

# **Political Parties, Left-Right-Orientations and the Vote in Italy, France, and Germany**

Hermann Schmitt  
University of Manchester, UK &  
MZES, University of Mannheim, Germany

[Hermann.Schmitt@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Hermann.Schmitt@manchester.ac.uk)

and

Paolo Segatti  
University of Milan, Italy

[Paolo.Segatti@unimi.it](mailto:Paolo.Segatti@unimi.it)

Version of September 28, 2011  
8924 words overall

## **1. Introduction**

Many will agree that political parties, current political issues and the candidates that are up for election are the central factors that determine citizens' vote choices (Campbell et al. 1960). However, it never has been easy to assess the relative prominence of these factors. Problems with the measurement of party identification outside of the United States of America have demonstrated this at an early stage (Budge et al. 1976). This is astounding enough because parties themselves are a relatively easy matter: here at least we know what we are talking about. The case of issues is more complicated. Both their form and their effectiveness are debated.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, issues are bound to vary between electoral systems and often even between elections – a fact which renders any generalisation about the importance of issues for vote choices very difficult. Measurement problems are reduced if one focuses on ideological orientations instead of issue preferences. Technically speaking, ideological orientations are latent variables which to some degree determine preferences about specific political issues.

In European politics and beyond such ideological orientations correspond to the left-right dimension (Klingemann 1978, Lapointe 1981, Bobbio 1996). This dimension has occasionally been labelled as

---

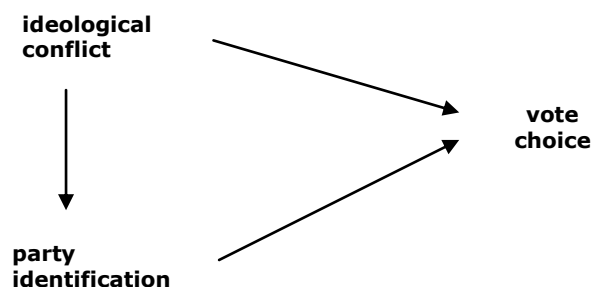
<sup>1</sup> Form refers to the varying nature of issues (especially *position issues* vs. *valence issues*), while effectiveness refers to the "mechanisms" of influence on vote (most important here are the *smallest distance theory*, *directional theory*, *saliency* or *issue ownership theory*); cf. with more detail Schmitt 2001: chap. 1.3.

a “*super issue*” (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976, Inglehart 1984) and understood as an “*imperialistic political code*” (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989) that integrates the central political issues of the time and records eventual changes. An example here is the environment issue which at the beginning of the 1980s was largely independent of left and right while twenty years later it clearly belongs in the left issue spectrum, in some countries at least.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper we ask about the relative importance of party identification and ideology for the voting decision in mature European democracies. In doing so, we need to take into account that the two do not vary independently from one another. Aggregate-analyses indicate that ideological conflict intensifies party identifications (cf. Schmitt and Holmberg 1995; Schmitt 2009). Transferring these aggregate findings to the analysis of individual level data, we propose that citizens’ ideological orientations determine their vote choices directly and indirectly thru their contributions to party identification.<sup>3</sup> This can be graphically displayed as follows (see figure 1).

Figure 1

**The Theoretical Model:  
Three Constructs and Their Interrelationship**



We will test this basic model in a comparative analysis of political orientations and voting behavior in three quite different electoral systems: Italy, France and Germany. This corresponds with a “most different systems design” which starts out with general, system-unspecific explanations and only introduces system-specific qualifiers if the former cannot be upheld.<sup>4</sup>

Founding members of the European Union as they are all three of them, these three political systems obviously have a lot in common. However, the differences between their electoral systems are obvious. One is in the regime type. While France is a (semi-) presidential system, Italy and

<sup>2</sup> On the variation in the meaning elements of left and right see recently Schmitt & van der Eijk 2009 and van der Eijk and Schmitt 2010.

<sup>3</sup> One could object to this by arguing that the causal direction should run the other way around, from partisanship to ideological orientations; i.e. the more partisan citizens are, the more ideological are they. And indeed, this association between these two concepts on the level of individual citizens is not fully recursive. However, were ideological orientations dependent on partisanship, we should not see much of a spread in strongly depolarized systems like Germany – because the partisan cues citizens are provided with there are not (very) ideological.

<sup>4</sup> See for this Przeworski and Teune (1970: 34 ff).

Germany are parliamentary democracies. As a consequence, throughout the Fifth Republic, the main political actor in France has been the directly elected president.<sup>5</sup> The prime minister in Italy and the federal chancellor in Germany are only indirectly elected, and do not enjoy equivalent powers. As a result, the election of the president of the French Republic is normally<sup>6</sup> the national first-order election, while in Italy and Germany the election of the members of the national parliament belong in that category.<sup>7</sup>

Another important difference between our three systems originates in their respective party system. Due to the constitutional position of the president and due to the fact that the French electoral law favours individual candidates over political parties,<sup>8</sup> the party system of the Fifth French Republic is characterized by partisan instability and ongoing party system changes. The same is true for Italy after 1992 when the old party system imploded in a series of corruption scandals, and a new political era presented itself with a new and, as it turned out, considerably weaker and less steady party system.<sup>9</sup> In marked contrast, the post WWII German party system is characterized by relative stability and concentration. For decades, only three relevant parties sent members to the *Bundestag* – the union of CDU and CSU, the FDP and the SPD. This only changed in the 1980s when socio-political change and the bad fortunes of a SPD led government contributed to the success of the Greens, and in the 2000s again when German reunification and again the bad fortunes of a SPD led government helped to establish throughout the country a significant Left party, *Die Linke*. Altogether, it is probably right to say that in Italian and French electoral politics people seem to be more important than parties, while in the German system the opposite seems to apply.<sup>10</sup>

This might also contribute to a final significant difference between our three electoral systems. We are referring here to the nature and depth of the ideological divide between relevant political forces. The political struggle in Germany clearly is of a pragmatic nature probably from the first grand coalition in the 1960s on. This can be understood as a result of the federal structure of the political system with its inbuilt requirements for co-operation and compromise between the two political camps, and has led to a long-term process of ideological depolarisation (e.g. Schmitt &

---

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that this has been more so in times when the president could rely on a majority in parliament than during the periods of co-habitation when the prime minister rather than the president commands a majority in parliament.

<sup>6</sup> If it does not closely follow a legislative election in which case the presidential contest tends to be degraded to a more acclamatory second-order event.

<sup>7</sup> A first-order election answers the power question. Other, less important, elections are second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Reif 1984). For details about the overriding role of the president of the Fifth Republic – in particular if he can count on a majority of votes in the National Assembly – see Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet and Moreau 2000: 48-62; see also Meny 1993.

<sup>8</sup> One indicator for this claim is that in France, public subsidies towards campaign expenditures are awarded to individual candidates rather than political parties.

<sup>9</sup> In 1993, a Mixed Electoral system explicitly conceived to restrain the power of political parties replaced the hyper-proportional system (Katz 2003). The system was based on 75% SM constituencies and 25% MM proportional districts. The party system changed radically as a result, and changed again after another reform of the electoral law in 2005. This second reform replaced the previous system of the 1990s by a proportional system again which however is different from the one of the First Republic. The Low Chamber 2006 PR system incorporates a number of thresholds designed to urge parties to form pre-electoral alliances. It is a majority ensuring system since it guarantees, with a national bonus, the majority of seats to the party or alliance with the most votes.

<sup>10</sup> For France, the significance of the “presidentiables” for the development of the party system is emphasized by Zadra (1996: 140 and passim) – but see Pütz (2004) who emphasises the relevance of parties. For Italy, analyses of the role and importance of S. Berlusconi are filling libraries.

Wüst 2006). The situation in Italy and France is strikingly different. Italy in particular is characterised by a long-lasting and deep ideological divide. In the so-called "First Republic" the divide was based on the clash between the communist and the catholic political "subcultures". This divide somehow seems to persist even when the party system that nurtured it, has disappeared and the religious cleavage on which it was anchored has been partially absorbed (Bellucci and Segatti 2010). As a result, there is nothing like a bottom up on-going process of ideological polarisation neither in Italy nor in France (Schmitt & Freire, forthcoming). Rather, the polarisation values for these two countries are oscillating between high and low depending perhaps on the issues and the style of the political leaders of the day.

Despite those important differences between the three electoral systems we suggest that, in principle, the effect of party identification and ideological orientations on the voting decision should be similar everywhere. We will test this proposition on the basis of three CSES II post-election surveys, two conducted in 2002 in Germany and in France, and one in Italy in 2006.

## **2. Partisanship and Ideology as Determinants of the Vote in Italy, France and Germany**

Previous research does not support our proposition. We first have a look at Italy, arguably the most interesting case. Throughout the "First Republic" the vote in Italy has traditionally been understood as an expression of social conflicts. More in particular, it was the integration of voters in regionally concentrated sub-cultures – socio-political milieus – that determined their electoral choices (Galli 1963). In those days, political parties were the key actors in the political game, and the focus of voters' social identities. De jure a parliamentary democracy, Italy de facto was a *Repubblica dei Partiti* as a prominent historian (Scoppola 1991) once dubbed it. Deeply entrenched social conflicts were not the only source of partisan allegiances, however. The Italian party system was also divided by a fundamental split over the Cold War issue. The combination of social cleavages on the one hand and political-ideological divisions on the other had a strong impact on the supply side of the Italian electoral game. The DC in particular, solidly anchored in the centre of the ideological spectrum, was the bulwark of both religious and secular voters that were "scared" by communist connection of the main party of the left, the PCI. Those cross-cutting divisions shaped the format of left-right continuum before the political earthquake of 1994. Giovanni Sartori (1976), for example, explains the high level of left-right polarisation in Italy by two main factors: the anti-system stances of the main opposition party PCI, and the occupation of the centre of the ideological spectrum by the DC given its two souls: catholicism and anticommunism.

The 1994 earthquake completely changed the supply side of Italian electoral politics and transformed it in a two-level competition, between electoral coalitions on one hand and between the parties upon which these coalitions rest, on the other. The disappearance of the DC, the restyling of the PCI, and the renaming of the AN set voters free to locate themselves on the left-right continuum away from the centre, while others became confused and could not locate themselves on the continuum anymore (Baldassari and Schadee 2004; Baldassari 2007).

The French and the German cases are somewhat less exiting. Parties in the Fifth French Republic have always been portrayed as being marginal. Political leaders – especially those with the potential to become president at some point in the future, i.e. *les présidentiables* – set up parties, they change their names and alliances, they split and reunite parties. As a result, French parties are volatile entities. Compared to them, ideological camps are relatively stable entities. *L'extrême gauche*, whatever the parties are called that represent it, is a constant in French politics, as well as the moderate left, the right or the extreme right. Citizens are seen to identify with ideological camps rather than with parties. Early on, aggregate analyses have shown that the ideological vote is a locally deep-rooted phenomenon (Siegfried 1913). Individual-level evidence points in the same direction: ideological orientations are reported to be central elements in the calculus of the French voter (Haegel 1993, Fleury and Lewis-Beck 1993a, 1993b). This is not to say that scholarly views on the significance of political parties for the voting decision would all coincide. French analysts tend to assume that party identifications hardly exist and certainly do not constitute a pivotal factor for the voting decision. This view has been supported by US colleagues (see Converse & Dupeux 1966 and Fleury and Lewis-Beck in the debate with Converse and Pierce). But there are other scholars, even from the same school, who have shown that French parties, however instable they might be, still form the primary objects of political orientation (Converse and Pierce 1986, 1993; Pierce 1995; Evans 2004).

In Germany, by contrast, party identification is seen as the main determinant of voting behaviour (Gluchowski 1983; Falter et al. 2000; Rattinger 2000; Arzheimer 2006). In fact, early election studies found the relationship between party identification and voting decision to be so strong that doubts arose about the conceptual independence of party identification from the vote – party identification and the voting decision seemed to correlate too strongly (Kaase 1976). This association has weakened somewhat since, not least because of the bipolar competition structure confronting now five relevant parties in two adversary ideological blocs.<sup>11</sup> Such a bi-polar competition structure involving four distinct parties in two blocs also existed in France in the 1980s (and was termed "*quadrille bipolaire*")<sup>12</sup> and in Italy from 1994 on. The electoral consequence of such a constellation is that voters find a serious choice alternative in their own ideological camp and can therefore vote against their long-standing party preference without changing ideological sides.

### **3. How Party Identification and Ideological Orientations Relate to One Another**

Party identifications are nurtured by ideological conflict. Without ideological conflict, they shrink and lose their impact on the vote. Conversely, ideological conflict between the relevant parties of a party system strengthens the partisan base in the electorate, both with respect to the number of their supporters and regarding the impact of such "ideologically loaded" party identifications on

---

<sup>11</sup> These are the SPD and the Greens and the Left on the left, and the CDU and the FDP on the right.

<sup>12</sup> Then the partisan actors were the PCF and the PS on the left side, and the UDF and the RPR on the right. After the consolidation of the National Front, three political camps are distinguished – left, right and extreme right (see Grunberg and Schweisguth 2003; with counter-arguments Andersen and Evans 2003).

vote choices (Schmitt 2009). The progressive decline of party identification in Germany during the grand coalition governments of SPD and CDU/CSU is a recent and therefore perhaps particularly obvious example. Because of the usual majority of federal opposition-led states in the *Bundesrat*, the second German chamber whose approval is needed for all significant laws, both of these assemblies *de facto* act under the constraints of a mutually consenting all-party-coalition. Under these circumstances, in which everybody knows that at the very end a compromise has to be reached, it is hardly opportune to fuel ideological conflict.<sup>13</sup>

This example also emphasises the impact of the institutional setup on the formation, durability and effect of party identifications. Clear government alternatives, the accountability of governments for accomplishments and failures and in structural terms: a majority-vote based, two-(plus-) party system favouring one-party governments – these are the contexts under which ideological conflict prospers and party identification flourishes. Coalition governments, and in particular situations of divided government, in which the other big party can influence government policy because it has to support it, tend to depress the development of party identifications. The same applies for the increasing integration of the political systems of Italy, France and Germany in the multi-level system of the European Union.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4. Data Basis, Research Design, Hypotheses**

Three largely identical representative post-election surveys are the data-base of this article, one conducted in France after the second round of the French Presidential election of June 2002, another one conducted in Germany after the federal election of October 2002, and the third in Italy after the 2006 legislative election.<sup>15</sup> Among other questions, all three surveys carried the second module of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems.

Our analysis of these data is organised like follows. First, we document the distribution of party identification and left-right-orientations in Italy, France and Germany. In accordance with the literature we expect party identifications to be more frequent in Germany than in France, while the French should have fewer problems than the Germans to position themselves and the relevant parties along the left-right continuum. Expectations for Italy are somewhat more difficult because of the far-reaching reshuffle of the Italian party system in the early 1990s. Before that time, we

---

<sup>13</sup> While “divided government” as such is unknown in Italy, similar constellations have existed in France in the past. Known under the label of “co-habitation”, they consist of a government in which the president can not rely on a majority in parliament, so that president and prime minister belong to different political camps. This first happened under the presidency of Francois Mitterand and has repeated itself under Jacques Chirac. “Co-habitation” tends to question the authority of the President and obscures, in the eyes of the public, political responsibilities – thus reducing the ability of voters to hold the government accountable. The policy consequences of the French “co-habitation” are, however, perhaps less far-reaching than those of the German “Politikverflechtung”.

<sup>14</sup> The multi-level system of the European Union also requires compromise and co-operation of different political orientations and thus severely limits ideological confrontation at least on the EU-level of government action.

<sup>15</sup> The Italian survey was funded by the Minister of Education and the University of Milan and realised by Ipsos. The French survey was funded by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, the Central Archive for Empirical Social Research at the University of Cologne and the MZES at the University of Mannheim and realised, with the support of Roland Cayrol, by CSA. The German survey was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), and realised by Infratest. The “CSES core” of all three of these surveys is available from the CSES website.

would have expected Italians to be the most ardent party identifiers as well as the most polarised in ideological terms. The breakdown of the old party system in combination with two changes of the electoral law and the resulting focus on large pre-electoral alliances rather than individual parties is likely to have changed things in Italy profoundly.

In the second step we look at the interaction between party identification and ideological orientations and perceptions. We examine whether the perceptions of left-right-positions of relevant parties vary in accordance with the degrees of party identification. If ideological conflict produces party identification, voters who identify with a party should perceive the ideological distance between parties to be greater than voters without party identification. We then turn to the interrelation between the left-right self placement of respondents and their likelihood of identifying with a party. Here we expect that respondents, who cannot position themselves on the left-right-dimension as well as those who avoid to side with the left or the right camp but position themselves in the neutral centre, are less likely to identify with a party than others.

Third and finally, we examine the effect of ideological orientations and party identifications on the vote. As a result of a partially limited data matrix (we will come back to this in more detail), a multiple regression model cannot be applied; instead, we identify the effects of left-right-orientations on the voting decision unconditionally first, and then again for the different degrees of party identification. We expect that the effect of left-right-orientations should increase with increasing party identification, and moreover co-vary with perceived ideological distinctiveness of the choice options.

## **5. Results**

### **5.1 The Distribution of Party Identifications and Left-Right-Orientations**

Citizens' party identification in this paper is established following the CSES-standard. According to this, respondents are initially asked whether they feel close to one of the parties. Those who agree to this question are called identifiers. Those who give a negative response are asked whether they feel a bit closer to one of the parties than to the others. Respondents who agree to this question are called sympathisers.<sup>16</sup> Finally, those who give a negative response to both of these questions are considered to be independent. Based on these two simple questions, Table 1 reports the frequency and strength of party identification in Italy, France and Germany.

The distributions are quite different. Italy has roughly as many identifiers as independents, but hardly any sympathizers. There is also a sizeable number of respondents – roughly one in five – who cannot or do not want to answer those questions. In Germany, things are somewhat more balanced in that regard. Three in four respondents are either identifying with a party or sympathizing with one; one in four has no party affinities whatsoever. The question is easy to answer

---

<sup>16</sup> At this point, the CSES measure asks further questions both about strength and direction of party identification. We do not touch these in the present analysis. The beauty of the simple opening questions is that they also cause little measurement problems even in intercultural comparison. See for such problems of the cross-national analyses of party identification the methodological appendix to Schmitt and Holmberg (1995).

for German respondents as is indicated by the fact that there are hardly any missing cases. In France, finally, the proportion of identifiers is actually highest among the three countries. More than half of all French respondents are outright party identifiers, while one in four of them is independent, and the rest is sympathizing. As in Germany, we find hardly any missing cases for those questions in France. Summing up, partisanship in Italy is strongly polarised, with an almost empty sympathiser category, and many refusals. It is more balanced in Germany. And somewhat surprisingly, partisanship is most prevalent in France.

Table 1

**The Distribution of Party Identifications in Italy, France and Germany  
in the CSES II Surveys**  
(in per cent of valid cases)

	Italy	France	Germany
identifiers ("yes")	43	55	38
sympathisers ("a little closer to one")	8	18	38
independents („no, not close")	49	26	24
don't know, no answer	19	< 1	< 1

Source: CSES II-surveys in all three countries. In the German data set, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Analyses are based on weighted data.

Can we trust these findings, are these results valid? We cannot rule out of course that the distributions we are discussing are to some degree election specific – it is actually the whole argument of this contribution that partisanship depends on ideological polarisation. Having said this, however, we still argue that we identify some basic system properties here, and justify this claim with the fact that we analyse very simple and identical survey instruments.<sup>17</sup> This has not been possible before, a fact which Converse and Pierce (1986) refer to as a possible limitation of the validity of their results.

We turn to left-right-orientations in our three countries. Within the CSES, those orientations are measured on an 11-point scale running from 0=left to 10=right, with 5 as the neutral centre.<sup>18</sup> We are inspecting a distribution over three categories, which collapses all left (0-4) and all right (6-10) self-placements and keeps the neutral centre (5) as it is (see for the full 11-point distribution Table A1 in an appendix to this paper). For reasons that will become obvious immediately, we are looking into proportions of all responses rather than proportions of valid responses.

<sup>17</sup> If there is such a thing as "identical wordings" of a survey question that is asked in two different languages and cultures: of course we can not rule out that different nuances of meaning could have been brought into the stimulus during the translation of the English master questionnaire.

<sup>18</sup> It was one of the more controversial decisions within the CSES Planning Committee whether those orientations should be measured on an even (10 point) or uneven (11 point) scale. The question here is whether something like a neutral centre on the left-right dimension does exist at all. Those who deny this argue that a centrist self-placement indicates that a respondent does not know where to place him- or herself rather than any substantive position.

These distributions are reported in Table 2. The one most striking finding is that more than one in three Italians cannot or does not want to place him- or herself on the left-right dimension.<sup>19</sup> French and German respondents, by contrast, do not have such problems in locating themselves.

Table 2  
**Left-Right Selfplacements In Italy, France and Germany**  
(in per cent of all responses)

	Italy	France	Germany
left (0-4)	23	33	53
center (5)	15	23	19
right (6-10)	26	40	22
dk, na	36	4	6

Source: CSES II-surveys in all three countries. In the German data set, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Analyses are based on weighted data.

It is not just the nonresponse which differs between our three countries. The distributions of substantive responses differ as well. In Italy we see two equally strong camps, one on the left and the other on the right, and in between a substantially smaller centre. In France, the right is stronger than the left, while in Germany the left is strongest by far. These latter two observations, it seems to us, is a reflection of the political climate at the time when the surveys were conducted. The German survey was realised after an election won very closely by the red-green coalition of SPD and the Greens. The emotions in the left camp were overflowing, left-wingers – new and old – triumphed. The French left however was deeply depressed when Lionel Jospin, the presidential candidate of the socialist party, was defeated in the first tour of the presidential ballot (by Jean-Marie LePen, the candidate of the extreme-right Front National). Left-wingers quarrelled with themselves, in particular because they themselves have brought it about (due to the lack of co-ordination between an about left candidatures). The degree to which these contextual factors influence the ideological self-assessment of the citizens has not been investigated to a great extent. But it cannot be seriously questioned that they exist.<sup>20</sup>

## 5.2 The Interaction of Party Identifications and Ideological Orientations

We assume that ideological polarisation strengthens party identification and increases its influence on vote choices. Ideological polarisation is understood as the sum of the distances of relevant

<sup>19</sup> An alternative interpretation of those high missing rates could question the quality of the survey which produced those findings, particularly because the Italian PID distribution reported in Table 1 is also plagued with high refusal rates. This however can be ruled out on two grounds: one is that other questions in the same survey are “well behaved” with regard to missing cases; and the other is that different surveys conducted at the same time, like the main ITANES survey of 2006, report similar high proportions of nonresponse for our two questions. Moreover, *Eurobarometer* analyses found a stable increase in left-right non-response in close temporal coincidence with the restructuring of the Italian party system (Baldassari 2007).

<sup>20</sup> This assumes that left-right-orientations, much as party identifications, can change in response to contextual factors. Especially the ideologically less determined might be influenced by the spirit of the time and adjust their assessment to the predominant climate of opinion.

political parties from an ideologically “neutral” centre. The further the parties deviate from this centre or are perceived as such,<sup>21</sup> the stronger the polarization in the party system. This applies particularly to the large parties, which significantly set the tone for the political debate between all parties (see van der Eijk, Schmitt and Binder 2005; Schmitt 2009; Schmitt and Freire forthcoming). We examine this interaction first by differentiating the perception of party positions according to the level of party identification. Our assumption is supported, if respondents who identify with a political party perceive the party system as being more polarized than independents do. The assumption is rejected if there is no consistent difference in the perception of party positions between respondents that are attached to or detached from political parties.

Table 3 provides some answers to these questions. First, and most importantly, we find our expectations largely confirmed. Party identifiers see larger distances between the parties than sympathisers do, and sympathisers in turn see larger distances than independents do. There is only one minor deviation from this rule: The French party sympathisers see their polar parties – *Front National* and *Lutte Ouvrière* – somewhat farther apart than the French party identifiers do (6,2 as compared to 5,8).

If we compare proportions of nonresponses – this time for party- rather than for self-placements, we find Italy again taking the lead. However, it seems to be somewhat easier for Italians to place the parties than to identify their own position. The opposite seems to be true in the two other countries, where we find somewhat elevated levels of missing cases in the party placements throughout, most noticeable for comparatively young parties like the *Schill* party in Germany (23 percent) or the *Démocratie Libérale* (DL, 17 percent) and the *Mouvement des Citoyens* (MdC, 12 percent) in France. This suggests that it takes some time until almost all citizens and voters realise the ideological position of a political party.

There is another way of looking at the association between left-right-orientations and party identification. If ideological polarization in fact boosts party identification, we can not only expect that identifiers and sympathisers perceive greater ideological distances between the major parties than independents do – this has already been demonstrated. Party identifiers and sympathisers are following partisan cues more closely than others and are more often exposed to ideologically framed conflicts between the parties. As a result, independents should be less familiar with the left-right dimension and less able to position themselves on it than party supporters. As a consequence, we expect the proportion of missing values in left-right self-placements of independents to be higher than that of party identifiers and sympathisers. Further, independents should place themselves over-proportionally in the neutral centre of the scale. Table 4 reports on our findings in view of these expectations.

---

<sup>21</sup> This applies to the perception of ideological distances, because – as is generally known – perception of reality is real in its consequences. Regarding this so-called “Thomas Theorem,” see Robert K. Merton (e.g. 1995; 380 and passim).

**Table 3**

**The perception of party positions according to the level of party identification**  
(figures are arithmetic means=AM, standard deviations=SD and percent missing values=MV)

	all respondents			Italy	strength of party identification:					
	AM	SD	MV		identifiers		sympathisers		independents	
AM				SD	AM	SD	AM	SD		
AN	8,1	2,2	26,5	8,6	1,9	8,1	2,0	7,6	2,4	
FI	7,6	2,2	25,6	8,0	2,0	7,8	1,9	7,2	2,3	
UDC	5,6	2,1	30,2	6,0	2,1	6,2	1,6	5,2	2,2	
Margherita	3,8	1,8	28,5	3,7	1,8	3,7	1,7	3,9	1,9	
DS	3,2	2,2	28,1	2,8	2,1	2,9	2,0	3,7	2,3	
RifCom	1,9	2,1	27,1	1,4	1,8	1,6	1,8	2,5	2,3	
Distance (AM)										
major parties	4,4			5,2		4,9		3,5		
polar parties	6,2			7,1		6,6		5,2		
France										
FN	8,7	3,5	6,8	8,9	3,5	9,2	3,0	8,0	3,8	
RPR	7,7	2,3	9,0	7,9	2,4	7,9	2,0	7,0	2,7	
UDF	7,4	2,2	9,6	7,6	2,1	7,5	1,9	6,7	2,5	
DL	6,9	2,4	17,4	7,1	2,4	6,9	2,4	6,2	2,5	
MDC	5,6	2,2	11,8	5,6	2,1	5,7	2,0	5,5	2,4	
PS	4,6	2,4	4,5	4,5	2,4	4,8	2,0	4,7	2,5	
Greens	4,6	2,1	5,7	4,5	2,1	4,7	1,8	4,6	2,2	
PCF	3,4	2,3	5,4	3,3	2,3	3,2	1,9	3,7	2,4	
LO	3,3	2,4	5,7	3,1	2,4	3,0	2,2	4,0	2,6	
Distance (AM)										
major parties	3,1			3,4		3,1		2,3		
polar parties	5,4			5,8		6,2		4,0		
Germany										
Republikaner	8,8	3,7	10,3	8,7	3,8	8,8	3,7	7,9	4,1	
Schill	8,2	3,4	22,9	8,3	3,4	8,0	3,4	7,5	3,7	
CSU	7,4	2,6	7,3	8,0	2,6	7,2	2,5	6,6	2,7	
CDU	7,0	2,4	6,6	7,4	2,5	6,9	2,3	6,2	2,5	
FDP	5,8	2,1	9,2	6,3	2,1	5,6	1,9	5,5	2,1	
SPD	4,4	2,2	6,1	4,1	2,3	4,6	2,2	4,8	2,2	
Greens	4,1	2,2	7,3	4,0	2,2	4,0	2,1	4,6	2,3	
PDS	3,1	2,8	8,9	2,9	2,9	3,5	3,2	3,7	3,1	
Distance (AM)										
major parties	2,6			3,3		2,3		1,4		
polar parties	5,7			5,8		5,3		4,2		

Source: CSES II-surveys in all three countries. In the German data set, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Analyses are based on weighted data.

Note: The two major German parties are CDU and SPD; in France these are RPR and PS; and in Italy *Forza Italia* and *Democratici di Sinistra*. The polar parties in Germany are the *Republikaner* and the PDS, in France these are *Front National* and *Lutte Ouvrière*; and in Italy *Alleanza Nazionale* and *Rifondazione Comunista*.

Table 4

**„Without party identification“**  
**according to the ideological self-placement on the left-right-scale**  
(in percent)

	left	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	right	dk	na
Italy	14	22	26	34	35	<b>73</b>	60	37	24	18	14	<b>90</b>	<b>61</b>
France	22	14	10	10	8	<b>44</b>	36	21	13	9	25	<b>58</b>	<b>56</b>
Germany	18	19	18	19	24	<b>29</b>	19	15	7	26	16	<b>36</b>	<b>48</b>

Source: CSES II-surveys in all three countries. In the German survey, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Weighted data are analysed.

Independents are over-proportionally represented among those who do not report a left-right placement. This is most pronounced in Italy, with almost all respondents who do not know their left-right location (90 %) and two in three (61 %) of those who refuse to answer. But it is also visible elsewhere. More than half of the French who do not know where to locate themselves (58 %) or refuse to answer (56 %) are independent. In the German survey, these percentages are a little lower (36 % and 48 %, respectively), but still significantly higher than all the other values for the different categories of left-right self-placement.

The concentration of independents in the centre of the left-right dimension is equally striking. Three in four Italian centrists are independent, almost one in two French, and almost one in three German centrists. These are, in each case the highest proportions of all valid categories of the left-right scale. Putting party system specific differences aside, we conclude in full accordance with the most different system design that in all three of our systems the percentage of independents is slightly lower among people placing themselves in the centre of the left-right scale than among those who do not know their position or do not answer, but still significantly higher than in all other scale categories.

### 5.3 The Effect of Party Identifications and Left-Right-Orientations on the Vote

Before we turn to the effect of left-right orientations and party identification on the vote, we need to review – if only very briefly – the different forms that vote choices take in the three countries under investigation. In post 1994 elections Italian vote choices took different forms, according to the different electoral laws that were used. From 1994 to 2001, voters for the *Camera dei Deputati* were given two ballots, one for the SM constituency and another for the MM districts. This system had many in-built incentives for strategic coordination between parties (e.g. D’Alimonte and Chiaramonte 1995, Ferrara and Herron 2005). What mattered most for the voters was the making of a bipolar competition structure between party alliances. The 2006 reform of the election law made things again simpler for the voters. They now have only one ballot to vote, containing closed

party list. Parties compete among themselves to capture the vote, but their votes are accounted for the majority premium given to their alliance. Bi-polarism based on parties replaced in 2006 the constituency based bi-polarism (D'Alimonte 2008).

In France, in French presidential elections to be more precise, there are two different voting decisions to be analysed, each of them in a different ballot. The first ballot is often described as a sincere vote for the most preferred choice option ("*vote du coeur*"). Things change in the second round, when utility considerations become much more important ("*vote utile*"; e.g. Nohlen 2000: 283). A typical example is a voter who supports the presidential candidate of another than his or her most preferred party, because the own candidate did not make it to the second ballot. The "*vote utile*" goes typically to the candidate of the own ideological camp who received the most votes in the first ballot.

In the election of the members of the German *Bundestag*, every voter has again two votes, one for a local candidate and one for a party list. When these two votes are allocated differently – i.e. when the candidate which a voter supports with the first vote does not belong to the party which he or she supports with the second vote<sup>22</sup>, we assume that these two votes are inspired by different motives. In the case of sincere voting, it seems plausible that party identification and ideological preferences influence the party vote, while specific candidate characteristics and local issues might determine the candidate vote. For strategic voters, however, motives might differ significantly. They typically would support the candidate of their most preferred party if he or she stands a chance to win the constituency mandate; and support the potential junior partner of the preferred government coalition with the party vote. Astonishingly enough, it is only recently that systematic empirical research is done on the different motives behind individual vote splitting (e.g. Gschwend 2007).

How can we determine the effect of party identification and ideological orientations on vote choices? This is basically a regression task, in which the probability of choosing one of the choice option (parties or candidates) is regressed on the ideological distance and the strength of party identification, plus the interaction of these two factors. This is typically solved with the help of a stacked data file, in which the choice options define the stacks. However, this research design cannot be applied here due to the fact that many French voters did not disclose which party they identify with. For many French voters, the directional component of their party identification cannot be identified.<sup>23</sup>

This incomplete data matrix leads us to apply an alternative strategy of analysis, which does not require the directional component of party identification and can be carried out without stacking

---

<sup>22</sup> Split-ticket voting is an increasing phenomenon in the German voting system. In our post-election survey in 2002, 25 percent of the telephone respondents voted for a candidate of another party than the one which they supported with the party vote. In this group, the most frequent combination is a first vote for the SPD candidate in the local constituency combined with a party vote for the Greens. 40 years ago, the Cologne election study which was conducted during and after the election of 1961, found only 7 percent of the respondents splitting their vote.

<sup>23</sup> Given this background, we do not see how the structural equations analyses reported by Evans (2004) could be performed.

the survey information according to the electoral choice alternatives. In all our three countries, we regress the vote on left-right and examine how this effect changes for the three categories of party identification that are distinguished here – identifiers, sympathisers and independents.<sup>24</sup> While in this manner we still cannot determine effect of party identification on the vote, but statements about the interaction of left-right orientations and party identification on the voting decision become now possible (Table 5).

Table 5  
**The effect of left-right orientations on vote choices in Italy, France and Germany**  
(Nagelkerke's Pseudo R Square and number of valid cases in parentheses)

	all	identifiers	sympathisers	independents
<b>ITALY</b>				
recall 2006 vote	.24 (623)	.26 (376)	.31 (58)	.08 (157)
<b>FRANCE</b>				
recall 2002 first ballot	.37	.48	.27	.22
presidential vote	(679)	(423)	(112)	(141)
<b>GERMANY</b>				
recall 2002 second (i.e. party) vote	.21 (1800)	.30 (706)	.18 (723)	.12 (361)

Source: CSES II-surveys in both countries. In the German survey, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Analyses are based on weighted data.

In Italy, we analyse the vote recall of the 2006 election. In France, we examine the voting decision in the first round of the presidential election in 2002 because in this particular election, the vote in the second round did not offer a “meaningful choice” for many. In Germany, we analyse the second vote in the 2002 federal election because this vote is widely considered to be the decisive one. We find left-right orientations to be a significantly stronger predictor of vote choices in France than in Italy and Germany – at least in a choice situation which provides true alternatives between left-wing and right-wing candidates (as in the first ballot of the presidential election).<sup>25</sup> Italy comes in second – but here we have seen that a large proportion of respondents does not identify itself in left-right terms. Germany comes in last, which does make sense on the basis of its strongly depolarised party system. However, the distance to Italy is not really substantial.

But these unconditional regressions are not really informative, because their results depend very much on our prior selection criteria. This is why we finally turn to the interaction between party

<sup>24</sup> In terms of our initial plan of analysis in figure 1, we redirect the arrow that formerly ran from party identification to the voting decision to the arrow between ideological orientation and voting decision.

<sup>25</sup> Note that this looks very different if we analyze vote choices not in the first but in the second round when Chirac and Le Pen stood as the two final candidates to choose from. In this situation, left-right orientations did not play any significant role.

identification and ideological orientations in explanatory models of the voting decision. This interaction is the more important for our understanding of vote choices the more the effect of left-right orientations on the vote differs between our three categories of party identification – identifiers, sympathisers and independents.

We do find substantial differences (Table 5 again). In each of our three countries, the effect of left-right-orientations on the vote is at least twice as high for identifiers than it is for independents – in Italy even three times as high. This is so all countries and therefore independent of the strength of the unconditional effect of left-right orientations on the vote. Left-right orientations obviously depend on party identifications to be able to realise their full potential impact on the voting decision. It is the partisan interpretations of ideological differences between the voting alternatives, which identifiers are more exposed to than sympathisers, and sympathisers more than independents, that turn ideological orientations of citizens into the important factor for the voting decision that was found in our analysis.<sup>26</sup>

## 6. Summary and Outlook

The question of party identifications is a controversial issue in the European literature. Some consider them as not very developed and/or stable and instead emphasise the importance of ideological orientations for the voting decision. Others see them as the main structure that forms political attitudes and affects political behaviour. In this piece we have avoided taking sides on this matter and suggested a model which relates ideological orientation and party identification to one another. According to this model, party identifications live of ideological conflict between the parties. The stronger the ideological polarization of the party system, the wider and firmer should the support for these political parties be, and the more ideological *and* partisan should the voting decision be. This is nothing particular Italian or French or German; we rather expect that these mechanisms can be found in all democratic electoral systems.

We have found that the perception of ideological conflicts between the relevant parties of the party system “produces” party identification in all our three countries – or the other way around, that identifiers perceive greater ideological distances between the parties than independents do.

In the end we examined the effect of party identifications and ideological orientations on the vote. It appeared that voting decisions in France are more strongly grounded in ideology than in Italy and Germany – exceptions like the second round of the presidential elections in 2002 only confirm the rule here. Finally, with respect to party identification we have demonstrated a clear reinforcement effect: the closer voters are to one of the political parties, the more important are ideological orientations for their vote choice.

---

<sup>26</sup> It could be argued that the decisive factor is not party identification, but the elevated level of political interest that comes with it – and that increasing political knowledge is the cause for the increasing effect of left-right orientations on vote choices. However, this is not what we find empirically: the impact of left-right orientations on the voting decision is very low for French voters with a strong interest in politics (Nagelkerke-value of 16 percent) and very high for politically not interested respondents (Nagelkerke-value of 73 percent).

In this paper, we intended to add support to what previously has been derived from the analysis of aggregate data: ideological conflict fosters party identification. We were able to demonstrate the existence of quite substantial interactions between ideological polarization and party identification regarding individual citizens vote choices in three quite different electoral systems. The good news is: party identification and ideological orientations are interacting in the same way everywhere. On a more descriptive level, a puzzle remains to be solved: Why are Italian citizens so reluctant to identify in left-right and partisan terms? We claim that this question must find its answer(s) in the supply side of the Italian electoral system ... in the prevailing pre-electoral coalitions, in the fact that political parties are denounced, electoral laws frequently changing and even more in the complete reshuffling of its party system at the beginning of the '90. All those factors may have even contributed to change the meanings that voters attach to left and right as Corbetta, Cavazza and Roccato (2009) claimed.

## 7. References

- Andersen, Robert and Jocelyn A. K. Evans. 2003. „Reply: Framing Change in Political Bloc Development: A Rejoinder to Grunberg and Schweisguth.” *French Politics* 1:3, pp. 349-354.
- Arzheimer, Kai. 2006. “Dead Men Walking? Party Identification in Germany, 1972-2002.” *Electoral Studies* 25: 791-807.
- Baldassari, Delia. 2007. “Sinistra e destra: la dimensione ideologica tra Prima e Seconda Repubblica.” In *Gli Italiani e la Politica*, ed. Marco Maraffi. Bologna: il Mulino, pp.105-130.
- Baldassari, Delia. 2004. “Il fascino della coalizione. Come e perché le alleanze elettorali influenzano il modo in cui interpretano la politica.” *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica* 34 (2) pp.249-276.
- Bellucci, Paolo and Paolo Segatti, eds. 2010. *Votare in Italia:1968-2008*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Budge, Ian, Ivor Crewe, and Dennis Farlie. 1976. *Party identification and Beyond*. London: John Wiley.
- Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.
- Converse, Philip E. and Roy Pierce. 1986. *Political Representation in France*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Converse, Philip E. and Roy Pierce. 1993. Comment on Fleury and Lewis-Beck: “Anchoring the French Voter: Ideology vs. Party.” *Journal of Politics* 55: 1110-1117.
- Corbetta, Piergiorgio, Nicoletta Cavazza and Michele Roccato. 2009. “Between ideology and social representations: Four theses *plus* (a new) one on the relevance and the meaning of the political left and right.” *European Journal of Political Research* 48, pp. 622 – 641

- D'Alimonte, Roberto. 2008. "Italy: a Case of Fragmented Bipolarism." In *The Politics of Electoral System*, eds. Michael Gallagher and Paul Mitchell. Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press.
- D'Alimonte, Roberto and Alessandro Chiaramonte. 1995. "Il nuovo sistema elettorale italiano: le opportunità e le scelte." In *Maggioritario ma non troppo. Le elezioni politiche del 1994*, eds. Stefano Bartolini and Roberto D'Alimonte. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Eijk, Cees van der, Hermann Schmitt and Tanja Binder. 2005. "The Left-Right Dimension". In *The European Voter*, ed. Jacques Thomassen. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Evans, Jocelyn A. J. 2004. "Ideology and Party Identification." In *The French Voter: Before and After the 2002 Elections*, eds. Michael S. Lewis-Beck. Houndsmills, Basingstoke und New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Falter, Jürgen W., Harald Schoen und Claudio Caballero. 2000. „Dreißig Jahre danach: Zur Validierung des Konzeptes „Parteiidentifikation“ in der Bundesrepublik.“ In *50 Jahre Empirische Wahlforschung in Deutschland*, hrsg. von Markus Klein, Wolfgang Jagodzinski, Ekkehard Mochmann und Dieter Ohr. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Ferrara, Federico and Enrik S Herron. 2005. "Going it alone? Strategic entry under Mixed Electoral Rules." *American Journal of Political Science* 49:1, pp. 16-31.
- Fleury, Christopher J. and Michael S. Lewis-Beck. 1993a. "Anchoring the French Voter: Ideology vs. Party", *Journal of Politics* 55:1100-1109.
- Fleury, Christopher J. and Michael S. Lewis-Beck. 1993b. "Déjà Vu All Over Again: A Comment on the Comment of Converse and Pierce", *Journal of Politics* 55:1118-1126.
- Fuchs, Dieter and Hans-Dieter Klingemann. 1989. „The Left-Right Schema.“ In *Continuities in Political Action*, eds. M. Kent Jennings and Jan van Deth. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Galli, Giorgio, ed. 1968. *Il comportamento elettorale*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Gluchowski, Peter. 1983. "Wahlerfahrung und Parteiidentifikation. Zur Einbindung von Wählern in das Parteiensystem der Bundesrepublik Deutschland." In *Wahlen und politisches System. Analysen aus Anlass der Bundestagswahl 1980*, hrsg. von Max Kaase und Hans-Dieter Klingemann. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Grunberg, Gérard, and Etienne Schweisguth. 2003. „French Political Space: Two, Three or Four Blocs?“ *French Politics* 1:3, pp. 331-348.
- Gschwend, Thomas. 2007. "Ticket-splitting and strategic voting under mixed electoral rules: evidence from Germany." *European Journal for Political Research* 46: 1-23.
- Haegel, Florence. 1993. "Partisan Ties". In *The French Voter Decides*, eds. Daniel Boy and Nonna Mayer. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 1984. "The Changing Structure of Political Cleavages in Western Society." In *Electoral Change: Realignment and Dealignment in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, eds. Russell Dalton, Scott Flanagan and Paul Beck. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Inglehart, Ronald and Hans-Dieter Klingemann. 1976. „Party Identification, Ideological Preference and the Left-Right Dimension among Western Mass Publics.” In *Party Identification and Beyond*, eds. Ian Budge, Ivor Crewe and Dennis Farlie. London: John Wiley.
- Klingemann, Hans-Dieter. 1978. *Ideologisches Denken in der Bevölkerung westlicher Industriegesellschaften*. Universität Mannheim (Habilitationsschrift).
- Meny, Yves. 1993. *Le système politique français*. Paris: Montchrestien.
- Merton, Robert K. 1995. “The Thomas Theorem and the Matthew Effect.” *Social Forces* 74: 379-424.
- Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, Gisela und Patrick Moreau. 2000<sup>2</sup>. *Frankreich – eine politische Landeskunde*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Nohlen, Dieter. 2000. *Wahlrecht und Parteiensystem*. Opladen: Leske und Budrich.
- Pierce, Roy. 1995. *Choosing the Chief. Presidential Elections in France and the United States*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Przeworski, Adam and Henry Teune. 1970. *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*. New York: Wiley Interscience.
- Pütz, Christine. 2004. *Parteienwandel in Frankreich. Präsidentschaftswahlen und Parteien zwischen Tradition und Anpassung*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Quermonne, Jean-Louis. 1983. *Le gouvernement de la France sous la cinquième république*. Paris : Dalloz.
- Rattinger, Hans. 2000. „Die Bürger und ihre Parteien.” In *Wirklich ein Volk? Die politischen Orientierungen von Ost- und Westdeutschen im Vergleich*, hrg. Jürgen Falter, Oscar W. Gabriel und Hans Rattinger. Opladen: Leske und Budrich.
- Reif, Karlheinz. 1982. *Parteiensystem in Frankreich: Die Transformation des Parteiensystems durch die Institutionen der V. Republik*. Universität Mannheim: Habilitationsschrift.
- Reif, Karlheinz. 1984. „National Electoral Cycles and European Elections 1979 and 1984.” *Electoral Studies* 3: 244-255.
- Reif, Karlheinz and Hermann Schmitt. 1980. "Nine national second-order elections: A systematic framework for the analysis of European elections results." *European Journal of Political Research* 8: 3-44.
- Sartori, Giovanni. 1976. *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scharpf, Fritz W. 1985. „Die Politikverflechtungs-Fälle: Europäische Integration und deutscher Föderalismus im Vergleich.” *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 26: 323-356.
- Schmitt, Hermann. 2009. "Partisanship in nine western democracies: causes and consequences." Pp. 75-87 in *Political Parties and Partisanship*, eds. John Bartle and Paolo Bellucci. London and New York: Routledge.
- Schmitt, Hermann. 2001. *Politische Repräsentation in Europa*. Frankfurt: Campus.

- Schmitt, Hermann and André Freire. Forthcoming. „Ideological Polarisation: Different Worlds in East and West.“ In *Citizens and the European Polity: Mass Attitudes Towards the European and National Politics*, eds. David Sanders, Pedro Magalhães, and Gábor Tóka. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schmitt, Hermann and Andreas M. Wüst. 2006. “The Bundestag election of 2005: The interplay of long-term trends and short-term factors.” *German Politics and Society* 24: 27-46.
- Schmitt, Hermann and Sören Holmberg. 1995. „Political parties in decline?“ In *Citizens and the State*, eds. Dieter Fuchs and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Vol. 1 of the Beliefs in Government Series). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scoppola, Petro. 1991. *La Repubblica dei partiti*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Siegfried, André. 1913 (1964). *Tableau politique de la France de l'ouest sous la troisième république*. Paris : A. Colin.
- Zadra, Dirk. 1997. *Der Wandel des französischen Parteiensystems*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

## Appendix

Table A1  
**Left-Right Selfplacement on the 11-Point Scale**  
(in per cent of all responses)

	Italy	France	Germany
left=0	4	7	6
1	3	2	5
2	4	5	10
3	6	10	10
4	6	9	22
5	15	23	19
6	6	10	8
7	6	11	7
8	7	11	2
9	3	2	2
right=10	4	6	2
dk, na	36	4	6

Source: CSES II-surveys in all three countries. In the German data set, only the telephone interviews are analysed. Analyses are based on weighted data.