

The Personal Vote

Thomas Zittel

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS THE PERSONAL VOTE?

The personal vote is widely considered that portion of a candidate's electoral support that originates in his or her personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and record (Cain et al. 1987: 9). It thus by definition is *a non-partisan vote* rooted in individual candidates rather than in partisan ideologies and policies. Moreover, the literature on the issue needs to be kept distinct from debates on the personalization of politics (McAllister 2007). Students of the personal vote stress the elite level and the behavioral strategies of incumbent legislators to build personalized support bases among geographic constituents. In contrast, the concept of personalization points to the voter level and to the extent to which the main candidates of political parties affect vote choices. Obviously, both debates overlap and are interrelated. However, the personal vote-seeking concept is rooted in theories on legislative behavior, while the personalization concept advances from theories on voting behavior.

Originally, the literature on the personal vote focused with few exceptions on the strategic behavior of US Representatives. Among other works, it goes back to the seminal analyses of Morris Fiorina (1974, 1977). Fiorina perceived the increasing electoral margins and return rates in US House elections that he witnessed during the 1960s and 1970s to be a direct result of the strategic efforts of incumbents to focus on particularistic policies, to claim personalized credit in this regard, and to thus successfully build an incumbency advantage (see also Herrera and Yawn 1999). David Mayhew's ground-breaking book is a second

key reference in this regard. This author points to additional behavioral strategies that might explain incumbency advantages in congressional politics, such as the propensity of US Representatives to continuously advertise themselves and to take policy positions popular in their districts.

The most recent literature on the personal vote goes beyond its original case-specific roots and increasingly adopts a comparative perspective. This includes the proliferation of both theory-guided analyses on non US-American cases and genuinely comparative efforts on the issue (e.g. Heitshusen et al. 2005). This broadening in geographic scope informs and enriches the debate in three ways. First, it results in a more comprehensive picture of the distinct and multifaceted behavioral strategies related to the original concept. Second, it allows for more variance with regard to electoral system variables and as a result enhances our understanding of the electoral sources of personal vote-seeking behavior and of what kind of electoral rules inhibit or facilitate personal vote-seeking behavior. Third, it brings in cases characterized by strong parties and party government. This allows us to gauge the ways in which electoral rules interact with party factors and thus how parties might constrain but also facilitate personal vote-seeking behavior.

This chapter is designed to take stock of an increasingly comparative literature on the issue and to tie it back to original concepts and questions stemming from analyses of the US-American case, which it does in four main steps. First, it delineates the distinct and multifaceted behavioral strategies that are related to the overarching construct of the personal vote. Second, it gauges the electoral sources of personal vote-seeking behavior. Third, it explores the role of party in constraining personal vote-seeking strategies. Fourth, it identifies both gaps in the literature and promising issues for future research. In particular, this concerns the electoral and larger systemic effects of personal vote-seeking behavior.

THE FOCUS AND STYLES OF PERSONAL VOTE SEEKING

The behavioral strategies related to personal vote-seeking concerns have been characterized by a distinct focus of representation and also by distinct styles of behavior. This section first sketches the main conceptions and findings that emerge from the original case-specific literature on these issues and then ties them back to the major contributions that result from comparative research.

The original literature on the personal vote envisions legislators determined to mobilize personalized support bases to adopt territorial, and particularly local, *foci of representation*. Analytically, this is considered to be in contrast to national/partisan foci of representation. Those seeking personal votes are assumed to perceive themselves as representatives of distinct district-level geographic constituencies (see Evans, this Volume, on the importance of

localness). In contrast, those seeking partisan votes are said to perceive themselves as representatives of their parties and related ideological beliefs and policy positions.

Theoretically, local constituents and party are seen as competing principals to legislators and thus to mutually exclude themselves in cases of conflict and distinct policy choices. Empirical research on US Representatives stresses that under these circumstances legislators indeed tend to follow their geographic constituents rather than the party line (Mayhew 1974: 48). Cain et al. picture legislators as representing their districts to the national party rather than the other way round. Moreover, local and national/partisan foci are found to be rank ordered when it comes to allocating scarce resources. US Representatives are said to maximize institutional opportunities to please local constituents and to devote relatively large portions of individually available resources to this cause (Mayhew 1974).

The original case-specific literature on the issue stresses *three distinct behavioral styles* legislators might adopt to seek personal votes. These are position taking, credit claiming, and advertising (Mayhew 1974). These styles do not mutually exclude themselves, but different legislators might decide to highlight different styles (Grimmer 2013).

Position taking envisions legislators to make 'judgmental statements' on national policy matters that are popular among geographic constituents (Mayhew 1974). According to Mayhew, this presupposes *acting* in legislative contexts, particularly while taking roll call votes. Position taking in the context of roll call voting has been widely seen as a core 'currency of individual accountability' and thus has frequently been subject to analysis to gauge the level of personal vote seeking (Carey 2009). Substantial empirical evidence on the US-American case suggests that legislators tailor their voting records according to constituency preferences and that any failure to do so comes with the risk of electoral defeat (Mayhew 1974: 61; Carson et al. 2010).

Credit claiming sees legislators actively aiming to generate the belief among local constituents that he/she is personally responsible for desired policy outcomes (Mayhew 1974: 53). According to Mayhew, actively pursuing particularistic policies in legislative contexts can do this best. Fenno (1978) and Cain et al. (1987), in their seminal studies, emphasize that US Representatives are said to seek favorable committee assignments to foster the economic fortunes of their districts, to be determined to involve themselves when local economic interest are at stake, and also to be eager to use committee positions and available floor procedures (e.g. legislative amendments) to literally legislate local projects and to pursue so-called pork-barrel politics (Cain et al. 1987: 74). This particularly involves activities to secure federal funds for infrastructural developments in the district, such as construction projects or military deployments (pork). Cain et al. emphasize that US Representatives, in addition to channel federal funds to their districts, subjectively rate individual-level service provision (casework) as very important

activities for which they can claim credit, consequently allocating large portions of their staff resources to this task. However, these kinds of individual one-to-one service are clearly less effective than one-to-many constituency services designed to serve the infrastructural needs of districts.

According to Fiorina (1974, 1977), credit-claiming strategies are particularly useful and effective in building incumbency advantages in cases of politically heterogeneous and volatile districts. They might not be entirely contingent upon effective action and thus upon substantiated claims. Mayhew stresses that constituents might believe unsubstantiated claims in small and local matters, but generally effective credit claiming is said to be about combining *acts* (securing benefits that can be subscribed to individual legislators) with *communication* (publicly claiming responsibility).

Advertising strategies see legislators making themselves known among constituents 'in such a fashion as to create a favorable image but in messages having little or no issue content' (Mayhew 1974: 49). This strategy aims to develop the incumbent into a brand name to increase name recall and recognition. According to Mayhew, particular qualities to emphasize might be 'experience' or 'sincerity', which are valence types of quality generally viewed in positive ways. But these qualities might also enclose social characteristics such as religious or socio-economic background. Possible strategies to effectively communicate these qualities are manifold and, among others, encompass frequent direct constituency contacts, direct constituency communication via newsletters, posters, or new social media, and communication via the mass media.

For many decades, the personal vote-seeking concept hardly mattered in comparative research. Early studies that aimed to apply notions of individual accountability to European national systems found that legislators in European democracies predominantly functioned as team members and hardly deviated from their parties in roll call voting (Powell 2004; Uslander and Zittel 2006). This was said to result from, among other factors, parliamentary government and the close connection between distinct social groups forming national coalitions of voters and distinct parties that function as their representatives. Since individual accountability could not be found in these contexts, personal vote seeking was also considered insignificant. In contrast to the US-American case, legislators in European democracies were assumed to represent the party to their districts rather than the other way round.

In contrast to this common wisdom, it was Thomassen (1994; see also Thomassen/Andeweg 2004) who suggested broadening and better differentiating the concept of individual accountability to capture particular activities designed to send signals to geographic constituents without disrupting party unity or contradicting collectivist forms of representation. The most recent comparative literature picks up on the conceptual point Thomassen made and essentially focuses on communication and advertisement strategies that fall short of taking manifest policy choices in legislative contexts while seeking personal votes.

Figure 29.1 conceptualizes most recent comparative contributions to the argument Thomassen made. It shows that the concept of personal vote seeking encloses a larger number of behavioral strategies that are wide in range and that can be mapped along two crucial dimensions. The first concerns the level of particularism that legislators might pursue in their vote-seeking behavior: legislators might focus either on position-taking strategies or on credit-claiming concerns, and might focus either on adopting those positions on national policies that are popular in their districts or on particularistic policies that allow them to claim individual credit for specific desired policy outcomes.

The second dimension concerns the type of activity that is related to personal vote-seeking concerns – to whether legislators actively aim at influencing legislative choices or whether their aim is to simply communicate and advertise distinct policy positions or particularistic policies. The closer personal vote-seeking activities move towards the ‘choice end’ of the spectrum, the more adversarial they are and the more likely to disrupt party unity. For example, taking positions to please geographic constituencies in roll calls potentially causes the most immediate threat to party unity in case of conflict between party and district. In contrast, the closer related personal vote-seeking activities move towards the ‘advertising end’ of the spectrum, the less adversarial they are and the less likely to disrupt party unity. Taking positions popular among geographic constituencies

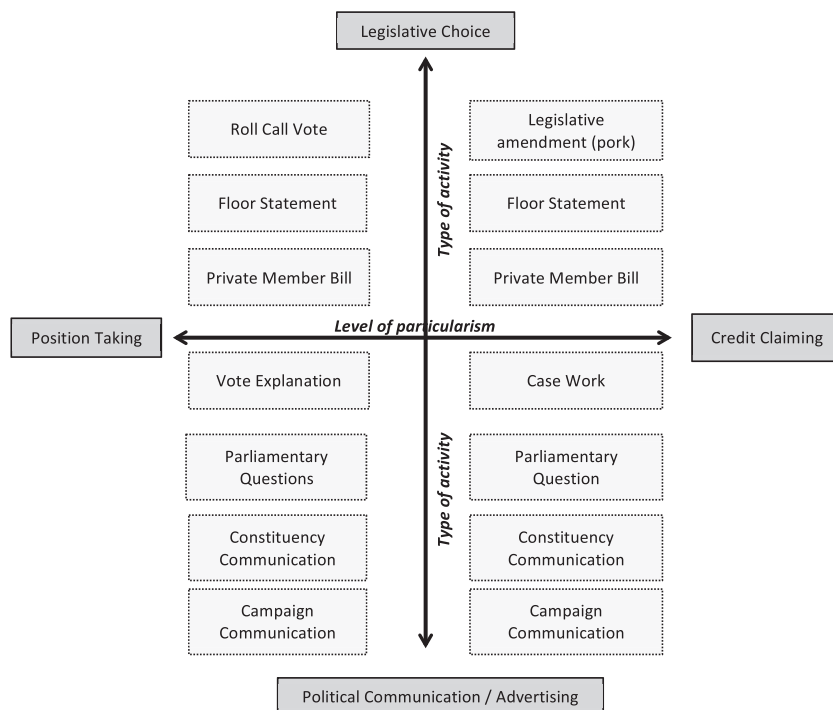


Figure 29.1 Two dimensions of personal vote seeking

in campaign speeches or via personal websites fails to directly affect legislative choices. This also allows for *waffling* and *narrowcasting*, designed to tell different things to different constituencies.

Credit-claiming styles of behavior also can be differentiated into choice-related and communication-related activities. For example, actively pursuing particularistic policies in legislative contexts via floor amendments or private member bills disrupts the ability of parties to achieve consistent and efficient policy making. In contrast, simply signaling behind-the-scenes activities to secure particularistic benefits via constituency communication or parliamentary questions allows legislators to please both their parties and their geographic constituencies.

Figure 29.1 demonstrates an important difference between the two dimensions that it maps. The second dimension, the types of personal vote-seeking activity, encloses a number of distinct formalized activities that differ with regard to arena, process, and the level of potential intra-party conflict. In contrast, the first dimension, which maps different styles of personal vote seeking, cannot be kept distinct on the basis of particular types of activities. Instead, some types of activity, such as asking parliamentary questions or communicating to constituents, can be used for both ideal typical styles of personal vote seeking, namely position taking and credit claiming.

The two dimensions depicted in Figure 29.1 can be further illustrated and clarified in light of three specific recent comparative contributions to the personal vote-seeking literature. The first contribution stresses the significance of individual-level service responsiveness in many legislatures. The second highlights the role of campaigns as means to seek personal votes outside of legislative contexts. The third demonstrates the use of position-taking and credit-claiming cues in legislative speech. The following paragraphs further elaborate on these three types of comparative analysis.

A number of rich and highly instructive country-specific observational studies on constituency services and communication unveiled the rather significant role of individual-level service responsiveness even in non US-American contexts. For example, Searing (1994) and Norton and Wood (1993) demonstrate for the British case both the importance of case work for backbench MPs and its increasing relevance across time. Müller et al. (2001) and Patzelt (1993) in similar studies go beyond the British case and show the relative importance of individual-level responsiveness and constituency communication for Austrian and German legislators (for Germany see also Zittel 2010). These studies emphasize the moderate resources British, German, and Austrian legislators provide themselves to pursue case work compared with their colleagues in US Congress. But they also stress that, within these limits, case work does matter to European legislators.

Recent survey-based studies on constituency campaigns highlight the campaign arena as a context for seeking personal votes at the margins. For example, Andeweg and Holsteyn (2011: 10) show, for the Dutch national elections in 2006, that around 25 percent of candidates subjectively pursued preference votes in

their campaigns by advertising their own person and candidacy in pronounced ways. Analyses that were conducted within the Comparative Candidate Survey (CCS) network reach similar conclusions. Significant minorities of candidates in many European contexts subjectively aim to advertise themselves in their campaigns and also adopt distinct campaign strategies to seek personal votes, such as highlighting local issues and spending large amounts of time on personalized canvassing activities to make themselves personally known (Zittel and Gschwend 2008, Zittel 2015). Studies that analyze the content of campaign speech draw similar conclusions. Campaign advertising is found to aim to provide signals to voters about legislators' individual preferences and priorities (see, for the US, Adams et al. 2004; Sulkin and Swigger 2008).

A wave of new studies on legislative speech points to related strategies among legislators aimed not only at taking positions popular among local constituents but also at claiming credit. Debus and Baeck (2014, 2016) and also Proksch and Slapin (2010, 2014) focus on parliamentary speeches to gauge the extent to which legislators take positions on the floor to signal their policy stances towards their parties and constituencies. However, since parliamentary parties orchestrate these activities they tend to underestimate the extent of personal vote seeking in legislative contexts. As an alternative, many recent studies focus on individual means to participate in legislative contexts to gauge personal vote-seeking activities at the margins. For example, Bräuninger et al. (2012) focus on the authorship of private member bills in the Belgian legislature as a means to uncover personal vote-seeking strategies (see also Solvak 2013 on the Estonian case). Unfortunately, this approach provides little evidence on whether private member bills are used to take positions or to claim credit and on whether they are really targeted to the local instead of the national level. To confront these issues, other authors focus on the content of individual-level activities such as parliamentary questions. On the basis of explicit keywords and hand-coding strategies, Martin (2011), for example, shows that Irish legislators use parliamentary questions to raise local, rather than national concerns and thus to signal attention to local constituents. Sieberer (2015) stresses the role of vote explanations as a means to signal positions to local constituents in the German Bundestag. Arter (2011: 144) shows for the Finnish case that a fair number of legislators use 'constituency specific' budget motions to propose and facilitate federal spending projects in their districts.

The literature on personal vote-seeking strategies predominantly focuses on the behaviors of incumbents rather than on their personal qualities. However, their personal characteristics are also a definitional part of the initial concept and might, for example, matter for voters. Consequently, some analyses do explore the role of valence factors that might mobilize larger segments of electorates independent of ideological orientations as a mechanism to mobilize the personal vote. The localness of incumbents has been of particular concern in this regard. Shugart et al. (2005), in their comparative analysis of six European established democracies, show that, contingent upon electoral rules, having been

born in one's district and also having gathered experiences in district level electoral offices helps winning mandates (see also Andre et al. 2014). Margit Tavits (2009), in a comparative analysis of five European democracies, shows, furthermore, that this might also hang together with other strategies of personal vote seeking in the legislative arena. Tavits finds that increasing levels of district-level political experience increases the likelihood of individualized position taking in legislative contexts. Other valence factors debated concern issues such as personal integrity or competence (Bishin et al. 2006; Mondak and Huckfeldt 2006). These, however, so far, have received little attention in the comparative literature on personal vote seeking.

Gender and race are standard factors used to gauge variance in the socio-structural backgrounds of legislators and to reflect upon different prescriptive models of political representation (Mansbridge 1999). However, with regard to personal vote seeking, either one of these personal traits is risky since electorates could potentially be divided over their desirability; in addition, related preferences could be closely related to partisan ideologies (Valdini 2012; Valdini 2013: 77). Valdini, for example, shows in her comparative analysis that 'the conditional effect of the personal vote is either neutral or negative for women's representation, depending on the level of bias against female leaders in the cultural context of the election' (Valdini 2013: 88). Fisher et al. similarly conclude for the UK that minority candidates suffer electorally from anti-immigrant sentiments among non-minority voters (Fisher et al. 2015). Consequently, socio-structurally defined candidate characteristics are not reliable instruments for personal vote-seeking concerns per se.

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND THE PERSONAL VOTE

The distinct behavioral patterns discussed in the previous section are not conclusive manifestations of the personal vote-seeking phenomenon. This is said to relate not only to distinct behavioral patterns but also to distinct *motivations* aimed at cultivating a personalized support basis to secure re-election. This section thus focuses on legislators' motivations and on whether personal vote-seeking motivations can be found on both sides of the Atlantic.

Motivations are hard to access in direct ways. Therefore, early students of personal vote seeking focus on electoral rules to draw inferences about the motivations of incumbents. From this perspective, the pronounced personal vote seeking behavior of members of US-Congress directly results from the country's plurality system. This has been portrayed as a strong indicator for personal vote-seeking motivations (Mayhew 1974).

The inferences drawn regarding the behavioral effects of plurality rules are plausible since plurality rules institutionalize personalized modes of election and individual accountability *vis-à-vis* distinct geographic constituencies in visible

and traceable ways. Individual accountability potentially affects legislators in direct and indirect ways. Indirect effects result from voter demands facilitated by voters' ability to identify and trace those legislators responsible to voice their particular concerns in legislative contexts. Direct effects result from legislators' heightened abilities under plurality rules to anticipate those responsible for their electoral fortunes and to react in appropriate ways. Close inter-party competition is said to positively interact with direct effects since in these cases marginal legislators might see a special need to mobilize the crucial 2 or 3 percent of the vote needed via personal vote-seeking activities.

From a comparative perspective, judged solely on the basis of election modes, the US electoral system is by no means an exception and thus is not particularly predisposed to provide incentives for personal vote-seeking activities. In contrast, personalized modes of election are in the majority among established democracies and thus should lead us to expect wide-spread incentives for personal vote seeking. A quick snapshot summary can easily prove this point: we witness plurality voting in single member districts in the UK and in Canada; in Germany and New Zealand mixed member systems allow voters to simultaneously cast a party vote in multi-member districts and a candidate vote in single member districts; proportional flexible list systems in Austria, Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and Sweden enable voters to disrupt party lists and to take choices on particular candidates; preference voting systems such as the Irish single transferrable vote (STV) or the Australian preference vote allow even voters to rank order individual candidates and thus express the intensity of their candidate preferences (Colomer 2011). Only a few established democracies, such as Portugal and Spain, deprive voters from choosing among candidates.

The wide distribution of electoral incentives to seek personal votes is further corroborated by a more recent debate in the comparative literature initiated by a path-breaking article authored by John Carey and Matthew S. Shugart (Carey and Shugart 1995). In this article the authors argue that proportional flexible list systems and preference voting systems provide increased incentives for personal vote seeking compared with plurality systems (Carey and Shugart 1995; Shugart 2005). This is said to result from *intra-party competition* that is facilitated under such electoral rules. Under flexible list and preference rules voters are allowed to choose between different candidates of one and the same party that compete in multi-member districts for candidate votes. From the legislators' perspective, this diminishes the value of party labels as vote-getting mechanisms and provides incentives to cultivate alternative vote-getting mechanisms such as personal records and qualifications. In addition, Carey/Shugart (1995) hypothesize increased incentives for personal vote seeking with increased district size.

Empirical research on the role of intra-party competition partly corroborates the assumed effects but finds few conclusive and dramatic direct effects (e.g. Heitshusen et al. 2005; Farrell and Scully 2010). André et al. (2015) and also Selb/Lutz (2015) explain this by pointing at electoral competition as a mediating

factor. According to these analyses, under flexible list systems, those most vulnerable are most likely to seek personal votes. Other authors point towards secondary electoral rules to explaining inconclusive or negative findings. According to these analyses, many flexible list systems are disguised closed list systems since threshold requirements raise significant obstacles to earning a mandate (Andeweg 2005; Müller 2005). In addition to these considerations, multi-member districts clearly raise collective action problems and might facilitate free-riding among legislators. Especially in large districts under flexible list rules, rational legislators would be best off if they are able to successfully claim credit without contributing to producing related collective benefits. This contradicts initial electoral incentives resulting from intra-party modes of competition.

Independent from recent debates on the behavioral implications of flexible list systems, in the past plurality rules in the UK and Canada also failed to result in similar forms and levels of personal vote seeking that we see in the US (Cain et al. 1984). This suggests that electoral incentives do not work in deterministic ways but rather need to be reinforced and nourished by other contextual factors.

PARTIES AND THE PERSONAL VOTE

Comparative research on the personal vote stresses party as a crucial factor that might inhibit or facilitate related activities independently from electoral rules. This argument implies a number of specific mechanisms that could function as a causal linkage between party- and individual-level behavior. These mechanisms include levels of control over ballot access and campaign resources. High levels of control over ballot access allow parties to staff legislatures either with like-minded partisans and team players or with individuals that are at least consciously aware to whom they owe their nomination to and thus of whom to please (Andeweg and Thomassen 2011). Preece (2014), in her analysis of Lithuania, supports this role of candidate nomination. Regardless of electoral rules, MPs whose future careers depend on getting renominated by central party leaders vote against the party less than those whose careers do not. Jun/Hix (2010) and Samuels (1999) reach similar conclusions regarding South Korea and Brazil.

Processes of candidate nomination are complex and differ with regard to the level of democratization and decentralization (Hazan and Rahat 2010). Autocratic and centralized nomination procedures should be most effective in constraining personal vote-seeking motivations. However, even in cases of decentralized nomination procedures that suggest to legislators to pay attention to local concerns, party policies and ideologies serve as common ground and require legislators to remain team players in national politics so as to not disrupt party unity.

Party organizations are also found to provide essential infrastructural and logistical help in campaign contexts contingent upon campaign regulation and the vitality of party organizational structures at the local level (Kreuzer 2000).

Legislators depend in their campaigns upon the help of their parties to organize campaign events and to distribute campaign materials. Parties, furthermore, might allocate campaign funds to legislators to enable them to buy media access and to produce campaign gadgets. Again, reliance on local party structures in this regard does provide an incentive to pay attention to local concerns. But, again, party policies and ideologies should serve as common ground and require legislators to remain team players in national politics and to not disrupt party unity.

Parties might not only control ballot access and campaign resources but also significantly constrain legislative behavior via legislative organization. For example, Suiter/Malley (2014) show that individual governmental ministers are able to channel particularistic spending to territorial constituencies while ordinary legislators lack these opportunities. These are left with claims made in parliamentary speeches that they had some role in final decisions. In addition, Martin (2014) shows, again for Ireland, that the cartelization of parliamentary posts in the hands of parties allows party leadership to tap into legislators' office seeking concerns and to offer mega-seats as compensation for lost opportunities to please local constituents. Concurrently, Nemoto et al. (2008) show how the Japanese LDP party affected the behaviors of dissenting legislators in a particularly controversial case of postal privatization via the allocation of posts and privileges. Especially those legislators in mid-career particularly depended upon party patronage were most likely to consent irrespective of their own policy preferences.

Clearly, the strength of parties in the electorate matters for the behaviors of legislators and party leadership. From the perspective of incumbents, personal vote-seeking strategies would not make much sense in voter markets that are staunchly partisan and homogeneous. In contrast, heterogeneous voter markets with a larger number of independent voters and/or ideologically moderate voters provide greater incentives to seek personal votes. Moreover, such markets might provide incentives for personal vote seeking not only to legislators but also to party leadership. With weakening partisanship in the electorate, parties might aim to use candidates as vote-getting cues and also as a means to tailor their messages to different segments of more complex electorates (Swindle 2002; Mair et al. 2004; Crisp et al. 2013). The increased interest of comparative research in the personal vote-seeking concept might flow not only from conceptual innovations but also from far-reaching processes of electoral dealignment and related increases in actual personal vote-seeking behavior.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN RESEARCH ON THE PERSONAL VOTE

The comparative study of the personal vote raises a number of issues that define future research needs and challenges and that shall be sketched and discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

One set of future research themes concerns research on the sources of personal vote-seeking behavior. The assumed motivational basis and the role of district size are of particular importance in this regard. Regarding the motivations of legislators, the personal vote-seeking literature largely rests upon a general assumption: legislators are considered to be primarily driven by vote-seeking motivations. However, this assumption is not without critics, who caution that legislators are also driven by genuine policy or office-seeking concerns as well as by biographical backgrounds or moral considerations (Searing 1994; Baumann et al. 2015). Observational and survey evidence are imperfect means to empirically unveil the motivational sources of personal vote-seeking behavior since we might lack counterfactual evidence, insight into causal mechanisms, and a proper understanding of the direction of an effect. Recent developments in experimental research on personal vote-seeking behavior offer interesting new methodological solutions to the problem but remain very first steps in this regard that need more effort and attention (Grose 2010; De Vries et al. 2015).

Regarding district size, the past emphasis on plurality systems downplays the complex and subjective ways in which legislators might define personalized constituencies. Research on subconstituencies in US-American single-member districts has already highlighted the role of district structure as well as mobilization bias in this regard. It shows that, contingent upon these factors, legislators might target either the median voter in their districts or ideologically more extreme groups of voters (Mayhew 1974: 39; Fenno 1978; Bishin 2000, 2009).

The few comparative analyses on subconstituencies that exist so far bring in the district size variable in further explaining variance in their nature. Early on, Loewenberg and Kim (1978) and Jewell and Loewenberg (1979: 494) suggested that representatives from multi-member districts tend to perceive their constituency not in territorial but rather in functional terms. The increased role of functional representation in multi-member districts is said to causally result from a reduced vote share threshold that candidates need to surpass to win a seat (Cox 1990), from increased competition for campaign funds, and also from strategic motivations to avoid costly inter-incumbency battles (Crisp and Desposato 2004). Eventually, it is also said to lead to policy specialization in legislative contexts and to distinct patterns of candidate nomination with an increased likelihood of the nomination of policy experts and group representatives in large districts (André et al. 2014). This research on subconstituencies in multi-member district is of recent origin. Since, from a comparative perspective, most candidates are elected in multi-member districts, it is of utmost importance to continue to further our understanding of the functional bases of personal vote-seeking behavior.

Regime type might count as another crucial institutional factor that constrains or facilitates personal vote-seeking concerns. However, little comparative research has been conducted on this issue. Parliamentary systems are widely considered a constraint to deviations in roll call voting compared with presidential systems (Huber 1996; Sieberer 2006). However, to what extent deviations

from party group are driven by personal vote-seeking concerns and whether other types of legislative activity similarly stress party unity in parliamentary systems remains an open issue for future research on the sources of personal vote-seeking behavior.

Another set of future research themes concerns the effects of personal vote seeking. This involves electoral effects – whether this actually makes a difference for voters – and also wider systemic effects. Regarding the electoral ramifications of personal vote seeking, Cain et al. (1987: 185) envision a multistep process. From this perspective, related activities and resource allocation choices create opportunities for contact between legislators and their constituents. As a result, increased constituency contact and communication is assumed to induce favorable evaluations. This is said to eventually lead to electoral support and incumbency advantages. The empirical evidence for this argument is so far mixed at best and appears to be contingent upon electoral and country context. Clearly, more efforts are needed in this regard.

The comparative analysis of Cain et al. (1984, 1987) on the US and the UK indicate strong support for the existence of a personal vote in the US. What they find, for example, is that, independent of key explanatory variables such as political interest and party identification, the frequency of constituency communication exerts some effect on the likelihood of name recall (respondents remember the name of a particular candidate) and name recognition (respondents recognize the name when presented with it) and that also, all else being equal, name recall and a favorable image as a good constituency representative is found to be more important in explaining vote choices than having the same party affiliation as the voter (Cain et al. 1984: 119). These findings on the US have received consistent support (Erikson 1971; Cox and Katz 1996). An optimistic estimate by Gelman and King (1990) for the US reports an incumbency advantage of six to ten percentage points. However, recent analyses emphasize a significant decline of the electoral advantage enjoyed by US Representatives to levels not seen since the 1950s. Jacobson (2015) concedes a diminished incumbency advantage in conjunction with an increase in party loyalty, straight-ticket voting, and president-centered electoral nationalization as products of the widening and increasingly coherent partisan divisions in the American electorate.

The effects of personal vote seeking on vote choices are found to be much weaker in other plurality systems, such as the UK, but are nevertheless detectable. According to Cain et al. (1984, 1987) party identification and approval rates for the incumbent government remain a crucial determinant for the vote choices of British voters. However, even in this case, incumbent visibility and reputation are found to positively and significantly affect vote choices at the margins (Cain et al. 1984: 120). Norton and Wood (1993), in light of increasing efforts of younger cohorts of MPs to seek personal votes, hypothesize an increasing share of personal votes in the electorate. Their analysis of the relative electoral advantage of these younger cohorts measured against the mean party swing tentatively

supports their argument. However, this finding is far from conclusive and has been challenged by, for example, Gaines (1998), who finds a small incumbency advantage of about 1–2 percent but no increase across time.

Research on other plurality contexts produces similar inconclusive and undramatic findings. For the German mixed system, Ade et al. (2014) and Hainmüller and Kern (2006) find an incumbency effect for the plurality tier of about 1 to 2 percentage points. However, in an effort to disaggregate this effect, Ade et al. (2014) find consistent results only for conservative candidates; SPD incumbents only benefited from their status in case of government participation of their party. In a recent analysis of the effects of personal vote seeking in campaign contexts among German constituency candidates, Gschwend and Zittel (2015) also uncover a small effect not only for incumbents but for challengers too. They show for the 2009 German federal elections that personalized constituency campaigns increase the likelihood of name recall, particularly among non-partisan voters. Furthermore, those voters that are able to recall a particular candidate are more likely to vote for this candidate irrespective of partisanship and political knowledge. In addition, according to this analysis, personal vote seeking in campaign contexts might not only marginally sway non-partisans but also better mobilize the partisan vote.

Research on the electoral effects of personal vote seeking is scarce and pessimistic for multi-member electoral systems. Marsh (2007), on the basis of survey evidence, finds that a substantial minority of Irish voters decides on the basis of candidate factors. However, Marsh concedes that direct survey questions on motives might overestimate this effect. In contrast, Ariga et al. (2015), in their analyses of pre-1993 Japan, argue against any incumbency advantage in multi-member districts and are able to support this position empirically. One of the main theoretical points of this paper is that incumbents might disappoint voters and that this might put them electorally more at risk in multi-member districts since particularistic benefits are harder to claim under these conditions and fewer votes are needed to unseat incumbents.

Personal vote seeking potentially matters beyond its electoral effects and thus is of larger systemic relevance. Analyses of the US-American case stress the negative ramifications of personal vote seeking with regard to budgetary politics and the efficiency of policy-making. This is because benefits such as public works projects are locally concentrated while costs are shifted to the public. Moreover, benefits are viewed as political favors rather than instruments for economic management and incentives for investment (Baron 1991: 193; Steinmo 1993). Comparative research tentatively supports this observation on the American case. For example, Hallerberg and Marier (2004) show for Latin American countries that increasing incentives for personal vote seeking at the electoral level increase the likelihood of higher budget deficits. Edwards and Thames (2007), in their study on 77 democracies between 1970 and 2000, corroborate this finding for a wider selection of cases. Bagashka (2012) argues that economic reforms are

less likely under electoral rules that facilitate personal vote seeking. Crisp et al. (2010) show that in countries with electoral systems that encourage personal votes we see more negotiated exceptions in international treaties aimed at liberalizing markets.

The available evidence on the relationship between personal vote seeking and budgetary policy-making, especially in European contexts, is far from robust and in light of this most relevant questions need further consideration. Furthermore, most of the available studies focus on the electoral level rather than on the array of actual behavioral strategies that are related to personal vote-seeking concerns. We thus need to better understand which particular strategy might lead to what kind of budgetary outcome and why. Furthermore, we need to better understand the contextual constraints and opportunities in this regard. For example, centralization of the budgetary process in the executive or strong parliamentary parties are said to be especially effective at contradicting the effects of personal vote-seeking concerns and maintaining budgetary discipline amidst candidate-centered electoral rules.

According to the literature on the issue, candidate-centered electoral systems providing incentives for personal vote-seeking behavior might also have far-reaching effects on the democratic process. From this perspective, strong parties are not entirely exogenous to electoral rules and related behavioral incentives. Personal vote-seeking incentives, rather, are said to facilitate deviations in roll call voting and thus might put responsible party government at risk (Crisp, et al. 2013; Sieberer 2013; Olivella and Tavits 2014). From this perspective, parties might, on the one hand, constrain personal vote-seeking behavior independent from electoral incentives but, on the other hand, might not be entirely immune to negative effects in the long run. However, this claim so far lacks robust empirical support. Furthermore, more complex and differentiated relationships need to be modeled and tested. Among others, this concerns the question of how personal vote seeking might affect intra-party decision-making processes in parliament. Since internal meetings and procedures of parliamentary party groups are hard or impossible to uncover, this question raises a tough challenge to future efforts in personal vote-seeking research.

The previous remarks suggest that personal vote seeking raises systemic risks and thus ought to be viewed with suspicion and should be discouraged. However, this would be a premature conclusion. Independent of its risks, some students of personal vote seeking emphasize its positive effects on the input legitimacy of political systems by, for example, facilitating direct contacts between legislators and constituents, turnout, and responsiveness towards the demands of non-organized constituents (Bawn and Thies 2003; Niven 2002; Robbins 2010). Eventually, striking some balance between small-scale and large-scale politics, between personal vote seeking and partisan politics, might be the most desirable outcome. An exclusive focus on public issues and ideological battles can cause

problems for democracy since this would exclude most immediate avenues for direct citizen complaints and for raising ‘smaller’ demands (Reed 1994). In contrast, a more pronounced emphasis on personal vote seeking potentially facilitates depolitization and ineffective government (Reed 1994). Like many things in life, the larger systemic effects of the personal vote depend on whether it is dispensed in the right dose.

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