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Choice: Size, Content,
Stability and Relevance**

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Theoretical Approach

The general idea behind consideration set models of party choice is that during elections, many voters actively consider voting for more than one party. However, voters are not believed to consider the entire supply of parties, at least not in multiparty systems. Rather, they are believed to enter election campaigns with an existing subset of voting alternatives from which they subsequently select the party to vote for. Simple and straightforward as it may seem, research on electoral behavior has been late in adopting this idea.

When phased decision-making processes are studied in consumer research, multiple stages are often discussed. For example, according to Shocker, Ben-Akiva, Bocara, and Nedungadi (1991) as well as Roberts and Lattin (1997), the decision process involves several nested steps. All possible options form the universal set, while 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). In previous studies of the application of 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 consumer research. For this reason, it is also believed that there is only very limited variation between voters in the awareness set in established party-based democracies, which is why the analysis of this stage is considered futile. We also refrain from distinguishing the final “choice set,” which according to Shocker et al. is defined as the final consideration set immediately prior to choice. In order to somewhat simplify the empirical measurement and analysis, we abstain from the assumption of a linear step-by-step deletion process. Rather, we follow the notion from Shocker et al. and hypothesize that the voter “processes his/her options in working memory, adding and deleting as necessary” (Shocker et al., 1991, p. 183).

The consideration set model approach for party choice, therefore, generally only 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, Steenbergen, & Hangartner, 2009). The consideration set model approach for party choice is schematically illustrated in Figure 1.

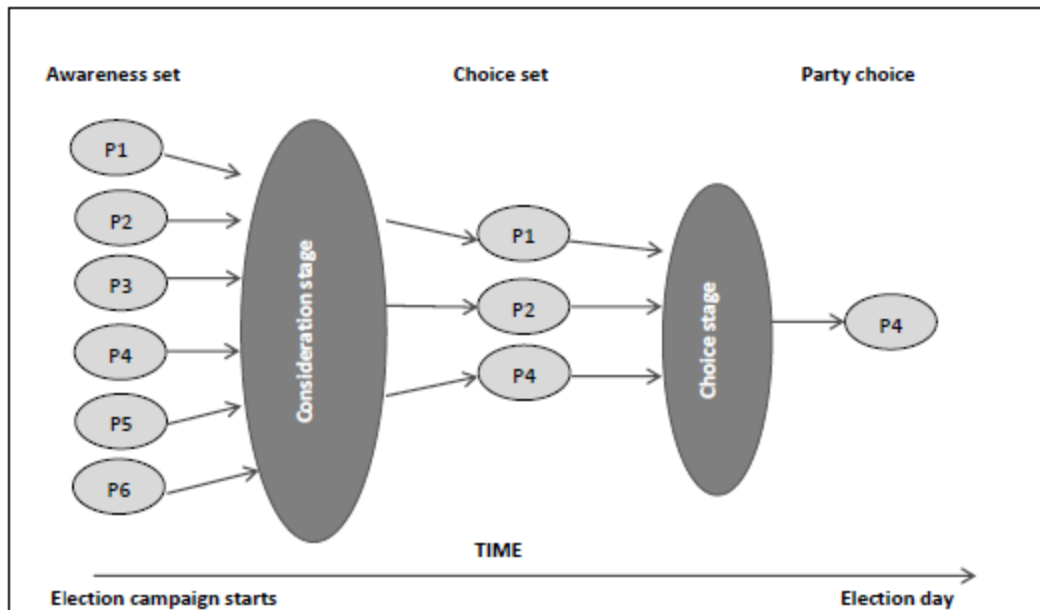


Figure 1. Schematic illustration of the decision-making process for party choice according to the consideration set model. Note: P1–P6 represents the parties entering the election.

The first stage, when the focus is on electoral choice, is accordingly the formation of the consideration set, concerning which parties there are considered to be options to vote for and which parties are excluded early in the election campaign or have already been excluded even before the campaign actually starts. Of course, some voters have only one party in their set and might see it as excluded if they voted for any other. However, according to research on the decline of party identification and voting stability, this group is believed to be in decline. Still, the size (number of parties) and content (which parties) of the consideration set are expected to be mainly dependent on more stable and longitudinal predispositions, such as ideological orientation and proximity, political identification, political sophistication, and voting history. In the second stage, the actual decision about which party to vote for is formed. This decision process is limited to the parties in the consideration set and is dependent mainly on short-term factors, such as issue positions and issue proximity, evaluations and expectations of party performance, and events taking place during the election campaign (Steenbergen & Hangartner, 2008; Wilson, 2008; Vries et al., 2009).

Distinguishing the two stages—the consideration stage and the choice stage—from each other requires 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 it also requires the temporal factor of different criteria and considerations to be examined. Furthermore, the approach is consistent with the sociopsychological theories of information processing, particularly the view of voters as “cognitive misers” who use heuristics as a necessary coping strategy to minimize information costs (Popkin, 1991; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991; Wilson, 2008). To distinguish the consideration set from the actual choice is also in line with Zaller’s (1992) notion that voters’ attentiveness and response 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. The distinction between separate phases in the decision-making process about party choice enables us to distinguish the effects of election campaigns in a more

realistic fashion than when we simply understand party choice as a choice between all parties in the party system.

So far, research on applying consideration set models to party choice has been limited and is mainly oriented toward statistical modeling, for example, probabilistic consideration set multinomial logit models (Paap et al., 2005; Steenbergen & Hangartner, 2008) or consideration set logistic regression (Steenbergen et al., 2011). In part, the technical nature of previous research in consideration set models of party choice has been due to the 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). As will become clear in this report, we now move on to empirically identify consideration sets of voters by using manifest measure of the size and content of sets of considered parties.

Previous Research with Consideration Set Models in Sweden

Previous research that has applied consideration set approaches to party choice in Sweden has been concentrated on issues of survey instrumentation for identifying consideration sets, in an attempt to test the fundamental assumptions behind the consideration set approach, that is, whether there are any voters at all that are actually considering to vote for more than one party. There are a few descriptive analyses of *consideration set size* (i.e., the number of parties voters consider voting for) and *consideration set content* (i.e., what combination of parties is selected in the party formation stage) (Oscarsson, 2004, 2009; Oscarsson, Gilljam, & Granberg, 1997; Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2008). A large number of ways of identifying the consideration sets of individuals have been tested out using both established measures, such as dislike-like scales, feeling thermometers, propensity to vote scales, and second-best party preferences, and new survey instruments with questions about the likely, feasible, and considered alternatives and what parties' voters can choose between. The choice of the operationalization used in this study to identify considered alternatives rests heavily on past experiences of applying different instruments in this context. It is fair to conclude that previous research has demonstrated that the CSM (consideration set model) approach seems relevant to apply in analyses of vote choice since a large enough proportion of the electorate actually do seem to have more than one party in their individual choice menus.

However, CSM has also been applied in explanatory analyses of party choice. The approach allows for voter, party, and consideration set characteristics to be modeled simultaneously. A pilot study by Oscarsson (2004) retrieved consideration sets using the number of parties that were positively evaluated along an eleven-point dislike-like scale from -5 to +5, using data from the Swedish national elections 1979–2002; it estimated the effects of party size, campaign momentum, leader evaluations, ideological proximity, perceived party competence, and habit (previous voting for the party) on the probability of a given party being picked in the final stages of party choice. In these analyses, leader evaluations—the party picked from a set was the party with the most liked leader—had a surprisingly small and insignificant effect while momentum, habit, and party size turned out to be significant. Ideological proximity and general assessments of parties' policies on prioritized issues had the largest and most robust impact on the probability of voting for a party included in a voter's consideration set.

In another study, open-ended questions about the pros and cons of all the alternatives in the consideration set were used to assess the selection criteria applied by voters in the final stages

of the decision process (Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2008). The results of this explorative approach showed that among the open-ended answers, statements about ideology and issues were most frequent. In second place came voters' judgments of confidence and trust in the alternatives. References to group loyalty and socialization were only found among the Left-Green Party voters, and references to the strategic context of the election (parties' standing in opinion polls, government formation, and parliamentary thresholds) were present to a surprisingly large degree.

Swedish election studies have introduced appropriate questions into recent surveys and Internet campaign panels carried out in conjunction with both national and European elections. This has provided a unique opportunity to analyze consideration set models of party choice more thoroughly. More specifically, we are now able to empirically test a large number of hypotheses about consideration set formation in low and high stimuli elections.

Although other data sources are readily available, in this paper, we focus on analyzing data collected through Internet campaign panels during the "super election year" of 2014, when Sweden had the election to the European Parliament in May and the national election in September. The justification for using campaign panel data is that the comparison of the decision processes taking place in a European Parliament election and a national election demands that data that are collected before the election are available. Pre-election data on consideration set formation is not available in the large representative Swedish EP election studies.

Evaluation of Our Approach to Consideration Set Analysis

The purpose of this report is to evaluate our approach and measurements of the consideration set approach to party choice. Previous research that has applied to consideration set approaches to voter choice in Sweden has been concentrated on issues of survey instrumentation for identifying consideration sets. There are a few descriptive analyses of *consideration set size* (i.e., the number of parties voters consider voting for) and *consideration set content* (i.e., what combination of parties are selected in the party formation stage) (Oscarsson, 2004, 2009; Oscarsson et al., 1997; Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2008). In this project, we lean on these previous experiences and have specifically designed an Internet campaign panel survey in order to fully explore the potentials of applying a consideration set model approach to party choice.

Several aspects are relevant for evaluation: (1) We do actually expect respondents to report consideration sets for party choice. This might be trivial criteria for evaluation but does still form the base for the proceeding analysis. (2) Of further relevance is how many parties does the voter consider or the *size* of the consideration sets. (3) A third aspect is which parties and combinations of parties the voters consider, and that is the *content* of the consideration sets. The content of the consideration sets, that is, the parties selected for further consideration, is in itself an indirect revelation of fundamental criteria for choice. (4) A further aspect is the *stability* of the consideration sets. Theoretically, we expect the voters to have fairly stable consideration sets, from which the final party to vote for is chosen. (5) A quite crucial aspect is that the party actually voted for should be included in the identified consideration sets or the *relevance* of the consideration sets. If the party voted for is not included in the consideration sets to a very high degree, the theoretical validity of the entire consideration set approach to voting could be questioned. (6) Furthermore, we would expect the relevance of the consideration set to increase during the campaign, meaning that the probability for the

party voted for to be included in the set should increase during the campaign. Finally, the *subjective decision process* should correspond to the process identified through our approach. This is tested through an analysis of time for vote decision and perceived difficulty in deciding which party to vote for.

To summarize, the six aspects of the consideration set approach to party choice employed here will be evaluated according to the following aspects: *occurrence, size, content, stability, relevance, and subjective decision process.*

1. <i>Occurrence</i>	<i>Do voters have consideration sets at all?</i>
2. <i>Size</i>	<i>How many parties are included in voters' consideration sets?</i>
3. <i>Content</i>	<i>Which parties are included in voters' consideration sets?</i>
4. <i>Stability</i>	<i>How stable are voters' consideration sets?</i>
5. <i>Relevance</i>	<i>Are the final party choice included in voters' consideration sets?</i>
6. <i>Subjective process</i>	<i>Is the subjective decision process reflected in the consideration set approach?</i>

Figure 2. Summation of six aspects for evaluation.

Operationalization and Instrumentation

Most previous studies applying consideration set models to party choice have been restricted to analyses of questions not specifically designed for this purpose, such as dislike-like scales (Oscarsson, 2004). To infer consideration sets from dislike-like scales, the researcher is required to define some kind of more or less arbitrary cutoff point in order to identify a consideration set, for example, all parties with a positive value. Regardless of how this cutoff is done, we cannot be sure that the respondent actually has the same considerations in voting as for parties that are “liked.” When it comes to voting, factors such as coalition possibilities, strategic voting, and short-term issue salience might also matter in which parties are considered. Another strategy has been to use recall questions in postelection surveys (Did you consider voting for any other party?). Even though this strategy might lead to the actual consideration set on Election Day, it is not possible to use it for tracking the actual decision process that lies behind the party choice. However, some studies have an approach more exclusively directed toward identifying and measuring consideration sets.

However, a research group at Mannheim University have employed the short-term panel of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) 2013 in order to study how the voters' consideration sets evolved in the course of the election campaign (Steinbrecher, Plischke, Schoen, & Wiegand, 2014). For this purpose, they used and compared specifically designed measures based on two different survey questions. The first was a direct question whether a respondent considered voting for a specific party or not, with the response options “do consider party x,” “do rather consider party x,” “do rather not consider party x,” and “do not consider at all party x.” Based on this question, four different variables with different “width” were constructed. Additional measurements were constructed from feeling thermometers for political parties, ranging from totally dislike (-5) to totally like (+5). A first measurement treats all parties with positive evaluations as part of the consideration set, while the second measurement only includes the party or parties with the most positive value into the consideration set.

The approach based on the feeling thermometer have the same limitations as discussed above, since the results depend on the cutting point of which parties to define as included in the consideration set. The second strategy with direct questions for every party does not have this weakness and does also provide grades of consideration. As the party system in Germany consists of seven parties with high probability to enter the parliament after the election, the strategy is evaluated in a multi-consideration setting, comparable to the Swedish case.

However, in the Swedish web panel surveys used here, we base the identification of the consideration sets on a different question, explicitly designed for analyses of pre-election consideration sets. The question used is, *Which party or parties are you considering voting for in the upcoming (national/European) elections? Is there any other party you are considering 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 addition, respondents are explicitly asked to check ALL parties that they consider voting for (see Figure 1 for details on instrument design).

Compared to the German study, this means that we are not able to separate “vague consideration” from more “strong consideration.” It could also be questioned if this distinction is theoretically valuable or whether “the outcome of a consideration set formation process is very clear cut: a party is either included in the consideration set or is not included in the consideration set” (Oscarsson, 2009, p. 6). The Swedish approach adheres to the either/or understanding of consideration. However, since the Swedish panel also includes the feeling thermometer for the parties, we are able to validate the “strength” of the consideration also for the Swedish voters’ consideration sets.

Data

The following descriptive analyses are based on the first seven waves of our nine-wave CSM (consideration set model) web panel survey, covering the period from 11th of March to the weeks after the national election in September.¹

The panel consists of two different samples. We have one probability-based sample that consists of 2,053 respondents. We also have a second sample with 15,085 respondents, where the respondents were recruited through ads in major newspapers (opt-in).² Both samples are fairly skewed with an overrepresentation of politically interested voters and also some bias compared to population demographics. Due to the skewness, inferences to the general population should be avoided. This is, however, a minor problem for the analysis performed, since our interest is mainly on development over time.

In the following tables and graphs, we analyze the two samples separately in order to compare them, even though the main focus is on the probability-based sample.

It should also be noted the panel covers two elections—the European parliament election in May and the national parliament in September. If not stated otherwise, the following analysis

¹ The fieldwork was prolonged when the Swedish Prime Minister informed that he would call for an extra election in March 2015 due to the failure of the government’s budget proposal. The constitution does not allow this until three months after the ordinary election. However, just days before the extra election was proclaimed, a broad agreement between the government and the right-bloc opposition parties was reached in order to ease minority rule.

² This paper, however, only includes those respondents who answered in all panel waves.

concerns formation of consideration sets for party choice in the national election. This means that the analysis is focused on panel waves where we ask for party choice in the national election, and accordingly excludes panel wave 2, when we only asked for party choice in the European Parliament election.

Occurrence of Consideration Sets

The question used to measure consideration set in the CSM panel survey is relatively straightforward. It is a “multiple answer” question where the respondent is asked “Which party or which parties do you consider voting for in the 2014 Swedish national election/2014 European Parliament election?” Additionally, the respondent is made aware of that it is possible to choose multiple answers. The question wording and setup are illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Vilket parti eller vilka partier överväger du att rösta på i riksdagsvalet år 2014
Kom ihåg att flera svar är möjliga!

<input type="checkbox"/> Vänsterpartiet	<input type="checkbox"/> Miljöpartiet	<input type="checkbox"/> Annat parti <input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Socialdemokraterna	<input type="checkbox"/> Sverigedemokraterna	<input type="checkbox"/> Tänker inte rösta
<input type="checkbox"/> Centerpartiet	<input type="checkbox"/> Piratpartiet	<input type="checkbox"/> Vet inte
<input type="checkbox"/> Folkpartiet	<input type="checkbox"/> Feministiskt initiativ	<input type="checkbox"/> Blankt
<input type="checkbox"/> Moderaterna	<input type="checkbox"/> Annat parti <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Är inte röstberättigad
<input type="checkbox"/> Kristdemokraterna	<input type="checkbox"/> Annat parti <input type="text"/>	

Figure 3. Question wording and setup in the CSM web panel survey.

Comment: Translated question wording: What or which parties do you consider voting for in the parliamentary election in 2014? Remember that several answers are possible!

The respondent can choose from 17 alternatives, including 10 named parties, three additional “other parties,” and a “blank vote” option. Moreover, the respondent is given three additional alternatives, namely “abstain,” “do not know,” and “not eligible.” The “do not know” and “not eligible” options are not possible to combine with stating one or more parties considered to vote for. The “abstain” option could however theoretically be treated as an alternative in the consideration set for party choice. However, at this stage, we leave this option out of the analysis. Also, very few of the respondents have actually reported this. Consequently, the size of a respondent’s consideration set may vary between 0 and 13 parties. This particular setup of consideration set instrumentation has been applied in previous election campaign web panels conducted by the Swedish National Election Study program (SNES program).

Around two-thirds of the panel participants actually consider more than one party, and this proportion is remarkably stable over all six panel waves. In general, the proportion with a consideration set is somewhat higher in the opt-in sample than in the representative as

presented in Table 1. Note that wave 2 only asked for parties considered for the European Parliament election, while wave 3 asked for both the European and the national elections, respectively.

Table 1. Proportion of respondents considering more than one party to vote for in the national election and the European Parliament election, respectively.

National election		Prob. sample		Opt-in sample	
Date	Wave	Considering more than one party	N	Considering more than one party	N
2014-03-11	1	64,3	823	68,8	9 205
2014-05-26	3	66,3	823	65,5	9 205
2014-08-25	4	63,2	823	63,2	9 205
2014-09-02	5	62,2	823	61,3	9 205
2014-09-15	6	65,5	823	66,8	9 205
2014-10-07	7	62,1	823	59,7	9 205
EUP election					
2014-05-14	2	57,8	1 114	57,8	13 113
2014-05-26	3	68,4	1 114	70,4	13 113

When the proportions with consideration sets are illustrated graphically in Figure 2 below, it is clear that the sizes of the consideration sets peak just after the national election (15 September). For the representative sample, we have a slight peak also right after the European election.

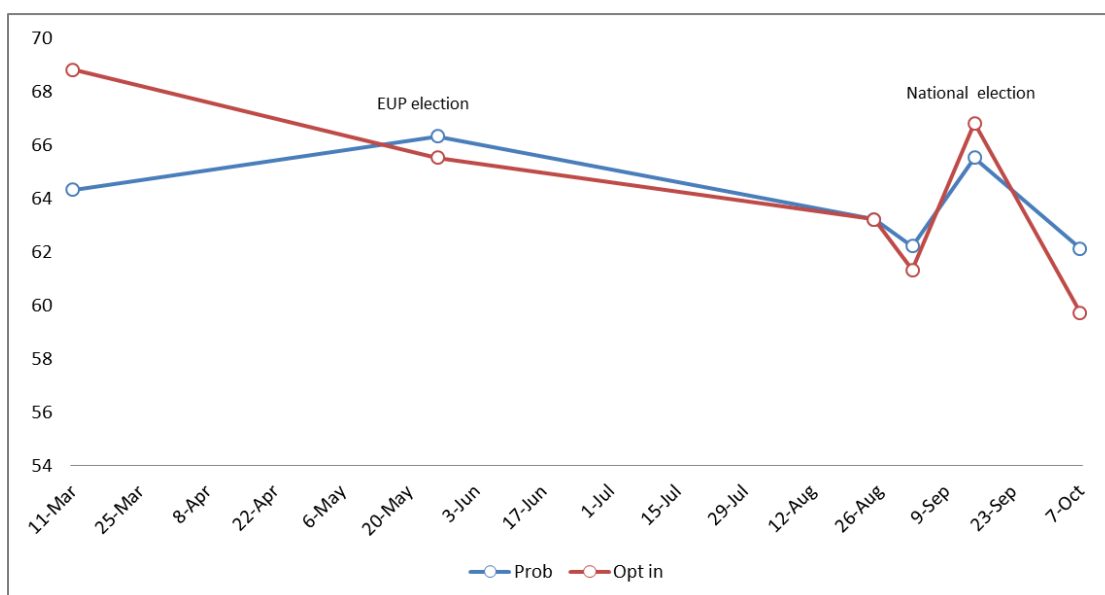


Figure 2. Proportion of respondents considering more than one party in the 2014 Swedish national election.

Comment: Results are from the 2014 CSM web panel survey. The blue line shows results for the probability-based sample of panel participants. The red line shows the results for the opt-in panel participants.

Whether the fairly high occurrence of explicit consideration is high or low in these two samples is hard to tell and does, of course, depend on point of reference. To compare with other studies might be misleading due to the different population representativity of the samples as well as how the questions are formulated. We could also expect that the mode of data collection matters. It is for example probable that respondents are more eager to appear as decided upon their party choice in personal interviews, as admitting that you consider several parties might make the respondent feel less informed and indecisive. For example, in the personal interviews for the Swedish Election Study shortly before the election in 2006, only 39% of the respondents answered that they were considering more than one party to vote for.

It is also less reliable to compare the proportion of voters considering more than one party to vote for between different elections, party systems, or countries, as the decision process, of course, is highly dependent on the actual political situation. With this said, the following description of size of consideration sets is restricted to the samples actually included in the panel analyzed here during the intense super election year in Sweden 2014. Even so, we might expect a response effect, as the present study quite clearly is designed for studying the decision process, even if this was not explicitly mentioned to the respondents. However, the fact that the proportion of respondents reporting consideration sets of more than one party is so stable does not imply a response effect increasing the willingness to report more than one party. It might, on the other hand, be the case that taking the survey leads respondents to consider one extra time if there is not a second or third party worth considering.

Size of Consideration Sets

With “size of consideration set,” we refer to the number of parties considered to vote for. Tables 2 and 3 below illustrate the distribution of consideration sets of different sizes. As noted above, below 40% of the respondents reported only one party they considered to vote for, and this holds all through the panel and for both samples, even though there are some variations.

Table 2. Proportion of respondents with different consideration set sizes at each panel wave (national election only). Probability-based sample.

CS size	Panel wave					
	1	3	4	5	6	7
1 party	35,7	34,1	37,4	37,9	34,7	38,3
2 parties	38,6	33,3	35,0	36,5	39,9	36,2
3 parties	18,6	22,8	20,7	19,0	19,0	19,6
4 parties	5,5	8,5	6,0	5,8	5,8	5,3
5 parties	1,2	1,1	0,7	0,7	0,7	0,7
6 parties	0,4	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,0	0,0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Comment: Consideration set size for the national election 2014. Probability-based sample. Number of respondents: 823.

Table 3. Proportion of respondents with different consideration set sizes at each panel wave (national election only). Opt-in sample.

CS size	Panel wave					
	1	3	4	5	6	7
1 party	30,6	34,3	36,6	38,6	32,9	40,0
2 parties	35,9	34,1	35,1	34,7	36,2	35,1
3 parties	23,9	23,0	21,2	20,2	23,2	18,3
4 parties	7,9	7,4	6,3	5,7	6,8	6,1
5 parties	1,3	1,1	0,7	0,7	0,7	0,5
6 parties	0,3	0,2	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Comment: Consideration set size for the national election 2014. Opt-in sample. Number of respondents: 9,205.

As could be expected, the proportion of voters considering only one party increases over the campaign. However, this increase is quite limited. As described above, most respondents actually reported consideration sets with more than one party also in the last panel step. The share of respondents considering four or more parties is quite limited all through the campaign.

One could also focus on the average sizes of the consideration sets. When discussing the average size of the consideration sets in the following, we focus only on those respondents actually considering more than one party. This is a vital fact if any comparisons with other studies are made. Also, as discussed above, if respondents that do not consider more than one party are included, the construction of the consideration sets is confused with the actual willingness to report more than one party at all. The average sizes of the respondents considering more than one party in the respective panel waves are reported in Table 4, separate for the two samples.

Table 4. Average size of consideration sets (average number of parties considered among respondents considering more than one party).

Average CS-size	Panel wave						N
	1	3	4	5	6	7	
Prob. sample	2,0	2,1	2,0	2,0	2,0	1,9	823
Opt-in sample	2,1	2,1	2,0	2,0	2,1	1,9	9205

Comment: Average consideration set size for the national election 2014.

As could be detected already in Table 4, the respondents consider the average two parties to vote for, and the pattern is very stable over our six panel waves as well as between the two samples.

Of course, the size of the consideration sets is highly dependent on how we measure them as well as of the skewness and representativity of the samples. The construction of the question used here is quite strict and direct, and as discussed above, the theoretical understanding of consideration is that it is a dichotomy—either you consider a party or not. The consideration sets identified with this question could be compared to consideration sets identified with the feeling thermometer. In Table 5, we have constructed two measures based on the feeling thermometer, in line with the German study mentioned previously. The positive thermometer measure includes all parties with a positive evaluation into the consideration set. The maximum thermometer measure includes only the party or parties with the highest value in the respondent's evaluation. The comparison is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Comparisons of consideration set size with different instrumentations.

Instrumentation	Panel wave					
	1	3	4	5	6	7
Prob. sample						
Explicit party set	2,0	2,1	2,0	2,0	2,0	1,9
Positive thermometer	-	3,6	-	3,5	4,0	-
Maximum thermometer	-	1,5	-	1,5	1,6	-
Opt-in sample						
Explicit party set	2,1	2,1	2,0	2,0	2,1	1,9
Positive thermometer	-	3,6	-	3,6	3,9	-
Maximum thermometer	-	1,5	-	1,5	1,9	-

Comment: Number of respondents are 762 from the probability-based sample and 8,690 for the opt-in sample.

The thermometer measurements identify different consideration set sizes. With the positive thermometer measure, the average size is between 3,5 and 4 parties, while the maximum thermometer measure is stricter and identifies consideration sets of 1,5 parties. This means that the two thermometer measures give more diverging sizes than the cases in the German study, where the positive thermometer did get average set sizes of between 3,65 and 4,1 parties, and the maximum thermometer measure resulted in average set sizes of between 1,7 and 1,9 parties. Even though no firm comparisons of consideration sets sizes should be made between studies, as discussed above, the tendency to define larger sets when using positive feeling thermometer measures than when the explicit measure is employed is also found in previous Swedish studies (Oscarsson, 2009). The size of the sets identified with the positive thermometer measure could maybe be interpreted as a reflection of the conflict level in the party system. In a less conflict-filled or polarized party system, there might be more parties evaluated positively than in a party system or political context with deep conflicts and high polarization. In the Swedish case with clear political “blocs” or government alternatives, it seems quite natural that several parties could be evaluated positively, even though they are not considered voting for.

Content of Consideration Sets

Content of consideration sets refers to which parties actually are included in the respondent's consideration sets, and how the sets are constructed in terms of combinations of parties. Close

to the content of the consideration sets is, of course, also the development of the set, or how the individual parties are considered during the campaign. The tables below show what proportion of the respondents actually include the respective party in their considerations for the Swedish national election at each panel step.

Table 6 is based on the smaller representative-based sample while Table 7 reports the opt-in sample. The differences between the two are due to compositional differences and different skewness between the samples. The most relevant in these tables is, of course, the development during the campaign rather than the absolute level of respondents considering the party.

Table 6. Proportion of respondents considering voting for respective party. Proportion of respondents with consideration set. Representative sample (n=823). Highest proportion marked.

Party	Panel wave					
	1	3	4	5	6	7
Left Party	28,2	28,6	26,9	25,6	27,3	25,6
Social Democrats	41,3	38,4	37,1	37,6	35,0	33,7
Green Party	31,8	35,4	32,0	28,9	29,3	26,7
Centre Party	8,9	11,7	11,2	12,0	14,7	15,2
People's Party	19,1	18,1	18,6	18,1	19,7	18,5
Moderate Party	26,6	25,9	26,4	26,3	26,1	26,6
Christian Democrats	7,7	9,6	10,6	10,8	10,5	9,2
Sweden Democrats	13,0	14,1	15,8	15,3	14,6	15,7
Feminist Initiative	11,7	20,4	15,1	16,0	19,2	17,1

Table 7. Proportion of respondents considering voting respective party. Proportion of respondents with consideration set. Opt-in sample (n=9,205). Highest proportion marked.

Party	Panel wave					
	1	3	4	5	6	7
Left Party	31,7	29,5	28,5	28,0	30,0	27,8
Social Democrats	30,4	28,8	28,9	28,3	28,5	26,2
Green Party	36,5	37,8	33,1	31,5	33,2	27,7
Centre Party	10,9	12,0	12,4	12,6	15,3	15,9
People's Party	23,9	22,9	23,1	23,4	23,2	22,4
Moderate Party	23,5	22,2	23,1	22,1	22,5	22,7
Christian Democrats	9,8	9,8	11,6	11,6	11,7	9,5
Sweden Democrats	11,5	11,6	13,0	12,7	11,6	12,8
Feminist Initiative	26,0	25,1	19,9	19,9	26,1	21,0

From the Tables 6 and 7, several things could be noted. It is clear that the degree to which individual parties was part of the consideration sets varied over the campaign but also that the two samples differ in this respect. From a demographical point of view, the opt-in sample is the most skewed, but none of the samples should be inference to the entire voting population.

Another way of illustrating the content of the consideration sets is to focus on combinations of parties as illustrated in Tables 9 and 10 below. The first table shows the combination of parties in the first panel wave, while the second table reports combination of parties at the postelection panel wave, which is just after the national election. To clarify the patterns, the Left (red) and Right (blue) parties are marked. The Sweden Democrats are considered to not be part of any of the blocs, since they were not discussed as coalition partner from any of the parties.

Table 8. Combination of parties in consideration sets. Proportion of respondents considering one party in wave 1 also considering other parties. Proportion of respondents with consideration set. Representative sample.

If consider	Also consider									Ratio
	L	S	Gr	FI	C	Lib	M	CD	SD	
L	-	51	43	25	1	2	1	1	2	14
S	35	-	39	12	3	9	12	2	6	13
Gr	38	49	-	21	10	11	12	4	3	16
FI	59	39	57	-	6	6	8	2	1	20
C	2	16	39	9	-	51	52	27	6	22
Lib	3	20	19	4	23	-	54	22	8	17
M	1	17	13	4	16	36	-	18	13	13
CD	2	10	16	3	27	49	59	-	15	20
SD	5	18	6	1	4	12	29	19	-	9

Comment: The rows sum is larger than 100% since respondents could have consideration sets with more than two parties. Number of respondents: 823.

Table 9. Combination of parties in consideration sets. Proportion of respondents considering one party in wave 6 also considering other parties. Proportion of respondents with consideration set. Representative sample.

If consider	Also consider									Ratio
	L	S	Gr	FI	C	Lib	M	CD	SD	
L	-	45	42	39	0	1	1	0	4	15
S	34	-	38	18	4	6	7	1	5	13
Gr	39	46	-	35	7	7	6	2	2	16
FI	58	35	56	-	4	2	3	0	2	18
C	1	8	13	5	-	47	57	27	9	19
Lib	1	11	10	2	38	-	60	25	10	17
M	1	8	6	2	30	40	-	20	19	14
CD	0	5	6	0	42	48	58	-	24	20
SD	6	10	3	2	9	12	35	15	-	10

Comment: The rows' sum is larger than 100% since respondents could have consideration sets with more than two parties. Number of respondents: 823.

Most voters who consider more than one party to vote for consider another party within the same government bloc. The respondents considering any of the Left parties (L, S, Gr, or FI) were not very inclined to consider any of the Right parties (C, Lib, M, or CD), and this pattern was even stronger just after the election (Table 9) than in the beginning of the panel (Table 9). It was only among respondents considering the Green Party (MP) that any of the Alliance Party was considered among 10% or more in the beginning of the panel, but this was not the case just after the election. Also, worth to note is the degree to which FI (Feminist Initiative) was part of the consideration sets among respondents considering to vote for any of the red-Green parties and the inclusion of FI increased between the two waves compared here. Among those considering any of the Alliance Party, on the other hand, the proportion that actually considers voting for the Social Democrats or the Green Party was quite considerable when the panel started but far lower at the last panel step. This points to a strengthening of the respective blocs during the election campaign and an intensified conflict line. When it comes to the Sweden Democrats, they were mainly considered together with the Moderate and the Christian Democratic Party and even more so just after the election than in the beginning of our panel.

Another way to illustrate the content of voters' consideration set is to look at the most common combinations of parties. In Table 10, we include both single consideration sets and consideration sets consisting of multiple parties.

Table 10. The 10 most common consideration sets in the 2014 Swedish national election.

		Panel wave					
		1	3	4	5	6	7
1		S	S	S	S	S	S
2		M	S-Gr	M	M	M	M
3		L-S	M	SD	SD	L-S	SD
4		S-Gr	L	L-S	S-Gr	SD	L
5		SD	SD	L	Gr	L	S-Gr
6		L	L-S-Gr	Gr	L-S	S-Gr	L-S
7		L-S-Gr	L-S-Gr-FI	S-Gr	L	L-FI	L-Gr-FI
8		Gr	Gr	Lib-M	Lib-M	L-Gr-FI	Lib-M
9		Lib-M	Lib-M	L-Gr-FI	L-Gr-FI	Gr	Gr
10		L-Gr	L-S	L-S-Gr	L-FI	Lib-M	L-S-Gr
Share		55,4	49,6	51,2	50,4	47,7	51,1

Comment: Number of respondents: 823.

As shown in Table 10, the Social Democrats alone represent the most common consideration set in all panel waves. Furthermore, the Moderates, the Sweden Democrats, the Left Party, and the Green are also represented as single consideration sets. Additionally, various combinations of two to four parties are represented in the top 10, which account for about 50% of the voters.

When considering only consideration sets consisting of more than one party, it is evident that there is a large number of different combinations in the Swedish electorate. However, as shown above, consideration sets are mainly structured by the ideological Left-Right

dimension. In Table 11, we report consideration sets that are considered by at least 1% of the respondents.

Among the 823 respondents who answered in all panel waves, over 150 different consideration sets are reported. Consequently, in addition to single and various Left-Right structured consideration sets, about 20% of the voters have consideration sets, including both Left and Right parties. As shown in Table 11, the most common “mixed” consideration sets include either the Sweden Democrats or one of the large parties (Social Democrats or Moderates) or both the large parties.

Table 11. Most common multiple-consideration sets in the 2014 Swedish national election.

	Panel wave					
	1	3	4	5	6	7
L-S	6,4	3,7	5,0	4,4	4,7	4,3
S-Gr	6,2	5,7	4,1	4,9	4,1	5,0
L-S-Gr	4,9	3,9	3,8	2,9	2,9	3,5
L-Gr	3,3	1,5	2,2	2,1	2,2	1,1
L-FI	2,3	2,9	2,2	3,0	4,1	2,8
L-Gr-FI	1,9	3,5	3,8	3,2	3,8	4,0
L-S-Gr-FI	1,8	3,9	2,2	1,7	1,9	1,8
Gr-FI	1,0	2,7	2,1	2,2	1,9	1,9
S-M	2,3	1,0	1,0	1,5	1,5	1,0
S-SD	1,5	1,2	2,3	1,6	1,6	1,5
M-SD	2,8	2,3	3,0	2,3	2,4	3,2
Lib-M	3,8	3,7	3,8	3,3	3,5	3,9
M-CD	1,2	1,6	1,7	1,2	1,0	0,7
C-Lib-M	1,1	1,0	0,9	1,3	1,2	1,8
Lib-M-CD	1,1	1,5	1,3	0,9	1,0	1,0
C-M	0,7	1,0	1,5	1,5	1,6	2,3
C-Lib-M-CD	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,1	1,7	1,8
Share	43,3	42,1	41,9	39,1	41,1	41,6

Comment: Number of respondents: 823

The Left-Right structure of consideration sets is further illustrated in Table 12, where we pool the parties into four exclusive groups.

Table 12. Bloc-specific consideration sets. Proportion of all respondents with CS >1.

	Panel wave						
	1	3	4	5	6	7	All waves
Mixed party set	21,0	20,7	20,0	19,8	20,5	16,5	34,7
Exclusive Right parties	21,7	21,4	23,9	24,0	24,9	27,3	16,1
Exclusive Left parties	52,8	52,9	50,4	50,3	50,1	50,3	46,1
Exclusive Sweden Democrats	5,5	5,0	5,8	5,9	4,5	5,9	3,2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Comment: Number of respondents: 823. Mixed consideration set includes both Left and Right parties and/or Left/Right parties and SD. Exclusive Right parties include C, Lib, M, and CD. Exclusive Left parties include L, S, Gr, and FI.

If all panel waves are pooled, more than a third of the voters have a mixed consideration set in one of the panel waves. Worth noting, however, is that the proportion with a mixed consideration set is lowest a couple of weeks after the election. To conclude, the content of voters' consideration sets is mainly structured by Left and Right parties. This confirms the theoretical validity of the consideration set approach to party choice in Sweden, since it is well documented that Swedish voters are strongly oriented by the Left-Right divide of Swedish politics. However, the Left-Right pattern is not universal, since we also capture a fair proportion of mixed consideration sets, reflecting the waning hold of the traditional Left-Right orientation.

Stability of Consideration Sets

The third descriptive aspect of consideration set models for party choice is their stability. If we conceive the consideration sets as mainly reflecting a general ideological orientation, we would expect the consideration sets to be fairly stable, incorporating more or less the same parties whenever we ask. On the other hand, the bloc pattern described above might imply some variation in the consideration set due to short-term factors but the considered parties are mainly in the same bloc. This would imply that the Swedish party system in fact bears traits of a "pseudo-two-party system" and that maybe there is actually more stability in the voting patterns than is maybe otherwise assumed.

But as described in Tables 8 and 9 above, the bloc pattern in the contents of the consideration sets is not universal.

A first distinction in regard to party set stability is between voters who only consider one party and those who consider multiple parties. More particularly, voters who only consider one party naturally tend to have a stable party set. Among those who consider only one party in all panel waves, almost all have a stable party set and consider the same party. On the contrary, voters who consider multiple parties tend to have unstable party sets where parties are sequentially included or excluded, which is shown in Table 13 below.

Table 13. Stability of consideration set content and size.

	Unstable			N
	CS	Stable CS	Total	
Consider one party in all waves	3,7	96,3	100	109
Consider more than one party in at least one wave	93,9	6,1	100	653
Consider one party in all waves*	3,3	96,7	100	1257
Consider more than one party in at least one wave*	91,6	8,4	100	7433

Comment: * opt-in sample.

However, most respondents who consider more than one party are not stable in how many parties or which party that is considered.

Table 13 also shows that there is a very limited difference between the probability-based and the self-recruited sample in terms of party set stability. For a more informative analysis on party set stability, however, we have to move on to Table 14, which shows the stability of content and size between each panel wave.

Table 14. Stability of party set content and size.

Content	Panel wave						Size	Panel wave					
	1	3	4	5	6	7		1	3	4	5	6	7
1	-						1	-					
3	50	-					3	55	-				
4	35	50	-				4	38	55	-			
5	30	40	64	-			5	31	43	67	-		
6	23	31	45	58	-		6	25	33	46	60	-	
7	20	25	33	40	55	-	7	21	27	34	41	56	-

Comment: Number of respondents: 812. The numbers represent the proportion of voters with an identical consideration set (Left)/consideration set size (Right) throughout each of the panel waves. A consideration set is considered stable if it is identical to the consideration set in previous panel waves.

An example of interpretation of Table 14 is that 20% of the voters have an identical party set from wave 1 to 7. Furthermore, 21% of the voters consider an identical number of parties in all panel waves. As shown in Table 13, voters with stable party sets generally consider only one party, whereas stable “multiple party sets” are fairly rare. As can be expected, the pattern of party set size stability is largely similar to content stability. This indicates that party sets do not only change in regard to content. Also, the size of voters’ consideration sets either increases or decreases to a high degree between panel waves although the average party set size is fairly stable.

The content of voters’ party sets is further illustrated and broken down on the party level in Tables 15 and 16. In Table 15, the presented proportions represent the share of voters who consider the same party in the following panel waves.

Table 15. Stability of party exclusion in consideration set between panel waves.

L	Panel wave						S							C						
	1	3	4	5	6	7		1	3	4	5	6	7		1	3	4	5	6	7
Panel wave																				
1	-						1	-					1	-						
3	83	-					3	83	-				3	81	-					
4	83	82	-				4	79	85	-			4	73	70	-				
5	80	78	84	-			5	79	85	92	-		5	72	68	81	-			
6	83	82	88	92	-		6	80	86	91	92	-	6	85	80	89	90	-		
7	73	72	80	84	79	-	7	71	77	80	81	80	-	7	76	77	83	85	78	-
Lib	1	3	4	5	6	7	M	1	3	4	5	6	7	CD	1	3	4	5	6	7
1	-						1	-						1	-					
3	78	-					3	90	-					3	82	-				
4	71	74	-				4	89	91	-				4	81	79	-			
5	71	75	86	-			5	86	88	91	-			5	76	77	80	-		
6	77	80	90	91	-		6	90	90	95	96	-		6	80	82	84	84	-	
7	70	73	77	81	79	-	7	85	84	87	86	84	-	7	69	65	69	72	70	-
Gr	1	3	4	5	6	7	SD	1	3	4	5	6	7	FI	1	3	4	5	6	7
1	-						1	-						1	-					
3	86	-					3	84	-					3	84	-				
4	80	77	-				4	91	91	-				4	70	66	-			
5	76	73	85	-			5	93	93	89	-			5	75	67	84	-		
6	80	78	87	90	-		6	94	92	93	93	-		6	85	74	90	93	-	
7	68	65	74	80	75	-	7	89	84	84	86	87	-	7	70	61	76	79	75	-

Comment: Number of respondents: 823. L: Left Party, S: Social Democrats, C: Centre Party, Lib: People's Party Liberals, M: Moderates, CD: Christian Democrats, Gr: Green Party, SD: Sweden Democrats, FI: Feminist Initiative. The numbers represent the proportion of voters who consider the party in previous panel waves.

For example, out of all the voters who consider voting for the Left Party in panel wave 1, 83% still consider them in panel wave 2, and 73% consider them in panel wave 7. Hence, the Moderates and the Sweden Democrats represent parties that are rarely dropped from party sets, while the opposite applies to the Feminist Initiative. However, as shown in Table 15, where the presented proportions represent the share of voters who consider a party they did not consider in previous panel waves, the Feminist Initiative is relatively frequently getting included in party sets.

Table 16. Instability of party inclusion in consideration set between panel waves.

L	Panel wave						S							C						
	1	3	4	5	6	7		1	3	4	5	6	7		1	3	4	5	6	7
Panel wave																				
1	-						1	-					1	-						
3	7	-					3	7	-				3	4	-					
4	5	6	-				4	7	6	-			4	5	4	-				
5	4	5	3	-			5	7	7	5	-		5	5	4	3	-			
6	7	7	6	7	-		6	8	8	7	6	-	6	8	7	6	5	-		
7	7	7	6	6	5	-	7	6	5	6	4	4	-	7	9	7	6	6	3	-
Lib	1	3	4	5	6	7	M	1	3	4	5	6	7	CD	1	3	4	5	6	7
1	-						1	-						1	-					
3	4	-					3	3	-					3	3	-				
4	5	6	-				4	4	4	-				4	4	3	-			
5	5	4	3	-			5	4	4	3	-			5	5	5	2	-		
6	8	8	6	6	-		6	7	8	6	6	-		6	6	4	3	3	-	
7	6	6	6	5	2	-	7	5	6	5	6	3	-	7	4	3	2	2	1	-
Gr	1	3	4	5	6	7	SD	1	3	4	5	6	7	FI	1	3	4	5	6	7
1	-						1	-						1	-					
3	12	-					3	3	-					3	13	-				
4	9	6	-				4	3	3	-				4	9	3	-			
5	7	5	3	-			5	3	3	2	-			5	9	3	4	-		
6	10	7	7	8	-		6	4	4	2	2	-		6	12	7	8	7	-	
7	9	7	6	6	5	-	7	4	4	3	3	2	-	7	11	6	7	6	3	-

Comment: Number of respondents: 823. L: Left Party, S: Social Democrats, C: Centre Party, Lib: People's Party Liberals, M: Moderates, CD: Christian Democrats, Gr: Green Party, SD: Sweden Democrats, FI: Feminist Initiative. The numbers represent the proportion of voters who consider each party but did not consider it in the previous panel wave.

To conclude, the consideration sets reported by our respondents could hardly be described as stable right through the campaign year of 2014. Most respondents considering more than one party in the beginning of the campaign do not stick to exactly the same set all through the period studied. But as was shown in previous section about the contents of the consideration sets, the tendency is to vary between ideologically close parties. In general, the pattern found supports the theoretical perspective that the voters are actually involved in a stepwise decision process, even if it is not straightforward. During the campaign, parties in ideological proximity are added, or deleted, from the consideration set as new information or new events occur. The consideration process seems to be more like a tentative and relatively open flow of alternatives with changing forms and attributes than a rational and one-directed stepwise deletion process of peeling an onion.

The next step in the evaluation of our approach to measure the consideration sets for party choice is to focus on the relevance of the consideration sets. Do they really reflect the relevant decision process?

Relevance of Consideration Sets

The perhaps most crucial validity test of the consideration set models for party choice is that the final party choice actually is between the parties considered earlier in the campaign. Table 18 shows the proportion of voters of the respective parties that actually had the party in their consideration set at each of the panel steps.

Table 17. Proportion of voters having elected party included in consideration set.

	Panel wave					
	1	3	4	5	6	7
L	96	100	98	100	100	95
S	95	97	98	100	100	96
C	66	75	86	91	100	91
Lib	88	83	92	95	100	97
M	93	93	96	97	100	95
CD	75	81	91	91	100	91
G	92	93	98	98	100	97
SD	96	88	99	97	100	97
FI	73	92	92	93	100	95

Comment: Number of respondents: 823.

The consideration sets reported by the respondents are indeed relevant in the sense that the party finally voted for is to a large degree also among the considered parties from earlier in the campaign. The Left Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Moderate Party were in at least 90% of the sets through all panel waves among those who actually voted for the party. Almost as stable position in the consideration sets is found for the Sweden Democrats, even though a dip in panel wave 3 is detected, and for the Liberal Party that started out in a somewhat weaker position but was found in around 90% of its voter’s consideration sets all through the campaign. As for the Centre Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Feminist Initiative, these parties found their way into the consideration sets during the campaign.

Another relevant aspect is how successful the respective parties considered were in actually getting the final vote. A party could be part of the consideration set for a multitude of voters and still receiving just a fraction of the final votes. Table 19 shows for each party the percentage of respondents actually having the party in their consideration set actually voted for the party in the election.

Table 18. Consideration sets and final party choice.

Considered	Voted for										N
	L	S	Gr	FI	C	Lib	M	CD	SD	Oth	
L	46	22	11	19	0	0	0	0	1	1	259
S	10	61	12	6	1	2	4	0	3	1	338
Gr	11	22	44	13	2	3	3	1	1	0	272
FI	17	8	24	44	1	1	3	0	2	0	177
C	1	5	5	0	34	17	22	11	4	0	157
Lib	1	6	2	1	8	43	26	11	3	0	194
M	1	4	2	0	7	13	55	9	8	0	296
CD	1	1	4	0	8	12	24	44	6	0	103
SD	4	6	0	0	1	4	14	6	62	2	177

The Sweden Democrats and the Social Democrats were the most successful in receiving the votes from respondents who had them in their consideration set, with just over 60%. The least successful was the Centre Party, since only every third respondent considering to vote for C actually did it. The remaining party all had a success rate of around 45%.

A further evaluation of the relevance of our approach is to compare it with the alternative measurement of consideration sets with thermometer scales (compare Table 5). As discussed earlier, we test both the positive thermometer measure (all parties given a positive value) and the maximum thermometer measure (parties with highest grade). Table 19 presents the proportion of voters for each individual party that had the party in the consideration set when the set is identified in these manners. The entries could be compared to Table 17 above.

Table 19. Proportion of voters having elected party included in consideration set—positive and maximum thermometer operationalization.

	Positive thermometer			Maximum thermometer		
	3	5	6	3	5	6
L	98	98	98	81	89	91
S	98	99	100	79	92	94
C	90	96	100	59	76	86
Lib	91	99	100	78	90	90
M	96	97	99	82	92	96
CD	85	91	97	54	67	85
G	98	99	100	89	91	88
SD	80	96	96	70	78	80
FI	97	100	98	83	83	83

Comment: Number of respondents: 823.

As previously discussed, the positive thermometer measure is close to trivial, since the variation is very low, both between the parties and over the separate panel waves. As stated before, Swedish voters tend to be positive to parties, while the probability of voting for a party not positively evaluated is low. The maximum thermometer measure shows, on the

other hand, a bit more variation. Noteworthy is that it does not capture the party voted for at the election (wave 6) for more than between 96% and 80%. This might indicate quite a lot of tactical voting, or voting due to a single factor (party leader, salient issue), rather than voting based on a general appreciation of the party. To base the identification of the consideration sets on the maximum thermometer measure would unable such analysis of short-time factors behind the final party choice with party evaluation as explanatory factor.

The Subjective Decision Process

The final aspect for evaluation here is how the decision process that we claim to identify relates to the more subjective aspects of the process according to the respondents. We try to capture this by looking at data on self-reported time of voting decision and also at data on how difficult (or easy) it was to reach a decision. The main expectation would be that respondents only considering on party all throughout the campaign panel responded that they decided their party choice long ago and that they found it easy. These would, in other words be the party-identified respondents. As for voters with consideration set, it is harder to formulate strict expectations, but we believe the decision to be hard as long as the respondent considers more than one party and the final decision is closer to the election. Tables 20 and 21 provide the results.

Table 20. Self-reported time of vote decision.

CS-size Election Day	Election		Earlier	Since long	Total
	Day	Last week	autumn		
1 party	3,7	17,2	15,0	64,1	100
2 parties	10,7	39,4	25,3	24,6	100
3 parties	20,0	45,7	21,0	13,3	100
4 parties	22,4	56,9	13,8	6,9	100
5 parties	12,5	62,5	25,0	0,0	100

Comment: Number of respondents: 1,075.

Indeed, the table shows that respondents with “one party sets” knew since long which party to vote for. For respondents with party sets at Election Day, most made up their mind during the last week before the Election Day. Also, the difficulty in deciding which party to vote for separates respondents with one party sets from respondents considering more parties.

Table 21. Difficulty to decide party choice.

CS-size Election Day	Rather		Neither	Rather		Total
	Very easy	easy		hard	Very hard	
1 party	58,2	22,8	5,3	13,2	0,5	100
2 parties	21,9	42,9	11,7	17,6	6,0	100
3 parties	14,7	31,3	10,0	35,1	9,0	100
4 parties	12,1	37,9	13,8	27,6	8,6	100
5 parties	0,0	25,0	12,5	37,5	25,0	100

Comments: Number of respondents: 1,076.

Furthermore, the table shows a tendency for voters with larger sets to confront more difficulties in which party to vote for.

Conclusion

Many voters tend to consider several parties when it comes to decide on party choice. But in accordance with the consideration set approach for party choice, they do not consider all parties equally but start with a set of considered parties. This approach to party choice sees the vote decision as the result of a decision-making process in several steps.

To capture the consideration process behind party choice, we designed a seven-wave web panel survey in conjunction with the Swedish national election in September 2014 as well as the European Parliament Election in May 2014. In order to measure the consideration sets and the consideration process, we employed a direct survey question where the respondents were asked which party or parties they consider voting for, with the possibility to mark several parties explicitly spelled out. All party alternatives were listed. The present analysis is the first evaluation of our measurements for the consideration process and consideration sets in the panel survey. In the introduction, we stated six aspects for evaluation: *occurrence, size, content, stability, relevance, and subjective reports of the decision process.*

The analysis has shown that a large share of Swedish voters in 2014 indeed seemed to have consideration sets of parties when the campaign started or at least that around two-thirds of the respondents in our surveys have it. The proportion considering more than one party to vote for fluctuates somewhat over the campaign and especially the proportion peaks just after the national election, when we asked the respondents if they had considered any other party than the one they voted for.

The average number of parties considered for is around two, but approximately 30% of the respondents actually reported consideration sets of three or more parties, quite steadily over the period. We also compared consideration set sizes found with an alternative instrumentation with feeling thermometers. When it comes to the content of the consideration sets, the respondents reported a multitude of combinations. Most parties were considered by a significantly larger proportion of voters than those eventually voting for the party. However, the combinations of parties show a quite clear ideological pattern following the government alternatives “Red-Green” versus “Alliance.” In a sense, this could be interpreted as expressing “pseudo parties.” Only respondents considering the Sweden Democrats fall outside this pattern, even though the Sweden Democrats mainly were considered together with parties from the “Alliance.”

The consideration sets reported are not always stable over the campaign period. Rather, voters seem to add or delete parties into their sets during the campaign, probably due to campaign-specific events or information. However, as previously stated, the sets tend to remain within the same ideological bloc. And when it comes to relevance, we concluded that the party that finally received the vote indeed was included in the consideration set mentioned previously. More than 75% of the respondents reported in the first panel step in March that they considered the party they finally voted for in September. The final aspect for evaluation was the coherence between the consideration process captured with our measurement and the respondents’ own report of the process. We found that both the self-reported time for vote decision and the experienced difficulty to decide which party to vote for fit logically with the reported consideration set size at Election Day. We conclude that our measurement is supported by the respondents’ subjective report.

To conclude, the design of our seven-wave web panel campaign survey, as well as the actual instrumentation with an explicit question of considerations regarding party choice, seems to work as intended from all six aspects put forward here for evaluation.

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