

**Preference, Choice and Vote:
Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Effects of Changing Economic
Conditions in 15 Countries**

by

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ABSTRACT

Recent work on economic voting has found small but homogeneous effects of changes in the real economy (inflation, unemployment and economic growth) on the preferences that individual voters have for political parties. But these findings run counter to an emerging consensus among political economists that effects of the economy are heterogeneous. More generally, these findings run counter to a common perception going back to *The American Voter* that political choices reflect differences in political sophistication between voters. This paper attempts to reconcile the new findings with expectations derived from the emerging consensus. It argues that past findings have been biased in ways that should have been predictable from a reading of Anthony Downs' *Economic Theory of Democracy* which almost fifty years ago proposed the use of a two-step model for understanding voting behavior, in which the formation of preferences are regarded separately from the exercise of choice. The newer findings are different because they distinguish between these two steps in the voter's decision-making process.

Recent work on economic voting has found small but consistent effects of changes in the real economy (inflation, unemployment and economic growth) on the preferences that individual voters have for political parties (van der Brug, van der Eijk and Franklin 2001, 2002, 2006). But these findings run counter to an emerging consensus among those who study public opinion formation that effects of the economy (and other issues) are heterogeneous (see especially Zaller 1992, 1998; cf. Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995). More generally, our findings run counter to a common perception going back to Campbell et al. (1960) that voters differ in sophistication and, consequently, that influences on their political choices reflect these differences. In this paper we try to reconcile our findings with those in the electoral behavior literature.

We start by summarizing that literature insofar as it relates to the consistency (or lack of it) in effects on voter choice. We then describe our own research and summarize its findings. Finally we propose and test an explanation for the differences between our findings and what would have been expected on the basis of the emerging consensus in behavioral voting studies. We conclude that nonlinearities in pre-existing findings derive from failure of the studies concerned to differentiate between preferences and choice. Our comparative approach has stimulated us to focus on voter preferences for political parties, in contrast to the normal approach of focusing on voter choices between parties, and our findings suggest that the normal approach is flawed. We believe that past findings have been biased in ways that should have been predictable from a reading of Anthony Downs (1957) who almost fifty years ago pioneered the use of a two-step model for understanding voting behavior, in which the formation of preferences are regarded separately from the exercise of choice.

The emerging consensus

In order to be able to judge political parties by the state of the economy, in the light of their responsibilities for the conduct of public affairs, voters must have information about both the economy and the situations of parties. Early studies of public opinion and voting behavior called into question whether the average citizen would have such information (Berelson et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1964, 1970). Analyses of American National Election Study panel data from 1956, 1958 and 1960 revealed that about half the respondents changed their opinions on policy issues as though they were answering at random. A general conclusion was that these people's

policy attitudes as expressed in opinion polls were for the most part *nonattitudes* (Converse 1970). More recently, however, various scholars have proposed that even though many citizens may neither be very attentive to politics, nor very informed about all sorts of details, this does *not* mean that they are unable to vote rationally. With the aid of cognitive cues, they may still be able to evaluate candidates or parties in a meaningful way (Fiske and Linville, 1980; Feldman and Conover, 1983; Conover and Feldman, 1982, 1984; Popkin, 1991; Zaller, 1992; Sniderman, 1993; Kinder, 1993).

This view has the same implications as the notion of 'information costs', which is central to rational choice perspectives on the electoral process (Downs, 1957; Barry, 1970; Enelow and Hinich, 1984). In this perspective, the costs (in time and energy) of becoming informed about politics generally exceed the gains of doing so. To still vote rationally, voters need information saving devices, perceptual cues that help them to make informed judgments concerning the political world, including the policy positions of parties. According to Downs (1957) voters therefore make use of ideologies to evaluate parties, since ideologies summarize the differences among parties on the most salient issues at each moment. Alternatively it has been suggested that party identification provides cues even to those who are unaware of parties' ideologies (Campbell and Kahn 1952; Campbell et al. 1960, 1966).

Although much research assumes that all voters use perceptual cues to the same extent, recent research has suggested that there will be differences between voters in the extent of cue-taking. Sophisticated voters will tend to vote on the basis of established party identifications and unsophisticated voters may well lack even the knowledge necessary to make use of perceptual cues. So the extent of cue-taking may be highest among the group of voters with intermediate levels of political sophistication (Zaller 1992).

When we focus specifically on economic voting, the extent to which citizens make use of economic conditions as cues to help them decide which party to support will clearly depend upon their relevant information. In order to vote on the basis of the economy, they should not only have information about the state of the economy, but they must also know which parties are to be credited or blamed. Moreover, the state of the economy would need to be salient to such voters. Different groups of voters may differ in their extent of economic voting for different reasons. Some voters may simply lack the necessary information about who is in government or about actual economic circumstances. At the other end of the spectrum, some voters may reach the conclusion that, in a capitalist and global economy, a national government has only limited opportunities to affect

economic developments. So, in the case of economic voting as in the case of partisan cues, we might expect voters at the intermediate level of sophistication to be the ones that react most strongly.

The kind of considerations different groups of voters take into account when deciding how to vote has important ramifications for our appraisal of electoral processes. Authors of classic studies of voting behavior in the US have shown that electoral preferences of the most sophisticated voters were most stable, whereas changes in election outcomes were mainly the result of changes in preferences of the least interested and attentive citizens (e.g., Campbell et al., 1960). These findings called into question the fundamental principle of democratic governance, that citizens evaluate political parties or candidates on the basis of substantive considerations and hence cast meaningful votes in elections. Apparently a large proportion of the (American) electorate was not able to cast a vote on the basis of substantive considerations. This view was heavily contested for a number of years (Dalton and Wattenberg 1992; Sneiderman 1992). New insights from a study by Zaller (1998) lead to a different appreciation of the electoral process. Zaller found that more sophisticated voters make their electoral decisions on the basis of ideology, whereas less sophisticated voters make their choices on the basis of what happens to the economy. If less sophisticated voters evaluate the government on the basis of its handling of the economy, this would clearly be in line with the democratic ideal that voters hold their leaders responsible at election time for at least some of their actions during their time in office, but it would also imply a very heterogeneous electorate in which different groups decided how to vote on different grounds.

Moreover, if Zaller's interpretation is indeed correct, then other considerations pertaining to the attributes of respondents also need to be taken into account. To the extent that voters are motivated by economic self-interest (pocket-book voting), we might expect certain groups of voters to be more sensitive to economic developments than others. Dorussen & Taylor (2002) argued that this would be particularly relevant for the effects of unemployment. Some citizens are less vulnerable to unemployment, those authors argued, because their jobs are not so much at risk when unemployment rises, whereas others are more likely to lose their jobs in such circumstances. The group that is expected to be very sensitive to unemployment rates consists of citizens who are themselves unemployed – their chances of finding a job diminish when unemployment increases. If this group reacts more strongly to changes in the economy, this would provide evidence of a form of pocket-book voting, where voters bring concerns about their own situation to bear on their process of political preference formation. The group expected to be least sensitive to the unemployment

rates, according to Dorussen & Taylor, consists of retired citizens who (because they are not employed and are not seeking employment) do not have to concern themselves with the state of the job market. They may, on the other hand be more sensitive to levels of inflation, because at least some of them depend to a large extent on savings which lose value as a consequence of inflation. Again, greater sensitivity to inflation by this group would be evidence of a form of pocket-book voting.¹ On the other hand, if none of these supposed sensitivities are found in practice, this would suggest that people do not in fact "vote their pocket-books." The alternative theoretical perspective found in the literature is that economic voting is not egotropic (concerned with people's pocket-books) but rather that it is sociotropic (concerned with the good of society as a whole) in nature.

A final source of voter heterogeneity is ideological self-placement in left/right terms. It has been suggested (Powell and Whitten 1992; Whitten and Palmer 1999) that right-leaning government parties should be particularly sensitive to levels of growth, whereas left-leaning government parties should be particularly sensitive to unemployment levels. Similar differences may well exist among voters.² Left-leaning voters might be expected to give more weight to parties' performance in dealing with unemployment, whereas right-leaning voters might be more concerned with inflation.

All this heterogeneity among voters, if it indeed exists, would suggest that the state of the economy would affect different classes and conditions of voters very differently, which would make it hard for the economy to have measurable effects on election outcomes unless its effects are powerful enough to overcome such heterogeneity. Yet our findings imply that the economy only has very small effects on the preferences of voters, as we shall see.

Researching the effects of economic conditions on individual voters

Conventional wisdom asserts that economic conditions are closely linked to election outcomes. At least since the 1930s, it is argued, voters in democratic countries have tended to hold governments

¹ In the typology of Dorussen and Taylor (2002) the least sensitive citizens are retirees and civil service employees. However, the extent to which civil servants are sensitive to job loss may well differ enormously between countries. Moreover, in many countries, various semi-public sectors exist in which employees have a similar status to those who work in the public sector. In cross-country comparisons, therefore, distinctions between civil service and other employees become arbitrary.

² It might be thought that similar differences would have to be seen among voters, but this is not necessarily so. Voters could hold different types of party to account in different ways without themselves having different concerns. This would happen if they had different expectations for the behavior of different parties when in office – a prospective orientation that we have already documented in our findings (see van der Brug, van der Eijk and Franklin, 2006, chapter 4).

accountable for bad economic times, reducing their support for the incumbent government (or for the parties holding government office) in conditions of high unemployment or inflation, or of low economic growth (Tuftte 1976; Christal and Alt 1981; Hibbs 1987; Fair 1988; Lewis-Beck 1988; Markus 1988, 1992; Erikson 1989; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1992; Nadeau and Lewis-Beck 2001; Dorussen & Taylor 2002). However, the evidence in support of this conventional wisdom has been by no means conclusive and has given rise to a series of protracted debates in the literature, none of which shows much sign of convergence. This is the case for almost any topic that students of economic voting are concerned with, such as the question whether voters hold governments responsible for economic conditions generally within their country, or rather for their own "pocket book" financial situation (whether economic voting is sociotropic or egocentric), and whether voters respond retrospectively (holding governments responsible for past successes and failures) or prospectively (giving support to parties that promise better future economic times) to economic conditions. Moreover, the modeled forms of vote and popularity functions differ considerably — within as well as between countries — as do the estimated parameters. The instabilities in the findings of different studies made the editors of a recent symposium exclaim: "We all prefer to think that the instability is apparent only. That is, it is due to something we are missing or doing wrongly — if we could just find the 'trick', everything would be well" (Lewis Beck and Paldam 2000:114).

We do not presume to claim that we have found the `trick` that makes everything well; but we do believe that we have taken a major step in the right direction. In other research (van der Brug, van der Eijk, and Franklin 2001, 2002; van der Eijk 2002; van der Brug, van der Eijk, Kroh and Franklin 2006) we argue that, indeed, past researchers have been doing something wrong. We assert that most existing studies in the field of economic voting misspecify the dependent variable, party choice, and that many of the instabilities in the findings are a consequence of this misspecification. Studies at both the aggregate and individual levels have generally relied on a very crude distinction between support for (or votes for) governing parties and support for (or votes for) opposition parties. Obviously this crude distinction does not adequately describe the choice process in multi-party systems. Anderson (1995) and Stevenson (2002) do distinguish between parties that are members of a coalition government, but neither of these authors distinguishes between opposition parties, thus still failing to specify the choice process. Moreover, perhaps even more importantly, past studies have focused on choices between parties rather than on preferences for parties, thus ignoring a primary component of Downs' (1957) account of voter decision-making, which unpacks the decision

process into two stages: a first stage in which preferences are updated and a second stage in which choices are made. One purpose of our research was to suggest how and why the customary specification of the dependent variable can be expected to yield invalid estimates of the effects of economic conditions (or of any other independent variables) on party choice. Another was to derive, from careful consideration of the implications of Downs' two stage model, expectations for party choice and election outcomes that are consistent with observed patterns.

Past studies of economic voting have looked in detail at variations across political systems and at variations across voters. No past study has looked at both these levels simultaneously. Our study does this and, in addition, also focuses on variations between political parties and on the corresponding structure of electoral competition for votes. We analyze the effects of economic conditions on electoral support for each of a country's parties, treating government/opposition status as a variable helping us to understand the different impact that the same economic conditions have on different parties. Government versus opposition status is, however, not the only characteristic of parties that we distinguish; we also look at their size, ideological complexion, and whether they control government ministries with responsibility for economic affairs. We show – by estimating aggregate election results from the parameters of our individual level models – that particular opposition parties as well as particular government parties are affected very differently by the same changes in economic conditions. We even show instances of governing parties gaining votes (at the expense of other governing parties) as a result of a worsening economy (van der Brug, van der Eijk and Franklin 2006).

Also problematic in past research is the fact that the main finding from aggregate-level studies (that 'good' economic conditions benefit incumbent government parties) has never been unambiguously replicated at the individual level (Fiorina 1978; Kinder and Kiewiet 1979; 1981; Lewis-Beck 1988; Nadeau and Lewis-Beck 2001). Individual level studies generally assess the effect of respondents' views of economic conditions on their support for a government or an opposition party. But these assessments of economic conditions themselves turn out to be strongly affected by preferences for the governing party or parties (Bartels 1996; Franklin, Wlezien and Twiggs 1997; Duch and Palmer 2002). Only for the United States, looking at a sequence of ten presidential elections, has evidence been found for an effect of real economic conditions on individual voting decisions (Markus 1988, 1992; Nadeau and Lewis-Beck 2001); but those studies were forced by their small number of cases at the aggregate level to employ grossly underspecified

models of voting behavior. A major objective of our research has been to determine the effect of objective economic conditions on individual-level vote choice using fully specified models across a much larger number of electoral contexts (we studied 42 contexts in all).

Another thing that may have made the findings of past studies unstable is that they were conducted in venues that contained a great deal of non-random ‘noise.’ Studies of vote choice at the time of an election need to take account of all the factors that influence election outcomes so that effects of the economy can be isolated after having controlled for all other factors. The problem here is that we simply do not know what all these other factors are. Though we have a fairly good understanding of what makes people vote the way they do, this understanding is by no means sufficiently detailed to serve as a basis for controlling all the factors that influence election outcomes. Indeed, the track record of political scientists in predicting election outcomes is almost as bad as their track record in establishing consistent effects of economic conditions (see, for example, Dalton and Wattenberg 1993, Anker 1995, Erikson 2002). So past studies of the effects of the economy have likely been contaminated by all the unknown effects of campaign slogans, political scandals, and candidate traits that make it so difficult for us to move from explanations of individual behavior to explanations of election outcomes.

We believe that we have found a venue for studying the effects of economic conditions on political behavior that is not subject to nearly as much non-random noise as the conventional venue of voting choice at national elections. The individual-level data for our study come from three large-scale surveys of the electorates of member countries of the EC/EU conducted in mid-1989, mid-1994 and mid-1999 (see Appendix). These provide us with a total of 42 political contexts for which distinct readings of economic conditions are available and within which we can evaluate individual-level political preferences (and the consequences of these preferences in terms of party choice). The occasion for each of these surveys was the five-yearly occurrence of elections to the European Parliament; but it is important to stress that none of the survey items we employ relate specifically to the European Parliament elections themselves. All of these items relate either to the national political environments within member countries, or to politics in general. From the perspective of our interests here, the surveys are convenient equally-spaced sources of survey data that provide us with the means to investigate economic voting in comparative perspective. The fact that the data were collected at the occasion of European Parliamentary elections is no impediment to our enterprise. Past research has definitively established that these elections provide no stimuli that

divert citizens from the concerns that characterize their national political circumstances (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh 1996). On the other hand, we expected to benefit from the fact that these elections are considerably less subject to the sort of non-random 'noise' that can make it so hard to investigate actual national elections. Rather, at these elections we see baseline forces at work unclouded by high profile candidacies or campaign hype.

We were able to check this reasoning in a straightforward and rather definitive fashion. Though European Elections are generally conducted separately from national elections, because of the vagaries of national election cycles there have always been a few instances of national elections occurring on the same day as European elections (3 in 1989, 1 in 1994, and 2 in 1999). These six cases provide us with a critical test of the adequacy of our data. Though national elections undoubtedly introduce additional effects on electoral choice, as already noted, nevertheless to the extent that the same effects are measured those effects can be compared with the effects found in contexts where national elections were not held. If the determinants of party preferences at the time of real national elections were to be different from the preferences expressed by respondents to our surveys, then we should be able to detect such differences by using appropriate interactions with a dummy variable indicating whether a real (concurrent) national election was held at the same time as the European election. In earlier studies (Oppenhuis 1995; Van der Eijk and Franklin 1996) such analyses did not succeed in demonstrating anything distinctive about response behavior at the time of concurrent national elections, and we have now demonstrated that the same is true in a study of economic voting (van der Brug, van der Eijk and Franklin 2006).

Our research builds on earlier work in the subfield of economic voting. We measure economic conditions in exactly the same way that most aggregate-level studies do, taking OECD statistics for economic growth, inflation, and unemployment in the countries that we study at the times of our surveys (this yields one value for each of the three indicators for each time-point in each country, 42 values in all for each of these indicators). Where our research is most distinctive is in the construction of the dependent variable. Instead of focusing on party choice (or, rather, the choice between government and other parties) as past research has done, we instead focus on party preferences. This focus was chosen partly because of our comparative perspective. By focusing on the extent to which a party is preferred we derive a dependent variable that is comparable across political systems. The things that might lead voters to prefer one party over another can be coded in such a way as to be party- (and hence system-) independent, enabling us to pool our data over space

and time in the manner described by, for example, Stimson (1985). Party preferences are derived from a set of questions asked of voters in each country, one for each party, that elicit a score from 1 to 10 for their propensity to vote for each party.³

Our findings are largely consistent with recent findings in the economic voting literature that take account of the ideological complexions of governments and clarity of accountability in the countries that are studied (Powell and Whitten 1992; Whitten and Palmer 1999). However, we are able to show the effects of economic conditions not only in high clarity countries (as do these authors) but also in low clarity countries. We find that where voters find it hard to associate government parties with good or bad economic times, instead they hold large parties accountable (whether in government or in opposition). In systems with poor clarity of accountability party size thus replaces government status as the basis for assessing responsibility.⁴

In line with the findings of Powell and Whitten, we also find that the ideological complexion of a party plays a role in mediating the influence of good/bad economic times. This appears to be because in high clarity systems some voters behave prospectively, choosing a party they deem capable of handling particular problems that concern them. In low clarity systems, by contrast, voters appear to find it just as hard to distinguish between parties on the basis of their ideology as on the basis of their government/opposition status. In such systems retrospective voting is the rule. The ideas explored in these studies have implications that go far beyond the study of economic voting. Indeed, our book can be regarded as a showcase for the potential of a research strategy that was implicit in the almost fifty-year-old theorizing of Anthony Downs, but which has been largely ignored by scholars since that time. Downs (1957) suggested that the choices made in elections were determined by a two-stage process in which voters first update their utilities (which correspond to what we call ‘vote propensities’ – see footnote 3) and then reach a choice on the basis of those

³ The actual question asks about the likelihood that respondents would *ever* vote for a given political party. Considerable research has validated the resulting variables as measures of Downsean utility (Tilly 1995; van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; van der Brug, van der Eijk, Kroh and Franklin 2006). However, because the word ‘utility’ has acquired an overlay of meanings from its use in rational choice theorizing we prefer to employ the term ‘propensity to vote’ which corresponds to the notion of party preferences as these words are used in ordinary English (a voter most prefers the party for which he or she reports the highest vote propensity).

⁴ Indeed, party size turns out to be important even in high clarity countries. There, smaller members of a governing coalition are held less responsible for good/bad economic times than the coalition’s largest member, and small governing parties sometimes even gain votes (at the expense of their larger partners) when economic times are bad. Party size is also important among opposition parties, in helping to distinguish between parties that are likely to be helped or not by bad economic times.

utilities. By separating the two stages we can take account of factors that impinge on vote propensities (such as party size) that could not be taken into account when the dependent variable was conceived as party choice, and we can take account of factors that impinge on choice (such as the state of competition between political parties) that could not be taken into account without knowledge of voters' preferences for parties. Our findings serve to vindicate the use of this research strategy.

Effects of the economy on individual-level preferences for parties

Our findings nevertheless produce a puzzle. The effects of the economy found in our research are small compared to other effects on voting. Of course, small effects can have large consequences if everyone in the electorate is involved in those effects. Political consequences from changing economic conditions are interesting to political scientists precisely because of the supposition that all voters are indeed affected by any changes in economic conditions, and that the party preferences of all voters are subject to influences from such changes. But is this supposition valid? The notion that voters are homogenous in the way they reach their decisions has been quite common in much of the research on party choice. However, as mentioned earlier, recent studies have suggested that voters are actually rather heterogeneous in the way they reach electoral decisions (Sniderman et al. 1991; Bartle 1997; Krause 1997; Zaller 1998; Pattie & Johnston 2001; Dorussen & Taylor 2002; Kroh 2003). One purpose of this paper is see whether voters are homogeneous enough in the face of changing economic conditions to give rise to the palpable consequences for election outcomes that our study appears to find. Another is to explore in more detail the effects of economic voting at the individual level, and to try to evaluate those effects in the context of other effects on voters' party preferences. We will start by rehearsing the individual-level implications of our findings.

Table 1 shows our principal findings at the level of individual voters in three models, one of which includes effects of the economy and two of which do not. Model A comes from van der Eijk and Franklin (1996) and is included primarily to demonstrate that a fully specified model at the individual level does not yield effects that are much different than those in models that necessarily

Table 1 Effects on preferences for parties in 15 countries, with and without interactions with economic conditions

	(A) Without economy or previous vote(1989)			(B) Without the economy (1989-1999)			(C) With the economy (1989-1999)		
	B	SE [±]	Beta	B	SE [±]	Beta	B	SE [±]	Beta
Individual level variables									
Previous national vote				.764	.009	.402**	.769	.009	.404**
Class	.500	.023	.109**	.356	.027	.060**	.355	.026	.060**
Religion	.505	.018	.126**	.306	.026	.054**	.306	.025	.055**
Postmaterialism	.289	.040	.046**						
L/R distance	-.421	.005	-.295**	-.327	.007	-.241**	-.322	.007	-.237**
Issues	.567	.016	.200**	.471	.020	.113**	.471	.020	.113**
EC-approval	.244	.020	.044**	.269	.030	.040**	.272	.030	.041**
Government approval	.587	.121	.191**						
Government approval * concurrent election	.082	.010	.027**						
Left-right distance * extremity of party	.033	.009	.027**						
Left/right distance * perceptual agreement	-.006	.000	-.040**	-.004	.054	.000	.013	.054	.001
Issues * perceptual agreement	-.010	.002	-.037**	-1.198	.174	-.032**	-1.194	.173	-.032**
Party and system level variables									
New politics party	1.023	.211	.105**						
Government party * Time since last election				0.003	.002	.009	-.002	.002	-.006
Government party * Time s. last election_squared				0.001	.000	.038**	.001	.000	.041**
Government party				-.154	.055	-.022*	-.172	.060	-.025*
Party size	6.614	.093	.284**	6.355	.201	.316**	6.347	.208	.315**
Government party * party size				-2.592	.280	-.091**	-2.217	.308	-.078**
Right party				-.149	.037	-.023**	-.153	.037	-.024**
Right party * Government party				.105	.072	.011	-.074	.076	-.008
Right party * Party size				.872	.292	.029*	1.044	.301	.035**
Right party * Government party * party size				.130	.416	.003	.266	.440	.007
Economic conditions (and their interactions)									
GDP							.066	.021	.036*
Unemployment							.137	.025	.044**
Inflation							-.029	.007	-.028**
Government party * GDP							.105	.034	.029*
Government party * unemployment							.053	.057	.010
Government party * inflation							-.070	.013	-.030**
Party size * GDP							-.125	.185	-.011
Party size * unemployment							-.258	.187	-.014
Gov. Party * Party size * GDP							-.281	.249	-.018
Gov. Party * Party size * unemployment							-1.558	.310	-.062**
Right party * GDP							-.119	.028	-.040**
Right party * Unemployment							-.202	.041	-.042**
Right party * Inflation							-.025	.010	-.016*
Right party * Government party * GDP							-.298	.077	-.057**
Right party * Government party * unemployment							.019	.085	.003
Right party * Party size * GDP							.252	.237	.016
Right party * Party size * unemployment							-.013	.329	.000
Right party * Gov. P.* Party size * GDP							1.298	.371	.071**
Right party * Gov. P.* Party size * unemployment							1.922	.464	.059**
N		9,288			27,505			27,505	
Adjusted-R ²		0.428			0.462			0.469	

Note: Significant at * 0.01, ** 0.001. [±]Standard errors corrected for panel heterogeneity.

contain fewer individual level independent variables.⁵ Comparing models B and C, the first thing to notice is that effects of the economy (even when taken together with other party-level and national variables) add almost nothing (less than 1 percent) to variance explained. The second thing to notice is that effects of individual-level variables are hardly changed by the addition of variables from the party, election, and national levels. So, these variables are not at all collinear with individual-level variables. Finally, we should note that the magnitude of the effects of economic conditions is much lower (judged on the basis of the standardized regression coefficients) than the effects of individual-level variables. Among the individual level variables, previous vote, ideological distance and issue priorities exert the strongest effect. Even though standardized coefficients are a crude criterion for comparing the impact of different effects, it is clear that these variables contribute much more to party preferences than economic circumstances do. Quite clearly, some of the effects of economic conditions are only significant because of the enormously large dataset we employ in this study. A dataset with the number of cases generally found in a typical election study (no more than 4,000) would find fewer significant effects.⁶

Effects of the economy in high order interaction with party characteristics, as shown in Table 1's Model C, are hard to interpret. Elsewhere we have "translated" these effects by modeling archetypal combinations of characteristics (van der Brug, van der Eijk and Franklin 2006). However, in this paper we are more concerned with the magnitude of these effects than with their interpretation.

The small magnitude of effects of the economy on individual-level preference formation has a number of implications that deserve to be explored. In the first place, the findings provide support for those who have argued that the effects of subjective assessments of the economy measured in past research have been too great (eg. Bartels 1996; Wlezien, Franklin and Twiggs 1997) to have

⁵ Several of the variables included in the 1989 study were not available in the other studies. Model A also demonstrates the use of two tests that did not yield significant effects in Models B and C. The first was a test for whether preferences for all party types were adequately explained by the model (in 1989 preferences for "new politics" parties were not adequately explained, as shown by the significant effect of a dummy variable picking out such parties). Models B and C contain no such deficiencies. The second was a test for whether any independent variables would have had different effects at a proper national election. We see in Model A significant effects of an interaction between the existence of a concurrent national election and government approval. It makes sense that government approval should count for more at a real national election, but it is noteworthy that no other interaction with concurrent election proved significant in any model. Government approval itself was not measured in the other surveys and so plays no part in Models B and C.

⁶ Note, however, that one election study would find no effects of the economy for a more fundamental reason: at one point in time economic conditions are constant, and an independent variable that does not vary cannot contribute to variance explained.

been a reflection of economic conditions. A second implication arises as a corollary of the small effects of the economy in preference formation: our findings hardly tell us anything new about how voters come by their preferences for parties (see the Coda to van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996, for a detailed checklist of what was learned from the use party utility data in investigating political preference formation across much the same universe of countries as are examined here). A third implication is that the effects of other issues could in certain circumstances overwhelm the effects of the economy. Effects of issues (which relate, of course, to issues other than the economy) are shown in Table 1 to be substantially greater than effects of the economy. This implies that a salient issue of another type can overwhelm and nullify effects that would otherwise have been felt from economic conditions.

By far the most powerful influence, however, is a strategic consideration: voters prefer parties that are large enough to have a good chance of putting their policies into effect. Party size can shift an individual's utility gained from voting for a party by 3 points on a 10-point scale; these 3-points being the advantage a party controlling 50 percent of legislative seats has in comparison with a party that controls only 5 percent of legislative seats.⁷ These findings thus confirm the old adage that 'nothing succeeds like success.'

The bulk of the remaining effects on preference formation come from issues, including EU approval, and left-right affinities (considered by many to be surrogates for unmeasured issues). Issues have less effect, however, when there is lack of agreement on where parties stand in left-right terms. Model A shows effects of left-right affinities that are also less when there is lack of agreement as to where parties stand (cf. van der Eijk and Franklin 1996), but in Models B and C that interaction is made redundant by the inclusion of past vote in the equation, as a surrogate for unmeasured effects.⁸ One of the more interesting effects that we can measure when we use party utility data as a dependent variable is the extent to which voters need to know where parties stand if they are to hold them accountable. Lack of perceptual agreement about the political stances of parties can be seen to inject an element of uncertainty into the formation of party preferences.

⁷ The 6-point effect shown in Table 1 would only apply to a comparison between parties controlling virtually no seats with parties controlling virtually all seats – something that does not happen in a competitive democracy.

⁸ The number of variables available to us over all three sets of surveys are considerably fewer than those available in each individual study, because of lack of comparability between studies, as already mentioned. The use of past vote choice also provides comparability with aggregate-level studies which, because they involve time-series analysis, generally include past vote as a control for time-serial dependencies.

Demographic effects on party preference formation are much less than have been implied by the findings of past research that did not employ party utility data. Class and religion have much weaker effects than issues and left-right affinities have. Nevertheless, even though demographic effects play only a marginal role in our findings, still the effects that we find on party preference formation are rather fixed. Parties occupy different niches in a political system, and it is hard for a party to change its policies or its ideological affinities over any short period of time. It is true that events (a scandal or a disaster) can change the salience of issues that favor one party or another, but the shifts in preferences that result tend to be rather short-lived and, except when an election occurs in the immediate wake of the event in question, such changes in issue salience seldom have long-term consequences for party preferences. A party can of course shift its ideological and issue positions, but not quickly. And even when a party has succeeded in making a small shift in its ideological or issue stance, the effect will often be felt only by rather few voters: those who take the party seriously as a contender for their votes.

It is for this reason that the economy is of so much interest as a possible source of political change. Because, unlike most other influences on vote choice, economic conditions can change quite radically from one election to the next, even effects as small as those of the economy that we measure in this research can have palpable effects on election outcomes if all members of the electorate are affected by them in the same way. But is this in fact the case? Does the economy actually impact on all voters in the same way? This is the question to which we now turn.

Relevant distinctions among voters

In order to be able to judge political parties by the state of the economy in the light of their policies, voters must have information about both the economy and the policy positions of parties. We have already summarized the debate among political scientists regarding the extent to which the average citizen can be expected to have such information – a debate that has suggested the importance of perceptual cues for voter rationality. On the basis of that summary it is evident that we need to distinguish voters according to a number of circumstances that define their likely heterogeneity: their ideology, their political sophistication, their unemployment status, and whether they are retired.

The literature does not provide simple or clear-cut expectations regarding the relationship between economic voting on the one hand and political sophistication on the other. As we have seen, classic accounts of the role of political sophistication stress that citizens with the lowest levels

of exposure, interest and knowledge change only randomly, while the attitudes of those who are better informed and more aware remain stable or display a systematic pattern of change (Converse 1964, 1970). These early accounts led experimental researchers to distinguish between political “novices” and political “experts” when studying the effects of watching television news on evaluations of the President (Iyengar et al. 1984).

Zaller (1992) argues that a more nuanced distinction between levels of attentiveness is needed, because attitude change may be nonlinearly related to political attention. He expects citizens with intermediate levels of attentiveness to be the most affected by news stories. This argument is empirically supported by the study of Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995:189) who find that the effects of (negative as well as positive) political advertising are strongest among citizens with intermediate levels of information. When studying differences in the ways citizens reach electoral choices, Zaller (1998) also subdivided his sample into more than two levels of attentiveness. In that study he found that the extent of economic voting decreased monotonically with levels of attentiveness.

The measure of attentiveness included in our data does not lend itself to this type of coding. There is, however, no reason to suppose that patterns found for attentiveness would not apply equally to political interest or to education. Since the theory is still not entirely clear on whether we should expect linear interaction effects, we decided to distinguish a number of groups of voters with different levels of interest and education. We have the advantage of a very large sample of more than 35,000 respondents, so that we do not have to worry about losing 2 or 3 degrees of freedom if we explore these possible interaction effects in such detail.

Political interest was measured with a question that was included in all European Elections Studies, and which asks people how interested they are in politics. The response categories are "a great deal", "to some extent", "not much", and "not at all" enabling us to define dummy variables that distinguish between four levels of political interest.

Since the educational systems are different across various European countries, education is a very difficult variable to operationalize in comparative studies. A common approach is to ask respondents how old they were when they completed their full-time education. Even though this provides only a very rough indication of how well people are educated, it does provide a measure that is comparable across countries. The categories that we distinguished for our study, by means of dummy variables, are: low education (stayed in school only until age 14), medium low (graduated at

15 to 18), medium high (completed full-time education at 19 to 21 years old), and high (completed full-time education at 22 or older).

In addition, we created two dummy variables to distinguish unemployed and retired citizens from the rest of the sample and several further dummy variables to distinguish between various groups of citizens in terms of their positions on the left/right dimension. For all of these dummy variables we sought to discover whether there were significant interactions between them and variables measuring the state of the economy.

Results

Earlier in this paper we presented a model (Model C, Table 1) in which the considerations of voters were assumed to be equal across the entire European electorates. We could, naturally, use that model to check for significant interactions between the relevant characteristics of individual voters and economic conditions. The common way to specify interaction effects is to define those variables and add them to the model. Doing so for Model C would require, however, that for each of the individual level variables we would have to create an interaction term for each of the 28 other effects specified in that table. Presenting the results of such analyses would be a Herculean task. Given the exploratory nature of the inquiries in this paper, we therefore decided upon a simpler procedure, as follows.

First we estimated Model C for the entire sample and saved the residuals from that analysis. We then selected a group of respondents distinguished by one of the dummy variables, such as (for instance) the unemployed, and estimated the model again for the selected group but this time using the residuals as the dependent variable. These residuals represent the part of the variance in the dependent variable that was not explained by the model when it was tested over the entire sample. If any of the effects are significantly different for the selected group than for the entire sample (i.e., if significant interaction effects exist), this would show up as a significant effects of one or more independent variables on these residuals. Conversely, if no significant effects are found, there is no significant interaction effect for the group in question, and there is consequently no need to specify such an effect.

In this way we explored the model for interaction effects. Given the enormously large sample at our disposal, we have much statistical power to detect such effects if they exist. Yet the tests we conducted largely failed to find significant interaction effects. We performed these tests for

all 6 indicators of the economy (the main effects of unemployment, inflation and economic growth, as well as the interactions of these with “government party” and “party size”) using 8 different dummy variables, thus checking for 96 interaction effects – those that would alter the extent to which individuals hold parties accountable for the state of the economy. Of these only two turned out to be significantly different from zero at the .05 level of significance, and one was significant at the .01 level. Since this finding is no different from what we would have obtained by chance alone, our conclusion is that no significant interaction effects exist between the state of the economy as defined in our models and various individual level variables defined for the investigation conducted in this chapter.

When we tested for the existence of significant interactions with other effects, these did return some more significant results. The results of these tests are presented in Table 2, which contains columns only for effects that proved significant in interaction with one or more of the test variables defined for this analysis. There we also include interaction effects for left/right distance, the only one of the individual-level variables to yield significant interaction effects.

Table 2: Significant interaction effects between economic condition and individual voter characteristics, using Model C in Table 1.

<u>Characteristics of respondents</u>	<u>Characteristic</u>		<u>Economic conditions</u>	
	Left/right distance		Party size * GDP	Right wing party * inflation
Unemployed				
Retired				
Right-wing (position 8, 9 or 10)	-0.050***			-0.080***
Education low	0.050***		0.805*	
Education medium low	0.029**			
Political interest low	0.047**			
Political interest medium low			0.898**	

Note: Significant at *0.05, ** 0.01, *** 0.001.

As is shown in the first column of Table 2, left/right distance affects party preferences of different groups of voters somewhat differently. The original main effect of left/right distance in Model C is a negative one: the smaller the ideological distance between a voter and a party, the higher the preference for such a party. The negative interaction effect shown in Table 2 for right-wing voters in the first column thus indicates that the (negative) effect of left right distance is

stronger among these voters than among others. Similarly, the positive effects in that same column for citizens with low and medium low education, and for those with low political interest, indicates that such voters are somewhat less driven by ideology than are more sophisticated voters, in line with past findings. It must be added, however, that, although these effects are highly significant in this large sample, they are very weak effects, which only slightly moderate the role of left/right distance. Given that assessing the effects of left/right distance is not a primary purpose of this study, we will not further elaborate on this point here.

The tests for interactions with economic conditions show that, for the effect of economic growth on government parties, there are two significant interactions: one with low education and one with medium low political interest. These effects are positive, which means that less sophisticated voters hold larger parties more accountable for economic growth, irrespective of whether these parties are in government or not. This is not totally in line with past theorizing, but is quite compatible with Zaller's ideas if we assume that many of the unsophisticated do not actually know which parties are in government, while being aware of which the large parties are. This makes sense. As argued in our book, large parties are part of the political firmament throughout the lifetimes of most voters, who would be hard put never to have heard of them, since they are associated in people's minds with "the regime." Government parties, by contrast, come and go. One has to be in touch with current events to know which parties are in government at any particular time. On the basis of this reasoning it is not hard to imagine that, when the economy is doing well, unsophisticated voters will look more favorably on regime parties. So they would reward the large parties, rather than the incumbents. These findings reinforce an argument made in our book in favor of a parsimonious model that takes no account of whether parties are in government or not, but only of their size. The effects shown in Table 2 for party size * GDP amplifies the distinction between small and large parties for a fairly large subgroup of voters, making the government/opposition distinction, for that subgroup, even less relevant.

Our third clearly significant finding is that, among right-wing voters, right-wing parties are penalized even more as a result of higher inflation than among other voters (particularly left-wing voters). This amplifies, for these voters, the distinction already found between the effects of inflation on left and right parties. Because these voters prefer right-leaning parties more than left-leaning parties, preferences for the right leaning parties are more strongly affected (for many such voters,

their preferences for left parties will already be quite low, limiting the extent to which they could fall further as a consequence of poor economic conditions).

Much more interesting than the small number of significant interaction effects we found in our analyses for the effects of economic conditions, however, are the large number we did not find. Out of 152 possibilities (19 effects of economic conditions interacting with 8 individual-level variables) only one was significant at better than 0.001 probability. Above all we find no evidence of pocket-book voting. Interactions with unemployed and retired are nowhere significant. While we do find two instances where political interest and sophistication play an apparent role, these are no more than might have been expected by chance, and it is noteworthy that this role (if it is real) is restricted to assessments of GDP growth. Unsophisticated voters have opinions about inflation and unemployment that are no different from those of more sophisticated voters, quite in contrast to much theorizing on this topic.

Reconciling the findings

How do we reconcile our findings of homogeneous effects of economic conditions with the findings in recent research of heterogeneous effects? Unless our respondents or their circumstances are in some way different from those investigated in other research (which would cast doubt on all our findings) there is only one possibility. If party preferences for all respondents change in step with changes in economic conditions, then respondents whose choices change must be distinctively situated in the competition between parties, being more likely to shift their votes in response to a shift in preferences. This would happen if such respondents were more likely to have preferences for parties that were tied between different parties. Indeed, with changes in preferences as small as those we measure, it seems likely that only those respondents will shift their party choices whose preferences for two or more parties were indeed tied before the shift occurred. When preferences for two or more parties are tied for first place in the minds of voters, even small changes in utility may lead to changes in party choice. If the politically less interested and less educated citizens are less likely to identify with a single party, then they are more likely to change their votes for whatever reason. This does not mean, however, that they are more affected by the economy than more sophisticated citizens, in contrast to Zaller's suggestion.

We will illustrate our point by focusing on the voters whose preferences for the two parties they most prefer are tied, and who are therefore the most likely to respond to a change in their

relative preferences for parties by changing their party choice. If the probability of being tied was distributed equally across social groups we could expect to obtain stable results when estimating the effects of economic conditions on party choice. However, if proportions of tied voters are distributed rather unevenly across countries and groups, a uniform effect of economic conditions upon party preferences will have quite diverse consequences for party choice in different circumstances. Table 3 shows how the proportion of tied voters is distributed across various social groups in the countries of the European Union in 1999.

Table 3: Proportions of respondents whose first two preferences for parties are tied (EU average)

Political interest	Education	Retired	Unemployed
low .23	still studying .23	retired .17	unemployed .23
medium .20	low .19	not retired .22	not unemployed .21
high .18	medium .22		
	high .21		

We can begin our discussion of this table with political interest. If we look at the EU average, we can see that 23% of those with low political interest are tied, against 20% of those with medium political interest, and 18% of those with high political interest. We showed earlier that the effects of the economy are uniform across the various social groups. Suppose we would analyze a model of economic voting on three subgroups of respondents that are selected by their political interest, and suppose that the economy would have the *same* effect on party preferences of all subgroups. If the dependent variable had been party choice, we would have estimated a larger effect in the analysis of the least interested; *not* because the economy has a larger effect on these individuals, but because more of these voters change their party choice as a consequence of this uniform effect. This is exactly the mistake made in many studies of economic voting that do not take party competition into account (e.g., Zaller 1998; Dorussen & Taylor 1998).⁹

⁹ To make matters worse, the patterns are very different across countries. The least interested are most likely to be tied in France, England, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, and Finland, the median interested are most likely to be tied in Flanders, Wallonia, Denmark and Greece, whereas the most interested are most often tied in the Netherlands and Austria. It is no wonder therefore that leading scholars in the field of economic voting complain about the inconsistencies in findings across different countries. When selecting a different group of countries and when analyzing change in party choice, one is bound to get highly different results, even if the underlying effects of the economy on party preferences are uniform across countries and social groups.

Looking at three other characteristics of citizens which are often thought to be moderators of economic voting — their levels of education and whether they are unemployed or retired — we also see that the patterns are very different. Respondents with little education are the least likely to be tied, which is no doubt partially a generational effect (given the high proportion of ties among those still studying), but there is some indication of curvilinearity along lines consistent with Zaller's findings. Those who are retired have fewest ties, as have those who are not unemployed. These distributions would give rise to more susceptibility to economic conditions among precisely the groups suggested by Dorussen and Taylor, but not for the reasons they suggested.¹⁰ Failure to distinguish preferences from choice necessarily produces models that are misspecified and findings that mislead.

Discussion

This paper finds that the effects on party fortunes of economic conditions are small in comparison with effects of individual-level and party characteristics, but that these effects are largely homogenous. Only right wing voters show a clearly significant deviation from homogenous behavior, and that deviation merely serves to accentuate the general pattern found for all voters.

The fact that these homogeneous effects on party preferences nevertheless have heterogeneous consequences for party choice suggests that what we are seeing at work is the process by which previously unmobilized citizens (most often younger citizens who have not yet acquired the habit of voting) acquire their party preferences. Some of those mobilized by a shift in economic conditions will no doubt eventually fall back into a state of indecision about which party to support, but, for most, the shift from indecision to clear choice will have been a step on the path to acquiring a party identification and the habit of voting (cf. Plutzer 2002). The fact that we see greatest indecision among those who are still studying supports the notion that what we are seeing are processes of political mobilization underway in our electorates.

Our failure to find different effects of the economy on particular subgroups of the electorate speaks against the notion of pocketbook voting. There is no sign that either the unemployed or the retired react to economic conditions with their own circumstances in mind. Our results thus support findings beginning with Kinder and Kiewiet (1979), which show that, when deciding which party to

¹⁰ Again there are widespread differences between countries, making for unstable findings in comparative research.

support, voters respond to general economic conditions rather than to their own personal situation. These findings run counter to the findings in some of the economic voting literature, however (e.g., Dorussen & Taylor 2002). The proper interpretation to place on those findings, in our opinion, is to see the unemployed as more likely to be young and not yet mobilized in support of a particular political party, and the retired as more likely to be set in their partisan ways.

Our findings are also encouraging for those concerned about the ability of democratic electorates to properly hold governments accountable. Though we have only investigated accountability for economic conditions, we have found no evidence that some groups of individuals are not affected (or affected differently) by such conditions. All the subgroups we distinguished react in much the same way: holding government parties or large parties or ideologically distinctive parties responsible in rather specific ways depending on circumstances, but not depending on the sophistication of the voters. Better educated electorates, for example, would not apparently react very differently from the actual electorates voting in European countries during the final decade of the 20th Century.

Just as importantly, these largely negative findings reinforce the notion that effects of the economy are small but widespread, affecting all classes and conditions of voters almost equally. The homogeneity of responses somewhat mitigates the small magnitude of the effects of economic conditions. Because of this homogeneity, economic conditions do have the opportunity to influence election outcomes. Such interactions as we found only served to accentuate the effects of the economy on political preference formation for certain groups — no subgroups were less concerned about the economy than were respondents in general. So the findings of this paper do not undermine the notion that even small effects of economic conditions can have large consequences for election outcomes.

We should stress that the failings in existing models that we have identified in this paper will apply just as much to the effects of other variables on voting choice, such as issue preferences, candidate evaluations, and so on. They will not just be features of economic voting. The only reason that instabilities seen in the economic voting literature have not been evident in the comparative politics literature is because only the economic voting literature contains multiple attempts at analyzing voting choice cross-nationally. As studies of comparative electoral choice proliferate in coming years, with the new availability of CSES and other comparative data, we can expect the same instability in results as has plagued the economic voting literature unless scholars gain a new

respect for the theorizing of Anthony Downs and adopt the two stage approach that we have employed in this paper.

It is extraordinary to note that failure to adopt a Downsean approach to the study of voting behavior is not grounded in any theoretical critique of Downs' theorizing. The appropriateness of Downs' two-stage model has never even been questioned in the political behavior literature, which indeed continues to cite it approvingly. But though the theory is continually cited, its implications have routinely been ignored. Instead of trying to find a means of implementing the Downsean calculus of voting, scholars have been satisfied to employ various short cuts that eliminate a fundamental feature of that calculus. In this paper we have tried to demonstrate some of the costs of this shortsightedness.

Appendix: The Surveys

For the analyses in this paper we used European Elections Studies (EES's) from 1989, 1994 and 1999. What follows is a description of the 1999 survey. The description of the 1989 and 1994 surveys can found in van der Eijk and Franklin (1996). These differ from the 1999 study primarily in having employed face-to-face interviews in each of the (then) twelve member countries, and having generated samples that were of roughly equal size (about 1,000 cases) in each country.

The 1999 EES is a sample survey of the electorates of the (then fifteen) member states of the European Union: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The fieldwork for this study began immediately after the European elections on the 9th and 13th of June 1999. The first interviews were conducted on June 14th, the last on July 8th. The main part of the interviews was conducted in the two weeks between June 14th and June 27th.

The study was organized by the EES Workgroup, an international group of researchers that, on the occasion of previous European elections in 1989 and 1994, organized similar surveys of the voting age population in the member states of the European Union (see, e.g., Schmitt, Pappi, van der Eijk, Scholz et al., 1997; van der Eijk, Oppenhuis, Schmitt, et al., 1993).¹¹ In spite of each study's

¹¹ The EES Workgroup is an international group of researchers that, on the occasion of the European elections of 1989, 1994 and 1999, organized similar surveys of the voting age population in the member states of the European Union. In

unique emphasis on particular aspects of European elections and the contexts within which they take place, each of these three studies is designed along similar principles. Therefore, the three European Election Studies of 1989, 1994 and 1999 offer not only ample opportunities for comparisons across political systems, but for longitudinal comparisons as well (as employed in this paper).

Data emanating from the EES 1999 have been archived at the Steinmetz Archive at the University of Amsterdam and were released to the general scholarly community in March 2002. This appendix provides some general information about the EES 1999, such as the samples selected in each country, the non-response and weighting of cases. All three studies are archived by Steinmetz Archives, and can be obtained from there, as well as from most other social science data archives (such as the Zentral Archive in Cologne, or the ICPSR in Ann Arbor). The European Elections Study Workgroup maintains a website that contains additional information about the EES data and the work of the EES group: <http://www.europeanelectionstudies.net>

The questionnaires for the EES 1999 were identical in the various member states, apart from minor but unavoidable differences generated by differences in party names and country-specific institutions. As a consequence the study offers wide opportunities for comparative analyses. Owing to a different form of data-collection, the Italian data differ from the others in a number of minor ways, which have been documented in the codebook (Van der Eijk, Franklin, Schönbach, Schmitt,

its preparation of the 1999 study, the group convened several times, in particular in Enschede (the Netherlands, July, 1997) and Mannheim (March, 1999). The group that organized the 1999 study consisted of Wouter van der Brug (University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands), Cees van der Eijk (idem), Mark Franklin (Trinity College, Connecticut, USA), Sören Holmberg (University of Gothenburg, Sweden), Renato Mannheimer (University of Genova), Michael Marsh (Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland), Hermann Schmitt (University of Mannheim, GFR), Klaus Schönbach (University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands), Holli Semetko (idem), and Bernhard Wessels (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, Germany).

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Semetko et al. 2002).

General profile of the study

The EES 1999 is a stratified sample of the European population, in which each of the 15 member states is a stratum. Random samples are drawn in each of the 15 countries, of the citizens of each of these countries (able to speak the country's language), 18 years and older. In all countries, except Spain, a multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. The interviews were conducted by means of *Computer Assisted Telephonic Interviewing* (CATI). The number of interviews conducted in the different member-states of the European Union is presented in Table A.1.

Table A.1: number of interviews conducted in different countries

Austria	501
Belgium	500
Flanders	274
Wallonia	226
Denmark	1001
Finland	501
France	1020
Germany	1000
Greece	500
Ireland	503
Italy	3708
Luxembourg	301
The Netherlands	1001
Portugal	500
Spain	1000
Sweden	505
United Kingdom	1008
Britain	977
N. Ireland	31
Total	13549

Weighting

The analyses in this paper employ a political weight variable, which is described in more detail in the codebook. When applied, it generates a turnout and distribution of party choice that is identical to the actual results of the June 1999 European election in the respective countries. This variable was constructed in the same way as its counterparts in the 1989 and 1994 European election study

datasets. Applying this weight leaves the effective number of cases unchanged from the raw data for each country, with the exception of Northern Ireland. The number of interviews conducted in that system was so small that it did not seem appropriate to weight them. The Northern Irish records have been assigned a value of zero (0) on this variable, so that using this weight excludes Northern Irish cases from the analysis.

Before being employed in our study, this weight variable was multiplied by a constant in each political system, so that the effective number of cases becomes equal for each of the systems. This ensures unbiased estimates of the effects of systemic (or contextual) factors (such as effects of economic conditions). The weight variable actually employed in our analyses accomplishes this, while at the same time ensuring that the sample distribution of voting behavior in each system mirrors the actual outcome of the European elections in that system.

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