The Electoral Trade-off: How Values and Ideology Affect Party Preference Formation in Europe*


Agnieszka Walczak
(corresponding author)
Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR)
Universiteit van Amsterdam
Oudezijds Achterburgwal 235
1012 DL Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Email: a.walczak@uva.nl
Tel: 0031 20 525 2447

Wouter van der Brug
Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR)
Universiteit van Amsterdam
Oudezijds Achterburgwal 237
1012 DL Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Email: w.vanderbrug@uva.nl

*This study was conducted as part of the Marie Curie Initial Training Network in Electoral Democracy (ELECDEM).
Abstract
Scholarly literature on post-communist countries of East Central Europe points to differences in how voting behaviour is structured in those countries in comparison to more established democracies of Western Europe. This paper shows that, in addition, considerable variance exists in the impact of values on party preferences across East and West. However, those differences can be explained by a general pattern characterising voter behaviour. We theorize and empirically prove that the variance in the effects of values across countries is caused by the varying degree to which voters’ attitudes are structured by left/right. In countries where it is less clear for voters what the left/right stands for and where they can locate their attitudes in terms of left/right, the effect of values is stronger. In turn, in countries where voters know better how their attitudes relate to the major dimension of competition, the effect of values is weaker. Our findings explain why in post-communist democracies the effect of left/right on party preferences is weaker, while the effects of values are stronger than in Western European countries. This proposition is empirically substantiated in a two-step analysis using the European Election Study 2009.

Key Words: Values, Left/Right, East Central Europe, Elections, Voters, EU Member States
1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars of comparative electoral behaviour have been increasingly interested in cross-country differences in the extent of structural voting, ideological voting and issue voting. Several of these studies focus on the differences in the determinants of party support between established democracies in Western Europe and formerly communist countries in East Central Europe. Those studies, which treat established and consolidating democracies as rather homogenous blocks of countries, show that in the latter the effect of social class and left/right distance is weaker (De Graaf et al., 1994; Van der Brug et al., 2008), while the effects of religion and EU issue voting is stronger than in established democracies (De Vries and Tillman, 2010). However, those studies do not account for variances within country groups. This approach downplays different paths of development that those countries have undergone (Kitschelt, 1999) and disguises differences among them. This study takes a broader view on the variation between European countries by examining differences in the effects of values on party support and outlining factors which explain those cross-country differences.

The focus of this paper lies on the demand-side factors that determine the extent to which values affect party preferences. We believe that the crucial variable responsible for the differences in the effects of values on party support across countries is the extent to which voters’ value stances are structured by left/right. From the extant literature we can devise two opposing hypotheses on the impact of values on party preferences. The first line of reasoning is that if party political conflicts are not structured by left/right, it is difficult for voters to know where parties stand on these conflict dimensions (Van der Brug et al., 2008). When voters do not know where parties stand on specific value dimensions, they may have difficulty relating their own value stances to their position on left/right. Subsequently, it is unlikely that voters will take these values into consideration when forming their party preferences as they will not know how those values relate to the major dimension of political competition. The effect of values on party support is then expected to increase when issues and voters’ attitudes towards those issues are more strongly associated with left/right. However, research on policy voting has also shown that there is a trade-off between the effect of left/right and the effect of issues on party support (Bellucci, 1994; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996). When voting is strongly structured by left/right distance, there is less room for issues to have an effect, and vice versa. The same reasoning could hold for values which are associated with those issues. This leads us to the prediction that there is more room for party support to be structured by values when voters’ value stances are to a lesser extent structured by left/right.
This paper tests those opposing predictions. Based on our aggregate analysis we empirically prove that in countries where voters’ stances on values are to a considerable extent structured by left/right, voters use the left/right considerations to convey their preferences. Thus, the effect of values on party preferences is weaker in those countries. In turn, in countries where voters’ positioning on values is to a weaker extent structured by left/right, voters take direct recourse to values. Here, the effect of values on party preferences is stronger. Not only do these findings contribute to our general understanding of the way voters arrive at their party choice, but also the results of our paper help us understand the differences between party support in consolidating democracies in East Central Europe and established democracies of Western Europe. In Western democracies, voters know better what the left/right means in practical policy terms and how their attitudes relate to the major dimension of competition as more stable party systems have provided them with enough clarity on where they stand on the left/right dimension. Thus, voters are able to convey their attitudes at the ballot box through direct recourse to left/right. In less stable democracies of East Central Europe, in turn, it is less clear for voters what the left/right stands for and where they can locate their attitudes in the more abstract terms which dominate political competition. As a result, the left/right cognitive shortcut proves to be less useful for voters in their decision which party to choose and values play a more important role.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section we discuss the relevant literature and derive expectations on the cross-country differences in the impact of values on party preferences. We test those expectations in a two-step analysis based on a research design proposed by Van der Eijk and Franklin (1996). For this purpose, we employ the European Election Study 2009. Subsequently, we present our findings and conclude by discussing their implications for comparative research on party preferences in the European Union.

2. Theoretical Expectations

2.1. Values, left/right and party preferences

Many previous studies have shown that across various European systems the behaviour of parties and voters alike has been structured largely by the left-right dimension, which until the 1990s remained the dominant ideological dimension (Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990; Klingemann et al., 1994; Van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; Hix, 1999). Not all substantive differences between parties and among voters, however, are captured by their positions on the left/right dimension. In elections not all issues can play a role because it is unrealistic to assume that there will be a party with which one fully agrees on all possible substantive
issues. In the words of Sartori (1976), “when the citizen speaks, he may have many things to say, but when he is coerced into casting a (...) vote, he may well have to (...) vote for the party (...) perceived as closest on the left-right spectrum (...)

Electoral research from the 1980s and 1990s confirms that voters reached their electoral decision by considering which party is the closest to them on the left/right dimension (Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Oppenhuis, 1995; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Schmitt, 2001; Van der Brug et al., 2008).

The left/right dimension constitutes an ‘ideological super-issue’ (Pierce, 1999), which summarises diverse policy issues in the domestic arena (Marks and Steenbergen, 2002). However, the meaning of the left/right dimension is not fixed, but may vary across countries and over time (Gabel and Huber, 2000). Similarly, the degree to which issues are structured by the left/right dimension may vary. This applies both to issues structured by left/right at the level of political parties as well as at the level of voters. Given the heterogeneity of issues dominating political discussions in countries of the European Union, we may encounter differences across countries with respect to which issues have been assimilated by the left/right dimension. Furthermore, the degree to which those issues have been assimilated by left/right may vary across countries. Similarly, values associates with those issues may be to a varying extent structured by left/right. The above implies that the left/right as a cognitive shortcut may take a different meaning in various countries as it structures various issues, and related values, to a varying extent across countries.

Recent research points to a gradual decline of left/right in its capacity to structure behaviour of parties and voters in Western Europe. An important development is that the largest parties have converged on the left/right dimension (Pennings and Keman, 2003). As the Third Wave social democrats have accepted the basic principles of free market capitalism, the larger political parties have become less distinct in left/right terms. If the differences between parties on the left/right dimension have become smaller, the left/right ideology proves to be a less useful cue for voters on which to base their electoral choices. As it has been referred to above, the meaning of left/right goes beyond the socio-economic policies. New issues, such as environmentalism and immigration have, to a large extent become integrated in the left/right dimension, at least at the party level. However, some of those issues are at the level of voters almost uncorrelated with the left/right. Recent research shows that voters’ attitudes towards immigration are very weakly structured by the major dimension of competition (Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009). Thus, if voters want to influence immigration policies by their vote, they cannot take recourse to their left/right position in their party choice. The combination of these two developments – parties converging on the
left/right dimension and new issues not being structured by left/right – leads to the prediction that the left/right ideology will lose its capacity to structure voting behaviour. Subsequently, other considerations, such as voters’ value orientations towards political issues may play a more substantive role in structuring party preferences. Owing to the facts that new conflict dimensions may arise, which are not clearly structured by left/right and that choices of voters at the ballot box may be increasingly influenced by other considerations than left/right, it is pertinent to look at the effects of values on party preferences. As we may expect considerable variance with regard to which values are important for electorates in each of the European countries as well as how values relate to the main dimension of competition in those countries, we systematically compare the effects of values on party preferences across all countries of the European Union.

Values are cognitive structures of knowledge and beliefs guiding peoples’ attitudes towards political issues (Campbell et al., 1960; Johnston Conover and Feldman, 1983; Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990). They are regarded as the ultimate underpinnings of political behaviour as they condition the formation of attitudes and preferences on a range of issues (Feldman, 2003). Values are considered stable long-term determinants of party preferences (Feldman, 2003), in contradistinction to voters’ opinions and preferences on concrete issues which may be ambivalent and inconsistent (Converse, 1964; Meffert et al., 2004, Steenbergen and Brewer, 2004). Values are more encompassing than specific issues and are also more deep-rooted. They are expected to constrain attitudes towards more specific issues. In our analysis, we use the term ‘value schema’ rather than ‘value dimension’, both employed in political behaviour literature. The reason is that various items that measure respondents’ attitudes on issues in a specific policy domain are too weakly related to speak of ‘dimensions’. The term ‘schema’ has been used in social psychology to describe cognitive structures which organise attitudes and political beliefs in a bipolar spatial metaphor (Johnston Conover and Feldman, 1984; Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990). In this paper, we look at four value schemas – socio-economic, libertarian-authoritarian, EU integration and immigration, which have dominated the literature on party choice and attitude formation.

The first value schema we employ here refers to socio-economic issues and encompasses the traditional division of attitudes towards free market and role of the state in the economy. On the one hand, we find approval of state involvement in the economy and a more just distribution of income and wealth in society, while on the other we find support for free market economy and economic freedom of individuals without state control (Downs, 1957; Lipset et al., 1954). The second value schema, labelled libertarian-authoritarian,
encompasses attitudes on the position of individuals in the society, namely greater societal and personal freedoms, including equality of women and rights for sexual minorities, greater citizen participation in democratic structures as well as life-style issues. This is contrasted here with attitudes including restriction of personal freedoms of minorities, respect for authority and discipline, emphasis on economic and physical security such as a tough stance on crime and support for a stronger army (Inglehart, 1977; Flanagan, 1987; Flanagan and Lee, 2003; Dalton, 1984; Flanagan, 1987; Hooghe et al., 2002; Knutsen, 2006). A further value schema used in this study refers to attitudes towards European integration and immigration (Kriesi et al., 2006, 2008; Hix, 1999). Those attitudes seem to have restructured the traditional socio-cultural dimension in Western Europe and overshadowed the questions of lifestyle and public order in their importance for party preferences (Kriesi et al., 2008; Bornschier, 2010). Although Kriesi et al. (2008) assert that the socio-cultural schema has been restructured by attitudes towards immigration and EU integration, we consider attitudes towards both issues separately from the traditional socio-cultural value schema as they are clearly distinctive to the materialist vs. post-materialist considerations. Furthermore, we look at the impact of attitudes towards EU integration and immigration on party preferences separately as there are reasons to expect that in consolidating democracies voter attitudes towards EU integration are independent from considerations regarding immigration.

2.2. What explains country differences?
Which factors explain cross-country differences in the effects of values on party preferences? We argue that the crucial variable is the extent to which voters’ attitudes are structured by left/right. Where party systems have been less stable, voters will have more difficulty linking their attitudes and value stances to their positions on left/right. In other words, it will be less clear for them where their own attitudes can be located in terms of higher order concepts which dominate political competition and what the left/right effectively stands for in terms of practical policy. Thus, voters’ stances on value schemas will be weakly correlated with their positions in left/right terms. In turn, when party systems are more established, where positions of political parties on issues and left/right have been more stable, thus allowing voters to undergo a learning process with respect to party positioning, voters will be more capable of relating their stances on values to their position on left/right. They will know better what the left/right dimension signifies in terms of practical policy and where their attitudes can be placed on the more abstract continuum used in political competition. Thus, in more stable democratic systems voters’ value stances will be to a higher extent correlated with their
position on left/right. It is the extent to which voters’ positions on values are structured by left/right which will be responsible for the differences in the effects of value schemas on party preferences.

As we know that voters evaluate political alternatives in higher order concepts such as left/right (Downs, 1957; Conover and Feldman, 1984; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; van der Brug, 1997), we believe that this shortcut fulfils its function when voters know what left/right stands for and how to place their own attitudes in terms of left/right. We could expect, on the one hand, that in countries where voters are to a lesser extent capable of linking their attitudes to left/right, the less clear it will be for voters what the left/right stands for and where their own attitudes can be located in terms of more abstract meaning which dominates political competition. We could expect here that in those countries we will observe a weaker effect of values on party preferences. In turn, in countries where voters are more capable of linking the attitudes they hold to their position on left/right, the more clarity they will have about what the left/right shortcut stands for and where exactly their attitudes fit in terms of an abstract dimension of competition. Those considerations lead us to the first of our two opposing expectations.

**Hypothesis 1:** There will be a positive relationship between the degree to which voters’ stances on values are structured by left/right and the impact of values on party preferences.

On the other hand, we could expect that in countries where voters are more capable of linking their values to their position on left/right, voters will more often use the cognitive shortcut as they know better what this shortcut means in practical policy terms. Their attitudes and stances on values will be transmitted through the usage of left/right. In this case, a direct recourse to values will be unnecessary as voters can convey their attitudes through voting according to their left/right position. However, in countries where voters are less capable of linking their stances on values to left/right, the cognitive shortcut will prove less useful for voters as they will not be able to convey their attitudes effectively through the simple recourse to their left/right stance. Here, the direct considerations such as values will play a more important role for party support. This reasoning leads us to the following expectation.

**Hypothesis 2:** There will be a negative relationship between the degree to which voters’ stances on values are structured by left/right and the impact of values on party preferences.
We also take into account other factors which may explain why the effects of values on party preferences are higher in some countries than in others. We treat them here as control variables to test our main hypotheses on the relationship between the degree to which attitudes are structured by left/right on the one hand and party preferences on the other. One of those factors is the agreement among voters with regard to where political parties in their country stand on left/right. This structural agreement denotes the degree to which voters share the same perceptions of where parties are located on the left/right scale in the political system (Van der Eijk, 2001). We expect that the higher is the agreement among voters on where parties stand on left/right, the more clarity voters have regarding where parties stand on left/right. Van der Eijk and Franklin (1996) have shown that the effect of left/right on party preferences is positively related to the degree to which voters agree upon where political parties stand on the left/right political spectrum. In line with previous argumentation, our expectations here can be two-fold. On the one hand, we expect that the clearer it is for voters where political parties stand on left/right, the easier it will be for them to know where parties stand on issues and which values they associate with them. Therefore, we hypothesise as follows.

**Hypothesis 3**: There will be a positive relationship between the degree of structural agreement among voters and the impact of values on party preferences.

On the other hand, we could expect that if it is clear for voters in a party system where parties stand on left/right, voters will use the left/right considerations more extensively. As voters are able to convey their attitudes through recourse to left/right, the effect of values will be weaker. This reasoning leads us to the following hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 4**: There will be a negative relationship between the degree of structural agreement among voters and the impact of values on party preferences.

Furthermore, we account for two other factors that may affect the impact of values on party preferences. The first one is voter polarisation. We know from the existing literature that the more political parties are polarized on a dimension of competition, such as left/right, the stronger is the effect of voters’ positions on this dimension, in this case their left/right positions, on party preferences (Van der Eijk et al., 2005). In a similar vein, we expect that the more voters are polarised in terms of their stances on value schemas, the stronger will be the
effect of those values on party preferences. Last, but not least, the differences in the effects of value schemas across countries may be attributed to the extent to which voters of those countries consider particular issues as important or problematic for their country. In order to capture the differences in the significance of problems among European electorates, we account for voter perceptions regarding the most important problem facing the country. We expect that the more an issue is considered as the most important problem facing the country of respondents, the higher will be the effect of values associated with this issue on party preferences.

2.3. The East-West Divide?
Over the past two decades much research has focused on the differences in patterns of party preferences between consolidating democracies in East Central Europe and more established democracies in Western Europe. Various studies have pointed to historical legacies of authoritarian rule under the communist regimes as an explanation for differences of how party support is structured across East and West. In consolidating democracies the party systems are less stable than in established democracies. In the former, political parties have repeatedly adapted their policies and ideological profiles in the face of changing opportunities for political mobilisation. The political systems have been more fluid, as parties have been appearing, changing their names, coalescing with other parties or vanishing from the political scene (Cirtautas, 1994; Wesolowski, 1996). Consequently, it has been more difficult for voters to establish how political parties differ in terms of policies they advocate as party stances have been blurred on some, mostly economic, issues (Markowski, 1997). This lack of clarity has been partly caused by strategic considerations of left-wing parties that aimed to shake off their communist image by adopting extensive market policies, thus taking the possibility from voters to distinguish political parties on the economic left/right dimension (Tavits and Letki, 2009). In addition, the frequent changes in the supply of parties or movement of elites between political parties in the early stages of the party system development have led to confusion among voters with regard to which policies political parties advocate, contributing to increased voter volatility (Tavits, 2008). The shifts in the policies formulated by political parties in new democracies have been partly induced by the requirements of accession to the European Union (Vachudova and Hooghe, 2009). Those changes in identity and location of political parties have undermined the learning process that voters in new democracies have been undergoing. Unlike in Western democracies, where voters live in stable political systems with the same parties competing mostly from the same
location in the left/right spectrum (Oppenhuis, 1995; van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; van der Brug, 1997), voters in post-communist democracies have experienced a fluid party system where the learning process with regard to where parties stand on left/right and what is their stance on issues has been much more difficult. Even if party systems have been slowly stabilising (Kitschelt et al., 1999), voters have been experiencing more stable positions of parties only in the last couple of years, which does not allow for a thorough learning process.

Twenty years after the fall of communism, voters from both established and consolidating democracies are guided by similar considerations while choosing a political party at the ballot box. Still, differences remain with regard to which determinants of party support play a more important role in structuring party preferences in the new and established democracies of the European Union. Research has shown so far that the consolidating democracies see somewhat stronger effects of religion, satisfaction with democracy and age, and somewhat weaker effects of social class, government approval and strategic considerations than more established democracies do (Van der Brug et al., 2008). Considerations regarding EU integration play among East Central European voters a bigger role than in the West (De Vries and Tillman, 2010). The major difference, however, in the determinants of party preferences is the significantly lower effect of left/right on party preferences in the consolidating democracies. It seems that in the new democracies voters use the left/right considerations in their decisions to support a political party to a lesser extent than their counterparts in the West. In turn, no systematic research has been conducted so far with regard to the effects of values across established and consolidating democracies. Owing to the different paths of development of Western European and East Central European countries, we expect to find differences in the effects of values on party support between both groups. We argue that whatever differences will be found between East and West they will be explained by the contextual variables outlined in the previous section. Now, we turn to a brief methodological discussion, after which we proceed with presentation of our results.

3. Operationalisation, Data and Methods

This paper explores and explains differences in the effects of values and left/right across countries of the European Union. For this purpose, we employ a two-step analysis based on a research design proposed by Van der Eijk and Franklin (1996). We use the European Election Study 2009 (EES 2009) which is a representative study of the electorates of all EU countries. Our analysis involves 28 political systems as Belgium is treated as two separate political
systems (Flanders and Wallonia).\(^1\) The total sample size amounts to 27,369 respondents, where the majority of country databases contain exactly 1,000 respondents.

The method proposed by Van der Eijk and Franklin (1996) allows us to systematically compare voter preferences for political parties across countries of the European Union. Methodologies such as multinominal or conditional logit, which are frequently employed to analyse party choice, do not lend themselves to answer the research questions of this study. In such approaches, the outcome variable (party choice) is a nominal variable, which differs from country to country as it consists of a country-specific set of choices. As long as we do not want to redefine the outcome variable to a dichotomy, we would have to carry out separate country studies without straightforward means of comparing the results across countries. In order to overcome this restraint, we create a stacked data matrix with propensities to vote for political parties as the outcome variable (Tillie 1995, van der Eijk and Franklin 1996, van der Eijk 2002, van der Eijk et al. 2006). The outcome variable is the observed strength of support that a respondent assigns to all political parties in her party system. In each country, voters are asked how likely it is (on an 11-point scale) that they will ever vote for a list of political parties in their country. Those propensities to vote for political parties can be regarded as preferences, because voters generally decide to vote for a party they most prefer. An advantage of this method is that vote propensities are comparable across countries as the electoral support of voters to political parties is measured on an identical scale. Even though the question on vote propensities is framed with reference to each particular party, the resulting party preference variable no longer refers to a specific party, but to parties in general. This enables us to consider the effects of explanatory variables on propensities to vote for all political parties across Europe.

In the first step analysis, we create a stacked data matrix for each of the political systems under study. The stacked data matrix is derived from a survey data matrix, in which the unit of analysis is transformed from the respondent to the respondent*party combination. The respondent appears here as many times as there are parties for which vote propensities were measured. The level of analysis is effectively changed from the individual level to the individual*party level. In the first step, we measure the effects of value schemas, controlled by a number of variables, on party preferences for each political system under study. The variables of interest are socio-economic, libertarian-authoritarian value schemas as well as EU integration and immigration schemas. We control for left/right distance, age, gender, social

---

\(^1\) Belgium is effectively a two-system country as it is not possible for voters in the Flemish region to cast a ballot for Wallonian parties and vice versa. For this reason, Flanders and Wallonia are treated separately.
class, education, religion, approval of the government, satisfaction with democracy, retrospective and prospective economic evaluation and party size. As the outcome variable reflects preferences of voters for all political parties, we need to transform the explanatory variables so that they reflect the relation between a respondent and a political party. This can be done by setting the explanatory variable in relation to the outcome variable through employing a distance measure or the y-hat procedure, both of which will be explained below.

In order to operationalize the value schemas, we employ a number of questions from the EES 2009. For the socio-economic schema, we use questions on whether private enterprise is the best way to solve a country’s economic problems, whether major public services and industries should be in state ownership, whether politics should abstain from intervening in the economy as well as whether income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people. For the libertarian-authoritarian schema, questions are used on whether same-sex marriages should be prohibited by law, whether women should be free to decide on matters of abortion, whether women should be prepared to cut down on their paid work for the sake of their family, whether people who break the law should be given much harsher sentences than they are these days as well as whether schools must teach children to obey authority. Furthermore, we use questions on immigration – whether immigrants should be required to adapt to customs of the receiving country and whether immigration in the country of respondents should be decreased significantly. We also employ questions on EU integration, in particular whether EU membership of the country is regarded as a good or bad thing and which stance respondents have on EU unification and EU enlargement. Responses to each set of questions are on the same valence i.e. they have been re-coded on the same scale so that low scores indicate left-wing attitudes and high scores indicate right-wing attitudes.

The value schemas represent very broad concepts which do not need a priori to reflect a single dimension, although recent literature on party choice postulates the presence of clear socio-economic, libertarian-authoritarian (Kitschelt, 1995) and integration-demarcation (Kriesi et al., 2006, 2008) dimensions in Western Europe. In order to analyse the dimensionality of the schemas and explore whether each set of items can be combined in a single scale both in each country under study, confirmatory factor analysis with varimax

---

2 For the socio-economic schema, low scores reflect attitudes approving of state control of the economy, while high scores point to attitudes encompassing laissez-faire market economy and retrenchment of the state. For the libertarian-authoritarian schema, low scores indicate acceptance of same-sex marriages, women’s right to decide on abortion and her occupation as well as less emphasis on law and order in the society, while high scores indicate the opposite. For EU integration and immigration, low scores indicate favourable attitudes to further EU integration and immigration, while high scores point to opposition to closer EU integration and little tolerance towards immigrants. Here, we employ the logic of Kriesi et al. (2006, 2008), who attribute left-wing attitudes to greater support towards EU integration and immigration and right-wing attitudes to opposition to both.
rotation and non-parametric Mokken scaling have been used. All employed techniques show that those dimensions can be found in some countries of the EU, but not in others. This does not allow us for the creation of separate scales which would be comparable for all countries. Therefore, we use the items relating to value schemas as separate items in a y-hat procedure. Here, we predict the outcome variable for each party separately on the basis of a simple regression analysis using the vote propensities for this party as the outcome variable and the items chosen to represent each value schema as predictors. These regressions per party yield one predicted score (y-hat) for each respondent for each value schema. After these y-hats are computed for each party separately, they are saved and used as an explanatory variable. They represent linear transformations of the original independent variables, which are centred on their means in order to remove country-specific differences from the analysis. Such transformed y-hats are added to the stacked data matrix as they are comparable across parties and countries.

Most of the control variables have been constructed using the y-hat procedure as well. The relevant literature on party choice teaches us that we should control for age, social class, education (Swyngedouw et al., 1998), gender (Gidengil et al. 2005), religion, approval of government and satisfaction with democracy (Van der Eijk et al. 1999), retrospective and prospective evaluation of the economic situation in the country of respondents (Lewis-Beck, 1988) and party size (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996). Furthermore, we control for left/right distance in the first stage of analysis. Those variables, except for the left/right distance, are created using the inductive procedure where either a numerical independent variable or a set of dummy variables are regressed on propensities to vote for political parties in the political system. Age is created by regressing age of voters on propensity to vote for political parties. Gender uses a dummy for male/female in the same procedure. Social class is created with a subjective measure of self-assessed belonging to a particular class location. Education is represented by respondents’ self-placement according to various levels of education specific for each country. Religion is a composite variable of religious denomination, church attendance and level of religiosity. Approval of government uses a dummy representing the level of satisfaction with the incumbent government, while satisfaction with democracy is created with questions on satisfaction with democracy in the country of the respondent in particular and in the EU in general. The retrospective and prospective economic evaluation

---

3 Those techniques have been employed on each country separately to explore whether comparable value scales emerge.

4 Due to space limitations the results of the confirmatory factor analysis and Mokken scaling are not included in this paper. They are available upon request from the authors.
variables are constructed with questions on how voters assess the country’s economy in the last year and how the country’s economy will develop in the coming year respectively. For the left/right distance, we use the questions asking respondents to indicate how they would place themselves on an 11-point left/right scale as well as to indicate where they perceive the political parties on the same scale. This variable is transformed in the distance variable by subtracting the voter’s own position from the position of each party on the left/right scale. The absolute value of this variable has been included in the stacked data matrix.\(^5\) If voters prefer parties close to them in terms of left/right distance, then the resulting measure should exert a negative effect on vote propensities i.e. the smaller the distance between voter and party, the greater the preference for the party. In addition to the individual-level variables, we add party size as a party-level control variable. Measured in parliamentary seats, party size is meant to represent a strategic consideration which voters may take into account while casting a vote at the ballot box. When two or more parties are nearly equally attractive for some voters, then those voters tend to vote for the largest of these parties because it has the best chance of achieving its policy goals.

After having included the value schemas and control variables into the stacked data matrices of 28 political systems, we performed a linear regression, using the Huber-White-Sandwich estimate of variance to account for the dependency among observations pertaining to the same respondent (Rogers, 1993; Williams, 2002). From each stacked data matrix we stored the coefficients for the socio-economic, libertarian-authoritarian, EU integration and immigration value schemas in a separate database. The number of observations in this database equals the number of the analysed political systems, namely 28. This database will be used in the second step analysis, in which we aim to explain the differences in the effects of value schemas on party preferences across countries. Here, we again use linear regression with White’s heteroscedastic consistent standard errors (Lewis and Linzer, 2005). The explanatory variables that we include in the second step analysis are measures of correlation between voters’ left-right self-placement and their position on the value schemas, left/right system agreement, voter polarisation on the value schemas as well as variable depicting the most important problem facing the country. In order to operationalise the correlation variables, we take recourse to the question on voters’ self-placement on the left/right scale and their responses on questions which have been used to construct the value schemas, as explained above. The positioning of voters on a value schema has been created by adding up

\(^5\) If the respondent did not answer the question on the position of any particular party, we replaced the missing value with the national sample mean of the perceived party position. In this way, we lost only respondents who failed to place themselves in the left/right terms.
and averaging voters’ responses on the schema of interest. The correlation variables thus yield a single correlation for each value schema per each party system. In order to operationalise the left/right system agreement we use a question where respondents were asked to place each political party on the left/right scale ranging from 0 to 10. This measure of perceptions of left/right positions of political parties has been weighted using the proportion of valid votes obtained in the national parliamentary elections preceding the elections to the European Parliament in 2009 (van der Eijk, 2001). The polarisation of voters on value schemas is measured by the standard deviation in the positions of voters on the value schemas in each party system under study. Furthermore, we analysed voter responses to the question regarding the most important problem facing their country. Countries where at least 5% of voters see issues related to the value schemas under study as the most important problem were indicated with 1, while others with 0.

The choice of the two step analysis has been dictated by two considerations. Firstly, we aim to capture and explain the differences in the effects of value schemas across all countries of the European Union. Dividing the countries under study into categories would not reflect the differences among them. Secondly, our variables of interest – value schemas – cannot be interacted with the explanatory variables in the stacked data matrix as they have been transformed in the course of the y-hat procedure. This restriction precludes us from including covariates in a stacked data matrix or using hierarchical modelling, where y-hat variables would be interacted. Now, we turn to the findings of the two step model.

4. **FINDINGS**

Table 1 presents the results of the second step analysis, in which we explain the variation in the effects of the socio-economic schema (model 1), libertarian-authoritarian-schema (model 2), immigration (model 3) and EU integration (model 4) across 28 political systems under study. The first part of each model shows the effects of left/right system agreement and correlations between voters’ left/right self-placement and their stances on value schemas, voter polarization on relevant issues and a measure of most important problem facing the country. The second part of each model shows bivariate regressions of the correlation variables on value schemas.
Table 1: Factors explaining variation in the effects of value schemas on party preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 Socio-economic schema</th>
<th>Model 2 Libertarian-authoritarian schema</th>
<th>Model 3 Immigration</th>
<th>Model 4 EU Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LR system agreement</td>
<td>-.12 (.12)</td>
<td>-.37** (.16)</td>
<td>-.30 (.31)</td>
<td>-.57** (.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlation</td>
<td>-.19 (.21)</td>
<td>-.66*** (.21)</td>
<td>-.85*** (.26)</td>
<td>-.24 (.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LR self-placement &amp; SocEcon</td>
<td>.01 (.28)</td>
<td>-.12 (.25)</td>
<td>-.01 (.17)</td>
<td>-.32 (.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy as the most important problem</td>
<td>.12*** (.03)</td>
<td>-.03 (.06)</td>
<td>.07* (.03)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bivariate Regressions**

| LR self-placement & SocEcon | Correlation | -.33** (.14) | -.80*** (.16) | -.72*** (.24) | -.1 (.33) |
|                            | Correlation | -.33** (.14) | -.80*** (.16) | -.72*** (.24) | -.1 (.33) |
|                            | Correlation | -.33** (.14) | -.80*** (.16) | -.72*** (.24) | -.1 (.33) |
|                            | Correlation | -.33** (.14) | -.80*** (.16) | -.72*** (.24) | -.1 (.33) |

Notes: *** significant at p < 0.01 ** significant at p < 0.05 * significant at p < 0.1 (one-tailed); cell entries represent regression coefficients obtained in a second step analysis in a linear regression using White’s heteroscedastic consistent standard errors.

Table 1 shows that there is a negative relationship between the degree to which voters’ stances on values are correlated with left/right and the impact of values on party preferences. This relationship holds for the socio-economic, libertarian-authoritarian and immigration value schemas, while it does not explain the variation in the effect of EU integration. The effects of the correlation variables between left/right self-placement and the libertarian-authoritarian schema as well as the correlation between left/right self-placement and immigration, controlled by structural agreement, voter polarization and the most important problem variable, are strong and highly significant (-.66 and -.85 respectively). The effect of the correlation between left/right self-placement and socio-economic schema fails to reach statistical significance once we add left/right system agreement to the model. However, its effect points in the negative direction (-.19) and shows high statistical significance in the bivariate regression (-.33). The bivariate regressions show strong significant effects of the correlation variables for the socio-economic, libertarian-authoritarian schemas and immigration (-.33, -.80 and -.72 respectively). Moreover, models 1, 2 and 3 show that our explanatory variables account for a considerable amount in the variation of the effects of
value schemas (R² of .57 for socio-economic, .56 for libertarian-authoritarian and .33 for immigration schema). The R² in bivariate regressions shows that the correlation variables explain the lion’s share of the variance we are interested in (.16, .46 and .27 respectively).

Model 4 shows that the negative relationship between the correlation variable of voters’ stances on EU integration and their left/right positioning and the impact of EU integration on party preferences does not hold, unlike for other value schemas. This may not be surprising as EU integration represents a relatively complex policy issue. As De Vries (2007, 2010) points out, EU integration as a complex issue which is relatively new to national politics, will impact party choice if political parties provide cues for voters on this issue. How the effect of EU integration on party choice varies across countries, can be mostly explained by the degree to which parties link their EU position to their positioning on the major dimension of competition i.e. left/right. Our analysis provides indirect support to those findings. As it is shown in Graph 3, the degree to which voters stances on EU integration are correlated with their positioning on left/right has been very low, with very little variance across countries. The correlations range here from .01 (France) to .22 (Sweden), with a high effect of EU integration on party preferences in Malta (.4). However, countries vary to a high extent with regard to how EU integration affects party preferences, as it is depicted by the spread of the effects on the y-axis. This variance cannot be explained by the demand-side variables, which have been included in this study.6 The results presented in model 4 show that those demand-side explanatory variables can to a very limited extent explain variation in the effects of EU integration on party preferences (R² of .23). The correlation variable per se barely explains any variation, as R² in the bivariate regression amounts to .003. This leads us to conclude that the variance in the effect of EU integration across countries cannot be explained by differences in the electorates per se, but might be induced by differences in the supply side among those countries. In order to explain this variation, we need to look at the supply side in every country, which remains an avenue for further research. Any attempt to do so here would go beyond the scope of this paper.

Graphs 1-4 visualize the effects of the correlation variables on the corresponding impact of value schemas on party preferences in 28 political systems under study. Graphs 1, 2 and 3 show that the higher the correlation between voters’ stances on the socio-economic, libertarian-authoritarian and immigration schema is, the lower the effect of this value schema

6 The variable EU integration as the most important problem has been omitted as in no EU country any problem related to EU integration has been mentioned at the level of 5% of the responses. The reason might be that the European Election Study 2009 was conducted in the period of economic crisis in Europe, when socio-economic concerns overshadowed any other potential problems.
is on party preferences. In Graph 4 we see that the relationship between the correlation variable and the impact of EU integration on party preferences does not hold. Here, the variance in the effect of EU integration on party support cannot be explained by demand-side variables. Those results provide support for our Hypothesis 2, according to which we were supposed to observe a negative relationship between the degree to which voters’ stances on values are structured by left/right and the impact of those values on party preferences across countries (however, this does not apply to EU integration).

**GRAPHS 1-4 AROUND HERE**

Furthermore, Table 1 shows that structural agreement relates negatively to the effects of value schemas on party preferences, which supports our Hypothesis 4. It turns out that the more voters agree about where parties in their political system stand on left/right, the weaker will be the effect of values on party preferences. This effect is strong and significant for the libertarian-authoritarian schema and EU integration (-.37 and -.57 respectively), while it fails to reach statistical significance for the socio-economic and immigration value schemas (-.12 and -.30 respectively). Polarization of voters, in turn, does not have a consistent effect on the value schemas. Contrary to what has been expected, polarization has a negative effect on the impact of value schemas on party preferences, with the socio-economic value schema as an exception. However, all those effects are not significant. Finally, if voters consider some issues as the most important problem facing their country, the effect of values related to those issues increases. This effect is significant for the socio-economic and immigration value schemas (.12 and .07 respectively), while it has a negative effect and fails to reach statistical significance for the libertarian-authoritarian schema (-.03).

The general pattern of the negative relationship between the correlation variables and the effects of socio-economic, libertarian-authoritarian and immigration value schemas on party preferences captures differences in those effects between established and consolidating democracies. In Graph 1 we see that most East Central European countries are characterized by a low degree to which voters’ attitudes on socio-economic values are structured by left/right and a high impact of this value schema on party preferences. In turn, in most of the established democracies voters’ stances on the socio-economic schema are to a higher extent structured by their position on left/right. Here, the effect of the socio-economic value schema on party preferences is weaker. The graph reveals that there are two groups of consolidating democracies – Poland, Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia where the impact of the socio-
economic value schema on party preferences is low and Romania, Latvia and Lithuania where socio-economic considerations exercise a stronger effect on party preferences. The former countries are those that have not been substantially affected by the economic crisis of 2009, while the latter group represents East Central European countries which suffered under the economic meltdown. In order to account for this difference and fully capture the effect of the correlation variable, we introduced as a control variable voters’ perception about the most important problem facing their country. After controlling for this and a range of other variables, as depicted by Table 1, the analysis still reveals a negative effect of the correlation variable on the magnitude of the socio-economic schema on party preferences.

In Graph 2 we see that in most consolidating democracies the correlation between voters’ stances on the libertarian-authoritarian schema and left/right is low, while the effect of the value schema on party preferences is high. In most of the established democracies, in turn, the correlation is relatively high, while the effect of the libertarian-authoritarian schema remains moderate. The same pattern can be found in Graph 3, which shows the effects of the correlation variable of voters’ left-right self-placement and immigration on the impact of the immigration schema on party preferences across countries. In most of the consolidating democracies, voters’ stances on immigration are to a weak extent correlated to their left/right position, but the effects of immigration on party preferences are considerably high. In most established democracies, the correlation is higher and the effect of immigration is lower.

The results show that in most of the consolidating democracies of East Central Europe the effects of values on party preferences are stronger, while in most of the established democracies of Western Europe the effects of values are weaker. In order to visualise those differences between country groups, Table 2 presents the effects of left/right and value schemas, controlled by a range of explanatory variables, on vote propensities. Model A shows the effects in established democracies of Western Europe, including Cyprus and Malta, while model B shows the effects in consolidating democracies of East Central Europe. We explain 32 per cent of the variance among established democracies and 29 per cent among consolidating democracies. The comparison of standardized coefficients reveals that the effect of left/right distance is slightly weaker in East Central European countries than in Western European countries, which confirms previous findings by Van der Brug et al. (2008). However, the effects of the value schemas seem to be slightly stronger in consolidating
democracies. The opposite pattern can be observed in Western Europe. Here, the effect of left/right on party preferences is stronger, while the effects of values are weaker.

Table 2: Effects of left/right and value schemas on party preferences across regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Established democracies (model A)</th>
<th>Consolidating democracies (model B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left/right distance</td>
<td>-.38</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic schema</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libertarian-authoritarian schema</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU Integration</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Class</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Approval</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Democracy</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrospective economic evaluation</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective economic evaluation</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party size</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_cons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²-adjusted</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of observations</td>
<td>73 969</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * significant at p < 0.01 (one-tailed); cell entries present regression coefficients obtained in a robust regression on a stacked data matrix containing established democracies of Western Europe, including Cyprus and Malta (model A) and consolidating democracies of East-Central Europe (model B).

The results of our analysis show that there are considerable differences across EU countries in the effects of socio-economic, libertarian-authoritarian and immigration value schemas on party preferences. Those differences can be explained by the degree to which voters’ value stances are structured by their position on left/right. The analysis also shows that there are differences in the effects of values on party support across Western European and East Central European countries. In newer democracies the effects of values on party preferences are stronger than in established democracies, while the effect of left/right on party support is weaker. In the established democracies, in turn, the effects of values on party support are

---

As the value schemas have been created using the y-hat procedure, they have similar distributional characteristics. Thus, we use standardized regression coefficients (beta) to meaningfully compare the effects of value schemas across the datasets.

The comparison of betas allows for a substantive interpretation of differences across country groups. An insertion of a dummy for East Central European countries in a combined data matrix would not provide us for any meaningful comparison of both country groups. The reason is that our variables of interest - the value schemas - have been created through the y-hat procedure.
weaker, while the effect of left/right is stronger. However, significant heterogeneity within country groups remains, pointing to the fact that there is a general explanation for the variance in the effects of values across countries rather than only an East-West specific one. This general explanation related to how voters’ values stances are structured by left/right captures the differences between consolidating and established democracies in the effects of values on party support.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study proposes and empirically substantiates an explanation for the differences in the effects of values on party preferences across countries of the European Union. In countries where voters can better link their attitudes to the abstract dimension of competition i.e. left/right, the impact of values on party preferences is smaller. Voters to a lesser extent refer to their value stances in their decisions at the ballot box as they can convey their preferences through direct recourse to left/right. In those countries voters know better what the left/right stands for and how their attitudes can be described in the abstract terms of left/right competition. In turn, in countries where voters can to a lesser extent relate their attitudes to their stance on left/right, the observed impact of values on party support is stronger. Here, voters take direct recourse to values in their decisions which party to choose as the left/right does not fulfil its purpose as a cognitive shortcut. In those countries, voters have difficulty in establishing where their attitudes can be located in the left/right continuum as well as what the left/right means in terms of practical policy. Those findings provide us with an explanation for the differences in the effects of values on party preferences between consolidating democracies of East Central Europe and established democracies of Western Europe. The aggregate analysis shows that in consolidating democracies voters’ stances on the socio-economic, libertarian-authoritarian and immigration value schema are to a weaker extent correlated with their position on left/right than in established democracies. The impact of values on party preferences is in the newer democracies stronger, while the effect of left/right is weaker. In the established democracies, in turn, the effect of left/right on party support is stronger, while the effects of values are weaker.

The contribution of this article is two-fold. Firstly, the findings teach us about a general mechanism of how voters arrive at their electoral decision at the ballot box. The aggregate analysis shows that there are differences across countries with regard to how voters’ attitudes are structured by left/right. Those structural differences, which may result from varying degrees of stability of the party systems, provide us with an explanation why we
observe strong effects of values on party support in some countries, while lower in others. This study focuses on a wide spectrum of values, encompassing values towards economic issues, personal freedoms, tolerance of minorities as well as questions related lifestyle, immigration and integration in the European Union. It shows that all those issues are not the same for voters. Voters’ attitudes on EU integration are not structured by voters’ position on the left/right dimension. The differences in the effects of EU integration on party preferences across countries must be attributable to other factors, possibly induced by the supply side in the political systems. Secondly, this study contributes to our understanding of the differences in the patterns of party support across East Central European and Western European democracies. Our explanation for the variance in the effects of values across those country groups directly relates to the latest findings that point to the lower effect of left/right on party support in the new democracies (Van der Brug et al., 2008). It stresses the fact that the lower effect of left/right in newer democracies is associated with the higher effects of values on party support in those countries. However, our analysis goes beyond this regional comparison by showing that countries of the Western Europe or Central Eastern Europe are not a monolith, but there are considerable differences in the impact of values within both country groups.

Our findings have two important limitations that may constitute an avenue for further research. Firstly, our explanation for the differences in the effects of values on party preferences across countries reaches its borders at values related to EU integration. The characteristics of the electorates which we explored in this study do not account for the variance in the effects of EU integration on party preferences across countries and regions. This finding points to other possible explanations which focus on the supply-side factors that may influence party preferences. An interesting angle for pursuing further research into the differences in the effects of EU integration on party preferences across countries offers the issue linkage perspective (De Vries, 2007, 2010), where EU issue voting is explained by the degree to which political parties relate EU issue to the major dimension of competition. As there is a considerable variation in the impact of values related to EU integration on party preferences across countries, it may prove worthwhile to explore how party system characteristics of the newer and established democracies condition the way in which EU integration affects party preferences. Secondly, our analysis takes an aggregate-level perspective by examining how voters’ stances on values are structured by left/right in the electorate as a whole. In a further step, we could extend our findings into the differences in the effects of values and left/right on party support by looking at how individual-level
characteristics such as political knowledge mediate those effects. Notwithstanding these avenues for further research, our findings offer a theoretical and empirical contribution to our understanding of the determinants guiding voters’ decisions at the ballot box.
References


Graph 1: Effect of Socio-Economic Value Schema on Party Preferences

Correlation b/w Voters' LR Self-Placement and their Stance on Socio-Economic Value Schema

Graph 2: Effect of Libertarian-Authoritarian Value Schema on Party Preferences

Correlation b/w Voters' LR Self-Placement and their Stance on Libertarian-Authoritarian Value Schema
Notes: Graphs 1-4 show the effects of correlation variables on the impact of value schemas on party preferences. The coefficients for value schemas for 28 political systems, which have been obtained in the 2nd stage analysis, are depicted with 95% confidence intervals.