

Individual and contextual variation in spatial voting

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Abstract

Party identification and issue preferences are central explanatory factors in many models of voting choice. Their effects on party preferences are usually conceived to be additive. That is, party identification is expected to increase the likelihood of supporting one’s preferred party, but not to make voters more or less responsive to issues or ideology. This paper suggests an alternative model in which party identification moderates the impact of issue preferences on the vote. This hypothesis is derived from dual-process models of opinion formation. These models suggest that party identifiers should be more likely to evaluate parties in a heuristic fashion, based on party labels, and that they should be less sensitive to parties’ issue positions. In addition, I expect the moderating role of party identification to be conditioned by voters’ level of political sophistication and by the issue-specific degree of party polarization. These hypotheses are tested with data from four recent Dutch election studies.

Introduction

Spatial models of electoral competition offer a framework to explain both citizens' voting choices and parties' electoral strategies. They are based on the fundamental premise that voters' preferences on political issues influence their voting choice, with voters tending to support either a party or a candidate whose program is congruent with their own preferences. This focus on political issues corresponds closely to normative theories of representation stressing the importance of ideological congruence between citizens and their representatives (Powell 2004; Thomassen and Schmitt 1997).

These models' central component is the definition of a political space, characterized by one or several issue- or ideological dimensions in which voters and parties can be located. Most spatial models assume citizens are more likely to support a party that is closer to them in this space, and parties seek to adopt a position that maximizes their expected vote share. While this baseline model's simplicity is appealing, it leads to predictions about party behaviour that often conflict with empirical observations (Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005). In particular, such models typically lead to the expectation that parties should converge toward the centre to maximize their vote returns. In an effort to produce more realistic hypotheses, spatial models have been extended on three fronts: by introducing additional determinants of voting choices (e.g., Adams 2001; Erikson and Romero 1990), by changing the incentives to which parties respond (e.g., Schofield and Sened 2005), and by considering more sophisticated means by which voters can evaluate how their choice ultimately affects government policies (e.g., Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005; Kedar 2005).

This paper concentrates on the first of these possible extensions. From this perspective, a significant development has been introducing models that combine two types of individual-level determinants of voting behaviour: spatial or policy factors, on the one hand, and "behavioural" factors, on the other, in particular party identification (Adams 2001; Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005). Combining these two sets of factors has resulted in more

powerful models offering better explanations of voting choices and producing more realistic predictions about optimal party positions.

While the development of such *unified models* must be welcomed, this paper suggests that their depiction of the interplay between behavioural and spatial factors remains unsatisfactory. Such models usually are based on the assumption that the two sets of factors have *additive* effects (Adams 2001; Jessee 2010). In other words, they assume that all voters respond to spatial factors in the same way, whether or not they identify with a party. Party identification only affects voting choices by providing a given party a fixed advantage when voters compare and evaluate parties or candidates. Party identifiers are thus biased in favour of one party, but otherwise they respond to spatial factors in the same way as voters who do not identify with any party. This study suggests a different interpretation of the effects of traditional loyalties: Party identification should not only increase the chances of supporting one's "own" party, it should also reduce voters' responsiveness to spatial factors. In other words, spatial factor effects should be *conditional* on party identification.

In addition, this paper investigates how the effect of party identification varies across groups of voters and between different issues. It suggests that differences between identifiers and nonidentifiers, in terms of their responsiveness to spatial factors, are systematically related to voters' level of political sophistication and to the degree of party polarization on a given issue. The expected moderating effect of party identification should be strongest among sophisticated voters and on polarized issues.

These hypotheses are tested with data from four recent Dutch election studies. The rest of this paper is structured as follows. First, the standard specification of unified voting choice models is presented. This model is then extended to allow for interactive effects of issue distances and party identification. The next section discusses the expected effects of political sophistication and party system polarization. The data section presents the election studies

used, as well as all variables' operationalization. Following this, the empirical analyses' results are presented. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these findings.

Unified spatial models

In a unified voting choice model, party utilities are a function of both party identification and the distances between voters and parties in the political space. If the political space is characterized by K issue dimensions, the utility of citizen i ($i = 1, \dots, n$) for party j ($j = 1, \dots, J$) can be defined as

$$y_{ij} = \sum_k \beta_k (v_{ik} - p_{jk})^2 + \gamma \cdot \text{pid}_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij}. \quad (1)$$

In Equation 1, y_{ij} is the utility of voter i for party j , v_{ik} and p_{jk} are the positions on issue k of voter i and party j , respectively, β_k is the parameter capturing the impact of voter-party distances on issue k , pid_{ij} is a dummy variable indicating whether voter i identifies with party j , γ captures the party identification effect, and ε_{ij} is a random error term. This is similar to the model specified, for example, by Adams et al. (2005, 22).¹ One would expect party identification to increase the utility for one's traditionally preferred party, and the coefficient γ should thus be positive. Similarly, citizens should be less likely to support a party further away from them in the political space, resulting in negative values for the estimated β_k coefficients.

In the Equation 1 model, the dependent variable is a citizen's utility for a given party. Party utilities express a party's attractiveness for one's voting choice. They stand in a direct relation with voting choice, with citizens being expected to vote for the party for which they have the highest utility (Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005; Merrill and Grofman 1999). At

¹ Equation 1 is a simplified version of the model of Adams et al. (2005), who also include additional nonpolicy factors, such as class or religion.

the theoretical level, spatial models always are formulated in terms of party utilities. In empirical tests of such models, however, two types of dependent variables have been used: voting choice (e.g., Erikson and Romero 1990; Iversen 1994) or party utility (e.g., Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989; Westholm 1997), measured, for example, by questions concerning the degree of sympathy or the probability of future vote for the various parties. Several authors have emphasized the advantages of using party utilities as the dependent variable, rather than voting choice (Macdonald, Rabinowitz, and Listhaug 1995; van der Eijk et al. 2006; Westholm 1997). The main reason advanced by these authors is that spatial models make predictions about voters' utilities for all parties in competition, not only those for which a voter has the highest utility. Using party utility as the dependent variable thus allows one to more thoroughly test the underlying theoretical model. Accordingly, this paper will rely on such measures of party utility.

When the dependent variable used to test the above model is a party utility, the observations do not correspond to respondents, but to *respondent-by-party* combinations. With respect to party identification, three types of respondent-by-party combinations can be distinguished:

- A party identifier's utility for his or her traditionally preferred party,
- A party identifier's utility for another party, and
- A nonidentifier's utility for any party.

In order to distinguish among these three situations, two distinct party identification effects must be specified. Taking a nonidentifier's party utility as the reference point, on the one hand, party identification can increase voter utility for his or her traditionally preferred party, and on the other hand, it can decrease the utility for other parties. When a single party identification dummy is used, as in Equation 1, this accounts for only the first party identification effect. In other words, using a single party identification dummy involves the implicit assumption that, other things being equal, party identifiers' utility for a party with

which they do not identify is the same as nonidentifiers' utility. This is a strong assumption to make and one that does not appear to be supported empirically (Lachat 2008, 2011). As a consequence, it is necessary to modify the above model when party utilities are observed. Two party-identification variables must be included: one variable, "pid," distinguishes between party identifiers and nonidentifiers; the other, "pid own," identifies the party with which identifiers usually feel close. With these two variables, the theoretical model can be formalized as

$$y_{ij} = \sum_k \beta_k (v_{ik} - p_{jk})^2 + \gamma_1 \cdot \text{pid}_i + \gamma_2 \cdot \text{pid own}_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij}. \quad (2)$$

Compared with the Equation 1 model, there are now two party-identification dummies. Among nonidentifiers, both pid_i and pid own_{ij} take the value 0. Among party identifiers, pid_i takes the value 1 for all parties, while pid own_{ij} takes the value 1 for the party with which they identify, and the value 0 otherwise. These two variables' effects are captured by the parameters γ_1 and γ_2 . The remaining variables are defined in the same way as in Equation 1.

The parameter γ_1 corresponds to the difference between nonidentifier's utility for any party and party identifier's utility for the parties with which they do not identify. The parameter γ_2 , in contrast, indicates the difference among party identifiers between their preferred party's utility and that of one of its competitors. Typically, it is expected γ_1 would be negative and γ_2 , positive (and larger in absolute value than γ_1). This means that party identifiers, *compared with nonidentifiers*, have a higher utility for their traditionally preferred party but a lower utility for other parties.

Party identification as a moderating variable

In the models of Equations 1 and 2, both party identification- and voter-party issue distance effects are additive: The influence of voter-party distances on party utilities is independent from voters' party identification status. In other words, a given change in voter-party issue distances should result in the same effects on all voters' party utilities, whether or not they identify with a party.

This study proposes a different conception of the voting decision process by suggesting that party identification moderates the impact of spatial distances. Party identification represents a strong predisposition to support one of the parties (Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). It should play a central role in voters' decision processes and in the way in which they process information. A voter's party identification should be a highly salient and easily accessible attitude. It likely functions as a shortcut or *heuristic* for decision-making. Much research on political cognition shows that citizens do not process all available information in a systematic manner. Instead, they rely on simple decision rules or heuristics that allow them to reach a decision at a lower cognitive cost (Chaiken 1980; Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Fiske and Neuberg 1990; Fiske and Taylor 1991). When voters rely on the partisan heuristic, they can evaluate parties and choose which one to support without having to incorporate issue proximities in their decision. The impact of spatial factors on party preferences should thus be weaker among party identifiers than among nonidentifiers.

It is important to emphasize that this hypothesis fits with both major conceptualizations of party identification (e.g., Johnston 2006). The traditional party-identification model corresponds to the original concept developed in the "Michigan model" of voting choice (Campbell et al. 1960). Party identification is a psychological tie to one of the parties, acquired during socialization and constantly reinforced by political experience. It represents a voter's identification with a social group and is expected to be much more stable than other political attitudes (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Miller and Shanks 1996).

The revisionist model of party identification, in contrast, comes from the rational-choice tradition. It is most directly linked with the work of Downs (1957) and Fiorina (1981; see also Weinschenk 2010). Rather than being a defining feature of voters' social and political identity, party identification represents here a much more limited concept. It corresponds to a summary evaluation of parties, which is continuously updated, as voters receive and process new political information. From this perspective, Fiorina (1981, 84) describes party identification as a "running tally of retrospective evaluations of party promises and performance." This conceptualization of party identification is thus similar to that of an evaluation resulting from online information processing about parties (Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh 1989; Lodge and Stroh 1993).

This theoretical debate is important, with significant implications for understanding party identification's role and stability. However, it is not central for the present argument, and this paper's hypothesis can be demonstrated using either theoretical model. Central is that party identification represents a predisposition to support one of the parties and that it offers voters a heuristic device by which to evaluate parties. Party identification should fulfil this condition whether it is conceived as a group identity or as a summary evaluation. From the viewpoint of both theories, party identification can be expected to moderate the strength of the relationship between spatial proximities and party utilities.

In order to account for party identification's expected moderating effect, the theoretical model must be augmented by interaction terms between party identification and voter-party distances:

$$y_{ij} = \sum_k \beta_k (v_{ik} - p_{jk})^2 + \gamma_1 \cdot \text{pid}_i + \gamma_2 \cdot \text{pid own}_{ij} + \sum_k \delta_k \cdot \text{pid}_i \cdot (v_{ik} - p_{jk})^2 + \sum_k \phi_k \cdot \text{pid own}_{ij} \cdot (v_{ik} - p_{jk})^2 + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (3)$$

This model differs from Equation 2 by adding interactions between spatial proximities and each of the two party-identification dummies. Issue-distance effects on nonidentifiers' party

utilities are captured by the parameters β_k (with k indexing the different political issues, as in the previous equation), which are expected to be negative. The interaction terms are captured by the parameters δ_k and ϕ_k , which are expected to be positive. Their magnitude should be smaller than or equal to that of the β_k coefficients, meaning that the effects of issue distances are weaker among party identifiers than nonidentifiers. That two sets of interaction terms are included means that the impact of spatial factors is allowed to vary between the three types of voter-party relations defined above. The influence of voter-party distances on party utilities can vary between party identifiers and nonidentifiers (corresponding to the δ_k parameters). Furthermore, among party identifiers, issue distances can also have a different impact on their preferred party utility than on the utility of other parties (a difference captured by the ϕ_k parameters). One could question the need to include the latter set of interactions, assuming that party identifiers will evaluate all parties in the same way. Yet, this study considers that this question should be settled empirically.

Additional implications

Central to the above hypotheses is the idea that some voters characteristics may lead to a more heuristic or more systematic treatment of the available information in the voting choice process. Party identification is expected to play such a role, as it represents an easily available heuristic. Besides the availability of heuristics, however, the heuristic vs. systematic treatment of information also depends on voters' skills. The role played by citizens' degree of political sophistication has often been emphasized. Political "experts" have a higher level of political knowledge than political "novices" and they organize this information in a more systematic way (Fiske, Kinder, and Larter 1983; McGraw and Pinney 1990; Zaller 1992). This implies that they can process new information more easily and are better able to relate new pieces of information to what they already know. An important consequence is that a higher level of

political sophistication makes it easier to rely on diagnostic criteria, such as ideological orientation or issue positions. The moderating role of party identification should thus be stronger among political experts than among political novices. Citizens with a low degree of political sophistication and no party identification lack both the strong affective reactions to party labels of identifiers and the knowledge necessary to evaluate parties on the basis of issue positions.

In addition to party identification and political sophistication, the impact of spatial factors on the vote also varies across issues. This study will consider the *degree of party polarization* on the different political issues as a potential explanatory factor. On some issues, party positions strongly differ from one another, while differences are weaker on other issues. Several studies have shown that party polarization matters when comparing different electoral contexts, i.e., countries or electoral districts. A higher level of party system polarization leads to stronger ideological voting (van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005; Ensley 2007; Dalton 2008; Lachat 2008; Kroh 2009) and to stronger issue voting (Alvarez and Nagler 2004; Knutsen and Kumlin 2005; Lachat 2011). These findings have mainly been explained by a salience effect. Greater polarization means that parties' issue positions diverge more strongly. This should both incite parties to emphasize their issue positions more clearly and motivate voters to rely on more substantial criteria when evaluating parties.

This polarization argument is based on the general level of party system polarization. A similar argument can be made with respect to the issue-specific degree of party polarization. In a given election, the polarization of party positions varies across issue dimensions. Parties may adopt virtually identical positions on some policies, while taking much contrasted positions on other questions. Voters may thus be more motivated to reach an accurate decision with respect to some dimensions of evaluations than to others. They should, in general, give more weight to the issue dimensions on which parties differ strongly from one another. This expected effect of polarization should affect all groups of voters. Among

nonidentifiers, party utilities should relate more strongly to voter-party distances on issues that show a greater level of party polarization. Similarly, identifiers should rely more strongly on polarized issues for evaluating parties. Yet, it is difficult to derive a clear hypothesis regarding the impact of polarization on the *gap* between identifiers and nonidentifiers. In other words, it is an open question whether polarization affects identifiers more strongly than nonidentifiers.

To sum up, dual-process models lead to the hypothesis that party identifiers should rely more strongly on party labels as a heuristic, and less strongly on issues or ideology, than non-identifiers. The same theoretical framework also leads to the expectation that the conditional impact of party identification will be larger among political experts than among political novices. Finally, the impact of voter-party distances should be larger for more polarized issues.

These additional hypotheses mean that the effects of party identification and of spatial utilities, as specified in Equation 3, are also conditional on political sophistication and on issue-specific party polarization.

Data and operationalization

To analyze the interplay between spatial factors and party identification, this study focuses on the 1994, 1998, 2002, and 2006 Dutch elections. The study focuses on that country, because the Netherlands offer a multiparty system with several important issue dimensions. This offers promising ground on which to test spatial voting theories, and Dutch election studies include many questions concerning both voters' issue positions and their perceptions of party positions. These elements, in turn, multiply the number of observable implications of this paper's hypotheses. Moreover, this choice also fits with the emphasis on multiparty systems that characterizes much recent literature on electoral competition and spatial modelling

(Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005; Duch, May, and Armstrong 2010; Ezrow 2005; Kedar 2005; Schofield and Sened 2006).

An additional reason for investigating the Dutch case is linked with measuring the dependent variable, party utilities. Such measures are available in numerous national election studies, in various forms: like/dislike scales, questions on the degree of sympathy, thermometer ratings, or probabilities of future vote. While all of these question formats measure the *attractiveness* of parties, they are not equivalent to one another. As van der Eijk and Marsh (van der Eijk and Marsh 2007) have shown, the “probability of future vote” questions fare better than do alternative measures on several central criteria (see also Tillie 1995; van der Eijk et al. 2006). In particular, probabilities of future vote display a stronger relationship with actual vote choice (van der Eijk and Marsh 2007, 11–14). This aspect is central, as party utilities are expected to be the basis by which voters make their actual choice.

Party utilities were measured by asking respondents how likely it is that they “will ever vote” for each of a series of parties. Respondents answered using a ten-point scale, ranging from “certainly never” to “sometime certainly” (coded from 0 to 1 for the present analyses). Depending on the election study, the probability of future vote was measured for nine to twelve parties—although only part of these can be used in the empirical analyses, as questions on the perceived issue positions were asked for a smaller number of parties.

The other individual-level variables necessary to specify the model are party identification, voters’ issue preferences, their perceptions of party positions on the corresponding dimensions, and political sophistication. Voters’ and parties’ positions were measured on the following issue dimensions: euthanasia, crime (not in 1998), income differences, nuclear plants, ethnic minorities, European unification, asylum seekers (not in 1994), and social benefits (only in 1998). On all these dimensions, respondents’ positions and their perception of party positions were measured with seven-point scales, recoded here to the 0–1 range.

Information on both party utilities and voter-party issue distances is available for four to six parties, depending on the election study. These parties are: the Labour Party (PvdA, all years), the Liberal Party (VVD, all years), the Christian-Democratic Appeal (CDA, all years), the social liberal D66 (1994, 1998, 2002), the Green Left Party (GroenLinks, 1998), the orthodox Protestant GPV (1998), the List Pim Fortuyn (2002), the Socialist Party (2006), and the Christian Union (ChristenUnie, 2006). Party identification is based on the following question:

Many people think of themselves as adherents to a particular political party, but there are also people who do not think of themselves as an adherent to a political party. Do you think of yourself as an adherent or not as an adherent to a political party?

Respondents declaring themselves an adherent to a particular party were then asked, “To which party?”²

Political sophistication, finally, is an index of political knowledge. In all four election studies, respondents were shown photographs of politicians and were invited to mention their name, party affiliation, and political function. This information was asked for four politicians, resulting in a 13-point scale of knowledge. This variable is recoded to the 0–1 range for the present analyses.

The last variable included in the analyses is the measure of party polarization for each issue. To this end, I compute Taylor-Herman indexes of polarization, using average perceived party positions (Taylor and Herman 1971). This index is a weighted standard deviation of party positions. The polarization on issue dimension k is defined as:

² In 1998, up to three parties were coded, and in 2002, up to four. For voters indicating multiple identifications, the direction of their “main” identification was assessed by asking, “Which of these parties do you feel most attracted to?”

$$P_k = \sum_j \omega_j (p_{jk} - \bar{p}_{\cdot k})^2$$

where ω_j is the vote share of party j , p_{jk} is the position of party j on dimension k , and where $\bar{p}_{\cdot k}$ is the weighted average position on this scale, that is:

$$\bar{p}_{\cdot k} = \sum_j \omega_j p_{jk}.$$

The individual-level model to be estimated is that of Equation 3, extending it by adding political sophistication as well as interaction terms between sophistication and all variables. In that way, the impact of voter-party distances on party utilities can vary not only between the party identification statuses, but also across levels of political sophistication. The model is further complicated by the expected cross-level interactions between issue polarization and the individual-level variables. This model is estimated with a two-step strategy (Achen 2005; Lewis and Linzer 2005). First, I estimate the individual-level model, separately for each election, using ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions. The observations corresponding to voter \times party relationships, rather than to individuals, the number of observations is multiplied and it can vary across respondents. To reflect the true number of persons interviewed, the observations for each respondent are weighted by the inverse of the number of available voter \times party relationships for that person. The stacking procedure also implies that the observations corresponding to a given respondent may not be independent from one another. To avoid a possible bias, clustered standard errors were computed.

Then, I use the estimated coefficients of the first-step models as the dependent variable in context-level models, in which they are regressed on the degree of polarization. In order to increase the number of observations at that stage, the coefficients estimated with the four election studies are pooled. Following Lewis and Linzer (2005), the step-two models are estimated using weighted least-squares regressions, which allow one to account for the differences in the degree of uncertainty surrounding the first stage coefficients. As the impact

of issue distances can vary among voters (depending on party identification and political sophistication), separate step-two models are estimated for each of the three types of voter-party relationships, as well as for different levels of political sophistication.

Results

The main goal of estimating the above model is to test how the effects of voter-party issue distances are conditioned by party identification and party polarization. These results will be introduced in several steps. First, let us consider how party utilities vary across party identification groups. Table 1 shows the predicted party utilities and associated standard errors for voters who share the same issue positions with a given party, for three types of respondents: voters who identify with the corresponding party, voters who identify with a different party, and nonidentifiers. These predicted probabilities are computed for citizens with an average level of political sophistication. The results are similar in all four elections and reveal substantial differences in the levels of party support among these groups. Party identifiers have a very high utility for their traditionally preferred party, ranging from 0.90 to 0.95 (depending on the election study) on the 0–1 scale. In contrast, their utilities for parties with which they do not identify are much lower (below 0.60). This confirms that party identification strongly influences party utilities, as shown by numerous previous studies. Table 1 also shows that party identifiers' utility for parties with which they do not identify is substantially lower than a nonidentifier's utility. The gap between these (corresponding to the difference between the last two columns of Table 1) is highly significant in each election and ranges from 0.15 in 1998 to 0.21 in 2002.

[Table 1 about here]

Turning now to the effects of policy preferences, we can first consider how they vary by party identification status – ignoring for the moment the role of political sophistication and polarization. To that end, Figure 1 shows the estimated impact of voter-party distances in the 1994 election, separately for the three types of voter-party relations. As in Table 1, these results correspond to citizens with an average degree of political sophistication. For each issue, the estimated impact and associated 95% confidence interval is shown in black for nonidentifiers, in light grey for party identifiers’ utility for their preferred party, and in dark grey for identifiers’ utilities for other parties. Considering first nonidentifiers, we observe that on most issues, the voter-party distance has a negative and significant impact on party utilities. Nonidentifiers have a lower utility for parties that are more distant from them on the issues of euthanasia, income differences, nuclear plants, ethnic minorities, and European unification. Only the crime issue has no significant impact on nonidentifiers’ utilities. These issue-distance effects are also substantially large. On the euthanasia issue, for example, a nonidentifier’s party utility decreases by a value 0.29 (on the 0–1 scale), as the voter-party distance changes from 0 to the maximum value of 1.

[Figure 1 about here]

Among party identifiers, there are important differences in issue-distance effects between identifiers’ “own” party and the other parties. Voters’ utility for the party with which they identify appears to be virtually unrelated to issue distances. For five out of six issues included in the 1994 model, no significant relationship exists between issue distances and party utilities. Attitudes toward European unification is the only deviating case, but the estimated effect is positive. This is puzzling, as it indicates that party identifiers’ utility for “their” party is greater when it is more distant from them on the European issue. Although this result violates a proximity model’s expectations, it is a rare exception.

Party identifiers' utilities for other parties do respond to issue distances. For three issues (euthanasia, income differences, nuclear plants), there is a significant spatial distance effect in this group of voters. These results offer strong support for the hypothesis that the impact of issues in a proximity model is conditional on party identification. In particular, they reveal a strong contrast between nonidentifiers' party utilities, which are strongly influenced by issue distances, and party identifiers' utilities for their traditionally preferred party, which appear to be unaffected by issue differences. At the same time, however, these results show that party identifiers are not entirely unresponsive to issues: Their utilities for parties with which they do not identify do vary with issue distances, although the relations are not as systematic as those among nonidentifiers. For reasons of space, the corresponding results for the other elections are not presented here. But they reveal a similar pattern. Nonidentifiers' utilities are influenced by voter-party distances on most issues. The few exceptions, such as the crime issue in Figure 1, are issues that do not influence party utilities among any group of voters. Among party identifiers, in contrast, the only significant effect observed is that of the European unification issue in the 1994 election (which goes in the opposite direction of what one would expect).

Identifiers' utilities for the other parties, in contrast, are influenced by issue distances, but not as systematically as among nonidentifiers. In the latter group, 23 of 27 issues exert a significant and negative impact on party utilities. Among identifiers, their utility for parties with which they do not identify are related to only 18 out of 27 issues. Furthermore, for six of these issues, the estimated spatial parameter is weaker than among nonidentifiers.

These first results clearly show that the effects of party identification and spatial distances are not additive. In order to develop further the analysis, I turn to the role of political sophistication and party polarization. Figure 2 presents the predicted effect of voter-party issue distances among citizens with a low level of political sophistication (i.e., average minus one standard deviation), by party identification status and level of party polarization. The left-

hand panel of Figure 2 corresponds to nonidentifiers (with low political expertise). In this group, we can clearly see that the impact of issue distances on party evaluations grows larger as polarization increases (i.e., the estimated coefficient becomes more negative). The regression line, corresponding to the estimated effect of polarization from the step-two model, shows a strong (and significant) effect of polarization. The middle panel corresponds to the utilities of party identifiers, for parties with which they do not identify. In this type of voter-party relations, the influence of spatial distances is somewhat weaker than among nonidentifiers, but it also responds to party polarization in the expected direction. In the right-hand panel, finally, we can see the corresponding results in the case of identifiers' evaluations of their traditionally preferred party. In that case, the impact of voter-party distances on virtually all issues fails to reach statistical significance. Furthermore, there is no sign of a party polarization effect. Based on the results of the above analyses, we had concluded that identifiers' evaluations of "their" party are largely unresponsive to spatial factors. Among political novices, we can now further conclude that this result even holds for highly polarized issues.

[Figures 2 and 3 about here]

To conclude the presentations of the results, we can turn to Figure 3, which presents the corresponding results among citizens with a high level of political sophistication (i.e., average value plus one standard deviation). This figure is structured in the same way as Figure 2. The main difference between political novices and political experts concerns the groups of nonidentifiers (left-hand panel). At both levels of political sophistication, polarization strengthens issue voting. The effect is however much stronger among political experts. Among party identifiers, by contrast, political sophistication does not appear to play any role. Their evaluations of the parties with which they do not identify are more strongly influenced

by polarized issues, but experts and novices do not differ from one another in that respect.

And party identifiers' evaluations of their traditionally preferred party are not more responsive to issue distances among experts than they were among political novices. It is true that the right-hand panel of Figure 3 points to a reinforcement effect of polarization, but this effect is not statistically different from 0.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the role of party identification in models of voting choice combining *spatial* and *behavioural* factors. Such *unified* or *hybrid* models generally assume that party identification effects and spatial utilities are additive. All voters, whether or not they identify with a party, are expected to respond similarly to changes in parties' relative issue positions. In contrast to this standard assumption, this paper has suggested that party identifiers should respond less strongly to issue factors than should nonidentifiers. This hypothesis was derived from information processing models, according to which party identification should function as a heuristic, allowing party identifiers to make their voting choice at a lower "cognitive cost," without treating all information in a systematic way. This hypothesis should lead to a party utility pattern whereby identifiers exhibit a high utility for their preferred party, lower utilities for all other competitors, and wherein these utilities are only weakly affected by parties' spatial locations. This paper also suggested that the impact of spatial factors may be further conditioned by voters' degree of political sophistication and by the polarization of party positions on the corresponding issue dimension. The hypotheses were that the conditional effect of party identification would be stronger at higher levels of political expertise, and that party polarization would strengthen spatial voting among all voters.

These hypotheses were tested with data from the 1994, 1998, 2002, and 2006 Dutch election studies. These data allow for analyzing the determinants of voters' party utilities in a multiparty system, with numerous issue dimensions. As regards the hypothesis of a

conditional relation between party identification and spatial voting, the results were largely consistent across these four elections. There was strong support for the idea that party identification affects the relationship between issue distances and party utilities. It is evident based on the results presented here that the effects of these two sets of variables are conditional on one another. However, contrary to what was expected, party identification does not simply lead to a weaker relationship between spatial proximities and *all* party utilities. Rather, among party identifiers, the impact of issue distances varies across parties. While their utility for their preferred party is virtually unaffected by issue distances, party identifiers' utilities for other parties are sensitive to issue proximities, although in many cases, the relations are weaker than those among nonidentifiers.

As regards political sophistication and party polarization, the analyses have confirmed that both factors are important in moderating the impact of spatial factors. Furthermore, they both contribute to intensify the differences between the three party identification statuses. On the one hand, party identifiers generally do not respond to issue distances when evaluating their traditionally preferred party. This is the case even among sophisticated voters and for polarized issues. Nonidentifiers, on the other hand, are generally responsive to spatial factors, and they are all the more so as their level of political sophistication increases and in the case of polarized issues. In other words, not only are there differences between identifiers and nonidentifiers in the nature of the voting decision process, but these differences become larger with voters' degree of political expertise and with the issue-specific level of party polarization.

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Table 1. Predicted party utility (standard error in parentheses) for citizens with an average degree of political sophistication, when all issue distances are equal to 0, by party identification.

	Identifier: own party	Identifier: other party	Nonidentifier
1994	0.90 (0.02)	0.54 (0.02)	0.72 (0.02)
1998	0.95 (0.01)	0.57 (0.01)	0.72 (0.01)
2002	0.93 (0.01)	0.46 (0.01)	0.67 (0.01)
2006	0.95 (0.01)	0.48 (0.02)	0.67 (0.01)

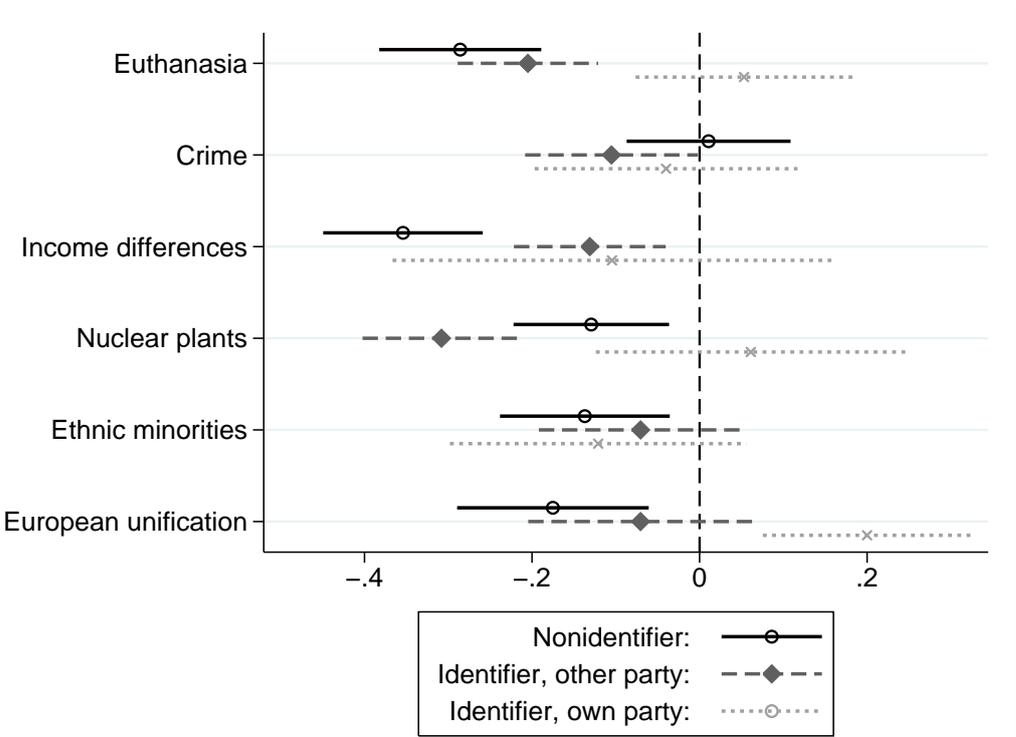


Figure 1. Impact of issue-distances on party utilities among voters with an average degree of political sophistication, by party-identification status, 1994 election.

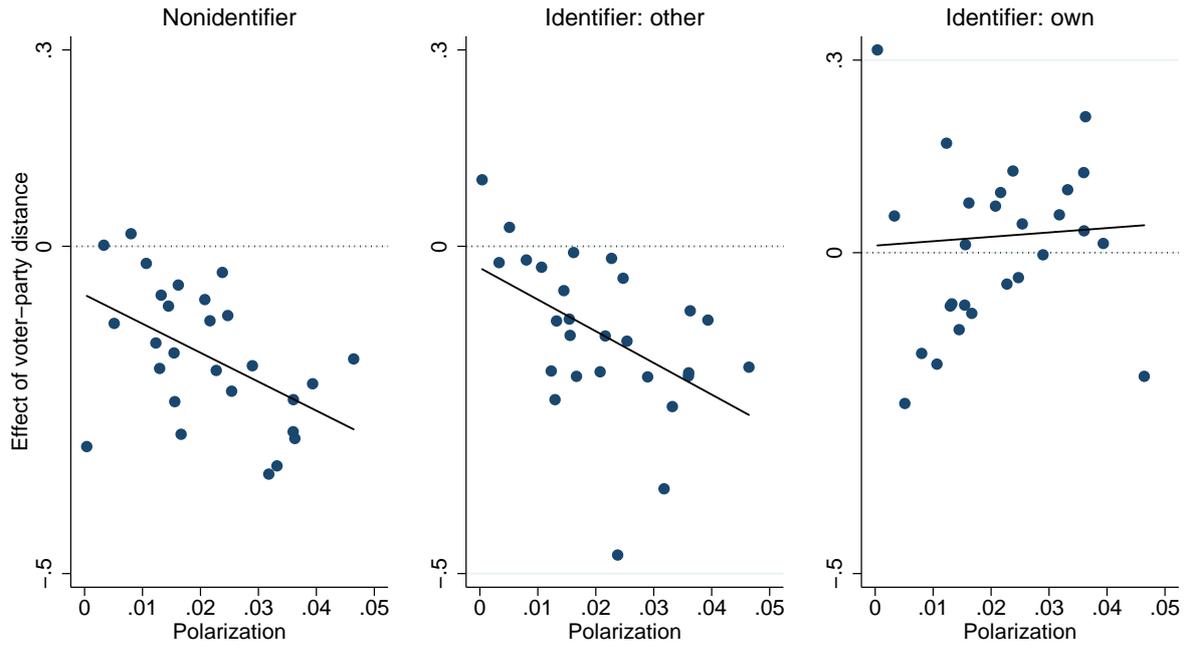


Figure 2. Impact of party polarization and party identification on the effect of voter-party distances, voters with a low level of political sophistication.

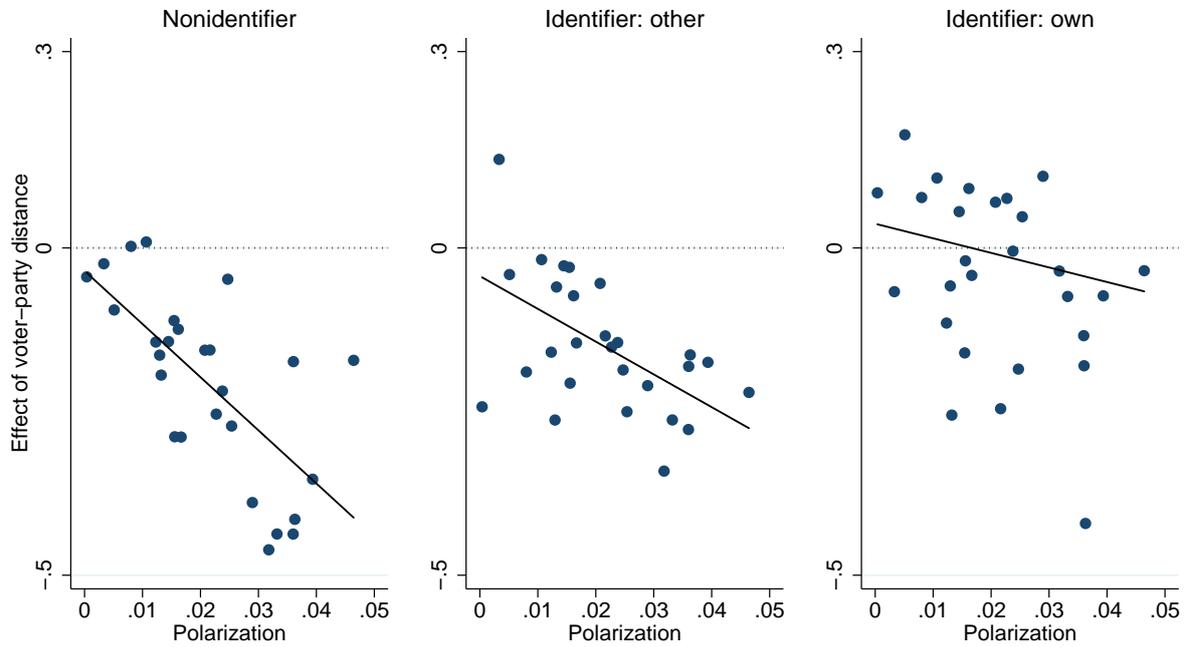


Figure 3. Impact of party polarization and party identification on the effect of voter-party distances, voters with a high level of political sophistication.