes are those as perceived by the respondents of the surveys conducted for the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES) in each election year (see Todosijević et al., 2010). A standard battery of questions asked in many electoral surveys regards the per-

ceived placement of the major parties on a left-right scale[1]. To have unique party positions for every election year I simply took the sample means of these variables. The importance weights on the vertical axes are meant to show the systemic relevance of a party at the time of a given election. These were computed using both the parliamentary seat shares held by parties at the moment of the election (i.e. the relative importance in the national parliament during the prior legislature) and the vote share obtained in that election (a proxy for the relative importance among the public opinion at the moment of the survey). The values displayed in the figure are averages across these two indicators[2].

Two things are worth noting. First, the most dramatic shifts toward the center are performed by the PvdA and the CDA, which reduced the gap between them from about five points in 1986 to about two points in 2002. This also implies a distancing of the latter from the VVD, which yet moderates its position of about half a point. Second, and most important, this process of ideological convergence among the major parties goes together with a progressive affirmation of other minor parties. On the center-left, following the rise of new post-materialistic values such as quality of democracy and the environment (Inglehart, 1977) and their integration into the general ideological space (Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976), the progressive-liberal Democracy 66 (D66) and the green-leftist GroenLinks (GL) contributed to the dispersion of the leftist supply into a more heterogeneous set of options. On the right side, the more recent politicization of the ethnic integration issue, and its reframing into a law-and-order issue (van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008), coincided with the emergence of extreme right parties, such as the populist Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) and, though only from the the 2006 election, the PVV.

The co-occurrence of these two phenomena is consistent with the expected consequences of changes in party polarization as described by previous literature. Since Key's metaphor of the "echo chamber" (Key, 1966), scholars have noted that elites' disagreement over a given issue bears the consequence of emphasizing it among the voters (Carmines and Stimson, 1986). This "salience effect" of party polarization has been shown to occur both when separate issue dimensions (Alvarez and Nagler, 2004; Lachat, 2011) and more general

[1]The scale of the variable has been harmonized to go from 1 to 11 in each year. For the question wordings of all the variables utilized in this study, see Appendix C and Todosijević et al. (2010).

[2]This solution is particularly relevant in 2002, when the new-comer Lijst Pim Fortuyn managed to move the center of gravity of the competition significantly to the right, eventually obtaining 17.3% of the vote share, without being represented in parliament before the election. The index of party system polarization, discussed below, has been also computed using only the prior seat-shares as weights, producing the same election ordering.

ideological orientations (Dalton, 2008; Lachat, 2008; Kroh, 2009; van der Eijk et al., 2005) are examined. Relating these findings to the observed changes in the Dutch party system suggests that the convergence of the traditional cleavage parties on both socio-economic and religious-secular issues has opened a space for other issue entrepreneurs to successfully mobilize voters, entering the main party competition (Adams et al., 2012a; Hobolt and De Vries, 2010).

To be sure, the affirmation of more extreme parties has also kept the overall ideological range of the policy supply fairly wide. As Figure 6.1 shows, the range between GL and LPF in 2002 is about five points wide, only slightly smaller than the range between PvdA and VVD in 1986. To be sure this is mainly due to the entry of LPF in the electoral arena, which led to a slight re-polarization between 1998 to 2002, dominated this time by the issue of multiculturalism (Oosterwaal and Torenvlied, 2010; Pellikaan et al., 2003). However, while the policy supply in 1986 consists of two distant and rather homogeneous ideological blocks, the options among which Dutch voters have been called to choose in 2002 are much more uniformly distributed along the ideological space.

Figure 6.2 shows the same process displayed in Figure 6.1 as it is captured by the vdE index. As the figure shows, the level of polarization in the Netherlands dropped almost 20% from 1986 to 1994, reaching a more stable trend around 30-35% between 1994 to 2002. A comparison between Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.1 shows how the index is sensitive to both the overall party dispersion and the positioning of the most important parties, overemphasizing conditions of high *bipolarization*, like in 1986, but also detecting the growth of smaller extreme parties, as between 1998 and 2002. All in all, the trend in Figure 6.2 confirms that the process of depolarization discussed by previous literature has been widely acknowledged in the voters' perceptions.

A common feature of multiparty systems, such as the Netherlands, is that political competition is likely to be fought over multiple dimensions (see Taagepera and Grofman, 1985). This often raises some doubts regarding the capacity of a single left-right space to capture and summarize the actual degree of ideological conflict in those systems. Scholars have been debating over the dimensionality of the Dutch political space for several decades. A common view supports a more encompassing definition of the left-right as a "common yardstick" to define party ideologies (see van der Eijk and Niemöller, 1983). A second perspective relates left-right divisions more strictly to economic issues, and claims about the emergence over time of other orthogonal dimensions, such as "ethical" issues and immigration (see Aarts and Thomassen, 2008; Pellikaan et al., 2003).

These views resemble two sides of the long-lasting debate in comparative political science regarding the meaning of the left-right, a debate that is still far from being settled. One position treats the left-right as a "super-issue" able to

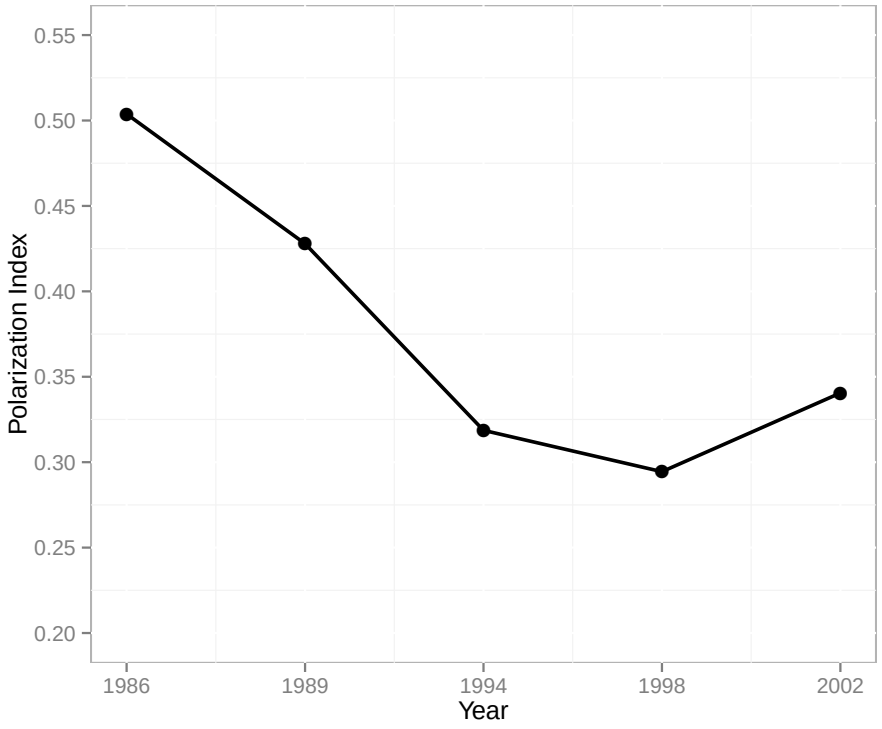

Figure 6.2: van der Eijk et al. (2005) Left-Right polarization index of the Dutch party system, 1986-2002. Data: DPES.

reflect whatever is the relevant policy conflict in a certain place and time (see e.g. Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976; Inglehart, 1990), while the other focuses on socio-economic divisions (see e.g. Budge and Laver, 1986). To avoid making potentially misleading assumptions, the perspective adopted here is rather empirical, and takes advantage of the measured perceptions of party positions on eight issue dimensions covering different policy domains provided by the DPES. If the trend in Figure 6.2 does not tell the whole story, then different patterns of polarization may emerge when party positions are assessed on other relevant issue dimensions. If, conversely, left-right perceptions are sensitive to other policy divisions, the trends should be similar.

Figure 6.3 displays the degree of polarization of the major Dutch parties on issues belonging to different domains, such as morality, law and order, immigration and EU integration. The time points included in the figure for every issue are those for which the measurement is available in the cumulative DPES data. Because issue positions are asked about different parties at different points in time, the trends are not directly comparable with the one shown in Figure 6.2. Thus, left-right polarization has been recalculated next to each issue at every time point, including exactly the same parties for which issue positions are observed[3].

As the figure shows, the trends of issue polarization resemble the one of left-right polarization, and the values of the two measures are very similar, in almost all cases. Exceptions are the "EU integration" and "Crime" issues, both not much polarizing at the time points considered, and "Euthanasia", over which party polarization becomes bigger than on the left-right between 1994 and 2002. Other issues show either smaller or similar values to the left-right. These results indicate that the presence of relevant issues that follow alternative patterns of polarization to the left-right is not a problem in the time span covered by this study.

The similarity between some trends can be interpreted as an indication of the fact that abstract ideological labels such as "left" and "right" are indeed able to capture policy conflicts over several domains beyond economic issues. This would provide support for the view of the left-right as a "super-issue". However, the figure unarguably shows that there is no evidence supporting the suspicion that, in the time between 1986 to 2002, the pattern of depolarization of the Dutch parties on the left-right has corresponded to a parallel one of re-polarization over an alternative issue. Thus, we can conclude that, regardless the number of potential dimensions in the Dutch political space, the degree of

[3]See Appendix B for the party lists. Because issue positions are observed on 1–7 Likert scales, the two measures have been made comparable by setting *Pmax* to 3

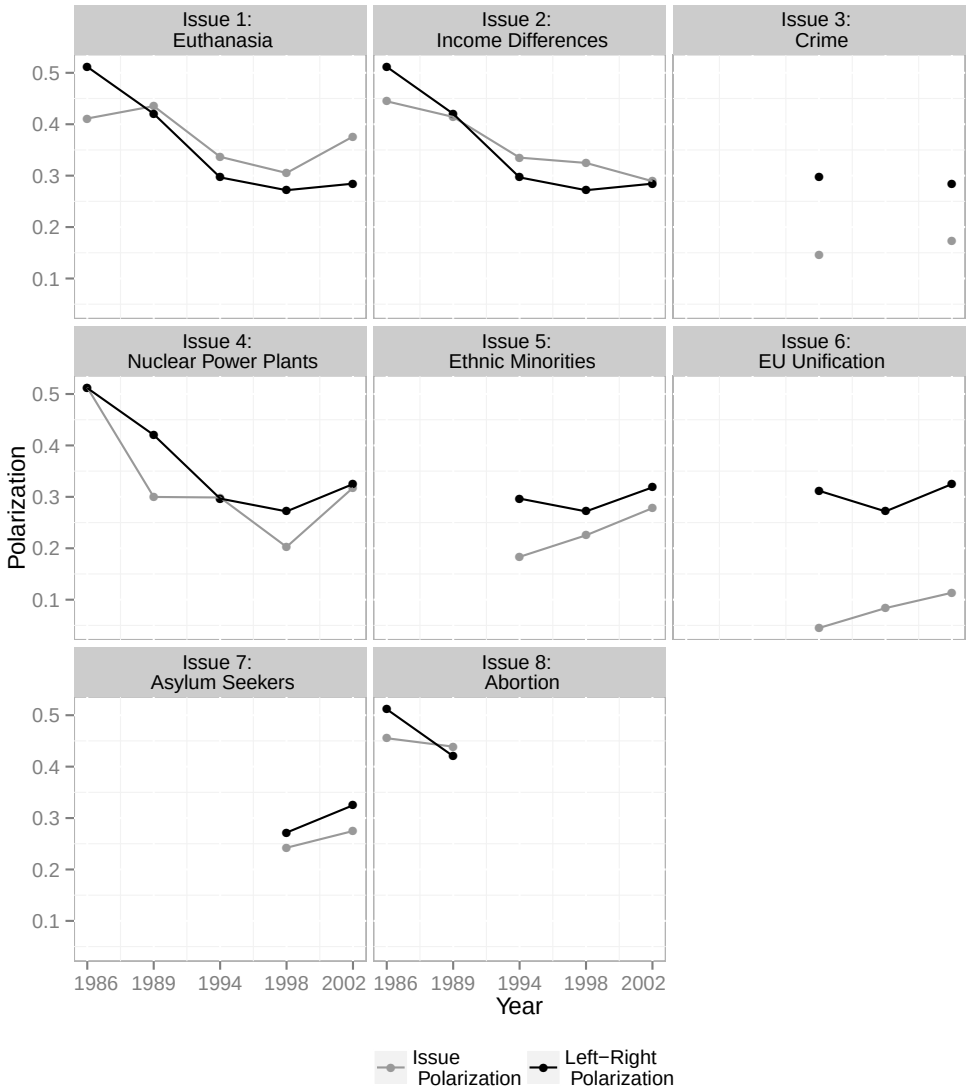

Figure 6.3: Polarization of the Dutch parties on eight issues compared with the left-right Data: DPES.

ideological *similarity* between the Dutch parties has indeed increased between 1986 to 2002, a process described in this section as “depolarization”. The next section will discuss how this impacted voters’ behavior.

6.2 The impact of party system polarization on citizens' political behavior

The process of depolarization described and measured in the previous section bears two relevant implications. First, the Dutch main parties are perceived to be much more moderate in 1998 or in 2002 than in 1986. This implies that their ideological identities are less sharply-defined than they used to be. Previous studies have discussed how ideological clarity in elites' political behavior influences citizens' perception of the intensity of partisan conflict, which will in turn influence their propensity to identify with a political party (Carmines and Stimson, 1986; Hetherington, 2001; Schmitt, 2009b; Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995). This process should be reflected by several indicators of preference certainty, and ultimately by stable voting behavior. As Dalton et al. state, «the existence of widespread partisan ties dampens the impact of short-term political events on election outcomes and limits the potential electoral appeal of new parties and political personalities» (Dalton et al., 2000, p. 38). Thus, the pattern of depolarization of the dutch party system should go be related with a decrease in mass partisanship and certainty about the party choice.

A second, more direct, implication leads to the same expectation. The process of depolarization and subsequent multiplication of the policy options in the Netherlands have reduced the distance between neighboring parties, making the "jump" from one to another less demanding in terms of ideological compromising for the voters. Research on policy voting has been extensively showing that people do indeed take into consideration party policy or ideological positions as they make their vote choice (Adams et al., 2005; Downs, 1957a; Enelow and Hinich, 1984). This implies that, as the distance between two parties increases, the probability that the past or potential voters of one party will be also attracted by the other should decrease. Thus, supposing that there are no closer parties available, the supporters of each party will be less likely to take into consideration other options, even in case that they are not completely satisfied by how their closest party is behaving.

To be sure, local distancing does not necessarily imply global polarization. In highly disproportional systems, such as the US or the UK, the distance between the two (main) parties corresponds to the overall level of system polarization (or contributes to the most of it). Thus, a distancing between the Republicans and the Democrats, or between the Conservative party and the Labour, strongly reduces the chances for the former or potential voters of one of these parties to find a viable option at all. On the other hand, in a polarized multiparty system such as the Netherlands, the constellation of ideological alternatives will look

different to different parts of the electorate, depending on their position relative to the parties. Whereas this will be explicitly investigated in the next section, a general expectation is, again, that an increased openness to many party alternatives will emerge among the Dutch voters as a function of the general system depolarization.

These expectations are tested empirically using survey data from the DPES. Among the variables offered in the cumulative file, there are four behavioral indicators that may provide evidence for a change across elections of the extent to which Dutch citizens are "open" to party competition. The first is based on the *propensity to vote* (PTV) scores, a battery of ten-point scales asking how likely the respondent would vote for each of the most important parties. PTV scores have been shown to be, among other evaluation scales, the closest predictors of the actual vote choice (Tillie, 1995; van der Eijk et al., 2006; van der Eijk and Marsh, 2007, see also van der Brug et al. (2007)). Given the non-ipsative nature of the measure, respondents are free to evaluate the chance they will vote for each party without being bounded within a single choice. For this reason, within-individual distributions of PTVs are a good indicator for the extent to which the individual vote choice is torn between several similarly attractive options. Thus, a first behavioral indicator is the level of *preference certainty*, i.e. the difference between the highest and the second-highest score given by each respondent of the battery[4].

A second indicator is a more direct measurement of voters' openness to alternative choices, and comes from a question asking whether the respondent seriously considered to vote for a different party from the one mentioned in the vote choice question. The indicator for *hesitation* is coded as a dummy, with value one if the respondent says that he/she considered voting for other parties and zero otherwise.

Other two indicators measure different but related aspects. The first is a measure of *party identification*, called in the DPES "party adherence". Party identification is generally measured with a set of questions asking whether the individual is attached to a party at all, the strength and the direction of the attachment. The cumulative DPES file offers a variable that tries to harmonize the different scales of party identification used over the years. To maximize the comparability between the years I create a dummy with value one if the respondent is adherent to a certain party (more or less strong) and zero otherwise.

Finally, the last behavioral indicator is the *vote switching* between two elec-

[4]Because all the PTVs are rescaled from 0 (will never vote for party) to 1 (will surely vote for party sometime), also PTV certainty ranges from 0 (same propensity to vote for at least two parties) to 1 (will surely vote for one party and never vote for any of the others).

tions. This is computed using two different variables present in the DPES cumulative file: the party voted for at the current election and the recall of the party voted for at the past election[5]. Vote recalls are generally criticized because of a well-documented tendency of respondents to over-report consistency in their voting patterns (see Himmelweit et al., 1978). However, as pointed out elsewhere (Dalton et al., 2000), there is no reason to believe that this bias systematically changes over time. Moreover, the trend of aggregate switching obtained in this way resembles the trend of volatility among the same elections calculated using different indicators in other studies (Aarts and Thomassen, 2008).

The behavioral indicators described here are used as dependent variables for four different models including a number of individual-level predictors and dummies for election year. The predictors included in all four models are gender, age, the level of education, the level of political interest, a dummy indicating whether the respondent identifies him/herself as a member of the working class, a dummy indicating whether the respondent belongs to one of the main religious denominations common in the Netherlands, and the degree of ideological extremity on the left-right[6]. The variable about respondent's party adherence is put as a predictor in all the models apart from the one predicting party adherence itself. Moreover, the model for PTV certainty requires to include among the predictors the highest PTV expressed by the respondent. This variable is necessary because the difference between the highest and the second-highest PTVs depends unavoidably on the magnitude of the former. Thus, to avoid including this predictor may lead to spurious effects due to the uncontrolled variation of PTV magnitude between individuals.

Finally, the model for vote switching includes three further predictors. The first is the left-right distance between the respondent and the current position of the party he/she previously voted for, to control for "impromptu" choice in the past election or simple change of idea. The second is an indicator aimed to measure the respondent's *motivation to switch* from the past vote choice. The logic behind the construction of this variable is based on two assumptions. First,

[5]For making the results more directly comparable, the four regression models discussed in this section have been run selecting only the respondents who reported to have voted at both the current and the previous election. The models have been run also on the full sample obtaining similar results. In the fourth model and in the two models of the next section, the choice of excluding *differential abstention* (i.e. the switch from voting for a party to abstaining) is mainly due to the very small number of observations belonging to this category. Results of a multinomial logit model including differential abstention show no statistically significant effects of the relevant predictors on this outcome.

[6]All the socio-demographic predictors are standardized from 0 to 1.

people who at the previous election had voted for a party that would end up in the governing coalition, should be motivated to change their party choice if they evaluate the government's performance in a negative way. This assumption is founded on an extensive literature on performance voting, stating that citizens' retrospective evaluations have a strong influence on their vote choice (see e.g. Fiorina, 1981). Thus for people who voted for the government, a negative evaluation of the latter should imply a "motivational push" from their previous party choice, other things being equal. The second assumption is that people who had voted for a party that stayed at the opposition should feel attracted by the government if they think its performance was good. Here the logic is opposite: instead of being *pushed away* from their previous party choice, the motivation to switch for these voters comes from the desire to reward a party (or a group of parties) that they think did a good job in office.

To construct this indicator I use one variable included in the DPES asking for the respondent's general satisfaction with what the government has done in the past legislature. The variable is measured on a five-point Likert scale, going from "very satisfied" (low value) to "very unsatisfied" high value. To obtain my indicator, I first center the scale around the neutral category, and then I reverse it for those respondent whose vote recall indicates a party which is currently at the opposition. Thus, the neutral point is zero for all respondents, a negative evaluation is assumed to have a positive effect on switching for those who previously voted for a current incumbent, and a positive evaluation is assumed to have a positive effect on those who had voted for a party which is now at the opposition. This variable may be considered an imperfect indicator for voters' motivation to switch, and in fact it is. However, given the absence of a party-specific retrospective evaluation, this proxy is the best way to avoid complex interactions[7].

Figure 6.4 plots the predicted values of the four behavioral indicators for every election year from 1986 to 2002, derived from the coefficients of the year dummies while holding constant all the other indicators at their mean, with bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals. Because PTV certainty has been rescaled from zero to one, the y-ranges of the four plots are directly compara-

[7]To be sure, the two types of motives captured by this variable can have different strength. To control for possible heterogeneity, the model has been specified also with a dummy identifying the respondents who had voted for a party that stayed at the opposition, and it produced very similar results. Previous analyses also employed an interaction between the untransformed retrospective evaluation and the dummy, returning again similar results. However, the latter specification implies to introduce in the analyses in the next section a three-way interaction, making the model and the following interpretations overly complex.

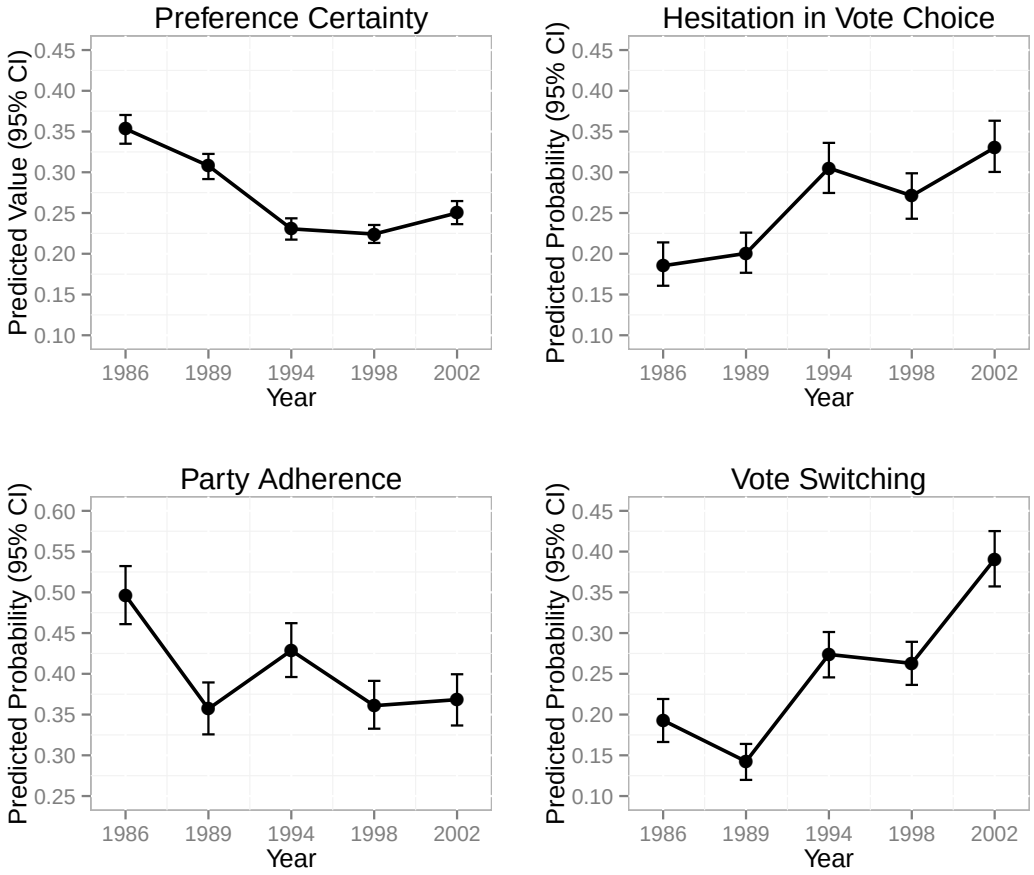

Figure 6.4: Trends of behavioral indicators in the Netherlands, 1986-2002. Data: DPES.

ble[8].

As the figure shows, all four behavioral indicators display a significant change in the expected direction during the time lapse considered. PTV certainty drops about 10% from 1986 to 1994, remaining then fairly stable until 2002. This implies that the second most attractive party for the average Dutch voter was around the 35% (about three points in the original PTV scale) less attractive than the first in 1986, and 25% in 2002. The time trend resembles the one shown in Figure 6.2 for the polarization index, with a large drop between 1986 and 1994 and a slight growth in 2002. Hesitation in party choice grows about 12% in the whole period, with a significant bump in 1994. The trend for this variable resembles the one for PTV certainty, with the most critical change being the one between 1989 and 1994, when the chance that Dutch voters considered voting for another party increased, on average, from 20% to 30%. Party adherence shows a more peculiar pattern, with a fall of about 15% between 1986 and 1989, a partial comeback in 1994, and a following drop again in 1998 and 2002. Whereas values like the one in 1994 seem not to fit with the trends observed among the other indicators, it is worth noting that, in the time span considered in this study, the probability that Dutch voters describe themselves as partisans drops from the 50% in 1986 to around 35% in 2002.

Finally, vote switching grows in the time between the five elections from 20% to 40%, with a peak of almost 15% only between 1998 and 2002. Although the amount of switching at the latter election can be considered a particularly exceptional event (as also argued by Mair, 2008) the trend of growing instability has a first peak in 1994, coherently with the changes in PTV certainty and vote choice hesitation. All in all, these results show that the trend of vote volatility documented by several studies (Aarts and Thomassen, 2008; Mair, 2008; van der Meer et al., 2012) is founded at the micro-level on an increased individual propensity among the Dutch voter to switch party, even when this is controlled for several socio-demographic characteristics and individual motivation to change. Moreover, the other indicators show that between 1986 and 2002 Dutch voters have become increasingly open to consider voting for several alternatives, and less likely to report any partisan attachment. When compared with Figure 6.1 and 6.1, the trends show that this change of attitude among Dutch citizens proceeds in parallel to a clear pattern of party system depolarization which, in 1998 and 2002, also relates to an increased fragmentation of the political supply. As it has been discussed earlier in this section, such a process of depolarization is likely to have contributed to this change by de-emphasizing

[8]For the coefficients of the four models, an OLS regression for PTV certainty and Logit regressions for the other three, see Table A.4 in Appendix A.

the traditional cleavage-related issues, blurring the identities of the main Dutch parties and thus decreasing their chance to appeal on partisan ties to hold their voters. Moreover, the party convergence reduced the gaps between neighboring parties, increasing the extent to which each of them has to compete with the others for the same electorate. However, it has been discussed that, in a multiparty system such as the Netherlands, this effect is more likely to be identified by observing local variations in distancing between parties, rather than taking into account the overall party system depolarization. This point is covered in the next section.

6.3 Global vs. local competition: the impact of party repositioning on vote switching

This part of the study is focused on whether the decrease in ideological distance between the Dutch parties occurred during the process of depolarization between 1986 and 2002 had an effect on their capacity to restrain their electorates. As discussed in the previous section depolarization implies, next to a de-emphatization of party identities, a reduction of the ideological distances between neighboring parties. Substantively, this means that in a depolarizing system party policy platforms will look to the citizens increasingly similar to each other. This should make switching from one party to another less demanding in terms of utility loss for the voters.

This has two immediate implications. First, party polarization tells us something about the extent to which parties can take a certain amount of votes for granted by the fact that their electorates have no other viable alternatives. Essentially, this means that elections in more polarized contexts are less *competitive*, for different parties do not need to appeal to the same voters. Second, if parties can count on the fact that their voters have no viable alternatives, they will have more room to misbehave, or at least to perform less optimally. Some evidence for this phenomenon is provided by the UK, where the ideological convergence between the Labour and the Conservative party has increased voters' propensity to evaluate them according to their competence (Green, 2007; Green and Hobolt, 2008).

However, in a multiparty system the patterns of ideological convergence can vary tremendously from one party to another. While in the UK the distancing between the Conservatives and the Labour contributes to a great extent to the *global* level of polarization, a system such as the Netherlands may have a number of *local* competitions between ideologically similar parties that occur more

or less independently from the overall systemic polarization. This also implies that, in the latter case, the number of viable ideological alternatives will vary across groups of voters, depending on their position relative to the parties.

Two expectations are tested here. The first is that, by correcting their ideological position between two elections, parties can influence their previous voters' decision whether or not to switch. Two types of repositioning are considered: *distancing from the closest party* and *extremization*. The first type of behavior is meant to capture the differentiation from the most similar alternatives, i.e. the distinction from the local competitors. The second behavior represents parties' distancing from the global center, i.e. their differentiation from the ideologically opposite alternatives. The general hypothesis is that, by increasing the distance from their most proximate competitors and by radicalizing their ideological stand, parties should reduce the propensity of who voted for them at the previous election to switch to another one at the current election.

The second expectation tested here is that party repositioning can moderate the effect that motivation to switch has on their previous voters' propensity to actually do it. Here party distancing and extremization are interacted with the individual-level variable about the motivation to switch described in the previous section. The rationale is that, by distancing themselves from their closest competitors, parties emphasize their distinctiveness in respect to the options that are most immediately available to their voters. This should in turn convince their former voters that a switch would represent a too-big change from their preferences, and therefore soften their motivation to switch[9]. A similar reasoning applies to radicalization, although in this case parties are expected to emphasize their ideological integrity *vis-a-vis* the other parties in the system. Thus, generally speaking, distancing and extremization should reduce the impact of the variable regarding the motivation o switch on the dependent variable.

These two expectations are tested in two separate models predicting vote switching, one without and one with the two interactions. For party distancing and extremization I include both the *lagged variable* (the distance from the closest party and the distance from the center at the previous election) and the *difference*, i.e. the increase (or decrease) in distance and extremity from the last election. In this way, the effect of repositioning is cleaned from sources of endogeneity given by the parties' previous placement. In the second model, motivation to switch is interacted with the two differenced variables, to capture the moderating effect of the party's strategy at the current election only.

[9]Note that "distancing" here may also imply simply keeping the same position while the closest party moves apart.

The individual predictors are the same included in the model for vote switching presented in the previous section. Controls at the party level are the share of seats at the national parliament at the current election, one dummy identifying whether the party is younger than ten years, and the opposition dummy discussed above. Next to the year dummies, to control for party-specific fixed effects, the model includes dummies identifying the party previously voted for. Finally, to obtain estimations that are robust to the potential correlation among former voters of the same party, cluster standard errors are reported. Table 6.1 shows the coefficients for all the variables besides the fixed effects[10].

Some important results are worth reporting. First, motivation to switch has always a significant effect going in the expected direction. The higher the value of the variable (which, as described above, indicates a negative evaluation of the government for the past voters of a current incumbent, and a positive evaluation for the past voters of a current opposition party) the higher is the probability to switch. This confirms the validity of the operationalization proposed here as a proxy of individual incentive to defect from the party voted for. Second, distancing has a significant negative effect on voters' propensity to switch from the party they had voted for, while the effect of extremization is not statistically significant. However, while the effect of lagged extremity has a bigger magnitude an shows a weak level of statistical significance[11], the effect of the lagged distance from the closest party is essentially null.

The first conclusion is to be drawn from the first model is that, in a multiparty system such as the Netherlands, ideological radicalization does not effectively help parties in keeping their voters from switching. However, the weakly significant effect of lagged extremity suggests that voters of radical parties are, in general, less likely to leave them to another party, regardless of their further repositioning. The second conclusion is that, while the lagged distance from the closest alternative has no influence on its former voters' decision to switch, to reposition itself further apart from the most proximate competitor can help a party to keep its voters from switching. Thus, one of the two expectations is actually confirmed by the data.

The second model tells a similar story. While the interaction between party extremization and motivation to switch has no effect, the one between the latter and party distancing has a negative and significant effect. This result is also in line to what expected, i.e. a negative moderating effect of party extremization

[10] For a complete report of the results see Table A.5 in Appendix A.

[11] The low level of statistical significance of the effect of lagged ideological extremity is most likely due to the small number of observations at the party level. When normal standard errors are considered, i.e. without the cluster correction, the effect displays a very strong statistical significance.

Table 6.1: Logit Model of Vote Switching. Data: DPES.

	Dependent variable:			
	Vote Switching			
	(Model 6.5)		(Model 6.6)	
	Coef.	Cluster S.E.	Coef.	Cluster S.E.
Individual Characteristics				
Is Partisan	-1.165^{***}	(0.113)	-1.152^{***}	(0.109)
Political Interest	0.366^{***}	(0.072)	0.359^{***}	(0.066)
Gender (Female)	-0.102	(0.077)	-0.104	(0.078)
Age	-0.669^{**}	(0.279)	-0.677^{**}	(0.275)
Education	-0.002	(0.227)	-0.002	(0.231)
Member of Working Class	0.102	(0.138)	0.094	(0.136)
Religious Person	0.066	(0.242)	0.079	(0.239)
Distance from Previous Vote	0.275^{***}	(0.039)	0.278^{***}	(0.041)
Left-Right Extremity	-0.435^{***}	(0.072)	-0.458^{***}	(0.073)
Motivation to Switch	1.332^{***}	(0.471)	1.459^{***}	(0.456)
Characteristics of the party voted for at last election				
Younger than 10 Years	0.346^{***}	(0.058)	0.392^{***}	(0.037)
Distance from closest party t-1	0.017	(0.145)	0.002	(0.139)
Distance from closest party Delta	-0.905^{***}	(0.299)	-0.969^{***}	(0.298)
Left-Right extremity t-1	-0.730^{*}	(0.438)	-0.700^{*}	(0.417)
Left-Right extremity Delta	-0.357	(0.847)	-0.241	(0.821)
Distance Delta*Motivation			-0.607^{***}	(0.145)
Extremity Delta*Motivation			-0.027	(0.114)
Constant	0.984	(1.457)	0.908	(1.365)
Observations	5,299		5,299	
Log likelihood	-2,702		-2,690	
Residual Deviance	5,404		5,380	
Null Deviance	6,301		6,301	
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

on the impact of motivation on voters' propensity to switch. To have an idea of the magnitude of the effect, Figure 6.5 plots simulated predicted probabilities to switch for each level of the motivation variable, interacted with three levels of party distancing, i.e. an increase of half a point, an increase of zero points and a decrease of half a point on the left-right scale.

As the figure shows, motivation to switch has essentially no effect on voters' propensity to switch as the party they had voted for increases of half a point its

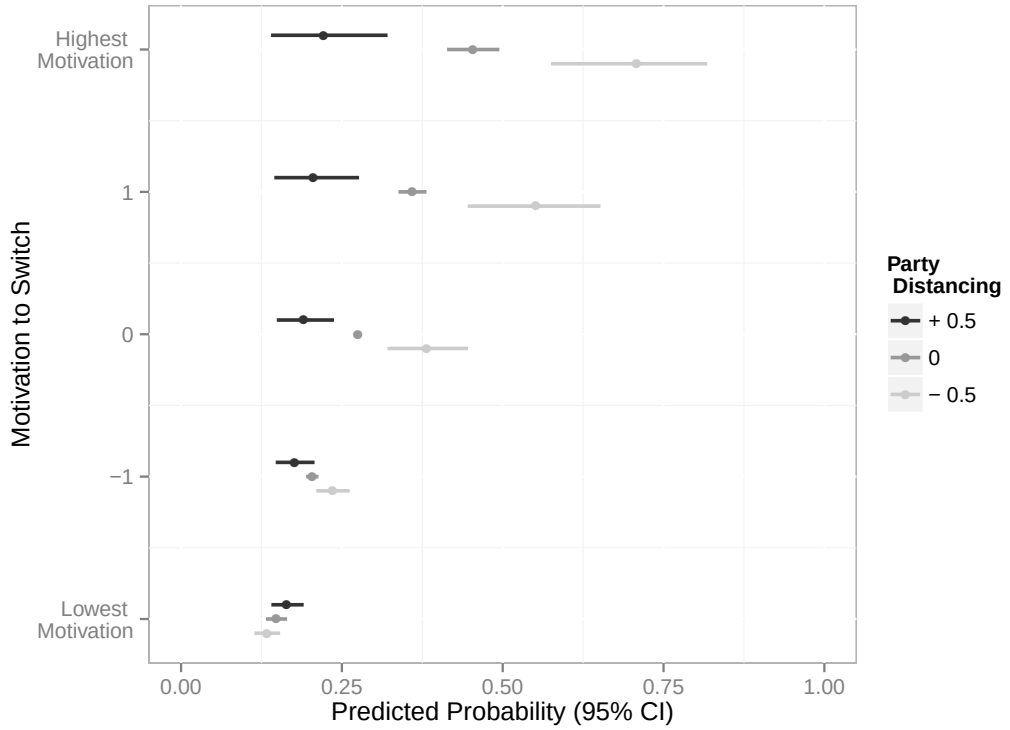

Figure 6.5: Simulated predicted probabilities to switch on motivation and party distancing. Data: DPES.

distance from the closest competitor. This pattern changes when the distance remains constant and when it decreases. In the first case, the probability to switch grows from less than 20% for the least motivated voters to almost 50% for the most motivated. In the second case, it goes up to about 70% on average. Moreover, a significant difference in probability to switch is already identifiable for voters who are neither motivated nor unmotivated to switch (the level zero, which consists in the neutral category of the Likert scale for all voters). While unmotivated voters will stay regardless of the party repositioning, neutral voters will be more likely to switch when their party gets closer to the next one or keeps the same distance, then when it moves away from it. This result confirms the expectation that the local competition between ideologically similar parties plays an important role in influencing voters' stability. Moreover, taken together with the null impact of both the main and the moderating effect of extremization, it confirms that, in multiparty systems, ideological radicalization is not as

much important as differentiation from the close opponents. The implications of these results, together with a more general discussion on the impact of party polarization on electoral competitiveness, are discussed in the next section.

6.4 Discussion and Conclusions

The implications of party polarization for voters' behavior have captured scholars' attention in relatively recent times, and mainly in contexts where they are most evident, such as the American and British two-party systems. This chapter provides a contribution to the debate by, first, extending the investigation to a multiparty context, the Netherlands, and second, by showing how, in the latter type of political system, the competition between ideologically similar parties plays an important role in influencing voters' electoral stability.

Previous studies have described how a process of depolarization in the Dutch politics, mainly driven by the social-democrat PvdA and the christian-democrat CDA, has deeply changed the configuration of the policy supply offered to the citizens between 1986 and 1998 (Adams et al., 2012a). Another stream of literature has been discussing a pattern of increasing electoral volatility occurred in the Netherlands during the same time period, and culminated in the election of 2002 (Aarts and Thomassen, 2008; Mair, 2008). The scope of this work is to bridge the gap between the conclusions drawn by these studies by focusing on the effect that contextual characteristics had on the individual Dutch voters.

This chapter is developed essentially in two parts. In the first, the pattern of ideological depolarization of the Dutch party system is compared to the variation across elections of some behavioral indicators. The aim of these indicators is to capture citizens' openness to more than one policy option, their propensity to feel attached (or adherent) to a specific party, and the extent to which their voting behavior is volatile between two elections. Despite controlling for several socio-structural characteristics, particularly salient in a formerly-pillarized society such as the Dutch one (Andeweg and Irwin, 2002), the differences across elections follow a pattern that resembles the one traced by polarization, as measured by the vdE index.

In the second part of the study the focus of the observation is moved to the level of the local competition between ideologically similar parties. Here the repositioning of parties between two elections, in respect to both the party system as a whole and to their closest alternative, is put as a predictor of the probability that their voters will switch or not. The logic is that the general process of depolarization in a multiparty system such as the Netherlands may have affected different groups of voters in different ways, depending on their position

relative to the parties. The results show that, by increasing their ideological distance from the most proximate alternative (which implies also remaining stable while others move) parties can indeed discourage their former voters to switch to another option. Moreover distancing has also a negative moderating effect on the impact that *motivation*, a variable constructed with the aim to capture the reasons why voters should want to switch, has on individuals' propensity to switch.

These findings, and particularly the latter, bear two important implications. The first is that they show how voters' anchoring to political options is embedded in the context. Here I discussed two particular characteristics of the context, which are both related to party polarization: the extent to which party can appeal on their ideological identities, and the simple policy distance between neighboring parties. In this perspective, elections held in polarized party system are supposed to be less *competitive*. In the depolarized Netherlands, weaker partisan ties and higher similarity between policy options make citizens more open to several options, and more ready to switch between them. However, in highly polarized contexts such as the US, the citizens who are open to consider voting for each party should be much less. This may, in turn, provide an incentive for candidates to campaign on ideologically homogeneous groups, further increasing the level of polarization. Evidence that this may be the case are offered by recent studies showing how partisanship increasingly correlates with ideology (Levendusky, 2009b) and group identification (Iyengar et al., 2012). By constraining the set of viable policy alternatives for the voters, polarization would end up constraining the set of viable policy alternatives for the governments. In the long run, such a system would lead to large policy shifts between government changes and more discrepancy between policy winners and losers.

This point relates to the second implication, i.e. that parties' distancing from the alternatives may increase the tolerance that their former or potential voters have before switching to another party. A most immediate implication of this is that in more polarized countries parties are more free to act ineffectively. To be sure, the extent to which parties can actually control their repositioning in a multiparty system with several political actors moving simultaneously is not clear from this study. What these findings show, is mainly that voters respond to party distancing, in a way that follows what suggested by observing global changes at the level of the electorate. It will be aim of further research to test via a more complete model of voting behavior (i.e. including also other options such as differential abstention or new voters) how much powers parties have in constraining their electorate, and which set of tools may be adopted to avoid making the elections less and less competitive.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

The central goal of this work has been to investigate the implications of a polarized political environment for the way in which citizens evaluate the political options, and for the rationales that guide their voting patterns. Because of its focus on both the positional properties and the potential for conflict of polarized party systems, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the mechanisms by which the ideological contrasts maintained by the political elites translates into more or less *rigid* voting styles on the public's side. This provides a key to reading both relevant aggregate phenomena (such as, for instance, varying degrees of electoral volatility) and individual-level choices (such as, for instance, keeping on voting for the same party despite a negative evaluation of its performance). Moreover, from a viewpoint where different voting styles can correspond to different incentives for the parties to deliver the positive externalities that electoral competition should produce, namely *responsiveness* and *accountability*, this study can work as a base for the evaluation of party systems' properties and their influence on the quality of electoral democracy.

The mechanisms discussed throughout this book are essentially two. One, introduced in Chapter 4 and recalled in Chapter 6, regards the mere *spatial properties* of polarized party systems, and how these are reflected in citizens' openness to consider different political options instead of only one. Because the mechanism by which party systems are expected to affect voters' preferences is related at this stage to pure positional considerations, this type of effect is defined as "mechanical". A second mechanism, discussed in Chapter 5 and shown again in Chapter 6, involves the type of *interaction*, or the style of competition, in which parties are engaged in polarized systems, and how this can influence voters' evaluations and perceptions of the qualities of the parties themselves. In particular, polarization is conceptualized here as a situation of great political *conflict*, which motivates citizens to rely more heavily on partisan cues as

they evaluate parties on substantive grounds, such as ideology and competence. Together, these two mechanisms are expected to reduce the sensitivity of the voters to party appeals, leading to a substantial *encapsulation* of the electorate (Bartolini, 2000).

In this final chapter I first summarize the substantive findings of the different chapters, organizing them by emphasizing the two major mechanisms that they propose, and discussing how they contribute to the existing literature of voting behavior. Finally, I discuss the main shortcomings of this study and suggest some possible ways by which alternative designs can be employed to overcome them, providing at the same time an outline of possible paths for future research.

7.1 Spatial Properties of Polarized Party Systems

Polarization means disagreement. In more formal terms, the concept indicates a situation where the interests of two or more political actors are mutually exclusive. As a consequence, in a polarized context, a certain degree of satisfaction of the preference of an individual or group will inevitably lead to an equal degree of dissatisfaction of the preference of other individuals or groups. This translates, in spatial terms, into a view of polarization as a matter of *distance*. The more two actors are ideologically distant, the more their views are different, antithetical, contrasting. In the political discourse, spatial terms are used exactly for this purpose: to express the difference between views, opinions, preferences for policies, or any other types of statements that provide meaning to an actor's political action. Thus, to study the positional properties of party systems and how they impact on the voters means, in the first place, to assess how people choose when the policy "packages" that are offered by the various parties are quite different from one another.

The first question asked in this study is whether or not greater differences between political options correspond in the voters' mind to smaller *choice sets*, and whether or not this is reflected by their tendency to switch among parties over time. The hypothesized effect is straigthforward: if the options offered by two parties are mutually exclusive, then moving from one to another will imply embracing new aspects (e.g. policies) while giving others up, with a degree of definiteness that increases as a function of the distance between them. Thus, in a polarized context, the average voter will probably think twice before switching his/her party choice.

While previous studies focusing on party differentiation were mainly interested in assessing whether disagreement over a certain political topic corresponds to greater salience (e.g. Alvarez and Nagler, 2004; Lachat, 2008; van der

Eijk et al., 2005), the question whether different party arrangements can affect voters' elasticity has never been asked so far. Yet that the context could play a significant role on this aspect is not necessarily given. After all, voters from more polarized countries could be simply accustomed to the idea of traveling larger ideological distances as they consider switching between parties. Hence, to assess whether the political context plays a role in influencing this aspect of voters' behavior is important to understand both individual choices and collective electoral outcomes. At the individual level, it can help clarifying the psychological mechanisms that lie at the basis of a certain observable behavior (the choice of defecting from, or confirming the support for, the party supported previously), without speculating over the *preferences* that may have led to it. In some cases, to stick with a party does not mean that a voter is extremely convinced about it, but rather than he/she sees no real alternatives. Thus, in order to fully understand a choice, it is important to know the structure of constraints upon which this choice is founded.

This applies to aggregate electoral outcomes too. After all, polarization is a property of the party system. Given the constraining potential of a certain spatial distribution of parties for the choice sets of their (effective and potential) voters, people in polarized systems should be, on average, less willing to switch. However, and again, this can be completely independent from their preferences. Thus, to observe an incumbent government reconfirmed in office after a bad mandate may not necessarily mean that voters are enthusiastically rewarding a poor performance, but rather that the party system is structured in a way such that the alternatives that individual voters perceive as viable are few. To be sure, the jump from the individual to the context is in fact not as simple. This is especially evident in multiparty systems, where large distances can coexist with clusters of parties that are relatively similar to one another. This is why in chapters 4 and 6 I have distinguished between "global" and "local" party competition, referring respectively to the overall competition between parties standing on different ideological sides, and the competition between ideologically similar parties. While the hypothesized individual mechanism remains untouched, its aggregation at the electorate's level should pass by a middle step, made of the arrangement of the options that are immediately close to each voter.

Chapter 4 discusses the mechanism by which party distances translate into more or less constrained choice sets. In fact, such a mechanism builds on a model of choice based on the well-established Downsian "spatial proximity" view (Downs, 1957a). The basic idea is that, given a voter's self-position on the ideological space, the more the distance difference between the closest and the second closest party increases, the more their attractiveness will be uneven. To obtain a direct measurement of such unevenness, I propose an indicator called

preference certainty, that captures how much the first preference of a voter is larger than the second, or, in other words, how much of a change it requires for the second best option to reach the first. The choice to focus on the two most preferred options only is justified by the nature of the vote as a one-trial event. The idea is that vote choice is more sensitive to external events that may provide new information or stimulate new thought when the first option is challenged by other potentially attractive alternatives.

To measure preference certainty I rely on a specific type of rating scale, the "probability to vote" (PTV) scores, that are regarded amongst the most valid indicators of party preferences (Tillie, 1995; van der Eijk et al., 2006). In Chapter 4 I offer a validation of the construct "preference certainty", and its measure by the means of the PTV scales. Other studies before had the intuition to employ rating scales in order to capture citizens' openness to change their party support (Kroh et al., 2007; Rosema, 2006). However, besides differences in operationalization, such studies have assumed a connection between preference certainty (or propensity to switch, or strength of the preferences) and the type of behavior that this construct is expected to be related to. Here the connection has been investigated empirically by matching preference certainty with the actual (self-reported) vote change or persistence between two elections, assessed using panel data. Findings show that voters whose preferences are very certain are more likely to stick to the same party, or even switch towards abstension, rather than voting for a different party.

When preference certainty is put as dependent variable, results show that both the overall level of party system polarization and the arrangement of the two most proximate parties have a substantial impact on it. More precisely, preferences of voters in more polarized party systems are, on average, more certain than those of voters in less polarized systems. Moreover, as the Dutch case in Chapter 6 shows, voters' preference certainty can vary considerably from one election to another within the same party system, again reflecting patterns of party polarization. These results are interpreted as a confirmation of the expected connection between the degree of party polarization and the extent to which voters are "open-minded" towards the political supply on, in other words, their *sensitivity* to the appeals of different parties. As discussed in several points in the study, this phenomenon defines the relation between polarization and the degree of "electoral *availability*" that is found in a certain country at a certain time, a property that can directly affect parties' incentives to be responsive to their public (Bartolini, 1999).

When observed side by side, the findings about the behavioral consequences of higher preference certainty, and those about its connection with party polarization, tell a simple story: that the context can account to a certain extent

for the structure of constraints that lies at the basis of voters' choice, and thus when we observe and evaluate the outcome of an election, this should be taken into account. Because voters whose preferences are very certain would rather abstain than switching to a different party, one can imagine that in a situation of extreme polarization the actual choice will be between confirming one's support for the usual party or abstaining, rather than between different parties. While this would represent a very extreme case, given the relatively small magnitude of the results, it is at the same time quite evident that a situation like that would heavily undermine citizens' trust in the political system, and affect their beliefs about the good working of the democratic machine. On the aggregate, electoral patterns of extremely low volatility and decreasing turnout may indicate that this phenomenon is taking place, and thus voters' views are being limited by the way in which parties are arranged. Yet again, the magnitude of the results in the rather large sample of European elections surveyed in this study suggests that, in reality, this type of outcome is not very likely.

While observing preference certainty provides information about the choice set upon which the vote is built, Chapter 4 remains agnostic about the *reasons* why a voter should switch or not. However, to fully assess whether voters' freedom of choice is limited by the spatial disposition of parties, one should observe what happens when voters have some incentives to defect from the party they previously voted for. In this respect, evidence that party positioning can successfully moderate voters' propensity to switch when they are motivated to do so is provided, for the Dutch case only, in Chapter 6. Motivation here is assessed by taking into account negative incentives (a negative evaluation of the government for former voters of a government party) and positive incentives (a positive evaluation of the government for former voters of an opposition party), that is to say, by considering factors that can *push* or *pull* voters away from the party they previously voted for. As findings show, the strength of the correlation between these motivating factors and the actual choice to switch is reduced when the party that has been voted for at the previous time repositions itself by *increasing the distance* from its closest neighbor. This confirms the expectations that certain positional arrangements can seriously limit voters' set of alternatives, and therefore keep them stuck on the same choice even when they should switch.

The contribution of these findings to the existing scholarship on voting behavior is both empirical and theoretical. Empirically, they show the validity and the potential of an individual-level measure of electoral availability such as "preference certainty". While other studies recognize the usefulness of PTVs for assessing within-individuals distributions of preferences, the connection with voting behavior discussed here provides the first assessment of the empirical

departure of the concept from a better-known factor of individual encapsulation, namely party identification. This ultimately qualifies preference certainty as an independent measurement of people's *voting style*, and suggests its inclusion, when available, among other individual factors that are employed to predict citizens' political behaviors.

Theoretically, this study advances our knowledge of the impact that spatial properties of party systems have on citizens' political behaviors, by describing a novel mechanism that takes into account the structure of preferences upon which the vote choice is built. Studies focusing on the role played by the political context in accounting for individuals' behavior started exploring the potential of large amounts of comparative data in relatively recent times. While the mechanisms regulating the importance of different choice criteria (e.g. issues, economy) as a function of certain contextual characteristics are now rather clear, to observe other types of behavior such as vote switching can inform our reading of cross-country differences in *explanatory power* of known models of choice, and help us explaining idiosyncratic "voting styles" of different electorates and groups of voters.

Regarding the first point, the findings discussed here suggest that the *susbtantive* reasons upon which the vote choice is founded are moderated by characteristics of the spatial disposition of the political supply. Because the extent of this moderation is found to be systematically correlated at the contextual level to the degree of party polarization, it follows that the observed effect of some considerations on the vote (for instance, government performance evaluations) may be reduced in more polarized systems because voters are being limited by the relative positioning of the parties around them. In other words, these findings suggest that the strength of the connection between some determinants of the vote and the vote itself is not only due to how *important* these determinants are for the voters at a given election, but also to how much voters are *free* to choose among the options that they are offered. To be sure, this mechanism can be reframed as a salience effect too, by arguing that in more polarized systems the impact of the *previous choice* on the present choice becomes stronger, downsizing in this way the role played by other substantive considerations. This characterizes polarized party systems as contexts where the *friction* of vote choice is stronger and thus, other things being equal, where political change should be somehow more difficult to achieve.

This relates to a second point, i.e. our understanding of different voting styles that characterize electorates in different contexts. As discussed previously, taking polarization into account can help explaining why in some contexts voters are less likely to punish incumbents that deliver poor performances than in others, or why within the same context different groups of voters are more or

less likely to defect from their previous vote. In other words, to know how much constrained people's choices are can provide a better view of the conditions under which different voters and different electorates are expected to behave in a relatively similar way given similar inputs. This should be taken into account when aggregate electoral results are interpreted in substantive terms as as an expression of the "people's will".

7.2 Polarization, Political Conflict and Partisan Loyalties

As I stated above, polarization means disagreement. While in spatial terms this translates into a matter of *distance*, allowing us to model polarization as the degree of party dispersion on the space, one important aspect goes beyond the parties' placement: the possibility that, as disagreement grows, the nature of the interaction between them will probably change too. In Section 1.2 I provide a "light" definition of polarization centered on the incompatibility between two or more actors' preferences. However, I also noted that the term is often used referring to a situation of "conflict". This is the case for instance in conflict studies, where polarization is conceived as a stage of escalation where a win-win solution is no longer likely, and mutual respect is threatened (e.g. Pruitt and Olczak, 1995, p. 81). Even in the everyday language, the connection between the two concepts is so tight that they are often used as synonyms. Yet this view of polarization is generally overlooked in political science. More fairly, the concept of ideological conflict *is* indeed often associated with polarization, but the full implications of this connection are left unaddressed. This implies that, for instance, the question how citizens cope with political choices when they perceive higher hostility between the parties is neglected, and polarization is regarded as a matter of mere differentiation. In Chapter 5 of this study I take the cue from a theoretical puzzle that, as I argue, derives from this neglect. Results suggest that viewing party polarization as a more or less entrenched political conflict can provide a key to reading voters' evaluations in a way that accomodates previous puzzling results.

An important conceptual step to be made is to assess *why* party polarization, defined here as disagreement or divergence of interests, should convert into political conflict. In my view, this point requires to spend a few words over the dimension of controversy that has been considered in this book, i.e. the topic on which parties are polarized. As I discuss in the chapters 2 and 5, ideological views have been conceptualized over the years as cognitive shortcuts to describe

policy preferences (e.g. Downs, 1957a; Hinich and Munger, 1994), as belief systems rooted into some core values (e.g. Converse, 1964; Jost, 2006), or even as statements of political self-identification (e.g. Conover and Feldman, 1981; Malka and Lelkes, 2010). All these views more or less implicitly regard ideology as a construct able to capture the structure of political divisions in (almost) its entirety. In this perspective, ideological polarization describes a situation where the disagreement spans across issue domains, becoming essentially an indicator of disagreement *tout court*. In other words, as polarization over ideological views grows, it becomes less and less likely to find an issue or a topic on which parties agree. This sets ground for conflict by providing *motivation*.

Given this premise, I argue that conflict arises when the emphasis of the interaction is put on party *identities*, rather than on other substantive matters. Here, besides giving concrete reasons for the strife, polarization plays an additional role: it makes party images more distinct from one another, allowing them to lean on ideological profiles that are clearly defined. This is the central point on which the concept of "partisan sorting" described by American scholars is built (see Levendusky, 2009b). When party ideological views are different enough, it will be easier for the citizens to link a certain ideological profile with a party label. This mechanism is known by social psychologists as *comparative fit*: a collection of stimuli is more easily recognized as belonging to the same group when the differences among them are smaller, on average, than the difference between them and other "remaining" stimuli (Turner et al., 1994). This should involve both the voters' side (with the formation of partisan stereotypes) and the parties' side (with better chances to appeal to stereotypical rhetoric when highlighting own qualities against the others'). To be sure, the conceptual overlap between ideological polarization and conflict is imperfect, as polarization can lead to genuine will for negotiation and debate over policy problems. In fact, the argument made here is rahter than conflict is *more likely* to happen when there is polarization, simply because the latter facilitates the occurrence of former. Thus, to sum up, when ideological polarization is higher, strategies that involve appeals to group identity and loyalty have more chances to be successful, hence providing incentives for the parties to use them.

The concept of polarization as political conflict has one immediate consequence: that the more the parties are divided, the more the citizens should be motivated to *take a side*. This is argued in Chapter 5, and confirmed by the empirical data. As the political context grows polarized, the likelihood to find survey respondents who define themselves as *partisans* increases too. This connection is also found, in reverse, during the process of depolarization of the Dutch party system discussed in Chapter 6. Moreover, and following the same logic, the data show that in more polarized contexts, partisanship is more likely

to overlap with perceptions of ideological proximity and party competence. In Chapter 5 this mechanism is suggested to provide an explanation of some puzzling findings that see the importance of valence considerations increasing as a function of party polarization (Clark and Leiter, 2013; Pardos-Prado, 2012), while according to the basic concept of valence politics the effect should be opposite (Green, 2007; Stokes, 1963, 1992). The findings presented in the chapter also affect, to a certain extent, the relationship between polarization and perceptions of ideological proximity. Here, while prior evidence shows a connection between party polarization and the accuracy of ideological considerations in determining party preferences (e.g. Dalton, 2008; Lachat, 2008; van der Eijk et al., 2005), I show that this connection is explained, in part, by a heavier role of partisanship in guiding citizens' ideological perceptions. Of course, at least for the case of ideological proximity, the salience mechanism that regulates the importance of different considerations and ist connection with polarization is rather complex, and for sure not reducible to a pure expression of partisan loyalty[1]. However, this is not the point of the study. The goal here is rather to show an aspect of polarization that is generally overlooked by research on voting behavior and, besides providing a plausible explanation for puzzling findings, can help understanding the relationship between the political context and the citizens beyond the simple assessment of party distances.

All in all, this work suggests that polarization has something to do with the *centrality of parties* in the political discourse, not only as protagonists of the political competition (Schmitt, 2009b; Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995), but also as providers of cues upon which citizens build their own opinions and preferences (Druckman et al., 2013; Taber and Lodge, 2006). This has a number of implications for our understanting of voting behavior in a comparative perspective. First of all, it is important to highlight the fact that, as the political conflict increases, it becomes increasingly more difficult to disentangle policy and competence-based evaluations from partisan considerations. This has methodological and normative consequences. Methodologically, it suggests that research focused on comparing the relative strength of these predictors of the vote in a comparative perspective should take into account in the expla-

[1]The problem with the perceptions of party competence is more complex, as in the version found in most of the available public opinion surveys, the variable suffers of a great endogeneity to party preferences and spatial considerations. Several recent studies highlight this problem, and in some cases they also suggest potential solution (Evans and Chzhen, 2011; Therriault, 2013; Wagner and Zeglovits, 2012). This is probably one of the reasons why, in Chapter 5, the predicted overlap between partisanship and the perception of party competence at the highest level of polairzation is considerably larger (70% of the cases) than for ideological proximity (50% of the cases).

nation, and possibly in the modeling, the fact that their degree of collinearity is systematically related to some characteristics of the political context. If ignored, this aspect could lead to observe biased effects in case the two measures are included together in the model and interacted with polarization.

Normatively, the findings of this study challenge the assumption that higher policy differentiation encourages citizens to behave more rationally. This assumption is built on the reasonable expectation that a low differentiation of the policy supply (or, as Bartolini (1999) calls it, "decidability") undermines the substantive *meaningfulness* of the vote choice, or in other words, the extent to which a different choice implies a different policy outcome (e.g. Lachat, 2011; Wessels and Schmitt, 2008). To be sure, nobody can deny the fact that, if all parties offer the same thing, then the vote choice can be hardly regarded as meaningful. What is questioned here is rather the expectation that greater party differentiation would be *linearly* related to the decidability of the political supply. While within some reasonable limits policy differentiation contributes positively to the voters' choices, when the disagreement is too much, and especially, when it affects *ideological worldviews*, the chances that political conflict is established overtake the beneficial effects of more decidability. That is to say, when polarization is high, the meaning of the vote choice can be quickly reduced to nothing more than an expression of partisan loyalty. Thus, following the suggestion of Schmitt and Freire (2012), the relationship between polarization and the competitiveness of elections is better described a bell-shaped pattern. When polarization is too low, and parties are barely distinguishable from each other, voters will be likely not to care about who wins the election, as the policy outcome will be similar. On the other hand, when polarization is too high, voters will be less sensitive to other parties' appeals, giving parties less incentives to adjust their policies according to where the most of the citizens stand and, ultimately, to behave competently.

All in all, these findings raise a question regarding the role of politics in the society, especially the function of parties as representatives of the societal divisions and the openness of the citizens to accept and build on each other's preferences. The claim here is that, probably, a very loud, conflictual and partisan behavior on the political elites' side, does not help citizens to evaluate and choose peacefully what is better for them. If the tones of the political confrontation force people to choose an advocate to be loyal to, and to seek for a lens through which to evaluate the political environment, this may lead people to approach politics following a "black and white", or "us versus them", approach. In the long run, this could have some detrimental effects for the integration between politics and society, i.e. the ability of politics to *channel* and not *fuel* the social disagreement. For instance, this could eventually lead citizens to lose trust in

the whole democratic system just because they are disappointed by "their own" party. In other words, given the party elites' relative freedom to confront each other in more or less consensual terms, a very conflictual competition may pay off in terms of having strong and loyal supporters, but it is probably not the best thing if we regard politics to be an expression of the citizens' will, and not of politics itself.

7.3 Limits of the Study, and Directions for Future Research

The aim of this study was to assess the impact of a component of the political context, i.e. ideological party polarization, on a set of political evaluations and behaviors that, together, summarize the extent to which voters are sensitive to party appeals. Such an assessment involved, first, defining a relationship between party positions and citizens' openness to vote for different parties, and second, discussing the role of party identification in the process of party evaluation, and how this becomes more prominent as polarization increases. In this part I briefly discuss the main limits of this study and I suggest some paths for future research that can address some of these points.

Given the emphasis on the *context*, this study relied for the largest part on a comparative design (in the chapters 4 and 5) and, to a smaller extent, on a case study based on a single country, the Netherlands (in Chapter 6), where the focus shifted to observing the variation of party polarization over time within the same country. For validating purposes only, a smaller set of analyses was conducted on a pooled set of three two-waves panel surveys (in Chapter 4). Besides the latter case, all the analyses that the substantive conclusions of this study are based on have been conducted on cross-sectional data. This choice can be criticized, as the simultaneous nature of the observation does not allow to properly disentangle the direction of causality. To be sure, in Chapter 5 the causal antecedence of party identification to other election-time considerations, such as ideological proximity and party competence, is assumed rather than tested empirically. This may raise some concerns, as a possible alternative explanation will inevitably involve a reverse causal path, i.e. party identification being the consequence of other substantive considerations.

I argue that this problem should be seen in the broader perspective of a *trade-off* between the scope of the analysis and the adherence between the hypothesized and the observed mechanisms. As it is discussed in the chapter, plenty of studies using methodologies that allow to address the direction of

causality, such as experiments or panel data, confirm that partisanship is able to shape citizens' perception of the political world, including their performance evaluations and ideological views (see Evans and Andersen, 2004, 2006; Gerber and Green, 1998; Gerber et al., 2010b; Goren, 2005; Green et al., 2002; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011). This evidence essentially shows that perceptual biases like motivated reasoning act to drive the voters towards looking for evidence that confirms their prior beliefs and choices (Taber and Lodge, 2006). However, because of their focus on addressing the direction of causality, these studies do not allow to assess whether and how the power of partisanship as a factor motivating citizens' evaluations is related to characteristics of the political context. The only single effort to address the role of polarization in this process, while controlling for the direction of causality, is a very recent piece by Druckman et al. (2013). While the experimental design allows the autors to show that party endorsements become more effective in influencing partisans' own preferences *when polarization is higher*, the scope of their finding is for obvious reasons limited to one single political context (i.e. the US) and to a limited set of policy issues. Thus, while the experimental design allows to explain the mechanism in a proper way, it does not help explaining the variance in the connection between partisanship and perceptions of party competence across levels of polarization (which, as a reminder, is related to the puzzle that motivated the analyses in Chapter 5), and more importantly, it does not allow to generalize the finding to political contexts that are different from the American one. On the other hand, the comparative scope of the analyses conducted here allows to show a trend that is generalizable across a wide variety of political environments, which are characterized among other things by different structures of the party system and different political cultures. Thus, given the cumulative nature of scientific inquiry, comparative studies should be regarded as complementary to experimental or panel designs, and their value should be considered for what they are: an important chance to make generalizations about the scope of political phenomena.

A similar problem regards the connection between systemic characteristics and individual behaviors. While the mechanism explained in Chapter 4 is correlative in nature (i.e. the causal process that drives individual preferences is assumed to be based on spatial considerations, independently from the context) the story told in Chapter 5 requires more discussion. In particular, one alternative explanation of the correlation between party polarization and the amount of partisans (modeled as the individual probability to have a partisan attachment) is that parties may tend to take more extreme positions *because* they already have a stable partisan support. This would mean, in turn, that partisan support comes from other societal changes that are independent from

the behavior of the political elites. To be sure, previous evidence based on single countries, such as the study of Hetherington (2001) for the US, show that changes of elite polarization temporally predate changes at the public opinion level. Yet, even in such a case, the question whether it is the perception of discordance among the political elites what fuels citizens' partisanship, or other societal changes that are captured and exploited by politicians, is essentially left unanswered. The lack of a cross-country comparative panel study does not allow to ultimately prove or disprove each of the two arguments. Nevertheless, there are some considerations to be made that could limit the concern within reasonable borders.

First, some individual-level controls that are known, or at least expected, to be related to party identification, such as age and political interest[2], are included in the model. This should reduce the impact of spurious effects related to sample composition, or, to put it differently, clear the air from suspects that individual-level lurking factors may cause both polarization and partisanship. Secondly, even taking a top-down perspective, it would be unrealistic to deny any "feedback effects" from the bottom. However, admitting that parties who have a stronger partisan base are more confident in taking extreme positions does not mean implying that partisanship is less of a *political* phenomenon. In other words, it is difficult to imagine that individual partisanship grows completely unrelated from what parties do, and that parties only capitalize on it at a subsequent time. Rather, among the behaviors that parties can adopt that is likely to provide people with a sense of group attachment, social psychology suggests that emphasizing the differences is more effective than deemphasizing them (Turner et al., 1994). Thus, and again, given the focus on context variation, and the unavailability of panel data covering a large-enough sample of political contexts, this study offers an explanation for a phenomenon that can be regarded as the most plausible, given our prior knowledge of party identification as a type of self-categorization.

Given the insights provided by this study, a possible design for a future study would look explicitly at the within-individual variation of the degree of partisanship (modeled as the individual propensity to see the self as a supporter of a particular party) over a great number of time points. This would allow to sort out the direction of causality by relating to simple Granger causality. Moreover, the time span covered by such a study should be long enough to capture different electoral cycles, and thus to maximize the probability that some changes in

[2]Ideally, education would have been regarded as more exogenous to party identification than political interest. However, due to the different coding of the variable among EES waves, it was not possible to obtain a harmonized measure.

the degree of party polarization and in the tone of the political debate will occur. Possible sources of data for this study would be particularly long panel studies, such as the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) or the British Household Panel Study (BHPS), matched together with other contextual information about parties' behavior. While the contextual variation would be still smaller than in a study based on cross-sectional data, such as the present one, such a design would nevertheless allow for more contextual variation than a lab experiment.

7.4 Final Remarks

Political polarization is growing in some countries and declining in others. In Europe, countries that belong to the first category are mainly located in the South, like for instance Greece, Italy, Spain, and Cyprus, and in the East, like Hungary, Czech Republic and Bulgaria. Many of these countries, for reasons that are to be sougth both inside and outside of their borders, entered in recent years into a condition where a strong and effective governance, a wise policy-making, and a political power that is *trusted* by the citizens, are particularly needed. Yet, in many cases, these qualities look more difficult to achieve than ever before. This is due, at least in part, to the irresponsible behavior of party elites, that is mirrored on the voters' side by quite disoriented choices. For instance, in Italy, the parliamentary election of February 2013, happened after a technocratic government lasting more than a year, resulted substantially into a tie between the left-wing and the right-wing blocks, with, in addition, a significant drop in turnout and the unexpected success of a pupulist party that built its own image by claiming to be "neither left nor right", and accusing the more established parties to collude against the people's will. In Greece, recent polls show that the extreme-left SYRIZA and the extreme-right Golden Dawn are among the most favorite parties of Greek citizens' vote intentions[3].

As it has been discussed extensively, the effect of polarization on citizens' voting choices is hardly a direct one. People do not choose for one party instead of another *because the system is polarized*. Rather, people can feel they have more or less choice, or behave like more or less blind followers of a party, when the system is polarized. However, this does not mean that we can not talk about what higher polarization *does* to a political system. In this sense, polarization may keep in office governments that should not be, or generate parliaments whose ideological orientations are so evenly distributed among opposite extremes that are in fact unable to reach any relevant choice. In other words,

[3]For a comment published on-line in April 2013 see `http://greece.greekreporter.com/2013/04/13/syriza-leads-in-latest-polls/` (retrieved July 25, 2013).

while the global economic crisis forces politics to be effective and responsive to an increasingly frustrated public opinion, excessively high party polarization may set the cards in a way that elites have no incentives to be responsive, and voters have no reasonable alternative options to choose.

All in all, while others before have been concerned with the negative consequences of an excessively low differentiation among the parties, this study urges to take into account the detrimental effects of too much polarization. This provides support to a narrative that pictures the relationship between polarization and the quality of democracy as "bell-shaped" (see Schmitt and Freire, 2012). While the whole figure is still far from being complete, this study is one additional tile to the mosaic of the complex relationship between the political context and the citizens.

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Appendix A

Additional Figures and Tables

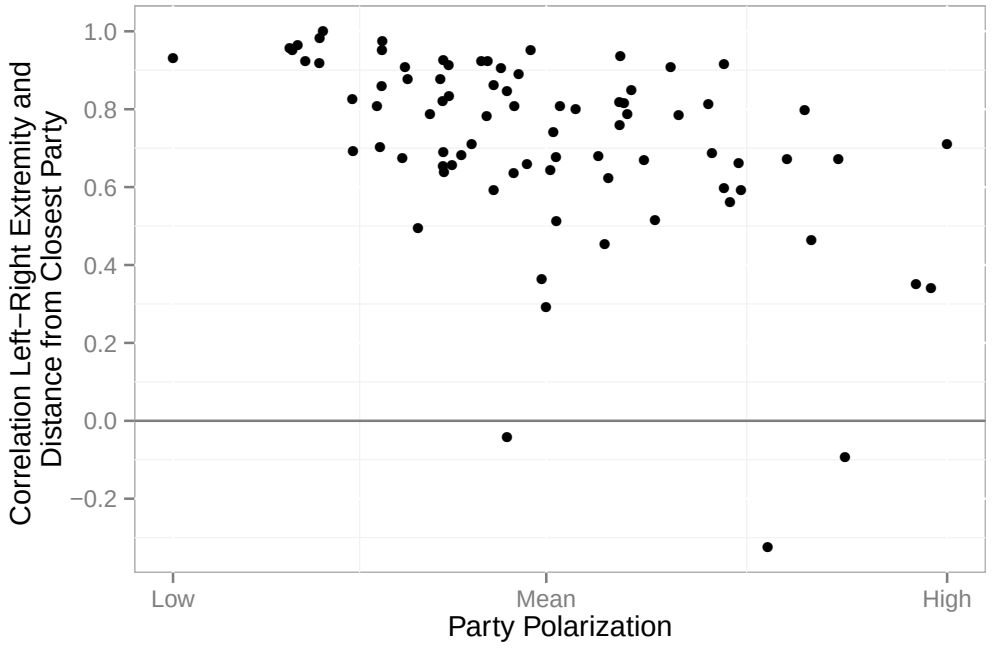

Figure A.1: Correlation between Distance from the Closest Party and Left-Right Extremity (Pearson *r* calculated separately for each election) and Party Polarization. Data: EES.

Table A.1: Multinomial Logit Model of Vote Switching, Chapter 4 – Full Output. Data: DPES.

	Base Outcome: Switch Party	
	Predicted Outcome:	
	Vote for the Same Party	Switch to Abstension
Certainty t_0	1.907^{***}	2.141^{***}
	(0.367)	(0.652)
Certainty t_{-1}	1.472^{***}	1.601^{***}
	(0.312)	(0.573)
Strength t_0	3.089^{***}	-0.984
	(0.567)	(0.956)
Strength t_{-1}	-0.161	0.778
	(0.571)	(0.311)
Age (t_{-1})	0.051^{**}	-0.044
	(0.023)	(0.048)
Education	0.004	0.057
	(0.038)	(0.077)
Working Class	-0.577^{***}	-0.028
	(0.164)	(0.326)
Strength Party ID (t_{-1})	1.071^{***}	-0.899^{**}
	(0.207)	(0.453)
Left-Right Extremity t_0	-0.014	-0.145
	(0.061)	(0.129)
Left-Right Extremity t_{-1}	-0.063	-0.074
	(0.067)	(0.142)
Wave 2 (1989)	0.085	0.098
	(0.191)	(0.381)
Wave 3 (1994)	-0.176	-0.246
	(0.182)	(0.375)
Constant	-3.001^{***}	-1.487
	(0.706)	(1.342)
Observations	1,590	
Log likelihood	-1010.431	
McFadden R-Square	0.133	
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table A.2: Multilevel Linear Models for Preference Certainty, Chapter 4 – Alternative Specification. Data: EES.

	Dependent variable:	
	Preference Certainty	
	(Model 4.3b)	(Model 4.3c)
Preference Strength	0.548^{***}	0.551^{***}
	(0.005)	(0.005)
Political Interest	-0.032^{***}	-0.031^{***}
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Gender (Female)	-0.010^{***}	-0.010^{***}
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Age	0.002^{***}	0.002^{***}
	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Left-Right Extremity		0.002^{*}
		(0.001)
Is a Partisan	0.054^{***}	0.055^{***}
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Polarization	0.151^{**}	0.138^{*}
	(0.072)	(0.073)
ENEP	-0.029^{***}	-0.029^{***}
	(0.005)	(0.005)
Time Dist. from Nat. Elec.	-0.002^{*}	-0.002^{*}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
CEE Country	0.050^{***}	0.053^{***}
	(0.019)	(0.019)
Distance Closest Party	0.014^{***}	
	(0.002)	
Dist. Difference 2 Closest Parties	0.031^{***}	0.031^{***}
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Size Closest Party	0.005^{***}	0.006^{***}
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Size Difference 2 Closest Parties	0.001	0.0002
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Constant	-0.174^{***}	-0.170^{***}
	(0.037)	(0.038)
Observations	58,475	58,475
Akaike Inf. Crit.	5,169	5,252
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	5,321	5,405
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table A.3: Multilevel Logit Models For Partisanship and Party Evaluations, Chapter 5 – Full Output (Data: EES)

	Dependent variable:			
	Partisan Attachment	L-R Closest Party same as PID	Most Competent Party same as PID	L-R Closest Party same as Most Competent
	(Model 5.1)	(Model 5.2)	(Model 5.3)	(Model 5.4)
Political Interest	1.833***	0.113***	0.130**	0.086**
	(0.035)	(0.043)	(0.064)	(0.044)
Gender (Female)	0.003	−0.028	0.025	−0.022
	(0.018)	(0.023)	(0.033)	(0.023)
Age	0.013***	0.001	0.003***	0.002**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Left-Right Extremity	0.315***	0.303***	0.082***	0.269***
	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.009)
Is a Partisan				−0.098
				(0.116)
Polarization	2.339***	1.657***	2.113***	0.567
	(0.795)	(0.410)	(0.589)	(0.395)
ENEP	0.054	−0.089***	−0.153***	−0.118***
	(0.054)	(0.029)	(0.038)	(0.026)
Distance from NE	−0.009	−0.012**	0.006	−0.008
	(0.009)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)
CEE Country	−0.369	−0.271**	0.283	−0.137
	(0.231)	(0.110)	(0.177)	(0.099)
Polarization*Partisan				1.252***
				(0.340)
Belgium (Fl) 2009	1.869***	−0.378	−0.357	−0.166
	(0.574)	(0.389)	(0.388)	(0.396)
France 2004		−1.452***		−0.978***
		(0.374)		(0.319)
Slovenia 2004		−2.177***		−1.379***
		(0.435)		(0.395)
Germany 2004		−1.087***		
		(0.383)		
Constant	−0.806**	0.188	1.448***	0.171
	(0.396)	(0.207)	(0.290)	(0.190)
Var Intercept (Election):	0.234	0.125	0.082	0.077
Var (Partisan):				0.031
Var Intercept (Country):	0.192	0.000	0.120	0.000
Observations	63,630	36,806	26,200	35,191
Groups (Election)	81	81	79	79
Groups (Country)	27	27	27	27
AIC	71,765	45,598	24,239	45,419
BIC	71,874	45,726	24,337	45,572

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.4: Regression Models for Behavioral Indicators, Chapter 6. Data: DPES.

	Dependent variable:			
	Preference Certainty	Hesitation	Partisan Attachment	Switch
	OLS	*logistic*	*logistic*	*logistic*
	(Model 6.1)	(Model 6.2)	(Model 6.3)	(Model 6.4)
Preferece Strength	0.621^{***}			
	(0.024)			
Is Partisan	0.074^{***}	-0.823^{***}		-1.203^{***}
	(0.007)	(0.073)		(0.078)
Political Interest	-0.057^{***}	0.171	1.417^{***}	0.395^{***}
	(0.012)	(0.131)	(0.117)	(0.133)
Gender (Female)	0.005	0.292^{***}	0.057	-0.067
	(0.006)	(0.067)	(0.061)	(0.068)
Age	0.214^{***}	-1.081^{***}	1.237^{***}	-0.754^{***}
	(0.014)	(0.148)	(0.128)	(0.149)
Education	-0.082^{***}	0.785^{***}	-0.230^{**}	0.102
	(0.011)	(0.121)	(0.107)	(0.121)
Member of Working Class	0.019^{**}	-0.016	-0.078	0.026
	(0.009)	(0.099)	(0.086)	(0.097)
Religious Person	0.001	-0.115^{*}	0.373^{***}	-0.101
	(0.006)	(0.067)	(0.062)	(0.068)
Left-Right Extremity	0.012	-0.096	1.373^{***}	-0.453^{***}
	(0.011)	(0.113)	(0.099)	(0.115)
Distance from Previous Vote				0.262^{***}
				(0.031)
Motivation to Switch				0.302^{***}
				(0.042)
Year = 1989	-0.046^{***}	0.092	-0.587^{***}	-0.366^{***}
	(0.010)	(0.118)	(0.098)	(0.123)
Year = 1994	-0.122^{***}	0.655^{***}	-0.257^{***}	0.451^{***}
	(0.010)	(0.113)	(0.097)	(0.114)
Year = 1998	-0.130^{***}	0.487^{***}	-0.564^{***}	0.399^{***}
	(0.010)	(0.110)	(0.095)	(0.112)
Year = 2002	-0.104^{***}	0.765^{***}	-0.507^{***}	0.986^{***}
	(0.011)	(0.113)	(0.099)	(0.115)
Constant	-0.288^{***}	-1.164^{***}	-1.978^{***}	-0.814^{***}
	(0.026)	(0.158)	(0.142)	(0.166)
Observations	5,443	5,287	5,462	5,299
Adjusted R^2	0.26			
Log likelihood		$-2,886$	$-3,331$	$-2,787$
Residual Deviance		5,772	6,663	5,575
Null Deviance		6,280	7,356	6,301

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.5: Logit Model of Vote Switching, Chapter 6 – full output. Data: DPES.

	Dependent variable:			
	Vote Switching			
	(Model 6.5)		(Model 6.6)	
	Coef.	Cluster S.E.	Coef.	Cluster S.E.
Individual Characteristics				
Is Partisan	-1.165^{***}	(0.113)	-1.152^{***}	(0.109)
Political Interest	0.366^{***}	(0.072)	0.359^{***}	(0.066)
Gender (Female)	-0.102	(0.077)	-0.104	(0.078)
Age	-0.669^{**}	(0.279)	-0.677^{**}	(0.275)
Education	-0.002	(0.227)	-0.002	(0.231)
Member of Working Class	0.102	(0.138)	0.094	(0.136)
Religious Person	0.066	(0.242)	0.079	(0.239)
Distance from Previous Vote	0.275^{***}	(0.039)	0.278^{***}	(0.041)
Left-Right Extremity	-0.435^{***}	(0.072)	-0.458^{***}	(0.073)
Motivation to Switch	1.332^{***}	(0.471)	1.459^{***}	(0.456)
Characteristics of the party voted for at last election				
Younger than 10 Years	0.346^{***}	(0.058)	0.392^{***}	(0.037)
Distance from closest party t-1	0.017	(0.145)	0.002	(0.139)
Distance from closest party Delta	-0.905^{***}	(0.299)	-0.969^{***}	(0.298)
Left-Right extremity t-1	-0.730^{*}	(0.438)	-0.700^{*}	(0.417)
Left-Right extremity Delta	-0.357	(0.847)	-0.241	(0.821)
Distance Delta*Motivation			-0.607^{***}	(0.145)
Extremity Delta*Motivation			-0.027	(0.114)
Fixed Effects				
Year = 1989	-0.106	(0.437)	-0.033	(0.404)
Year = 1994	-0.151	(0.853)	-0.089	(0.818)
Year = 1998	-0.166	(0.866)	-0.135	(0.810)
Year = 2002	0.437	(0.489)	0.487	(0.449)
Party = CDA	-1.069^{**}	(0.488)	-1.051^{**}	(0.462)
Party = VVD	-0.183	(0.237)	-0.182	(0.225)
Party = D66	-0.043	(0.382)	-0.015	(0.361)
Party = GL	0.543	(0.359)	0.494	(0.350)
Party = SGP	-0.061	(0.387)	-0.103	(0.380)
Party = SP	0.162	(0.269)	0.135	(0.260)
Party = CentDem	2.953^{***}	(0.611)	3.049^{***}	(0.579)
Party = GPV	-0.008	(0.292)	-0.030	(0.303)
Party = RPF	-0.333	(0.283)	-0.356	(0.285)
Constant	0.984	(1.457)	0.908	(1.365)
Observations	5,299		5,299	
Log likelihood	-2,702		-2,690	
Residual Deviance	5,404		5,380	
Null Deviance	6,301		6,301	
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Appendix B

Variables and Parties

B.1 European Election Study

B.1.1 Country/Election List

1994:
Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany (*East-Germany*, *West-Germany*), Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, UK (*Great Britain*, *Northern Ireland*).

1999:
Austria, Belgium (*Flanders*, *Wallonia*), Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK (*Great Britain*, *Northern Ireland*).

2004:
Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK (*Great Britain*, *Northern Ireland*).

2009:
Austria, Belgium (*Flanders*, *Wallonia*), Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Slovakia, Sweden, UK.

B.1.2 Party List

1994:
Belgium: VLD, CVP, SP, Anders Gaan Leven (AGALEV), Vlaams Blok, Volksunie, PS, PRL, PSC, Parti Ecologiste, FN
Denmark: Socialdemocratiet, Radikale Venstre, Konservative Folkeparti, Centrum Demokraterne, Socialistik Folkeparti, Kristeligt Folkeparti, Venstre, Fremdskridtpartiet
France: Parti Communiste, Parti Socialiste, Mouvement Radicaux de Gauche, Union pour la Democratie Francaise, Rassemblement pour la Republique, Front National, Les Verts, Generation Ecologie
Germany:
West Germany: CDU–CSU, SPD, FDP, Buendnis 90–Die Grunen, Republikaner, Linke Liste - Partei Deutscher Sozialisten
East Germany: CDU, SPD, FDP, Buendnis 90–Die Grunen, Republikaner, Linke Liste - Partei Deutscher Sozialisten
Greece: PASOK, New Democracy, Politiki Anixi, KKE, Synaspismos
Ireland: Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Labour, Green Party, Progressive Democrats, Sinn Fein, Democratic Left
Italy: Forza Italia, PDS, PPI, AN, Rifondazione Comunista, Lega Nord, Verdi
Luxembourg: Chretien Social (CSV), Letzebuerger Sozialistesch Arbechter Partei, Demokratesch Partei, dei Greng (GLEI-GAP), ADR, Nationalbewegung, KP, Nei Lenk,Neutral Onofhaengig Menschenrechterpartei, GLS
The Netherlands: CDA, PvdA, VVD, D66, Groen Links, Centrum Democraten, SGP, GPF, AOV
Portugal: PSD, CDU–PCP, CDS–PP, PS, Partido de Solidariedade Nacional
Spain: PSOE, PP, Izquierda Unida, Convergenzia y Unio, Partido Nationalista Vasco, Herri Batasuna
UK:
Great Britain: Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, Green Party
Northern Ireland: Alliance, Ulster Unionist Party, Democratic Unionist Party, Sinn Fein, Social Democratic Labour Party, Labour, Conservatives, Green

1999:
Austria: SPOE, OEVP, FPOE, Gruene, Liberales Forum CSA - Christlich-Soziale Allianz
Belgium :
Flanders: SP, VLD, Agalev, CVP, Vlaams Blok, VU-ID21
Wallonia: PS, PRL-FDF-MCC, Ecolo, PSC, FN

Denmark: Socialdemokratiet, Venstre, Det Konservative Folkeparti, Socialistisk Folkeparti, JuniBevaegelsen, Folkebevaegelsen mod EU, Dansk Folkeparti, Centrum-Demokraterne, Det Radikale Venstre, Enhedslisten - De Rod-Gronne, Kristeligt Folkeparti, Fremskridtspartiet
Finland: SDP, Keskusta, Kokoomus, RKP, Vihreat, Vasemmistoliitto, Kristilliset, PS Perussuomalaiset
France: PS-PRG, RPR, UDF, PC, Les Verts, Lutte Ouvriere-LCR, DL, FN/MN, Rassemblement pour la France
Germany: CDU/CSU, SPD, Buendnis 90/Die Gruenen, FDP, Republikaner, PDS
Greece: PASOK, New Democracy, KKE, Sinaspismos, DIKKI, Politiki Anixi, FILELEYTHERI
Ireland: Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Labour, Progressive Democrats, Sinn Fein, Green party, Democratic Left
Italy: Forza Italia, DS, AN, Lista Pannella–Bonino, I Democratici, Lega Nord, Rifondazione Comunista, PPI, CCD, SDI, CDU, Comunisti Italiani, Federazione dei Verdi, UDEUR, Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore
Luxembourg: CSV/PCS, DP/PD, LSAP/POSL, ADR, Dei Greng, Dei Lenk, GAL
The Netherlands: PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, Groen Links, SGP, SP, CD, RPF, GPV
Portugal: PS, PSD, CDS–PP, CDU, Bloco de Esquerda
Spain: PP, PSOE, IU, CiU, PNV, EH
Sweden: Vansterpartiet, Socialdemokraterna, Miljopartiet, Centerpartiet, Folkpartiet, Kristdemokraterna, Moderaterna
UK:
Great Britain: Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, SNP, Plaid Cymru, Green Party, UKIP (UK Independent Party)
Northern Ireland: Alliance, Ulster Unionist Party, Democratic Unionist Party, UK Unionist Party, Progressive Unionist Party, Sinn Fein, Social Dem. and Lab. Party

2004:
Austria : SPOE, OEVP, FPOE, GRUENE, KPOE
Cyprus: AKEL, DISI, DIKO, EDEK
Czech Republic: CSSD, KDU-CSL, KSCM, ODS, US-DEU
Denmark:Social Democratic Party, Radical Liberals, Conservative People's Party, Socialist People's Party, Danish People's Party, Liberal Party, The Movement of June, The people's movement against EU
Estonia: Keskerakond, Res Publica, Reformierakond, Rahvaliit, Isamaaliit, Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond, Eestimaa Uhendatud Rahvapartei, Eesti Kristlik Rahvapartei, Eesti Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Toopartei
Finland: Finnish Social Democratic Party, Centre Party of Finland, National Coalition Party, Left Alliance, Green League, Swedish People's Party, Christian

Democrats in Finland, True Finns
France: LO, LCR, PC, PS, Des Verts, UDF, UMP, MPF, FN, MNR, CPNT
Germany: CDU, CSU, SPD, 90/Die Gruenen, PDS, FDP, Republikaner
Greece: New Democracy, PASOK, KKE, Sinaspismos, LAOS
Hungary: Fidesz, Hungarian Democratic Forum, Party of Hungarian Justice and Life, Hungarian Socialist Party, Workers Party, Alliance of Free Democrats
Ireland: Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Green Party, Labour Party, PD's, Sinn Fein
Italy: Rifondazione comunista, DS, La Margherita, Comunisti Italiani, Verdi, SDI, UDEUR, IDV, Forza Italia, AN, UDC, Lega Nord, Nuovo PSI, Radicali
Latvia: Jaunais Laiks, PCTVL, Tautas Partija, Zalo un Zemnieku Savieniba, Latvijas Pirma Partija, Tevzemei un Brovobai/ LNNK, Latvijas Cels
Luxembourg: KPL, Dei Lenk, Dei Greng, LSAP, DP, CSV,ADR| **The Netherlands**: PvdA, CDA,VVD, D66, Groen Links, LPF, ChristenUnie, SGP, SP
Poland: LPR, PSL, PiS, PO, Self-Defense, SdPL, SLD, UP, UW
Portugal: Bloco de Esquerda, CDS-PP, CDU/PCP, Partido da Nova Democracia, PS, PSD
Slovakia: L'S-HZDS, SMER, KSS, SDKU, SMK, KDH, ANO, SNS
Slovenia: LDS, SDS, ZLSD, NSI
Spain: PP,PSOE,IU,Galeusca–Pueblos de Europa, EdP, CC
Sweden: Left party, Social Democrats, Centre Party, Peoples Party (liberals), Moderate Party (conservatives), Christian Democrats, Green Party, June-list
UK:
Great Britain: Labour, Conservative Party, Liberal Democrats, UK Independence Party, Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru
Northern Ireland: Alliance Party, Democratic Unionist Party - DUP, Sinn Fein, SDLP, Ulster Unionist Party - UUP

2009:
Austria: SPOE, OEVP, FPOE, BZOE, GRUENE, Liste Hans Peter Martin, Junge Liberale, KPOE
Belgium :
Flanders: CD&V, Open VLD, SP-A, Vlaams Belang, Groen!, N-VA, LDD, SLP (was Spirit), PVDA+ (Partij van de Arbeid plus)
Wallonia: CDH, MR, PS, FN, ECOLO
Bulgaria: BSP, NDSV, DPS, ATAKA, GERB, SDS-DSB, NAPRED, RZS
Cyprus: AKEL, DISI, DIKO, EDEK, European Party, Ecological and Environmental Movement
Czech Republic: CSSD, KDU-CSL, KSCM, ODS, SZ
Germany: CDU/CSU, SPD, B90/Die Gruenen, Linke, FDP
Denmark: Socialdemokraterne, Det Radikale Venstre, De Konservative, Social-

istisk Folkeparti, Dansk Folkeparti, Venstre, Liberal Alliance, Junibevaegelsen, Folkebevaegelsen mod EU
Estonia: Eesti Reformierakond, Eesti Keskerakond, Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit, Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond, Erakond Eestimaa Rohelised, Eestimaa Rahvaliit
Greece: New Democracy, PASOK, KKE, SYRIZA, Popular Orthodox Rally, Ecologist Greens
Finland: SDP, KESK, KOK, VAS, VIHR, RKP, KD, PS
France: LO/NPA, PCF, PS, Les Verts, MoDem, UMP, FN, Le parti de gauche
Hungary: Fidesz, Jobbik, Magyar Kommunista Munkaspart, MDF, MSZP, SZDSZ, KDNP
Ireland: Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Green Party, Labour Party, Sinn Fein, Libertas
Italy: PDL, Lega Nord, PD, IDV, UDC, Rifondazione/Comunisti Italiani, SEL, La Destra
Latvia: Peoples Party, Union of Greens and Farmers, New Era Party, Harmony Centre, Latvias First Party/Latvias Way, For Fatherland and Freedom, For Human Rights in United Latvia, Civic Union, Society for Other Politics
Lithuania: Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats, Social Democratic Party of Lithuania, National Resurrection Party, Order and Justice Party, Liberals Movement of the Republic of Lithuania, Labour Party, Liberal and Centre Union, Election Action of Lithuanias Poles, Lithuanian Peasant Popular Union, New Union Social Liberals
Luxembourg: Dei Greng, LSAP, DP, CSV, ADR, Dei Lenk, KPL, BL
Malta: Partit Nazzjonalista, Partit Laburista, Alternativa Demokratika, Azzjoni Nazzjonali
The Netherlands: PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, Groen Links, PvdD, ChristenUnie, SGP, SP, PVV, Trots op Nederland TON (Verdonk)
Poland: Polish Peoples Party, Libertas, Coalition Agreement for the Future, SLD, Civic Platform, Law and Justice
Portugal: Bloco de Esquerda, CDS-PP, CDU (PCP/PEV), PS, PSD
Romania: PD-L, PSD, PNL, UDMR, PC, PNT-CD, PRM
Slovakia: L'S-HZDS, SMER, SDKU, SMK, KDH, SNS, KSS, SF
Slovenia: DESUS, LDS, SLS, SNS, SDS, SD, ZARES, NSi, SMS
Spain: PP, PSOE, IU/IC-V, UPyD, CiU, ERC, EAJ-PNV, BNG, CC-PNC, NA-BAI, EA, UPN
Sweden: Vaensterpartiet, Socialdemokraterna, Centerpartiet, Folkpartiet, Moderaterna, Kristdemokraterna, Miljopartiet, Sverigedemokraterna, Piratpartiet
UK: Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, UK Independence Party, British National Party, Green Party

B.1.3 Descriptive Statistics

Table B.1: Descriptive Statistics EES

Statistic	Mean	St. Dev.
PTV Certainty	0.303	0.301
PTV Strength	0.813	0.251
Strong Preferences Dummy	0.837	0.369
Distance from Closest Party	0.632	0.738
Distance from $2^n d$ Closest Party	1.164	0.963
Is a Partisan	0.580	0.494
Most Competent Party same as PID	0.811	0.391
L-R Closest Party same as PID	0.631	0.482
L-R Closest Party same as Most Competent	0.566	0.496
Political Interest	0.481	0.302
Gender (Female)	0.533	0.499
Age	47.406	17.017
Left-Right Extremity	1.408	1.407
Polarization (vdE Index)	0.338	0.107
ENEP	4.709	1.552
Distance in Months from Closest $1^s t$ Order Election	14.763	8.106
Post-Communist Country	0.200	0.400

B.2 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (Panel and Cumulative Cross-Section)

B.2.1 Party List

Parties included in the study per year (Panel):
1981: PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, SGP, GPV, RPF
1982: PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, SGP, GPV, RPF
1986: PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, SGP, GPV, CentrumDemocraten, RPF
1989: PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL, SGP, CentrumDemocraten, GPV, RPF
1994: PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL, SGP, CentrumDemocraten, GPV, RPF

Parties included in the study per year (Cumulative Cross-Section):
1986: PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, SGP, GPV, RPF
1989: PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL, SGP, GPV, RPF
1994: PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL, SGP, CentrumDemocraten, GPV, RPF
1998: PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL, SGP, Socialist Party (SP), CentrumDemocraten, GPV, RPF

2002: PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL, SGP, Socialist Party (SP), LPF, ChristenUnie. Note that in each election year the party-level variables are attached to the respondents depending on their vote recall, and therefore they refer on the party list of the election year before.

Parties included in the analyses in Chapter 6 categorized as younger than 10 years:
GroenLinks: 1989, 1994, 1998.
CentrumDemocraten: 1994.

B.2.2 Parties for which issue positions have been measured, by issue and year

Issue 1 – Euthanasia: *1986:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1989:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1994:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1998:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL; *2002:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, LPF.
Issue 2 – Income Differences: *1986:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1989:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1994:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1998:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL; *2002:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, LPF.
Issue 3 – Crime: *1994:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *2002:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, LPF.
Issue 4 – Nuclear Power Plants: *1986:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1989:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1994:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1998:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL; *2002:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL, LPF.
Issue 5 – Ethnic Minorities: *1994:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1998:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL; *2002:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL, LPF.
Issue 6 – EU Unification: *1994:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1998:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL; *2002:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL, LPF.
Issue 7 – Asylum Seekers: *1994:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1998:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, GL; *2002:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, LPF.
Issue 8 – Abortion: *1986:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66; *1989:* PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66.

B.2.3 Descriptive Statistics

Table B.2: Descriptive Statistics DPES, Cumulative Cross-Section

Statistic	Mean	St. Dev.
Individual Characteristics		
PTV Certainty	0.270	0.265
PTV Strength	0.916	0.129
Hesitation	0.281	0.450
Vote Switching	0.282	0.450
Is a Partisan	0.407	0.491
Political Interest	0.503	0.278
Gender (Female)	0.484	0.500
Age (incategories)	0.492	0.258
Education	0.546	0.344
Member of Working Class	0.170	0.376
Religious Person	0.527	0.499
Distance from Previous Vote	1.291	1.061
Left-Right Extremity	0.386	0.304
Motivation to Switch	-0.301	0.813
Party Characteristics		
Younger than 10 Years	0.023	0.151
Distance from closest party t-1	0.773	0.643
Distance from closest party Delta	0.089	0.370
Left-Right extremity t-1	1.798	0.736
Left-Right extremity Delta	-0.158	0.345

Note: All the socio-structural variables included in the models have been rescaled from 0 to 1.

Table B.3: Descriptive Statistics DPES, Panel

Statistic	Mean	St. Dev.
Switch = 0 (Stay)	0.699	0.459
Switch = 2 (Switch to Abstension)	0.045	0.207
Turnout t0	0.935	0.246
Turnout t-1	0.923	0.266
PTV Certainty t0	0.290	0.281
PTV Certainty t-1	0.339	0.306
PTV Strength t0	0.910	0.141
PTV Strength t-1	0.914	0.164
Age (in classes) t-1	6.182	3.517
Education	3.788	2.450
Member of Working Class	0.283	0.450
Strength of Partisan Attachment t-1	0.470	0.359
Left-Right Extremity Delta	-0.120	1.289
Left-Right Extremity t-1	1.512	1.273

Appendix C

Question Wordings

C.1 European Election Study

C.1.1 Principal Variables used in Chapters 4 and 5

Most Important Problem/Issue:
2009, 2004, 1999:
What do you think is the most important problem facing [country] *today?*
1994:
Which of the following issues do you consider the most important?

Party Competence:
2009, 2004:
Which political party do you think would be best at dealing with [MIP]*?*
1999:
Which political party do you think is most likely to do what you want to be done on [MIP]*?*
1994:
Which party would you think would be best at... ?

Left-Right Self Placement:
2009, 2004, 1999:
In political matters people talk of "the left" and "the right". What is your position? Please indicate your views using [scale]. *Which number best describes your position?* (for 1994: *How would you place your views on this scale?*)

Left-Right Party Placements:
2009:

How about the (Party X)*? Which number from 0 to 10, where 0 means "left" and 10 means "right" best describes* (Party X)*?*
2004:
Wording not explicitly reported in the codebook.
1999:
And about where would you place the following parties on this scale?
1994:
And where would you place each of the following political parties of [COUNTRY] *on this same scale?*

Party Attachment:
2009, 2004, 1999, 1994:
Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party? If so, which party do you feel close to?

PTVs:
2009:
We have a number of parties in [country] *each of which would like to get your vote. How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties? Please specify your views on a scale where 0 means "not at all probable" and 10 means "very probable".*
If you think of (Party X)*: what mark out of ten best describes how probable it is that you will ever vote for* (Party X)*?*
2004:
We have a number of parties in [country] *each of which would like to get your vote. How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties? Please specify your views on a 10-point-scale where 1 means "not at all probable" and 10 means "very probable".*
If you think of [Party 1]*: what mark out of ten best describes how probable it is that you will ever vote for* [Party 1]*?*
1999:
We have a number of parties in <name of your country> *each of which would like to get your vote. How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties? Please specify your views on a 10-point-scale where 1 means "not at all probable" and 10 means "very probable". You may use any number between 1 and 10 to specify your views.*
If you think of Party 1: what mark out of ten best describes how probable it is that you will ever vote for Party 1?
1994:
We have a number of parties in [our country]*, each of which would like to get*

your vote. Please tell me for each of the following how probable it is that you will EVER vote for this party?

Note: For 2009 wordings reported here, the UK questionnaire has been used as example.

C.2 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study

C.2.1 Principal Variables from the DPES Cumulative Cross-Section data set used in Chapter 6

Left-Right Party Placements:
It is also said of political parties that they are left or right. Would you please indicate the degree to which you think that a party is left or right? (Todosijević et al., 2010, pp. 161-172)

Vote switching:
The variable was built using the vote at the current election and the recall of the vote at the previous election.
Party voted for in [current] parliamentary elections.
Which party did you vote for? (Todosijević et al., 2010, pp. 68)
Party voted for in [previous] parliamentary elections
For which party did you vote then? (Todosijević et al., 2010, pp. 67)

Dissatisfaction with Government's policy:
This variable was used to construct the "Motivation to Switch" variable.
With the help of this card, could you indicate how satisfied you are in general with what the government has done during the past four years? (Todosijević et al., 2010, pp. 120)

For a full report of the question wording of all the variables included, see Todosijević et al. (2010). Url: `http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/cgi-bin/file?comp=none&study=28221&ds=1&file_id=1025547`

C.2.2 Principal Variables from the DPES Panel data set used in Chapter 4

For a full report of the question wording (in Dutch) of all the variables included, see:
van der Eijk et al. (1988) `www.icpsr.umich.edu/cgi-bin/file?comp=none&study=9272&ds=1&file_id=682568` (Wave 1981-1986).
van der Eijk et al. (1990) `www.icpsr.umich.edu/cgi-bin/file?comp=none&study=6742&ds=1&file_id=669178` (Wave 1986-1989).
Anker and Oppenhuis (1995) `www.icpsr.umich.edu/cgi-bin/file?comp=none&study=6741&ds=1&file_id=669179` (Wave 1989-1994).