Party identification, electoral utilities, and voting choice

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First draft – comments are welcome

Introduction

This paper analyses the relationships between party identification and electoral preferences in the European context. The starting point for this research is the controversy between two opposite views of the concept of party identification. In the tradition of the 'Michigan school', party identification is an enduring commitment which shapes attitudes towards political objects and voting choices (Campbell, Converse et al. 1960). This conception has been reassessed by authors who argue that party identification is merely a summary evaluation, which is rationally updated as voters encounter new information (Fiorina 1981). Central in this debate is the question of the stability of party identification. The 'classical' and the 'revisionist' perspectives make different hypotheses about the dynamics of party identification. The revisionist model argues that party identification is more responsive to new information and to short-term political forces than expected by the classical model. Given this emphasis on the question of stability, empirical analyses trying to test the claims of these models usually rely on longitudinal data. These can be panel surveys realised during an electoral campaign (Brody and Rothenberg 1988), between two general elections (Converse and Markus 1979), or socio-economic panels which typically offer longer time-series (Schmitt-Beck and Weick 2001). As an alternative to panel studies, some authors have assessed the responsiveness of party identification to political forces by analysing changes in the distribution of party identification at the macro level (Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002) or by relying on rolling cross-sections (Whiteley 1988). Standard post-election surveys are less appropriate, as the two models make the same predictions regarding the relationship between party identification and voting choice in a cross-sectional analysis. This is problematic as data from panel surveys are relatively scarce and as they offer only limited possibilities for comparative analyses.

This paper proposes a different way of analysing the nature of party identification and its impact on voting choice. I rely for this on the concept of electoral utility (Tillie 1995; van der Eijk, van der Brug et al. forthcoming). Electoral utilities represent the value a voter attributes to a given candidate or party. They give more detailed information on voters' electoral preferences than voting choice, as they can be measured separately for each voting alternative and as these measures are not limited to a dichotomy. Electoral utilities represent an intermediary step in the relationship between voters' political preferences (issue position, ideological orientation, etc.) and their voting choice. They offer new possibilities to evaluate the two models of party identification. Following the logic of the revisionist model, the relationship between voters' political attitudes and their electoral utilities should be strong for

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all parties and it should not be affected by party identification. In the classical model, by contrast, party identification should have a direct impact on electoral utilities, and these should be only weakly related to voters' political attitudes.

The two competing models of party identification are presented in more detail in the next section. Next, I introduce the concept of electoral utility and derive hypotheses regarding the structure of these electoral utilities, their relationship with voters' political attitudes, and their impact on voting choice. These hypotheses are tested with data from the 1999 European Election Studies. The results of these analyses are mixed, but they support rather the classical model. The impact of party identification on the structure of electoral utilities and the strong differences between party identifiers and 'political independents', in particular, do not fit with the conception of party attachment as a mere summary of other political attitudes.

Two models of party identification

The traditional model of party identification corresponds to the original concept developed in the 'Michigan model' of voting choice (Campbell, Converse et al. 1960). Party identification is a psychological tie to one of the parties, acquired during socialisation and constantly reinforced by political experience. It is much more stable than other political attitudes and it plays a key role in the formation of voting choices. This is the pivotal element in this model of voting choice. 'Few factors are of greater importance for our national elections than the lasting attachment of tens of millions of Americans to one of the parties. These loyalties establish a basic division of electoral strength within which the competition of particular campaigns takes place' (Campbell, Converse et al. 1960: 121).

Party identification has a strong impact on voting choices. Most of the time, citizens tend to vote in line with their party identification. But exceptions are possible. Depending on political circumstances, on the performance of the parties, or on the characteristics of the candidates, voters may deviate from their party identification. But such defections do not lead voter to modify their party identification.

Several authors have drawn a parallel between a party identification and a religious identification. Following Miller and Shanks, a party identification provides voters with an ideology, which is to politics what theology is to religion: 'to provide structure, organization, and coherence to one's thinking' (1996: 121). It is not the simple expression of a preference for a given political party. It is a deep psychological tie, 'an extension of one's ego to include feeling a part of a group' (Miller and Shanks 1996: 120). A similar view is advocated by Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, for whom 'partisan identities are enduring features of

citizens' self-conceptions' (2002: 4). They also make an analogy between parties and religions, to emphasise the centrality of party identification and the strong differences existing between these identifications and standard political attitudes. They note that party identification shares the same degree of persistence than other social identities, like ethnicity or social class (Green, D., Palmquist and Schickler 2002: 75).

The 'revisionist' model of party identification, by contrast, comes from the rational-choice tradition. It is most directly linked with the work of Downs (1957) and Fiorina (1981). Rather than being a defining feature of voters' social and political identity, party identification represents here a much more limited concept. It represents a summary evaluation of parties, which is continuously updated as voters receive and process new political information. From this point of view, Fiorina (1981: 84) describes party identification as a 'running tally of retrospective evaluations of party promises and performance'. Similarly, according to Green et al. (2002: 110), party identification in this model 'reflects assessments about what the political parties are likely to deliver when in power'. This means that party identification is not part of the definition of citizens' identity. It simply reflects their expectations about parties. In this model, party identification represents a mere political attitude and it can thus change more easily. Citizens will respond to changes in parties' programmes, to their performance in office, or to the characteristics of their candidates and representatives, by rationally updating their summary evaluations of parties. In the classical model, party identification is the most stable factor in citizens' belief systems, and it influences their attitudes, their perception and evaluation of political actors, as well as their voting choices. In the revisionist account, by contrast, party identification is simply a summary of other political attitudes.

These two models of party identification make diverging predictions regarding the stability of party identifications or their relationship with political attitudes. Three points in particular have been important in the scholarly debate. The first is the direction of the causality between political attitudes and party identification. Whiteley (1988) presents the classical and the revisionist perspectives as two extremes on a continuum of models. In one case, party identification determines issue positions and candidate evaluations; at the other end of this continuum, party identification is entirely a consequence of these attitudes. Whiteley (1988) performs empirical tests of these and of intermediary models of party identification, by estimating transfer function models, based on the concept of 'Granger causality'. Many

authors have tested similar theoretical models with the help of structural equation modelling techniques (e.g., Markus and Converse 1979; Page and Jones 1979; Goren 2005).

Another central point of this debate is the stability of party identification and the degree to which it responds to short-term political forces (Converse and Markus 1979; Brody and Rothenberg 1988; Richardson 1991; Schickler and Green 1997). The third central question, finally, relates to the way in which citizens update their party identification when receiving new information. Several interpretations of the revisionist argument have been proposed, resulting in different specifications of the corresponding learning model (Achen 1992; Gerber and Green 1998; Gerber and Green 1999; Bartels 2002).

Most of this debate focuses on the relationship between three variables or groups of variables: party identification, voting choice, and political attitudes (most often issue positions and candidate evaluations). As the debate deals with questions of causal order or with dynamic relationships, such analyses typically require panel data. Such data, however, are relatively rare. Most election studies offer only cross-sectional data, in the form of post-election surveys. This means that models of the characteristics and consequences of party identification can only be tested on the basis of a limited sample of elections. Furthermore, for models designed to correct for measurement error in party identification or in political attitudes, a panel including at least three waves is required (Green, D. P. and Palmquist 1990; Carsey and Layman 2006). This rules out election studies consisting only of a pre-electoral and a post-electoral wave (such as the standard American National Election Studies). Such limitations can be in part overcome by analysing the dynamics of party identification at the aggregate level rather than at the individual level, such as in analyses of 'macropartisanship' (Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002: 109-151; Green, D., Palmquist and Schickler 2002: 85-108), or by relying on data from rolling cross-sections (Whiteley 1988). However, this strategy does not allow testing directly the underlying micro-level dynamics.

As long as panel data are necessary to test these competing models of party identification, only a limited number of cases (i.e., elections) can be considered. This also means that comparative analyses are difficult. Panel studies (conducted between elections or during the course of a campaign) are not only relatively scarce, they are also not very appropriate for comparative analyses, especially between countries. It is difficult to find a set of panel studies that are designed in a similar way (regarding the number and the timing of the panel waves) and which include comparable measures of party identification and of political attitudes. Comparative analyses of party identification based on panel studies are typically based on parallel analyses, performed separately in different elections or countries (e.g., Schickler and

Green 1997; Richardson 1991). This allows one to draw more general conclusions, by considering a larger number of cases. But it is not sufficient to design a truly comparative research, accounting for the role of contextual factors. Yet, a strong argument has been made that the importance of party identification is conditioned by contextual factors, like the fragmentation or polarisation of the party system (Schmitt and Holmberg 1995). Accounting for such factors may thus be important for developing more detailed models of the characteristics and consequences of party identification.

This paper proposes a different way to analyse the role and nature of party identification. Rather than focusing on the dynamics of party identification, I suggest a new perspective for analysing the relationships between political attitudes and voting choice, and the impact of party identification on these relationships. The key to doing this is to measure party preferences not only with voting choice, but also with measures of electoral utilities. Including measures of electoral utilities in a model of voting choice has important advantages. It allows one to analyse the determinants of voting choice in a more detailed and more rigorous way. Most models of voting choice rely at least implicitly on the concept of electoral utility (van der Eijk, van der Brug et al. forthcoming). But these are generally not directly observed. Most models assume that citizens choose the party from which they expect the highest utility. But they analyse only the result of this choice, not the underlying utilities. One of the few exceptions is the literature on spatial models, especially in the ongoing controversy between the 'directional model' and the 'proximity model' of voting choice (Westholm 1997; Macdonald, Rabinowitz and Listhaug 1998, 2001; Westholm 2001). It is common in this stream of literature to analyse evaluations of parties, rather than voting choice, as the former ones allow for a more detailed test of the concurrent hypotheses of the two models.

Hypotheses

Including measures of electoral utilities also brings new opportunities to test some aspects of the classical and revisionist models of party identification. Two types of relationships will be considered in this paper: the impact of voters' political attitudes on their electoral utilities, on the one hand, and the impact of these utilities on voting choice, on the other. The classical model and the revisionist model lead to different predictions regarding the impact of party identification on the strength of these relationships or on the structure of electoral utilities. To introduce more precisely these hypotheses, we can focus on the schematic representation of these relationships illustrated in figure 1.
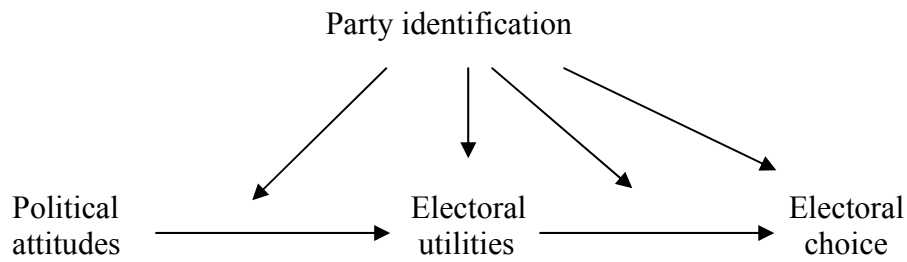
Figure 1
Schematic representation of a model of voting choice and possible effects of party identification

Political attitudes, on the left-hand side of figure 1, represent the various individual-level characteristics that may influence electoral utilities and voting choice. These may include evaluations of candidates and issue positions – the most important variables in the Michigan model of voting choice – as well as other attitudes, such as more general ideological orientations. These determinants of voting choice are not necessarily limited to political attitudes and could include other factors like social-structural characteristics. In the models analysed in this paper, however, we shall focus on voters' ideological orientation. These attitudes are expressed in terms of the distance between a voter and the corresponding party. These perceived distances between voters and parties have an impact on electoral utilities which, in turn, influence voting choice. In most cases, voters support the party with the highest electoral utility (van der Eijk, van der Brug et al. forthcoming). Figure 1 also presents possible effects of party identification, which are both direct and interactive. Party identification can first have a direct effect on electoral utilities. A voter may for example express a higher utility for the party she identifies with than we would expect on the basis of her political attitudes. A similar direct effect could be expected regarding voting choice. As far as interactive effects are concerned, party identification may strengthen or weaken the relationship between attitudes and utilities, as well as the relationship between utilities and voting choice.

Following the revisionist model, there should be a strong relationship between voters' political attitudes and electoral utilities. Voters should express a high utility for parties which are located close to them in the political space, which present candidates they consider as competent or attractive, or, more generally, parties with a political profile that corresponds to their own attitudes and political preferences. The concept of electoral utility, from this point of view, is close to the 'running tally' of the revisionist model. We would typically expect voters to identify with the party for which their utility is highest. This means however that the

relationship between attitudes and utility should not depend on party identification. Following the logic of the revisionist model, utilities are a product of voters' attitudes (when expressed as relationships or distances between voters and parties), but this relationship should not be affected by party identification. Political attitudes should affect electoral utilities in the same way among party identifiers than among voters who do not express any party attachment. Similarly, among party identifiers, the impact of attitudes on utilities should be the same for the party they feel attached to than for the other parties. In sum, following the revisionist model, party identification should not affect electoral utilities or the relationship between political attitudes and these utilities. In practice, however, one is likely to observe a direct effect of party identification on electoral utilities. This is because it is virtually impossible to specify a model including all the factors that may explain utilities (and party identification). The omission of part of the determinants of electoral utilities should result in a positive impact of identification on the electoral utility of the corresponding party and in a negative impact on the utilities of the other political parties.

From the perspective of the classical model of party identification, voters should also express the highest utility for the party they identify with. We would also expect voters to be relatively close to this party in the political space. Their ideological orientation should be quite similar to the perceived position of their 'own' party. But the general relationship between political attitudes and electoral utilities should be rather weak. The high utility that party identifiers expect from their preferred party is not a mere product of their political attitudes. It does not result from an evaluation of the party platform, but from a deep attachment to this partisan group. There should be an important gap between the utility of the party voters identify with and the utilities of other parties. And this gap should be relatively disconnected from the actual ideological distances between these parties. Following the classical model, party identification should thus have a strong direct effect on electoral utilities. We would also expect a weak impact of political attitudes on utilities. Finally, contrary to the revisionist model, we should here observe an interactive effect of party identification. The relationship between attitudes and utilities will be weak for party identifiers, as explained above, but it is likely to be stronger for voters who have no party identification. Among the latter group, utilities may well be influenced by the perceived distances between voters and parties.

As far as the relationship between electoral utilities and voting choice is concerned, both models of party identification lead to similar expectations. Utilities should have a strong impact on voting choice and we may expect to observe as well a direct impact of party

identification. It may be a decisive factor for voters who have high utilities for several parties, or it may reflect the impact of factors that are not captured by the measures of electoral utilities. Such relationships do not really allow one to discriminate between the two conceptions of party identification. The impact of electoral utilities on voting choice may however differ between party identifiers and voters who do not have any party attachment. Such differences would be captured by the interactive effect of party identification. They could be interpreted as supporting the classical model. From the point of view of the revisionist account, there are no reasons to expect differences between party identifiers and 'political independents' in the process of formation of voting choices. For both groups of voters, electoral utilities and voting choice should be a function of their 'distance' to parties (in terms of locations in the political space, or in terms of the perceived competence of parties and candidates). In the classical model, by contrast, there may be more fundamental differences between these two groups of voters in the way in which they evaluate parties and form their electoral decision.

Data and measures

To test these hypotheses, I rely on data from the 1999 European Election Study. European Election Studies are the only comparative project including detailed enough information on electoral utilities and on the perceived ideological positions of political parties – two elements that are central for the present analysis.

I measure electoral utilities with questions asking respondents to indicate the probability that they will ever vote for a given party. Such questions were first introduced in Dutch electoral studies. Van der Eijk and his co-authors have shown in several analyses that they represent valid indicators of the concept of electoral utility, and that these 'probabilities of future vote' are superior to alternative indicators like sympathy scales (van der Eijk, van der Brug et al. forthcoming; van der Eijk and Franklin 1995; see also Tillie 1995). The question used in the 1999 European Election Study was formulated as follows:

> *We have a number of parties in [name of 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 [name of party]: what mark out of ten best describes how probable it is that you will ever vote for [name of party]?

This was question was asked for a number of parties ranging from 5 (Belgium – Wallonia, Portugal) to 12 (Denmark). There are thus multiple utilities for each respondent and these respondent × party combinations form the observations for the following analyses.

As far as political attitudes are concerned, we need not only information on voters' political preferences, but also on how these preferences relate to the position of parties. As we seek to explain several utilities in the same model for each respondent, the characteristics of respondents must be transformed to express a voter-party relationship. In this paper, two indicators for voters' political attitudes will be considered: the position on a left-right scale and the attitude toward European unification. Voters were not only asked to indicate their own position on each of these two dimensions, but also to place a number of parties on these scales. For the purpose of these analyses, voters' attitudes can thus be expressed as the perceived distance (in absolute value) between a voter and a party, on each of these two dimensions. As both voters' and parties' positions were measured with 10-point scales, the variables measuring distances are also 10-point scales.

Party identification is measured either as a dummy variable, separating identifiers from non-identifiers, or as a four-point scale, where identifiers are divided into three groups, varying in the strength of their party attachment. Party identifiers are respondents who mentioned a party at the following question:

Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party?

The strength of these party attachments was then asked as follows:

Do you feel yourself to be very close to this party, fairly close, or merely a sympathiser?

As far as voting choice is concerned, finally, we analyse votes in two different elections: the 1999 European election and the last general election in the respondent's country.

As there are several electoral utilities for each respondent in the survey, it is necessary to modify the structure of the datasets for the analysis. The relevant observations are not

respondents, but respondent × party combinations. A 'stacked' data matrix is formed, where each respondent is represented as many times as the number of parties for which we have a measure of his or her electoral utility (for more detailed explanations on this procedure, see Eijk, Brug et al. forthcoming: 16-19). In the stacked data matrix, the positions of voters on the left-right scale and on the dimension of European integration are replaced by the distances between the voter and the corresponding political party.

For the analyses presented here, the dataset is weighted by two different factors. The first one is linked with the stacking procedure. This transformation multiplies the number of observations. In order to reflect the true number of persons interviewed, the observations corresponding to a given respondent are weighted by the inverse of the number of available respondent × party combinations for this person. The second weighting factor accounts for variations in the number of observations across the different countries. In most countries, about 500 or 1000 interviews were realised. But there are exceptions (300 interviews in Luxembourg, 3700 in Italy). I have thus also weighted the observations to give the same importance to each country.

Analyses

Before turning to the analysis of the central relationships illustrated above in figure 1, we can take a first look at the relationship between party identification and electoral utilities. Table 1 presents some descriptive statistics on the structure of electoral utilities and on variations in this structure linked with the strength of party identification.[1] We see that the average value of the highest electoral utility increases from 7.8 among non identifiers, to 9.6 among respondents who feel 'very close' to a political party. This difference between groups of voters is not surprising, as it fits with both theoretical perspectives. More interesting is the fact that the increase in the value of the highest electoral utility is strongest between respondents who have no party identification and the weak identifiers (or 'sympathisers'). The difference is about 1.2 units on the 10-point scale used to measure electoral utilities. By contrast, the difference between weak identifiers and strong identifiers is only half as large.

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[1] For this preliminary analysis, our observations are respondents, and not respondent × party combinations. The observations are only weighted by the size of the country sample.

Table 1. Structure of electoral utilities, by strength of party attachment

Strength of party attachment	Average value of highest electoral utility	Average difference between highest and second highest electoral utility	Average standard deviation of electoral utilities	N (min)
Not close	7.81	2.00	2.61	5601
Sympathiser	8.98	3.26	3.07	3215
Fairly close	9.25	3.19	3.14	1881
Very close	9.56	4.32	3.29	909

Note: data are weighted by country size. The weighted number of observations is rounded.

The second series of results in table 1 deals with the average difference between the highest and the second highest electoral utility. Here, too, the effect of party identification is clear. The difference between the preferred party and the second best one is much larger among party identifiers (about 4.3 units) than among non identifiers (2 units). Such a difference can again be explained in the framework of both models of party identification. In the revisionist model, it could be argued that voters who do not have a distinctive preference for one party are less likely to develop a party identification. In the traditional model, on the other hand, one could expect party identification to bias the way in which voters evaluate the attractiveness of other parties. Finally, we can look at the standard deviation of electoral utilities. This standard deviation was computed for each voter, and we report here its average value for the different levels of party identification. This third indicator shows a similar picture: the degree of polarisation of electoral utilities increases with the strength of party attachment.

The most important hypotheses we have formulated focus on the impact of political attitudes on electoral utilities. Political attitudes are measured as distances between voters and parties on two dimensions: a general left-right scale, and a dimension measuring preferences towards European unification. Party identification can influence electoral utilities in two different ways: directly, by increasing the average level of utilities, or indirectly, by weakening or strengthening the relationship between attitudes and utilities. The latter type of effect can be captured by including interaction terms in our model. Furthermore, it is not sufficient to simply distinguish between party identifiers and non identifiers (or to have a single variable measuring the strength of party attachments). Party identification is likely to have a different impact on the utility of the party a voter feels close to than on the utilities of other parties. Accordingly, party identification (strength) must be specified with two different variables. The model to be estimated can thus be written as follows:

$$U_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot LR_{ij} + \beta_2 \cdot EU_{ij} + \beta_3 \cdot ID\_own_{ij} + \beta_4 \cdot ID\_other_{ij} + \beta_5 \cdot LR_{ij} \cdot ID\_own_{ij}$$

$$+ \beta_6 \cdot LR_{ij} \cdot ID\_other_{ij} + \beta_7 \cdot EU_{ij} \cdot ID\_own_{ij} + \beta_8 \cdot EU_{ij} \cdot ID\_other_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

where, U_{ij} is the utility of party j for voter i, LR_{ij} is the distance on the left-right scale between voter i and party j, EU_{ij} is the corresponding distance on the scale of European unification, ID_own_{ij} is a dummy variable taking the value 1 if voter i identifies with party j, and ID_other_{ij} is a dummy variable taking the value 1 if voter i identifies with a party other than the party j. This specification corresponds to model number 2 in table 2. I also present results of a baseline model (model 1), which includes only the distances between voters and parties. Finally, model 3 is similar to model 2, but measures party identification as a four-point scale of identification strength, instead of a dummy variable. For these analyses, as we have interaction terms, the distance variables were centred. Distances on the left-right scale can take values between -2.9 and 6.1. Distances on the question of European unification vary between -2.7 and 6.3.

Table 2. The impact of perceived ideological distances and of party identification on electoral utilities, 1999 European Election Study. Coefficients and robust standard errors of OLS regressions.

	Model 1		Model 2 (PID as a dummy)		Model 3 (PID strength)	
	Coef.	Std. Err	Coef.	Std. Err	Coef.	Std. Err
Left-right distance	-0.53	0.01	-0.48	0.01	-0.50	0.01
EU distance	-0.15	0.01	-0.13	0.01	-0.14	0.01
Identifier, 'own' party			4.92	0.07	7.54	0.15
Identifier, other party			-0.67	0.03	-1.06	0.05
LR × Id. 'own' party			0.39	0.03	0.61	0.06
LR × Id. other party			0.13	0.01	0.23	0.02
EU × Id. 'own' party			0.10	0.02	0.16	0.04
EU × Id. other party			0.01[‡]	0.01	0.05[†]	0.02
Constant	3.99	0.01	3.91	0.02	3.92	0.02
R^2	0.20		0.37		0.35	
N (weighted)	7422		7090		7040	

† $p<0.01$; ‡ $p>0.05$. All other coefficients are significant at the 0.1 per cent level ($p<0.001$)
Note: data are weighted by country size and by the number of observations pro respondent.
The weighted number of observations is rounded.

The results of model 1 show that electoral utilities are strongly influenced by the perceived ideological distances. For each additional unit separating a voter and a party on the 10-point left-right scale, the corresponding electoral utility decreases by about half a point (also measured on 10-point scale). Distances on the dimension of European unification also influence electoral utilities, but the effect is much weaker. Most important, however, is to see

whether these relationships are conditioned by party identification. The second model shows that party identification has a direct effect on electoral utilities and that it influences the relationship between ideological distances and utilities. The direct effect of party identification is strong: Among party identifiers, the utility for the party they are attached to is about 5.6 points higher than for the other parties. But at the same time, this utility varies only slightly with changes in the ideological distance between voter and party. Party identification also weakens the relationship between left-right distance and utilities for the parties with which voters do not identify. While a one-unit increase in this ideological distance reduces electoral utility by about 0.5 point among voters who have no party attachment, the corresponding decrease in utility is about 0.35 in the present case. The results of model 3, finally, offer a similar picture. The coefficients of party identification and of the interactions including party identification are larger than for model 2, as a one-unit change in this variable corresponds here to the difference between political independents and the voters who feel *very* close to their preferred party. But altogether, the results of both models are similar.

We can now take a look at the impact of party identification on the relationship between electoral utilities and voting choice. The model that we estimate has a similar structure to the previous one. The impact of party identification can again be direct (on voting choice) or interactive. The model is specified in the following way:

$$V_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot U_{ij} + \beta_2 \cdot ID\_own_{ij} + \beta_3 \cdot ID\_other_{ij} + \beta_4 \cdot U_{ij} \cdot ID\_own_{ij} + \beta_5 \cdot U_{ij} \cdot ID\_other_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

where V_{ij} is a dummy variable taking the value 1 if voter *i* supported party *j*. The other variables are defined in the same way as in the previous model. As the dependent variable is now dichotomous, the model is estimated with a logistic regression. The corresponding coefficients are presented in table 3 for voting choice in the 1999 European election and in table 4 for voting choice in the previous general election. As in the previous case, a baseline model was first estimated, that does not include party identification. The full model was estimated in two versions, one with party identification coded as a dummy (model 2), the other with party identification as a four-point scale (model 3). The variable measuring electoral utilities was centred for these analyses, to avoid problems of multicollinearity. For both models, utilities can vary between -2.8 and 6.2.

Table 3. The impact of electoral utilities and of party identification on voting choice in the 1999 European election. Coefficients and robust standard errors of logistic regressions.

	Model 1		Model 2 (PID as a dummy)		Model 3 (PID strength)	
	Coef.	Std. Err	Coef.	Std. Err	Coef.	Std. Err
Electoral utility	0.73	0.01	0.60	0.01	0.61	0.01
Identifier, 'own' party			2.96	0.16	5.16	0.46
Identifier, other party			-1.35	0.10	-2.65	0.22
Utility × Id. 'own' party			-0.24	0.03	-0.42	0.09
Utility × Id. other party			-0.05[‡]	0.03	-0.06[‡]	0.05
Constant	-3.51	0.05	-3.01	0.06	-2.99	0.05
McFadden's R^2	0.47		0.57		0.56	
N (weighted)	7078		6851		6785	

‡ p>0.05. All other coefficients are significant at the 0.1 per cent level (p<0.001)
Note: data are weighted by country size and by the number of observations pro respondent. The weighted number of observations is rounded.

Table 4. The impact of electoral utilities and of party identification on voting choice at the previous general election. Coefficients and robust standard errors of logistic regressions.

	Model 1		Model 2 (PID as a dummy)		Model 3 (PID strength)	
	Coef.	Std. Err	Coef.	Std. Err	Coef.	Std. Err
Electoral utility	0.75	0.01	0.62	0.02	0.62	0.01
Identifier, own party			2.98	0.17	4.88	0.46
Identifier, 'other' party			-1.30	0.11	-2.59	0.23
Utility × Id. own party			-0.25	0.03	-0.40	0.09
Utility × Id. 'other' party			-0.04[‡]	0.03	-0.06[‡]	0.06
Constant	-3.64	0.05	-3.13	0.06	-3.09	0.06
McFadden's R^2	0.48		0.58		0.57	
N (weighted)	6486		6295		6243	

‡ p>0.05. All other coefficients are significant at the 0.1 per cent level (p<0.001)
Note: data are weighted by country size and by the number of observations pro respondent. The weighted number of observations is rounded.

The estimated coefficients and standard errors are virtually identical with both dependent variables. The impact of electoral utilities and of party identification on voting choices is the same in the case of the 1999 European election and of the previous general election. We shall consider both series of results simultaneously. Starting with the baseline model, we observe a strong impact of electoral utility on voting choice. Expressed in the more familiar probability metric, the results show for example that an increase in electoral utility from a value of 5 to a value of 9 leads to an increase in the probability of supporting this party at the European election from 0.53 to 0.96. The results of models 2 and 3 show however that the strength of this relationship is influenced by party identification. Similarly to its impact on the relationship between ideological distances and electoral utilities, party attachment weakens

the influence of electoral utilities on voting choice. For the same increase in electoral utility, the predicted probability that party identifiers support their 'own' party would vary only from 0.85 to 0.96. At the same time, however, party identification has a strong direct impact on voting choice. If a voter has an electoral utility of 8 for two parties and identify with one of these, the probability of supporting the party he or she identifies with in the European election would be 0.94, but only 0.51 for the second party.

Discussion

The results of the different models that were estimated are mixed. They offer partial support for both conceptions of party identification. As far as the relationships between ideological distances and electoral utilities are concerned, we could observe that the 'rational' basis of electoral utilities is more important for voters who are not attached to any party than for party identifiers. This fits with the idea that party identification is not a simple summary evaluation of political attitudes. If this were the case, the relationship between attitudes and utilities should not fundamentally differ between these groups of voters. But at the same time, ideological distances still matter among party identifiers – especially towards the competitors of the party they are attached to. The second series of models, which focused on the relationship between electoral utilities and voting choice, have also shown strong differences between voters who feel close to a party and voters who do not express any party attachment. Voting choice is less strongly related to electoral utilities among party identifiers. As explained, it is more difficult to distinguish between the two conceptions of party identification with respect to this second type of relationships. However, differences in the process of formation of voting choices, as illustrated by these results, may be interpreted as supporting the classical model of party identification rather than the revisionist perspective. The analyses presented in this paper have a preliminary character. Their main aim was to show how the concept of electoral utility can be used to test alternative models of party identification. Such analyses can be extended in several interesting directions. While data from the European Election studies do not offer a wide range of political attitudes, a few other determinants of voting choice or electoral utilities could be considered, like voters' satisfaction with the government performance or their social-structural characteristics. Also, it is possible to analyse in more detail inter-individual differences, linked for example with the degree of cognitive mobilisation, that also play a role in mediating the impact of party identification (Lachat 2004). Finally, as mentioned in the introduction, relying on the concept

of electoral utility opens up new possibilities for comparative analyses and for understanding
how contextual factors may influence the impact of party identification.

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