The Concept of Party Set
— A Viable Approach or Just Another Way to Slice the Same Cheese?

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INTRODUCTION

The cradle of modern election studies is found in the United States. First at Columbia and then at Michigan, the election research programs that were begun there have had a world-wide influence (Jennings and Mann, 1994). The classic works — together with the generosity of the founding fathers and the curiosity of the young foreign scholars — resulted in similar studies in many other countries (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954; Campbell, Miller and Gurin, 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes, 1960; Thomassen, 1994).

An almost inevitable and well-known consequence of this diffusion was a bias in both conceptualization and instrumentation favoring the American party identification model. Foremost among the crucial problems was that both theory and method were tailored to a two-party system. If the party identification model had some difficulties as a unidimensional construct in the U.S. (Weisberg, 1980, Weisberg and Rusk, 1970), the problem became much more intractable in countries with more than two parties (Borre and Katz, 1973; Butler and Stokes, 1969; Campbell and Valen, 1966; Crewe, 1976; Holmberg, 1981; Särlvik, 1970; Thomassen, 1976). For one thing, in the European multi-party context only the strength component — and not the direction component — of the party identification concept was found useful. Thus, from the very beginning, European scholars have put to use a somewhat crippled version of the American party identification model.

The most important measure in electoral research is, of course, the vote variable. When crossing the Atlantic, the basic dichotomy from the two-party system of the U.S. had to be expanded to a polytomy. At first, the solutions to this apparent lack of fit were to use more or less simple tabular analyses or to collapse party choice into a bourgeois-socialist dichotomy. Needless to say, this mode of analysis did not tell the full story of how the voters make up their minds in a multiparty parliamentary election.

An alternative approach, which did not emerge at that time, is to use the concept of *party set* as the point of departure. A voter's party set consists of only those parties that the voter would *really* consider voting for at a given time. It is from the parties in the party set the person chooses when voting.

If there is just one party in a voter's party set, the real choice is whether or not to vote at all. If the party set contains two parties, the situation is much like the one faced by many voters in the U.S., i.e., those who would consider voting for the Democratic or the Republican nominee. But suppose there are as many as eight viable parties competing to be the voter's choice. Among the eight, there may be four parties that are really considered by a given voter, and these four would comprise that person's party set.

Although the conceptualizations proposed in this article are new, the party set approach has been inspired by a number of Dutch studies. In the Dutch eight-to-thirteen-party consociational democracy, the misfit of the American party identification model is probably the most obvious. The finding that Party Choice was more stable than Party Identification among Dutch voters (Thomassen, 1976) was a devastating failure of the American model. Another study concluded that many Dutch voters identified with *more* than one

party — an option clearly not available in the party ID model (Van der Eijk and Niemöller, 1983; see also Tillie, 1990). The failure stimulated the development of alternative models of individual voting behavior. For instance, since the mid 1980s Dutch scholars have repeatedly measured voters' *selfreported probability of future vote* in National Election Studies. Data on the likelihood of voting for different parties have demonstrated its fruitfulness in a number of studies (Anker, 1992; Tillie, 1995).

The concept of party set is most relevant to multi-party systems. Since that includes most democratic systems, this is not a serious liability. However, before gaining admission to the lexicon of political science, the party set concept must demonstrate its worth. Obviously, the concept must be shown to increase our ability to describe and predict political behavior, and to advance our understanding of politics. The main focus of this paper is to examine whether the use of a concept of party set can be a viable approach or if it is just another way to cut the same cheese.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PARTY SET

Within Social Psychology the theoretical development most relevant to the concept of party set comes from Social Judgment Theory. In that theory, an individual's attitude is conceived as a series of latitudes or zones: the latitude of acceptance, the latitude of noncommitment, and the latitude of rejection. The relative sizes of these latitudes have been found to vary in systematic ways. As involvement increases, the size of the latitude of rejection increases while the latitude of noncommitment decreases in size (Sherif and Hovland, 1961; Sherif et al, 1965; Granberg and Sarup, 1992).

Within a person's *latitude of acceptance*, there may be one object, position, or party, which is most preferred, but the others will also be evaluated favorably. The parties within the latitude of acceptance comprise that person's party set. When a person changes party between elections or within a campaign, it is likely to be from one party to another within the initial party set. For individual voters, the amount of information needed to make the final party choice is obviously smaller when choosing from a subset rather than from a full set of alternatives.[1]

A most relevant question at this stage is: Why do we need a new concept in the first place? The most direct answer to that question is that a concept of party set is called for when information about voters' first choice or party affiliation no longer suffice when characterizing and analyzing the distribution, stability, dynamics and structure of political preferences in the electorate.

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[1]   A recent development in Political Science of relevance to these ideas on the party set is the concept of the region of acceptability in the Directional Theory of Issue Voting (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989; Macdonald, Listhaug, and Rabinowitz 1991). A party outside the region of acceptability is not a viable option for most voters. This concept bears a close resemblance to the latitude of acceptance concept in Social Judgment Theory. However, Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989) treat the region of acceptability as an aggregate attribute, whereas we look upon party set as an individual characteristic.

We expect the concept of party set to be a useful descriptive and analytic tool in multi-party democracies where a) the number of parties in the party system is high, b) voters have weak and unstable party identification, c) the electoral volatility between elections and during election campaigns is high, and d) a large proportion of the electorate decide how to vote very close to the election.[2]

The Swedish case fits well this description (Gilljam and Möller, 1996). The Swedish Party system has been transformed from a stable five-party system to an unstable seven-to-eight party system during the 1980s and early 1990s.[3] Party identification has decreased monotonically during the period 1956-1994 from which we can provide comparable data (Holmberg, 1994b; see also Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995). There has been a sharp increase of electoral volatility both between elections and during election campaigns in the 1990s. In the 1991 and 1994 elections, the proportion of party switchers was 30%. In 1994, 49% of Swedish voters claim they made their final party choice during the campaign (Gilljam and Holmberg, 1995:38).

Recent development of voting behavior in Sweden does not only present a set of new challenges for the political parties — such as more uncertainty and increasing party competition due to a more volatile electorate. It is also a challenge to electoral research which motivates a search for new analytic constructs. The party set approach is an attempt to meet this challenge.

We see a number of possible applications of the party set concept. Firstly, with the party set approach, we can identify _exactly_ what set of alternatives individual voters _actually_ confronted in the election. After the election, voters with four-party party sets can be asked to explain one by one why they voted for party A and not for parties B, C and D, respectively, i.e., the other parties in the party set.

Secondly, the party set approach can, at least theoretically, separate long-term from short-term factors in analyses of voting behavior. The success of this approach depends on whether voters' party sets can be shown to be very stable. If so, the party set can be understood as a stable _ideological_ affiliation, in much the same way as party identification

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[2]   a) The first expectation can be motivated using the language of the classic spatial theory of elections. When the number of viable alternatives increase, some, but not necessarily all, voters are likely to get more parties close to their ideal point in ideological space — at least as long as the space in which parties normally harbor is not expanded in any way. b) The number of parties within a person's party set can be seen as a function of the strength of party affiliation. When party affiliation decreases, the psychological distance between the voter and the most preferred party increases. As a direct consequence of that, the distance between the voter and the second and third most preferred party will decrease for many voters. Weakening affectionate ties between the voter and the most preferred party are expected to make it easier, psychologically, to add more parties to the party set. c) High levels of electoral volatility is an incentive for scholars within the field of electoral research to try 'go behind the scene' of individual political party preferences. What goes on below the surface of the best preferred alternative — the second, third and fourth best party — can give valuable insights when explaining individual voting behavior. d) This task becomes even more important when a large proportion of the electorate decide how to vote during the election campaign.

[3] During the years 1991-1994, the Swedish party system had eight viable parties. The right-wing protest party New Democracy was very successful in the 1991 election and was represented in the Swedish Riksdag. Because of the high level of party system fragmentation during the period 1991-1994, the bulk of the analyses in this paper concerns this period.

is a stable *psychological* affiliation. While the party set may reveal a life-long ideological left-right identification of the voter, the final party choice can be explained by short-term factors such as personal traits of party leaders or important political events during the election campaign.

Thirdly, data about which parties that were included in voters' party sets can be subject to scaling analyses — such as Coombs unfolding technique — in order to <u>recover spatial representations of the party system</u>. In recent literature, there are arguments that this type of dichotomous responses to political stimuli (included/not included in the party set) is a better alternative than preference ratings and preference orderings when employing the Coombsian unfolding model to mass data on party evaluations (van Schuur, 1988; van Schuur and Post, 1990).

We will not be able to develop and try out these sketchy ideas in this paper. Before we explore the analytic possibilities of the party set concept any further, we must first encounter more basic measurement problems and examine the descriptive value of the party set concept.

MEASURING PARTY SET

In part because it is a new concept, there is no readily agreed upon method for measuring party set. Therefore, we shall explore various ways of operationalizing the concept. Most of the data we present were not gathered with the concept of party set in mind, but each type of data seems to hold premise of a successful connection with the concept of party set.

We shall identify three possibilities that are available. First, in the multiparty systems in which the election studies have used a feeling thermometer, it would be relatively straightforward to say that all parties rated positively are in the person's latitude of acceptance, those rated at the neutral point comprise the latitude of commitment, and those rated negatively are in the latitude of rejection. In the Swedish Election Study of 1985, for example, fully 85% of the respondents had favorable attitudes toward at least two of the five largest parties (Granberg and Holmberg, 1988:98).

This way of using the feeling thermometer to measure party set can, of course, be elaborated and refined in more sophisticated ways. For instance, starting at the top, one can search for the largest gap between the parties rated on the positive side. Parties above the gap comprise the party set and those below fall outside the party set.

Because these two measures are based on a feeling thermometer, they can be referred to as <u>affect based measures of party set</u>. In the Swedish National Election Studies of 1991 and 1994, respondents have been asked to rate each of the main eight political parties on a -5 to +5 feeling thermometer; the labels are dislike strongly (-5), neither like nor dislike (0), and like strongly (+5).

As a second alternative, some election studies, especially those in the Netherlands, have included questions in which people are asked about the likelihood that they will vote for

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each of the parties on a scale from 1 (certainly never) to 10 (sometime certainly). In the 1986 Dutch Post-Election Study, for example, respondents rated 12 parties on that scale, and for the average person there were 3 parties that were rated somewhere between 5 and 10. This instrument, which has been used extensively in the Eurobarometer and the European Parliamentary Election Studies, can be used as an <u>anticipated behavior measure of party set</u>.

A third alternative — which we believe is the most appropriate and straight-forward operationalization of the party set concept — has been used by IMU, a private polling institute in Sweden. In their intriguing method for measuring attitudes toward the parties, respondents are asked in regard to each party: "Could you think of yourself as voting for party X?" The alternatives are: yes, absolutely; probably yes; don't know; probably not; and absolutely not. Inasmuch as people are asked to reflect upon themselves and their own reportoire of possible decisions, we call this a <u>self-perception measure of party set</u>.

At the aggregate level, the percentage of the electorate saying absolutely yes can be said to constitute the party's core or base of support. It is doubtful that the party's vote percentage will be lower than this figure. The percentage saying absolutely or probably yes comprises the pool of potential or likely voters for each party. The prospects for persuading voters who say don't know, probably not, or absolutely not, to vote for a party are unknown but probably quite small.

At the individual level, the parties evoking an answer of absolutely yes or probably yes can be said to comprise the latitude of acceptance, those evoking a don't know response are in the latitude of noncommitment, and the parties on which the person answers probably not or absolutely not comprise the latitude of rejection. The size of these latitudes can vary from person to person, although in an eight party system they must sum to eight. Whether such variation is systematic and capable of being related in a coherent way to the left-right scale, other relevant dimensions, and voting behavior remains to be explored.

THE FORM OF PARTY SET

In the first section, we analyze the form and content of party set. By *form* we refer to the pattern of responses which enables us to describe variations in the relative sizes of the latitudes of acceptance, rejection, and noncommitment. The *content* of the party set examines specifically which combinations of parties are present in the party set.

We begin by comparing three measures of party set. The first one, shown in Table 1, is based on data from the polling institute IMU. In each of 19 surveys conducted between January, 1991 and June, 1994, about 500 Swedish adults were asked the "self-perception" questions about the eight main parties. In our analysis, the results of those 19 studies are combined into one file. The total number of respondents was 9 953, and of these, 9 232 (93%) gave a codeable answer in regard to each of the eight parties.

By this indicator, Swedes on average had 2.9 parties in their party set, and the modal response was 3. Relatively few people (12%) had only 1 party in the party set, and even

fewer had a party set of 0 or all 8 parties (3% together). Only 11% had more than 4 parties in the party set. As can be seen in Table 1, the bulk of this large sample has either 2, 3, or 4 parties in their party set (75%).

T A B L E   1
THE FORM OF PARTY SET

number of parties in party set	Party Set Operationalization		
	Self Perception (IMU)	Affect 1 (SNES 1991)	Affect 2 (SNES 1991)
0	3	2	6
1	12	4	33
2	25	11	29
3	30	23	22
4	20	26	8
5	7	20	2
6	2	9	0
7	1	4	0
8	0	1	-
sum total	100	100	100
n	9 232	2 368	2 368
average number of parties in party set	2.9	3.9	2.0

Source: The Swedish National Election Studies (SNES) 1991 and data from the IMU polling institute, January, 1991 - June, 1994.

The second and third measures of party set in Table 1 are based on the feeling-thermometer questions from the 1991 Swedish Election Study. Only those who rated all eight parties somewhere on the -5 to +5 scale are included in the analysis. "Affect 1", the middle column in Table 1, defines party set as consisting of all parties which are rated positively. By this measure, the size of the party set was 3,9 parties, and the modal size included 4 parties. Nearly all respondents (98%) rated at least one party positively, and almost as many people rated more than one party favorably (94%).

The "Affect 2" measure of party set is also derived from the feeling thermometer ratings, but it is somewhat more complicated and sophisticated. This measure is based on the premise that the Affect 1 measure is too inclusive. For instance, if a person rated three parties at +4 and a fourth party at +1, most likely the vote selection will be made among the first three parties, and it is probably unrealistic to say that the fourth party is in the party set. Therefore, with Affect 2, the party set consists of those parties rated above the largest break on the positive side. If the largest gap occurs more than once and there are ties in the ratings, the party set starts at the top and includes the first tie, provided that the tie comes first or second from the top. If the largest gap on the positive side occurs more than once and there are no ties, all of the parties are in the party set.

With the Affect 2 measure, the average size of the party set drops from 3.9 to 2.0. More than two thirds of the electorate have one-party or two-party sets (33% and 29%, respec-

tively), and the modal size included one party. With this operationalization, no voters had party sets with seven or eight parties.

The three measures return party sets of very different sizes. The Affect 1 measure is the most inclusive, with an average size of four parties, followed by the self perception (3 parties) and the Affect 2 measure (2 parties). Given that the self perception measure is the most valid in regard to our theoretical definition of party set concept, we argue that the average Swedish voter has a set of three parties from which he chooses when voting.

One can argue that a party set approach becomes more relevant the more parties that fall within the voters' latitude of acceptance. If we can show that a growing number of parties are rated favorably and/ or are perceived to be likely alternatives in a choice situation, the use of the party set concept in electoral research becomes a more promising venture.

In order to study whether the number of parties in Swedish voters' party sets has increased over the last decade, the affect based measures of party set was applied to the 1982-1994 Swedish Election Studies (see Table 2). Throughout this period, the Swedish party system has been a seven-party system. The Environmental Party and the Christian Democratic Party have appeared alongside the traditional five parties — i.e the Left Party (former communist), the Social Democratic Party, the Center Party (agrarian), the People's Party liberals the Liberals, and the Moderate Party (conservatives).

T A B L E 2
AVERAGE NUMBER OF PARTIES IN PARTY SET 1982-1994,
(CALCULATED FOR SEVEN PARTIES)

Measure of party set	SNES 1982	SNES 1985	SNES 1988	SNES 1991	SNES 1994	Change 1982-94
Affect 1	2.8	3.2	3.2	3.6	3.5	+0.7
Affect 2	1.4	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.7	+0.3
number of respondents	2 382	2 428	2 373	2 391	2 215	

Source: The Swedish National Election Studies (SNES) 1982-1994.

The average number of parties in Swedish voters' party sets has increased during the twelve-year period 1982-1994.[4] For the Affect 1 measure, the average size of party set has risen from 2.8 to 3.5 between 1982 and 1994. For the Affect 2 measure, the increase is more modest, but statistically significant at the 95% level (+0.3).

As party set size increase, we can assume that a growing proportion of voters actually have to consider more than one alternative when voting in national elections. This development will most certainly have consequences for the process by which voters make up their minds. For instance, the psychological 'cost' of changing party between elections or during election campaigns decreases. A voter with two, three or four parties in the party

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[4] Analyses of individual preference orderings have shown that the affective gap between the best and second best party has decreased during the period 1979-1994. A growing proportion of voters give two or more parties the exact same evaluative response on a feeling thermometer (Oscarsson, 1997:chapter 5).

set — all considered to be acceptable alternatives — can let the final decision remain pending until election day.

THE CONTENT OF PARTY SET

We now turn to analyze the content of party set. Exactly which combinations of parties are most common in the electorate? Are some parties more often than others represented in voters' party sets? And do some parties more often than others appear together in voters party sets?

A simple frequency table of all combinations of parties show that 242 out of 256 theoretically possible combinations (95%) can be empirically identified with the self perception measure of party set taken from the IMU-data.

The list of all 242 combinations of party sets can certainly be of specific interest to analysts of Swedish politics, but it will also consume a lot of valuable space in this paper. Because of that, only all 1-party sets and the most common (>1%) two-to-eight party sets are shown in Table 3. The 10 most common combinations of parties have been ranked in the column farthest to the right.

The most common party set is a one-party set which includes the Social Democratic Party (6.8%). This one-party set is considerably more frequent than other one-party sets, not only because the Social Democrats was the largest party at this time, but also because Social Democratic symphatizers historically have had strong party affiliation.

The three most common two-party sets are the Left Party and the Social Democratic Party (4.7%), the People's party liberals and the Moderate Party (3.8%), and the Social Democratic Party and the Environmentalist Green Party (3.1%).

The most common three-party set includes the Left Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Green Party (4.1%). The second most common three-party set include the People's Party liberals, the Moderate Party, and the Christian Democrats.

After the 1991 election, Sweden was ruled by a four-party bourgeois coalition of the Moderate Party, the People's Party liberals, the Center Party, and the Christian Democratic Party. This was also the most common four-party set during the period 1991-1994, but it gathered no more than 1.7% of the electorate.

In the second column of Table 3, the parties have been ordered from left to right. It is obvious that the most common party sets tend to include parties that are positioned close to each other in ideological space.

T ABLE 3
THE CONTENT OF PARTY SET IN SWEDEN
DURING THE PERIOD JANUARY, 1991 TO JUNE, 1994
(SELF PERCEPTION MEASURE OF PARTY SET).

# of parties in set	Content of Party Set	Electoral Support (percent)	Number of Respondents	Ranking of the 10 most Common Combinations
0	-------------------	2.6	236	
1	------------------M	2.2	207	#8
1	--------------ND--	0.7	64	
1	------------CD-----	0.3	32	
1	---------PP--------	0.6	51	
1	-------C-----------	0.5	45	
1	----En-------------	0.3	29	
1	--S----------------	6.8	632	#1
1	L------------------	0.3	30	
2	L-S----------------	4.7	433	#2
2	--------PP------—M	3.8	348	#4
2	--S-En-------------	3.1	283	#5
2	--S------PP--------	2.4	221	#7
2	--------------ND-M	2.0	188	#9
2	--S-----------ND--	1.2	113	
2	--S---------------M	1.2	110	
2	--S-C-------------	1.2	107	
2	------------CD----M	1.1	103	
2	other 2-party comb.	4.4	413	
3	L-S-En-------------	4.1	375	#3
3	---------PP-CD----M	2.6	239	#6
3	--S----C-PP--------	1.9	175	#10
3	--------PP----ND-M	1.7	159	
3	-------C-PP-------M	1.7	156	
3	--S-En---PP--------	1.5	142	
3	--S------PP------M	1.5	138	
3	--S-En-C-----------	1.3	124	
3	--S------------ND-M	1.2	111	
3	------------CD-ND-M	1.0	93	
3	L-S------PP--------	1.0	93	
3	other 3-party comb.	10.4	993	
4	-------C-PP-CD----M	1.7	160	
4	L-S-En-C-----------	1.4	130	
4	--S-En-C-PP--------	1.4	129	
4	L-S-En---PP--------	1.3	119	
4	-------C-PP----ND-M	1.1	106	
4	other 4-party comb.	12.1	1 157	
5	5-party combinations	8.2	784	
6	6-party combinations	2.1	120	
7	7-party combinations	0.8	57	
8	L-S-En-C-PP-CD-ND-M	0.3	27	
		100.0	9 232	

Note: The labels used for the Swedish parties are: L=the Left Party (former communist); S=the Social Democratic Party; C=the Center Party (agrarian); PP=the People's Party liberals; M= the Moderate party (conservative); En= the Environmentalist Green Party; CD=the Christian Democratic Party; ND - New Democracy. Source: IMU-polls, January, 1991 - June, 1994.

The content of party set can also be analyzed in more sophisticated ways.[5] For instance, the proportion of voters who include a party in their party set can be used as a measure of that party's *electoral potential* (EP), i.e., the maximum electoral support a party can receive at a given time. A party can reach this maximum only if all voters who include the party in their party set vote for the party in the election.

To a great extent, we expect the parties' level of electoral potential to mirror their relative strength. But the relation between a party's proportion of votes and electoral potential can vary in interesting ways. Some parties may perform very close to their maximum level of support in national elections, while other parties may fail to gather massive electoral support though they have a large potential. In order to study these discrepancies more closely, we have also calculated the parties' *mobilized electoral potential* (MEP), i.e., the proportion of the parties' total electoral potential that was mobilized into votes.

In this analysis, we use the most restrictive Affect 2 measure of party set. By this indicator, the Social Democratic Party had the highest electoral potential in the 1991 Swedish election — 43% of the voters included the Social Democrats in their party set (see Table 4). The high level of mobilized electoral support (86%) show that almost nine out of ten voters who included the Social Democrats in their party set also voted for the party.

The second largest party in the Swedish system in 1991, the Moderate Party, appeared in 37% of the party sets and had a mobilization rate of 85%. Thus, the two largest parties — the Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party — were also the two most successful parties when it came to mobilizing their electoral potential.

The newcomer in Swedish Politics in 1991, New Democracy, managed to mobilize half of its electoral potential in the election (50%). This proportion is high compared with the other small parties that were not that fortunate. For instance, a third of the Swedish voters included the People's Party liberals in their party set (EP=33%), but the party's electoral support was only 9 percent (MEP=27%). The Environmentalist Green Party also failed to mobilize its electoral potential (MEP=27%) and was thrown out of the Riksdag because it didn't reach the four percent threshold for parliamentary representation.

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[5]   Here, we borrow some useful analytic constructs from Jean Tillie's book *Party Utility and Voting Behavior* (1995). These operationalizations were originally designed for voting probability data in the Dutch National Election Studies.

SWEDISH PARTIES' LEVEL OF SUPPORT, ELECTORAL POTENTIAL,
AND MOBILIZED ELECTORAL POTENTIAL, 1991

party	Level of Support (LS)	Electoral Potential (affect 2) (EP)	Mobilized Electoral Potential (LS/EP)
Left Party	4%	13%	31%
Social Democratic Party	37%	43%	86%
Center Party	8%	23%	35%
People's party liberals	9%	33%	27%
Moderate Party	23%	37%	85%
Christian Democratic Party	8%	27%	30%
Environmental Party	4%	15%	27%
New Democracy	7%	14%	50%
number of respondents	2 368	2 368	2 368

Note: The level of electoral support is measured by the vote variable in the Swedish Election Studies. The figures in the column for Mobilized Electoral Support are calculated as follows: the party's level of electoral support (proportion of votes) is divided by the party's electoral potential (see Table 5 above).

With the party set approach, we can also measure — on an aggregate level — to what extent parties compete over the same voters. Parties that are positioned close to each other in an ideological space and appeal to the same group of voters will often appear together in the same party sets. For two parties at a time, we have calculated the proportion of party sets which include both parties (see Table 5). This measure of *two-party electoral competition* can be used to describe the overall party competition in the 1991 Swedish Election.

T A B L E 5
THE LEVEL OF TWO-PARTY ELECTORAL COMPETITION IN 1991
(THE PROPORTION OF PARTY SETS IN WHICH TWO PARTIES APPEAR TOGETHER)

party	L	SD	C	PP	M	CD	En	ND
Left Party	-							
Social Democrats	10%	-						
Center Party	5%	10%	-					
People's party liberals	4%	13%	11%	-				
Moderate Party	2%	6%	9%	20%	-			
Christian Democrats	2%	5%	8%	12%	11%	-		
Environmental Party	4%	7%	6%	4%	3%	4%	-	
New Democracy	1%	2%	4%	4%	7%	4%	2%	-

Source: The Swedish Election Study, 1991, pre-election interviews.

The People's Party liberals and the Moderate Party appeared together in 20% of the Swedish voters' party sets during the election campaign 1991. According to our measure, the electoral struggle was the most intensive between these two parties. This is somewhat paradoxically, since the Moderate Party and the People's Party liberals based their elec-

tion campaign more or less on a common platform. The figure 20% means the two parties' electoral potential was overlapping to some degree. Thus, they appealed to the same group of voters.

Not surprisingly, the structure of inter-party electoral competition in the 1991 election reflects a traditional left-right dimension in Swedish politics. To a great extent, the parties' closest neighbors along the dimension was each others' worst competitors in the election. For instance, The People's Party liberals show high levels of competition not only with the Moderate Party, but also with The Social Democrats, (13%), the Christian Democrats (12%), and the Center Party (11%).

THE PREDICTIVE VALUE OF PARTY SET

A comparison of the party identification model and the party set approach when it comes to predicting final party choice can never be fair, simply because the party set contains more information about individual political preferences. However, we expect the party set approach to do a better job than the party identification model. If the party set approach performs worse than the party identification model in this respect, we are definitely out of business — since we cannot use the concept of party set to isolate, in a good way, the real alternatives individual voters have in the election.

Eightyfour percent of the respondents who were interviewed before the 1991 election voted for the same party with which they had identified prior to the election (see Table 6). Thus, voters' pre-election party identification will correctly predict final party choice in 84% of the cases. (Not surprisingly, this proportion is higher among strong party identifiers (96%) than among weak identifiers (90%) and among voters that were leaning towards a particular party (72%).)

The proportion of voters who voted for a party that was included in their party sets before the election was 97% with the Affect 1 measure and 87% for the Affect 2 measure. Thus, if the party set concept is measured with the Affect 1 measure, the set will almost certainly include the final party choice. The predictive value of the Affect 2 measure is, however, not much greater than that of the party identification measure.

Since the IMU polls are cross sectional, we cannot perform the same comparison of party set and final party choice as with the Election Studies. However, the respondents in the IMU polls are asked "Which party do you like best?" (unfortunately, this question comes before the probability of vote questions in the interview). The probability of detecting the respondents' best party in their party set is .98, and this tells us very little about the predictive value of the self perception measure of party set.

TABLE 6
THE PREDICTIVE VALUE OF PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND PARTY SET,
WITH THREE DIFFERENT OPERATIONALIZATIONS OF PARTY SET, 1991.

		Proportion of Correct Predictions of Party Choice	number of respondents
party identification		**.84**	**879**
party set (affect 1)		**.97**	**988**
party set (affect 2)		**.87**	**988**
size of party set	0	.00	48
(affect 2)	1	.90	324
	2	.90	296
	3	.94	220
	4	.99	81
	5	1.00	17
	6	1.00	2
	7	-	
	8	-	
party set (self perception)		**.98**	**9 232**

Source: The Swedish Election Study, 1991, pre-election sample with additional information on final party choice from a mail survey after the election. IMU-polls (self-perception measure) during the period January, 1991 - June, 1994.

A closer inspection of how the Affect 2 measure behaves in the analysis shows that the probability of detecting the voters' party choice increases as the number of parties in the party set increase. For one-party and two-party sets, the predictive value is .90, somewhat higher for three-party sets (94%) and very close to 1.00 for party sets with four parties (99%). For party sets with five or six parties, the probability is 1.00. This is not a very surprising result, but it confirms that we become more and more certain that the party choice is in the party set the more information we put in the model.

Because of the high probability of detecting the final party choice within the party set, the potential use of party set in analyses of voting behavior is high. The party set — the latitude of acceptance — identifies in a delicate manner the likely alternative choices in the individual decision process. With this tool, we can closely examine how subset of voters with the same combination of parties in their party set reasoned when they decided to vote for one of the parties in their set. That way we can isolate the *short term* factors — such as personal traits of party leaders or important political events during the election campaign — when explaining voting behavior.

THE STABILITY OF PARTY SET

The final analyses in this paper are devoted to measuring the stability of party set. If we can show that the party set is a very stable ideological identification at the individual level, the party set approach will definitely be a serious alternative to the traditional party identification model that rests upon the notion of life-long psychological party affiliation.

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Another relevant question is exactly *how* voters change their party sets if they decide to. A party set can change in many ways, both in size and content. How many voters drop or add parties to their party set? And how many choose to replace one or two parties with new parties?

Of course, we would have liked to monitor a sample of individuals over a long period of time in order to assess the stability and dynamics of their party sets. However, the Swedish Election Studies' rolling two-wave panels between elections is the only available option. In the following analyses, we have used the Affect 2 measure of party set, calculated for seven parties so we can make good comparisons over time.

The entries in Table 7 are total percentages taken from a crosstabulation of two new variables. One variable shows how many parties that have been *added* to the voters' party set since the recent election. The other variable shows the number of parties that was *dropped* from the set during the same period. As will become clear, the combinations of the number of dropped and added parties can summarize, in a very straightforward fashion, the stability and dynamics of Swedish voters' party sets during the period 1982-1994.

The proportion of voters that neither dropped nor added any party or parties to their set is a simple measure of party set stability. About 25%-29% of the Swedish voters leave their party sets totally unchanged between elections in the period 1982-1994. This proportion is considerably lower than the stability of party identification — during the same period, the comparable proportion of voters who identify with the same party over two consecutive elections was 83%, 84%, 79%, and 78% in the 1982-85, 1985-88, 1988-91, 1991-94 panels, respectively (Holmberg, 1994b, Oscarsson, 1995).

THE STABILITY OF PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND PARTY SET
IN SWEDISH NATIONAL ELECTION PANELS (CALCULATED FOR SEVEN PARTIES)

1982-1985 PANEL

# of parties	# of parties dropped from set						
added in set	0	1	2	3	4	5	
0	29%	11%	8%	2%	0%	-	
1	20%	7%	3%	1%	0%	0%	
2	10%	3%	0%	0%	-	-	
3	4%	1%	-	-	-	-	
4	1%	-	-	-	-	-	
5	0%	-	-	-	-	-	
6	0%	-	-	-	-	-	total sum
							100%
							n=887

1985-1988 PANEL

# of parties	# of parties dropped from set						
added in set	0	1	2	3	4	5	
0	26%	15%	7%	3%	1%	0%	
1	18%	9%	3%	0%	0%	-	
2	10%	2%	1%	0%	-	-	
3	4%	1%	-	-	-	-	
4	1%	-	-	-	-	-	
5	0%	-	-	-	-	-	
6	-	-	-	-	-	-	total sum
							100%
							n=837

1988-1991 PANEL

# of parties	# of parties dropped from set						
added in set	0	1	2	3	4	5	
0	25%	12%	6%	3%	0%	0%	
1	17%	9%	3%	2%	0%	-	
2	11%	4%	1%	0%	-	-	
3	3%	1%	0%	-	-	-	
4	1%	-	-	-	-	-	
5	0%	-	-	-	-	-	
6	0%	-	-	-	-	-	total sum
							100%
							n=972

1991-1994 PANEL

# of parties	# of parties dropped from set						
added in set	0	1	2	3	4	5	
0	27%	18%	8%	3%	1%	0%	
1	14%	9%	5%	1%	-	0%	
2	6%	3%	1%	-	-	-	
3	3%	1%	0%	-	-	-	
4	0%	0%	-	-	-	-	
5	0%	0%	-	-	-	-	
6	-	-	-	-	-	-	total sum
							100%
							n=799

The proportion of voters who had party sets with the same *size* at both times can be estimated by adding together the diagonal entries in the crosstabulations in Table 7. If a voter add and drop the same number of parties, the party set size remains unchanged, although, of course, its content changes. The proportion of party sets with unchanged size was 36% in the 1982-85 panel, 36% in the 1985-88 panel, 35% in the 1988-91 panel, and 37% in the 1991-94 panel. Thus, about a third of the Swedish voters stick with the same party set size in consecutive elections. About 10% of the voters keep their party set size constant, while replacing one or two parties.

A number of questions remain to be answered about the stability and change of individual party sets. For instance, detailed analyses of exactly which parties were dropped and added by which voters will tell us more about the dynamics of party set and, more generally, the dynamics of party preferences at both the individual and aggregate level. We would also like to combine this dynamic approach with the voters' own motivations *why* they added or dropped a party from their set.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have used a concept of party set as an alternative to the American party identification model, a model that was originally designed for two-party systems. In a multi party context, many voters can have more than one party that they consider to be likely or probable alternatives.

The theoretical foundation of the party set approach comes from Social Judgment theory. Individuals' attitudes are conceived as a series of latitudes or zones: the latitudes of acceptance, noncommitment, and rejection. The parties that fall within a voter's latitude of acceptance comprise that voter's party set.

Using data from the Swedish IMU polling institute 1991-1994 and Swedish National Election Studies 1982-1994, we have tried out three operationalizations of party set. A *self perception measure* (IMU-data) produces party sets with an average of three parties, while two *affect based measures* (SNES-data) produces party sets with an average of two and four parties, respectively.

The average number of parties in Swedish voters' party set has increased during the period 1982-1994. This result makes the party set approach increasingly relevant. A growing proportion of voters have not only one, but two or three or four parties that they include within their latitude of acceptance, and consider voting for in national elections. It is from among this set of parties we believe voters chooses when voting.

In a number of analyses, we have demonstrated how the party set concept can be applied in electoral research, both on the aggregate and individual level. At the aggregate level, we have proposed a measure of the parties' *electoral potential* and *mobilized electoral potential*. We have also been able to characterize *the structure of inter-party electoral competition* in the Swedish party system. These measures are all based on the concept of party set and can be applied in more systematic ways.

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At the individual level, we have shown that, using the three different measures of party set, the parties in the party set will almost certainly include the voters' final party choice. Thus, we think the predictive value of party set is at a satisfactory level. We have also shown that voters' party sets are not particularly stable. To a large extent, voters drop and add parties in and out of their party set between elections. Therefore, the party set should not be considered a stable ideological identification — for this, individual party preferences are far too volatile.

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

The analyses reported here are all necessary for making future progress, both *theoretically*, with the concept of party set, and *empirically*, with the problems of instrumentation and measurement. The theoretical status of the party set concept is still somewhat fuzzy — this is most obvious when relating the party set approach to the traditional party identification model.

The concept of party set has yet to proof its worth in *explanatory* analyses. To use the concept of party set in analyses of this sort is also the natural next step in this research. After all, electoral research does not really lack useful *descriptive* analytic tools as much as it lacks explanatory approaches. What immediately comes to mind is an analysis by which we can isolate explanatory factors why voters decided to vote for one party in their party set and *not* to vote for the others.

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