



2014

Gothenburg 2014-12-15

**Consideration and Choice:
Analyzing Party Choice in the
Swedish European Election**

Maria Oskarson, Henrik Oscarsson
& Edvin Boije

Report 2014:14
Swedish National Election Studies Program
Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg



Consideration and Choice. Analyzing Party Choice in the Swedish European Election

2014¹

Maria Oskarson

Henrik Oscarsson

Edvin Boije

Department of Political Science

University of Gothenburg

Sweden

¹ This paper reports findings from the research project “Developing Consideration Set Models of Voting Behavior” run by Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson and Maria Oskarson, with Edvin Boije as research assistant. The project is financed by Riksbankens jubileumsfond for the years 2014-2016. Project number P13-0721:1.

Abstract

In order to gain more insight to voters' decision processes, we apply a consideration set approach to explain party choice in the election for the Swedish European Parliament in May 2014. In line with the work on first and second decision rule criteria in European Parliament elections by Vries and her co-authors (Vries, Steenbergen, & Hangartner, 2009), we set out to develop hypotheses about how standard components of voters' calculus work in different stages of the voter decision process. We present tests of hypotheses about consideration set size and content, primary and secondary decision criteria, and the effects of proximity voting using Swedish data from a random based three wave Internet campaign panel conducted in conjunction with the European Parliament election 2014. The findings indicate that many voters in fact are considering more than one party to vote for in the beginning of the election campaign, and that a lack of party identification is the main explanation for this. As expected, the impact of Left-Right ideology is the main decision rule for which parties are even considered voting for, whilst proximity on the European integration dimension mainly matters as a second decision rule, that is, the choice of which party out of the consideration set actually is voted for. We also find that perceived issue competence on specific policy areas matter as secondary decision criteria, or tie-breakers, and that the different parties gain from different tie-breakers. We conclude that the consideration set model approach is a viable way of disentangling the decision processes behind the party choice in parliamentary elections in multi-party systems.

The most fundamental conception of elections to the European Parliament is that they are “second order elections” (Marsh, 1998; Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt, 2005). Compared to national “first order” elections, elections to the European Parliament are perceived as less important as less is at stake, especially since no government will form on the basis of the electoral outcome. Due to this second order status, participation is generally lower, and big parties as well as government parties tend to lose support, whilst smaller, niche and fringe parties tend to succeed compared to national elections. Also, multiple studies have concluded that the voters in European elections evaluate national government performance rather than base their vote decisions on actual European issues. However, since this conception was formed, the European Union, as well as the power and significance of the European Parliament, have changed. Even though the general characteristics of European elections as second order is still valid, recent research has pointed to the fact that with more information of European matters, voters to a higher degree base their vote decisions on actual EU matters (Hobolt & Spoon, 2012; Hobolt & Wittrock, 2011; Vries, Brug, Egmond, & Eijk, 2011).

To cast a vote for a party in an election – local, national, or European – is a result of two decisions. First, whether to vote or not, and second, in the case of voting, which party to vote for. How voters make these decisions have of course been the focus of research on voting behavior and elections ever since the beginning of individual based election research. Still, the knowledge of the actual *decision-making process* behind party choice is limited. That factors such as social background, political identification, degree of political sophistication, ideological position, and

perceived issue proximity are central for the party choice is well documented (Dalton & Klingemann, 2007). It is also well documented that electoral volatility has increased over time, as long-standing stabilizing factors such as political identification and class voting has waned (Bengtsson, Hansen, Narud, Hardarson, & Oscarsson, 2013; Dalton, 2013). Thus, we can expect that behind the party vote is more and more of an actual *party choice*, rather than manifestation of long-lasting party identifications. However, research on how voters actually make up their minds has still not been able to fully detect how different explanatory factors behind the decision on how to vote relate to each other and at what stage in the decision-making process they tick in. General knowledge about the sequencing and timing of decision criteria, evaluations, and considerations during individual voters' decision processes is required to gain new insights of political behavior in contemporary democracies.

In order to respond to this development we apply "Consideration set models of party choice" (CSM) as an intriguing remedy to the many challenges of a highly individualized voting behavior. Here, the CSM approach will empirically be tested for the European Parliament Election in Sweden in May 2014.

Theoretical Approach Behind the Consideration Set Model Approach

The general idea behind consideration set models for party choice is that at the time of elections, many voters actively consider voting for more than one party. But, voters are not believed to consider the entire supply of parties, at least not in multi-party systems. Rather, and more realistically, voters are believed to enter the election campaigns with an existing subset of voting alternatives from which they

subsequently select the party to vote for. While earlier generations of citizens often manifested group based interests or identifications by routinely supporting parties at elections, many voters in the 21st century are believed to engage in an actual decision process. The final stages of this decision process take place in a context of intense campaigning and information processing. In spite of this long term development, party choice tends to still be analyzed with the same models and methods as in more predictable and steady periods. The CSM approach inspired by consumer research will provide the theoretically based explanatory model in response to the contemporary voting behavior of citizens.

Applying a CSM approach to party choice enables researchers to combine insights from political sociology with insights into political psychology. More precisely, a CSM framework allows for a thorough analysis of taking into account how voters expose, evade and process political information. The implications of the CSM assumption that voters form consideration sets to reduce cognitive costs of demanding information processing is that voters expose themselves to certain political information only during intense elections campaigns, namely the type of information that is needed to pick a winner from a preselected set of considered alternatives. These assumptions of the model have testable implications as we would expect that exposure to party messages and campaign events would be limited to the parties included in the individual's party set.

In consumer research when phased decision making processes are studied, more stages are often discussed. For example, according to Shocker, Ben-Akiva, Bocara, and Nedungadi (1991), as well as Roberts and Lattin (1991, 1997), the

decision process involves several nested steps. All possible options form the universal set, whilst the subset of options that the individual actually knows about, forms the awareness set, of which some options are considered and others not. Thus, the consideration set is nested in the awareness set (Roberts & Lattin, 1991, 1997; Shocker et al., 1991). Within previous studies of applying a consideration set approach to party choice, the first two stages, the universal set and the awareness set, are generally excluded since the universal set (all possible parties) still presents a more restricted number of options than is the case in most consumption research. For this reason also the awareness set is believed to have very limited variation between voters in established party based democracies, which is why analysis of this stage is considered futile and the consideration set model for party choice generally distinguishes two separate stages in the decision process – the consideration stage and the choice stage (Steenbergen & Hangartner, 2008; Steenbergen, Hangartner, & Vries, 2011; Wilson, 2008; Vries, Brug, Egmond, & Eijk, 2009). The consideration set model approach for party choice can be schematically illustrated as in Figure 1.

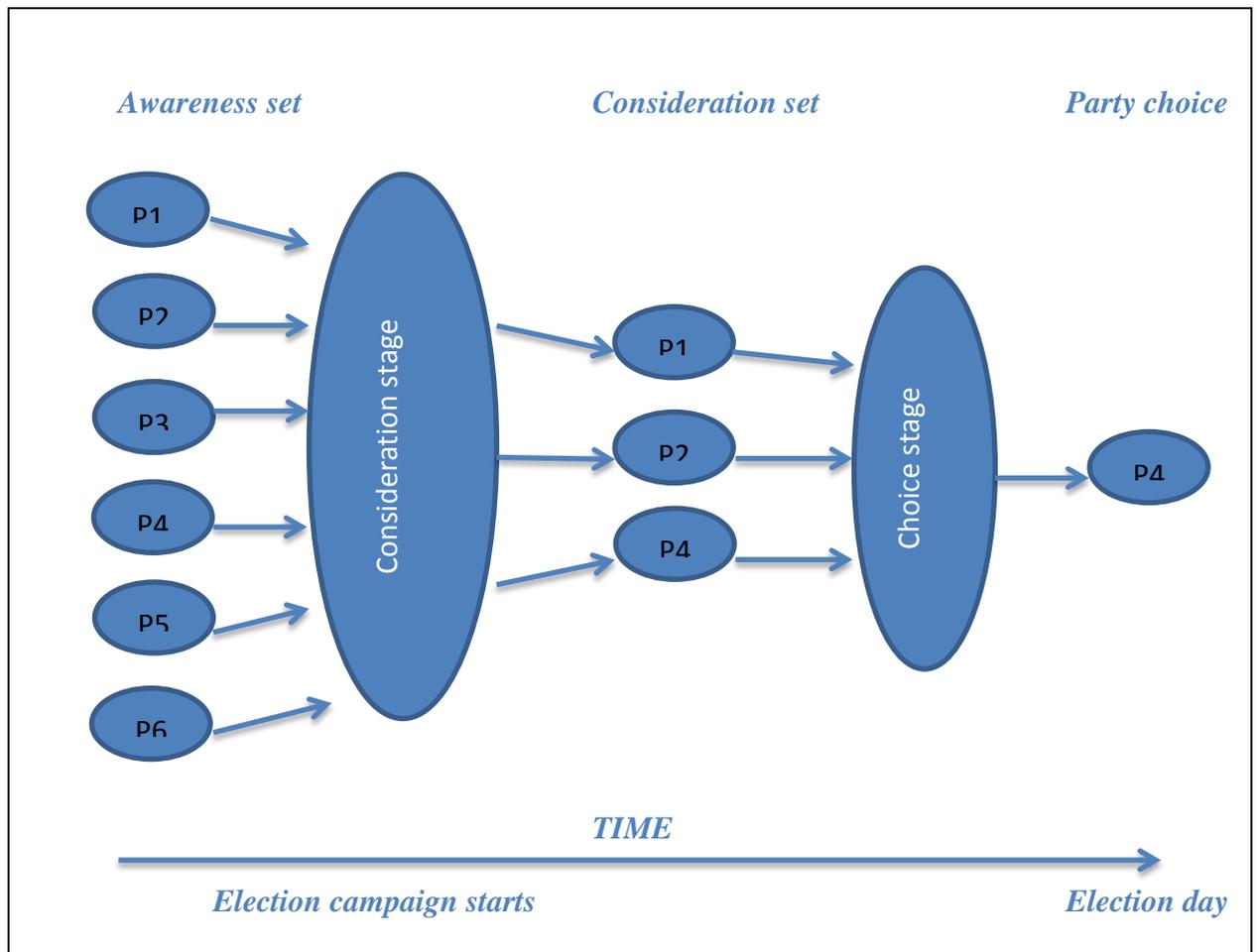


Figure 1. Schematic illustration of the decision making process for party choice according to the consideration set model (where P1-P6 stands for the parties entering the election).

Distinguishing the two stages – consideration stage and choice stage – from each other enables more fine-tuned analytical models, where it is possible to distinguish factors and criteria that influence the consideration set formation from factors and criteria influencing the actual vote choice, and also consider the temporal factor of different criteria and considerations. This is furthermore consistent with the view of voters as “cognitive misers” who use heuristics to minimize information costs

(Popkin, 1991; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991; Wilson, 2008). To distinguish the consideration set from the actual choice set is also in line with Zaller's notion that voters' attentiveness and responses to election campaigns are expected to be dependent on their predispositions not only in ideological terms, but also in terms of what parties they actually consider voting for (Zaller, 1992). The distinction between separate phases in the decision making process of party choice enables us to distinguish effects of election campaigns in a more realistic fashion than when we understand the party choice as a choice between all parties in the party system.

So far, research applying consideration set models for party choice has been limited and mainly oriented towards statistical modeling, for example probabilistic choice set multinomial logit models (Paap et al., 2005; Steenbergen & Hangartner, 2008) or choice set logistic regression (Steenbergen et al., 2011). Partly the technical nature of previous research on consideration set models for party choice has been due to limited instrumentation in surveys, necessitating various indirect techniques to identify the consideration sets. A more complete analysis is presented by Carole J. Wilson, who shows that local party strength forms a contextual determinant of the consideration of voters (Wilson, 2008).

Party Choice in European Parliament Elections

When it comes to voting decisions in European elections, the consideration set approach has the potential to offer a deeper understanding of the mechanisms at play when it comes to party choice in second-order elections. Cleavage structures and ideological orientations are based historically in national politics and believed to

structure the relation between voters and parties and accordingly provide main explanations to a voter's consideration set in elections. These fundamental structures for the relation between voter and party do not have their counterparts in European elections, restricting the possible impact of European issues to discriminate between the parties already in the consideration set.

In a paper from 2009 on EU issue voting in Britain from a consideration set perspective, Vries et al. (2009) build on the work on issue evolution by Carmines and Stimson (1989) and ask if EU issues act as primary (consideration stage) or secondary (choice stage) decision criteria when voters form their consideration sets. The basic assumption is that in the case of gradual issue evolution an issue starts as a "secondary decision criterion," or put differently, the issue is not of such great importance that it is used to eliminate alternatives. Over time, such an issue may become a "primary decision criterion," i.e. decisive for which parties are even considered voting for (Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Vries et al., 2009, p. 8). Their results suggest that even though EU issue voting has increased in Britain, it still doesn't have the position as primary decision criteria. Furthermore, the issue evolution process could on good grounds be believed to depend on the level of information on EU matters, since the degree to which EU issues actually influence the decision on party choice in European Parliament elections is found to depend upon information of EU issues. Vries et al. found in a comparative study of the 2009 election that EU issue voting was slightly more pronounced among sophisticated voters, but clearly more determining in contexts that provided more information of EU matters.

By applying a CSM perspective on party choice the European Parliament elections we will be able to better understand and depict the underlying decision processes among voters. In order to do this, we will make distinctions between the consideration stage and the choice stage. For the consideration stage it is also vital to distinguish between the *formation and size* of the consideration set (how many parties) and the *content* of the set (which parties). With the insights from previous research on European Parliament elections as second order elections, a number of hypotheses could be formulated for the three stages of interest – the formation of the consideration set, the contents of the consideration set, and the actual choice stage. First of all, considering the low intensity and visibility of the EUP elections, we expect that many voters actually report consideration sets of more than one party. We hypothesize that party identification is the main explanation for whether a voter considers more than one party.

H1) Party identification is the main explanation for the size of the consideration set.

To what degree factors such as political interest or ideological leaning could be expected to matter for whether a voter considers one or more party to vote for is somewhat of an open question.

The maybe most debated and researched aspects of voting in the elections to the European Parliament is the question of if the party choice is based on European issues, or on general LR orientation and national issues (van der Brug & Eijk, 2007). Due to the cleavage character of the Swedish multi-party system, and the low salience of the European elections, we believe EU issues to have an impact as secondary

decision rules (choice stage) whilst the probability to even consider voting for a party is primarily dependent on left-right ideological positions.

Still, to a large degree the weak impact of position on the EU dimension is found to be due more to the alternatives presented by the parties on EU issues, than a lack of EU attitudes among the voters (van der Eijk & Franklin, 2007; Vries, 2007). It is therefore not just a question of how the voters place themselves ideologically that matters, but also how the party positions are perceived; that is, ideological proximity between voters and parties. Referring to the previous discussion of primary versus secondary decision criteria, we expect the consideration stage to reflect that:

- H2) The consideration set is mainly based on LR proximity, and accordingly left-right ideological proximity is the first decision rule in the European Parliament election, and*
- H3) EU proximity does have an effect in the consideration stage, but the effect is weaker than the effect of LR proximity since EU proximity is a second decision rule.*

A basic assumption behind the consideration set approach is that not all voters make an actual choice between the parties entering the election. Party identification and previous voting habits might lead some voters to never consider more than one party. This leads us to expect that for voters with a consideration set with only one party, ideological proximity matters less than among voters actually involved in considerations between the parties. Accordingly:

- H4) Ideological proximity has stronger effects among voters considering more than one party.*

In the choice stage the first decision rule is no longer valid when voters considering more than one party make the decision which party to vote for. Rather, we expect other factors than left-right proximity to act as tie-breakers. The first potential secondary decision rule, or tie-breaker, is EU proximity; that is, proximity on general EU issues. However, another potential tie-breaker, or second decision rule, is the evaluation of competence of the parties in the consideration set when it comes to handling central issues of the election campaign (Bélanger & Meguid, 2008; Green & Jennings, 2012; van der Brug, 2004). Consequently we have formulated three hypothesis for the choice stage:

- H5) Left-right proximity is not a decision rule in the choice stage,*
- H6) EU proximity is the main decision rule in the choice stage, and*
- H7) In the choice stage evaluations of the parties, issue competence matters as a tie-breaker between the parties.*

Data

The Swedish election studies program offers good opportunities to explore these hypotheses. Empirical data on Swedish voters' choice sets has been accumulated over the past 10 years and a number of different suggestions of instrumentation have been proposed (Oscarsson, 2004; Oscarsson, 2009; Oscarsson et al., 1997). However, in order to enable analyses of consideration set models, ordinary election studies are not the most appropriate method since they are restricted to measurement at one or at the most two points in time, and also they do not always

include optimal instrumentation for consideration sets for party choice. In order to fully study the decision process we need panel studies with more steps.

To meet these challenges a specific web based campaign panel was setup and deployed in March 11th of the Swedish “super election year” 2014, explicitly for the research project “Developing Consideration Set Models of Voting Behavior.” The main purpose of this seven-wave panel was to provide a unique and very detailed coverage of the evolution of consideration sets over the full span of the election campaign. The SNES program has long experience with conducting similar web based campaign panels, although this constitutes the first large scale attempt at recruiting a nationally representative panel study based on probability samples. With this data set we will have the opportunity to exploit the full analytic power of existing data, and cover the EUP and national elections in 2014 for the purpose of developing CSM.

The panelists were recruited through a postal invitation which was sent out to a random population sample of Swedish citizens aged between 18-70 years.² Out of the 27,000 invitations sent out, 2,053 panelists were recruited and the relatively low response rate (7.7 percent) clearly illustrates the difficulties in recruiting a representative sample to an online panel survey. In the sample older respondents are somewhat over-represented – the average age is 48 years compared to 42 years in

² Parallel to the randomly selected population based sample of respondents, a second group of panelists (n=approx. 19.290) were self-recruited to the CSM panel study. Data from the self-recruited sample is heavily skewed in terms of representativeness and will not be used in the empirical analyses of this paper, but will be used later in the project mainly for the purpose of methodological evaluation and theory development.

official statistics. Furthermore, compared to the Swedish Election Survey, we have an over-representation of people with high education and an interest in politics. Of the party sympathizers, the Green Party, the Liberal Party and the new party Feminist Initiative are over represented compared to the election results of the European election in May 2014.³

Operationalization and Instrumentation

Most previous studies applying consideration set models for party choice have been restricted to base the analyses on questions not specifically designed for this purpose, such as like/dislike scales (Oscarsson, 2004). To infer consideration sets from like/dislike scales enforces the researcher to define some kind of more or less arbitrary “cut point” in order to identify a consideration set, for example all parties with a positive value. However this is done, we can never be sure that the respondent actually makes the same considerations for voting as for which parties are “liked.”

When it comes to voting, factors such as coalition possibilities, strategic voting, and short term issue salience might also matter for which parties are considered. Another strategy has been to use recall questions in post-election surveys (e.g. “Did you consider voting for any other party?”). Even though this strategy might lead to the actual choice set on Election Day, it is not possible to use for tracking the actual decision process behind the party choice.

³ All analyses in this study were also conducted on the larger opt in panel. Although the opt in panel is heavily skewed towards politically engaged and interested citizens, the results of all our hypotheses tests were confirmed.

In the CSM web panel surveys used here, questions are explicitly designed for analyses of pre-election consideration sets. The questions used are: Which party or parties do you consider voting for in the upcoming (national/European) elections? Is there any other party you consider voting for? The questions were asked in the first phases of the panel surveys, a month or so before the election in question, and then in consecutive surveys. In order to analyze how different factors such as ideological proximity affect if a party is included in the consideration set or not we have “stacked” the data set. This means that every alternative within the possible consideration set, here party system, is used as the unit of analysis. In other words, every respondent occurs as many times as there are parties to choose between (voter-party dyads). For the analysis with stacked data sets robust logistic analysis is employed. The standard errors are corrected since the observations emanated from the same respondent are not independent.

For ideological position and ideological proximity we asked the respondents to first place themselves on the ideological scales, and thereafter to place the position of each individual party. The scales ranged from 0-10 with end points marked as “far to the left” as 0 and “far to the right” as 10 for the left-right dimension, and “negative to the EU” as 0 and “positive to the EU” as 10 for the EU dimension. Ideological proximity was operationalized as the difference between the respondents’ own positions and those of the respective parties. The questions on issue competence stated five issue areas (Employment, Education, Gender Equality, Immigration, and Environment) and an “other” option and asked the respondents to mark which party or parties had a “good policy” for each issue area. One objection to this might be that

the answers of this question reflect general issue salience as well as issue ownership, but since the question explicitly asked for “good policy” on pre-defined issue areas we are convinced that the answers capture evaluations rather than salience.

Formations of Consideration Sets in the Swedish European Election of May 2014

In order to test the hypotheses we have specified the “consideration stage” as 21 days before the European Parliament election held on the 25th of May. Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents in the panel actually considered more than one party (58%), and that the average size of the consideration sets among voters considering more than one party was 2.5 parties. In the appendix we report the sizes and contents of the consideration sets for the sample in more detail.

Table 1

Share of Respondents with More than One Party in Consideration Set, Swedish EUP Election 2014

	Swedish EP election 2014	Average consideration set size
Considering one party	42%	1.0
Considering > 1 party	58%	2.5
Number of respondents	1,283	

Note. Respondents not reporting any party are not included in the percentage base.

The first hypothesis formulated stated party identification as the main determinant to more than one party in the consideration set, whilst the impact of political interest and ideological leaning was more of an open question. Table 2 below confirms a strong effect of party identification.

Table 2

Determinants for Considering More than One Party. Binomial Logistic Regression Coefficients

	1	2	3	4
Sex	0.13			0.17
Age	-0.02***			-0.02***
Education (high)	0.15			0.03
Political interest		-0.12		-0.14
Political interest EU		0.00		0.03
Party Id: Strongly convinced		-1.72***		-1.74***
Party Id: Somewhat convinced		-0.60***		-0.63***
Left-right position (0-10)			-0.02	-0.05
EU position (0-10)			0.03	0.03
Constant	1.04	1.00	0.16	1.86***
Pseudo R2	0.02	0.08	0.001	0.09
N	1159	1159	1159	1159

Note. Dependent variable “considering more than one party” coded is as 1 and considering one party is coded as 0. Significance levels: *: p<0,05; **: p<0,01; ***: p<0,001.

As expected it is party identification that is the main determinant for if a voter considers more than one party or not. Since the dependent variable is “more than one party in the consideration set,” the effect of party identification is negative.

It is far less probable for strongly convinced party identifiers to consider more than one party than voters without party identification, and also less probable than voters with a weak party identification. Apart from party identification it is only age that has a significant effect, with older voters less inclined to consider more than one party. Age does not however seem to co-vary with party identification in the sample used, as the effect of party identification remains the same under control for age (model 4) as when age is not controlled for (model 2). Worth noting is that education and political interest have no effect on consideration of more than one party, which indicates that there are no substantial cognitive differences between the voters who consider only one party, and those who consider more.

Consideration Stage

So, what are the main determinants for which parties are actually considered voting for? We hypothesized that ideological proximity should be the main determinant, and that it is possible to distinguish ideological proximity along different ideological dimensions, here the EU dimension from the left-right dimension. Furthermore we presented a distinction between first- and second-order decision rules in formulating the hypotheses.

H2) The consideration set is mainly based on LR proximity, and accordingly left-right ideological proximity is the first decision rule in the EU election.

H3) EU proximity does have an effect in the consideration stage, but the effect is weaker than the effect of LR proximity since EU proximity is a second order decision rule.

H4) Ideological proximity has stronger effects among voters considering more than one party.

Table 3 compares the effects of LR proximity and EU proximity. The first model is among all respondents, whilst the second model captures the difference in the effects of ideological proximity between respondents considering one party and respondents considering more than one party by adding the interaction variables between size of the consideration set and the two measures for ideological proximity. The results support all three hypotheses, as is also illustrated in figure 2.

Table 3

Consideration Stage. Probability that a Party is Included in the Consideration Set as a Function of Ideological Proximity. Robust Logistic Regression (All Respondents)

	1	2
Proximity (0-10)		
Left-right	-0.54***	-0.77***
EU	-0.25***	-0.47***
>1 party * Left-right		0.28***
>1 party * EU		0.28***
Constant	0.41***	0.52***
Log-likelihood	-4,321.18	-4,125.39
Pseudo R2	0.21	0.24
N	1,177	1,177

Significance levels: *: p<0,05; **: p<0,01; ***: p<0,001.

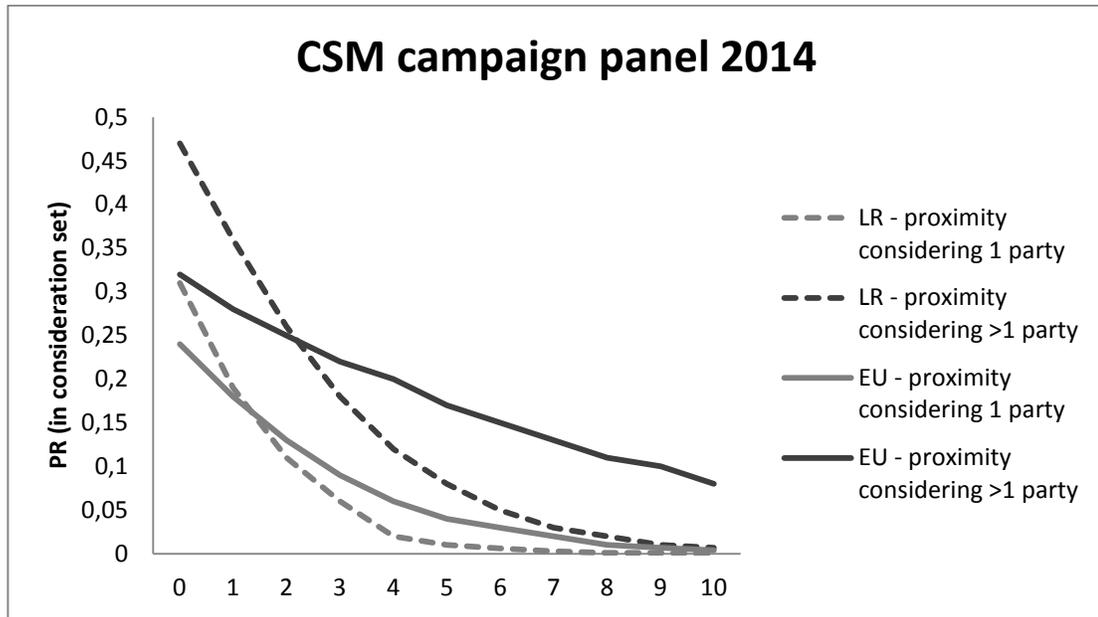


Figure 2. Predicted probability for a party to be included in the consideration set as a function of ideological proximity (based on results in Table 3).

As hypothesized, left-right proximity is the main explanatory factor for which parties are even considered voting for. The probability that a party is included in the consideration set is, according to this analysis, over 40 percent if the party is placed at the same left-right position as the voter, whilst it is only 20 percent or less if the placement differs by two or more scale steps. Proximity along the EU dimension matters also, but far less than proximity along left-right and the tolerance for parties with a more distant ideological position than the respondents' own is markedly higher.

We also find support for the hypothesis that the effects of ideological proximity are higher among respondents considering more than one party, as compared to those considering just one party, which is clarified in Figure 2, where the

darker lines show the probability for a party to be in a consideration set of more than one party.

With this analysis we have confirmed that ideological proximity matters for the consideration stage, and that it is first and foremost LR proximity that is decisive for which parties are considered. We have also confirmed that the effects of ideological proximity differ between respondents who, already 21 days or more before the European Parliament election, considered only one party, and respondents who considered more than one party. This leads us to the next step in the actual decision process – the choice stage.

Choice Stage

In the choice stage only respondents considering more than one party were included, since for voters with only one party in their consideration set the choice was already made. The hypotheses for what determined which of the parties in the consideration set respondents actually chose to vote for were the following:

- H6) Left-right proximity is not a decision rule in the choice stage, i.e. it has a weaker effect than in the consideration stage,*
- H7) EU proximity is the main decision rule in the choice stage, and has accordingly a stronger effect than left-right proximity, and*
- H8) In the choice stage evaluations of the parties, issue competence matters as a tie-breaker between the parties.*

The results are displayed in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Choice Stage. Probability that a Party in the Consideration Set is Voted for as a Function of Ideological Proximity and Evaluations of Party Competence on Issue Areas. Robust Logistic Regression (Respondents Considering More than One Party)

	Model 1	Model 2
Proximity (0-10)		
Left-right	-0.12**	-0.07
EU	-0.12***	-0.12***
Good policy (0-1)		
Employment		-0.15
Education		0.32*
Gender Equality		0.37**
Migration		0.55***
Environment		0.09
Constant	-0.07	-0.76***
Log-likelihood	-799.09	-772.66
Pseudo R2	0.015	0.047
N	499	499

Significance levels: *: $p < 0,05$; **: $p < 0,01$; ***: $p < 0,001$.

The dependent variable is now which party the respondent actually voted for in the European Parliamentary election, and the question was asked in the post election questionnaire. In the first model we compare the effects of ideological proximity along the two ideological dimensions, and the second model also includes the evaluations of the parties' policy competence.

The hypothesis that proximity along the left-right dimension would matter less in the choice stage does not receive immediate support. In model 1 where voter-party proximity along both ideological dimensions is analyzed, left-right proximity actually has the same effect as proximity along the EU dimension. We have accordingly not clear support for the notion that left-right ideological proximity matters only in the consideration stage, and that the EU dimension is the main second decision rule. However, when we include perceptions of issue competence on issue areas central in the election campaign, the impact of proximity along the general left-right dimension vanishes, whilst the effect of general EU proximity remains. The effect of LR proximity is in other words replaced by the more concrete perceptions of issue competence, whilst the independent effect of EU proximity remains as a tie-breaker in the choice stage.

Model 2 furthermore states that competence on migration policies was the most decisive tie-breaker in the consideration stage, followed by gender equality. These were also the dominant issues for the two new parties gaining mandates from Sweden in the European Parliament – the Sweden Democrats and the Feminist Initiative.

The final stage is to separate the analysis presented in Table 4 for all individual parties. This means that the analysis identifies tie-breakers for the individual parties when voters considering more than one party in the beginning of the election campaign finally reached the decision of which party to vote for, disregarding other parties that were in the consideration set, or how many parties were there. This analysis is performed solely for those who actually considered more

than one party in the first panel step, which limits the number of respondents. In spite of this, some patterns are discernable for most parties, as is clear from Table 5.

Table 5

Effect of Ideological Proximity and Evaluations of Party Issue Competence on Party Choice. Robust Logistic Regression Among Respondents Considering More than One Party

Choice stage	L	S	G	C	Lib	CD	M	SD	FI
Proximity									
(0-10)									
Left-right (0-10)	-0.46*	-0.46***	-0.11	-0.28	-0.59***	-0.37*	-0.52**		-0.11
EU (0-10)	-0.51***	0.00	-0.24***	-0.39*	-0.24*	-0.09	-0.24*		-0.20*
Good policy									
(0-1)									
Employment	0.31	0.81	0.23	0.66	0.16	1.23*	0.45		-0.14
Education	0.10	0.32	0.62*	-0.30	0.40	0.96	1.34**		0.06
Gender Equality	1.50*	1.30***	0.52	0.05	0.31	1.05	0.34		1.52**
Migration	-0.24	0.89**	0.20	1.12*	0.65	-0.06	0.08		1.77***
Environment	0.59	0.56	1.33**	0.98	-0.47	-1.05	0.89***		-0.17
Constant	-1.62*	-3.00***	-2.02***	-2.59***	-0.82*	-2.74***	-1.95**		-2.87***
Log-likelihood	-94.99	-152.73	-208.34	-75.34	-135.70	-69.25	-92.88		-125.65
Pseudo R2	0.38	0.31	0.20	0.24	0.27	0.25	0.38		0.27
N	494	495	490	495	493	489	486		477

Significance levels: *: p<0,05; **: p<0,01; ***: p<0,001.

First of all, the EU-proximity clearly mattered for voters who finally decided to vote for the EU-skeptical Left Party, but also for the less skeptical Green Party. For the Social Democrats and the Liberal Party it was rather the left-right proximity that acted as a tie-breaker. Regarding issue competence, most parties had one or two issue areas where their perceived competences seemed to have had effects as tie-breakers. For the Left Party gender equality issues had some effects as tie-breakers, besides the EU proximity; for the Social Democrats gender equality but also migration issues mattered, for the Green Party environmental issues mattered for the final voting decisions among voters who had the Greens as one of the parties in their consideration set. The Centre Party gained on migration issues, whilst the Liberal Party mainly gained on the general left-right proximity. The Christian Democrats had a small advantage from employment issues. For people choosing the Moderate Party out of their consideration set, the perceived competence on educational issues as well as environmental issues are what seem to have been main tie-breakers for people finally voting for the Moderate Party, besides the general left-right proximity. For the Sweden Democrats, this analysis is not possible to perform. This is due to a lack of variance in the responses of people who voted for the Sweden Democrats, after having considered voting also for other parties in the beginning of the election campaign. All respondents finally voting for the Sweden Democrats answered that the party had a good migration policy. The new-coming party the Feminist Initiative finally gained on perceived gender equality competence, but also on migration issue competence.

The results in Tables 4 and 5 confirm the hypothesis that perceived issue competence has an effect as a tie-breaker when voters are considering more than one party to vote for, and the fact that we find variations in which issue areas matter for the different parties further confirms this finding.

Conclusions & Further Research

Elections to the European Parliament are known to be “second order elections.” With the consideration set approach presented here we are able to explore explanatory factors for party choice in a more thorough way than when the analysis is restricted only to actual party choice. The distinction between the consideration stage and the choice stage opens up for further insights into how different explanatory factors work in different faces of the decision process, not least the inter-laced effects of left-right vs EU dimensions.

The preliminary analyses applying the consideration set approach to party choice in the European parliamentary election of 2014 have provided some findings. The first step in the analysis was the formation of the consideration sets. This step sheds light on whether the voter actually enters the election campaign with consideration of more than one party, or if the decision of which party to vote for is already made when the election campaign starts. We found that more than half of our respondents (58%) actually had a consideration setoff of more than one party when the election campaign started. The main explanatory factor behind this was proven to be a lack of party identification. As theory predicts, party-identified voters tended to consider only one party. In our analysis of the consideration stage we applied the

notion of first versus second decision rules on ideological proximity along the left-right dimension and the EU dimension and found that left right proximity indeed seemed to be the first and discriminatory decision rule for which parties were even considered voting for, whilst there also was some effect of EU proximity. As expected these effects were significantly stronger for respondents considering more than one party. In the choice stage the analysis focused on respondents with an actual consideration set of more than one party.

Somewhat contrary to our hypothesis the effect of left-right proximity was of the same magnitude as that of EU proximity, not fully rendering support to the notion of EU proximity as the main secondary decision rule, or tie breaker. However, when we also considered issue competence, the effect of left-right proximity vanished, whilst that of general EU proximity remained. The main tie-breakers for voters considering more than one party were accordingly general EU proximity together with perceived issue competence on the migration issue. However, the respective effects varied between the different parties, indicating that in fact the parties gained from different tie-breakers.

The consideration set model approach as applied here confirms the value of distinguishing between the consideration and the choice stages in the decision process of party choice. It enables us to isolate primary from secondary decision criteria which is vital not the least when comparing European with national elections. Only by doing so will we be able to fully understand how voters decide what party to vote for.

Appendix: Table A1. The content of consideration set EP election 2014

# of parties in set	Content of Party set											Electoral Support (percent)	Number of Respon- dents	Ranking of the 10 most Common Combinations
	0-parties (including "do not know")											0	2	
1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	M	6.8	87	#3
1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	CD	--	2.2	29	
1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	C	--	1.3	17	
1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	Lib	--	--	4.3	55	#5
1	--	--	--	--	--	--	SD	--	--	--	--	4	52	#7
1	--	--	--	--	--	JL	--	--	--	--	--	0	1	
1	--	--	--	--	G	--	--	--	--	--	--	6.8	88	#2
1	--	--	--	PP	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.9	12	
1	--	--	S	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	9.6	124	#1
1	--	FI	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.2	29	
1	L	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	4.1	53	#6
1												42.2	547	
2	--	--	S	--	G	--	--	--	--	--	--	4.6	59	#4
2	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	Lib	--	--	M	3.8	49	#8
2	--	FI	--	--	G	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.8	36	#9
2	L	--	S	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.6	34	
2	L	FI	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.3	30	
2	L	--	--	--	G	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.2	28	
2	--	--	--	--	--	--	SD	--	--	--	M	1.5	19	
2	Other 2-party combinations											14.8	190	
												34.6	445	
3	L	--	S	--	G	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.7	35	#10
3	L	FI	--	--	G	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.5	33	
3	--	FI	S	--	G	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.3	17	
3	Other 3-party combinations											12.8	165	
												19.3	250	

4	L	FI	S	--	G	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.6	20
4	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	Lib	C	CD	M	0.6	8
4	Other 4-party combinations											2	26
												4.2	54
5-8	5-8-party combinations											0.7	9
n												100	1,286

References

- Bélanger, È., & Meguid, B. M. (2008). Issue salience, issue ownership, and issue-based vote choice. *Electoral Studies*, 27(477-491).
- Bengtsson, Å., Hansen, K. M., Narud, H.-M., Hardarson, O., & Oscarsson, H. (2013). *The Nordic voter: Myths of exceptionalism*. London: ECPR Press.
- Carmines, E. G., & Stimson, J. A. (1989). *Issue evolution. Race and the transformation of American politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dalton, R. (2013). *The apartisan American. Dealignment and changing electoral politics*. Thousand Oaks: CQ Press.
- Dalton, R. J., & Klingemann, H.-D. (2007). *Oxford handbook of political behavior*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Green, J., & Jennings, W. (2012). The dynamics of issue competence and vote for parties in and out of power: An analysis of valence in Britain, 1979–1997. *European Journal of Political Research*, 51, 469-503.
- Hobolt, S. B., & Spoon, J.-J. (2012). Motivating the European voter: Parties, issues and campaigns in European Parliament elections. *European Journal of Political Research*, 51, 701-727.
- Hobolt, S. B., & Wittrock, J. (2011). The second-order election model revisited: An experimental test of vote choices in European Parliament elections. *Electoral Studies*, 30, 29-40.
- Marsh, M. (1998). Testing the second-order election model after four European elections. *British Journal of Political Science*, 0(4), 591-607.

- Oscarsson, H, Gilljam, M. & Granberg D. (1997) . The Concept of Party Set — A Viable Approach or Just Another Way to Slice the Same Cheese? Working paper presented at the annual meeting of the Swedish Political Science Association in Uppsala, October 5-7, 1997
- Oscarsson, H. (2004). Verkligen väljande väljare [Virtually Voting Voters]. In S. Holmberg & H. Oscarsson (Eds.), *Väljare. Svenskt väljarbete under 50 år [Voters. Fifty years of Swedish voting behavior]*. Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik AB.
- Oscarsson, H. (2009) Identifying Voters Consideration Sets. Paper presented at the 5th ECPR General Conference in Potsdam, Germany, September 10-12 2009.
- Paap, R., Nierop, E. v., Heerde, H. J. v., Wedeld, M., Fransesa, P. H., & Alseme, K. J. (2005). Consideration sets, intentions and the inclusion of “don’t know” in a two-stage model for voter choice. *International Journal of Forecasting*, 21, 53-71.
- Popkin, S. L. (1991). *The reasoning voter: Communication and persuasion in presidential campaigns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Reif, K., & Schmitt, H. (1980). Nine second-order elections - A conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results. *European Journal of Political Research*, 8, 3-44.

- Roberts, J. H., & Lattin, J. M. (1991). Development and testing of a model of consideration set composition. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 28(4), 429-440.
- Roberts, J. H., & Lattin, J. M. (1997). Consideration: Review of research and prospects for future insights. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34(3), 406-410.
- Schmitt, H. (2005). The European Parliament elections of June 2004: Still second-order? *West European Politics*, 28(3), 650-679.
- Shocker, A. D., Ben-Akiva, M., Bocara, B., & Nedungadi, P. (1991). Consideration set influences on consumer decision-making and choice: Issues, models, and suggestions. *Marketing Letters*, 2(3), 181-197.
- Sniderman, P. M., Brody, R. A., & Tetlock, P. E. (Eds.). (1991). *Reasoning and choice. Explorations in social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Steenbergen, M. R., & Hangartner, D. (2008). *Political choice sets in multi-party elections*. Paper presented at the The Politics of Change, Amsterdam.
- Steenbergen, M. R., Hangartner, D., & Vries, C. E. d. (2011). *Choice under complexity: A heuristic-systematic model of electoral behavior*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago.
- van der Brug, W. (2004). Issue ownership and party choice. *Electoral Studies*, 23, 209-233.

- van der Brug, W., & Eijk, C. v. d. (Eds.). (2007). *European elections & domestic politics. Lessons from the past and scenarios for the future*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press.
- van der Eijk, C., & Franklin, M. N. (2007). The sleeping giant: Potential for political mobilization of disaffection with European integration. In W. van der Brug & C. Van der Eijk (Eds.), *European elections & domestic politics. Lessons from the past and scenarios for the future* (pp. 189-208). Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Vries, C. d., Steenbergen, M. R., & Hangartner, D. (2009). *A choice set modeling approach to EU issue voting*. Paper presented at the EUSA conference panel "Transnational Politics and the Vote," Los Angeles, USA.
- Vries, C. E. d. (2007). Sleeping giant: Fact or fairytale? *European Union Politics*, 8(3), 363-385.
- Vries, C. E. d., Brug, W. v. d., Egmond, M. H. v., & Eijk, C. v. d. (2011). Individual and contextual variation in EU issue voting: The role of political information. *Electoral Studies*, 30, 16-28.
- Wilson, C. J. (2008). Consideration sets and political choices: A heterogeneous model of vote choice and sub-national party strength. *Political Behavior*, 30, 161-183.
- Zaller, J. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

