The Conditionality of Voter Decision-Making:
How Voter Sophistication Conditions the Impact of Ideological Proximity – but not the Impact of Valence – in European Electorates

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Abstract: While voting studies emphasize the roles of ideological proximity and parties’ valence images on vote choice, we have less information about when and to whom valence and ideology matter. I analyze individual level decision-making in Germany, Britain, and the Netherlands to evaluate whether citizens’ tendencies to weigh ideological proximity vis-à-vis parties’ valence images are conditioned by political sophistication. I find that politically sophisticated voters rely much more heavily on ideological proximity than do less sophisticated voters, but that both types of voters rely equally on valence considerations. These findings have important implications for understanding voting behavior and mass-elite policy linkages.
It is well-established that the ideological proximity between voters and parties affects citizens’ voting decisions (e.g., Bafumi and Shapiro 2009; Downs 1957; Merrill and Grofman 1999). There is also a growing consensus that performance politics and valence considerations — defined as those factors that reflect the competence, integrity and unity of a party (Clark 2009) — also influence voters’ decisions (Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000; Clarke et al. 2009; Green and Jennings 2012a, 2012b; Schofield 2005; Stone and Buttice 2008). However, while there is a clear trend in the voting literature towards analyzing both ideological proximity and valence considerations in informing voting decisions (e.g., Green and Hobolt 2008; Stone and Simas 2007), there is less research exploring under what conditions voters will respond to tradeoffs between these factors. In particular, while reliance on ideological proximity has been examined through the lens of political sophistication defined in terms of citizens’ levels of political interest, education, and knowledge (e.g. Hetherington 2001; Kam 2005), there are fewer studies that evaluate how sophistication mediates voters’ reliance on valence considerations (for an exception, see Clarke et al. 2009)

This paper evaluates how political sophistication conditions the relative weights voters place on citizens’ ideological proximities to political parties, vis-a-vis their valence-related considerations. While ideology informs voters’ evaluations of parties’ policy promises, valence pertains to voters’ evaluations of party elites’ competence, honesty, unity, and leadership abilities – attributes that all voters plausibly value – and we expect voters to weigh both parties’ ideologies and their valence-related attributes when making political decisions. However, the complexity of ideological considerations, and the costs associated with collecting and processing information relating to political parties’ ideologies, are such that politically sophisticated citizens
should rely disproportionately on such considerations when making their vote choices, compared to less sophisticated citizens.

While considerations relating to ideologically-based evaluations of political parties are complex, valence-related considerations are comparatively easy to understand and process (Clarke et al. 2009; A. H. Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986; Mondak and Huckfeldt 2006), so that all types of votes – the politically-sophisticated along with the less-sophisticated – should be equally capable of making valence-based party evaluations. This difference in complexity implies that while sophisticated voters will weigh ideological considerations more heavily than less sophisticated voters, valence should weigh approximately equally across all types of voters.

In order to empirically test my hypotheses, I examine individual-level survey data from five national elections in Germany, from 1976 to 1998, using the European Voter Data Project (Thomassen 2005). In order to test the generalizability of my hypotheses for party-centric systems I also analyze survey data from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, using the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies and the British Election Studies. Examining the German, British, and Dutch cases, I find strong support for my hypotheses that politically sophisticated voters weigh ideological factors much more heavily than do less sophisticated voters, and that sophisticated and less-sophisticated voters attach roughly equal weights to valence-related considerations.

These findings have important implications for theories of political representation and also for party strategies. If politically sophisticated voters are disproportionately moved by ideological considerations– as my empirical findings imply – then parties have electoral incentives to target their platforms towards this subgroup, an expectation that is supported by
research that concludes that European parties respond disproportionately to the policy viewpoints of politically sophisticated citizens (Adams and Ezrow 2009). However, my findings have an additional – and positive – implication, namely that parties have electoral incentives to enhance their valence images because all voters – including the most and the least politically-sophisticated – attach roughly equal weights to elite attributes such as competence, integrity, and unity.

**Political Sophistication and Voter Decision Making**

Voting is a complex process which may prompt voters to weigh multiple, cross-cutting factors including parties’ ideological positions and their valence attributes (Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Laver and Sergenti 2011; Stone and Buttice 2008). This decision calculus is plausibly conditional on political sophistication. Previous work has demonstrated that politically sophisticated voters act in distinct ways from their unsophisticated counterparts (Bartels 1996); perhaps most importantly, sophisticated and unsophisticated voters access different types of information when they make political decisions (e.g., Boudreau 2009; Kam 2005; Lau and Redlawsk 2001).

Research on voter decision-making has demonstrated that citizens form preferences and make political decisions based on policy or ideological considerations (e.g., Downs 1957; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Green and Hobolt 2008). Parties’ ideologies allow voters to project the policies parties are likely to implement across the spectrum of issues, and there is extensive empirical evidence that voters reward parties that are ideologically close to the voters’ own preferred positions (Dalton 1985; Erikson, Merrill and Grofman 1999; MacKuen, and Stimson 2002). However, making voting decisions based on ideological proximity requires high
levels of political knowledge and sophistication (Boudreau 2009; Converse 1964; Downs 1957; Lau and Redlawsk 1997). In order to vote ideologically, citizens must accurately perceive the positions of the different parties in the system both relative to each other and relative to the voters’ own preferences on these issues. Research into public opinion and voting behavior has demonstrated that many individuals lack consistent policy preferences or conceptions of party ideology, and that some voters cannot accurately place parties on the left-right scale (Converse 1964; Delli-Carpini and Keeter 1991; Zaller 1992). Even in European electorates, which generally display higher levels of political awareness than their American counterparts (Andeweg and Irwin 2002), voters’ abilities to process and use ideological cues both within and across countries (Stevenson 2009).

Sophisticated voters are likely to be more aware of parties’ ideological and policy positions, and are more likely to be politically active and engaged (Huckfeldt and Mendez 2008; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), compared to less sophisticated voters. As such, sophisticated voters pay a smaller cost to gather and process ideological information, and have a greater incentive to use this information in making political decisions (Lau and Redlawsk 2001). In this way, sophisticated voters are more likely to act as a Downsian voter and emphasize policy proximity, since they have already paid the cost of gathering this information (Downs 1957). Moreover, there is some evidence that sophisticated voters prefer to use complex information, even if simpler cues are available (Boudreau n.d.). Due to these high informational costs of ideological voting, I expect that the politically sophisticated will engage disproportionately in ideological voting compared to the less sophisticated.

Valence, on the other hand, should matter equally for both sophisticated and unsophisticated voters. Political outcomes (e.g., a growing economy, a reduction in crime, a
clean environment) directly affect all voters and, as such, all voters should react to this information. Valence is accessible, since voters have both direct experience with political outcomes (Clarke et al. 2009) and because voters generally have consistent preferences about what makes good government, such as honest, competent, and united party elites leaders (A. H. Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986; Mondak and Huckfeldt 2006). Also, both traditional media and “soft media” – such as talk shows or tabloids – focuses disproportionately on issues such as competency and integrity, and, therefore even low interest voters are likely be exposed to information pertaining to the valence characteristics of parties (Baum 2005; Clark 2009; Popkin 2006).

Issue competency is the factor traditionally associated with Stokes’ (1963) conception of valence. Valence issues, according to Stokes, are “those [issues] that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate,” (1963: p. 373). Under this definition, valence refers to the party considered most competent at achieving the ends desired by voters (e.g., Stokes 1963; Pardos-Prado 2012). Relying on issue competence-related valence, voters must merely have a preference about a preferred political outcome, rather than a position on a particular policy, a comparatively less cognitively-taxing task. Essentially, voters are evaluating the performance of parties based on their past experience with these parties – such as economic growth, the crime rate, the provision of public services, and the focal party’s leaders’ handling of domestic and foreign crises – rather than having to evaluate future policy outcomes (Clarke et al. 2009; Green and Jennings 2012a, 2012b; Pardos-Prado 2012).

Party leader evaluation is also an important valence attribute in party-centric systems. Given the important role played by party leaders in these systems, voters use these evaluations to
shape their voting decisions (Clarke et al. 2009; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). The charisma and success of a party leader can act as a cue to voters about the overall competency of a party (Clarke et al. 2009; Lupia and McCubbins 1998) and can have both “direct” effects on vote choice (i.e., voters choosing a party due to preferences about a leader), and “indirect” effects in shaping vote choice, i.e., voters using leader evaluations as a cue about party competency (A. King 2002: 6). Beliefs about party leaders’ competency and integrity are accessible to most voters and plausibly shape the opinions of both the politically sophisticated and unsophisticated (Mondak and Huckfeldt 2006).

In party-centric systems, it is also important to consider the overall competency of the party itself. Clark (2009) considers those valence features that affect both political elites within the party, such as corruption and incompetence, and those characteristics that indicate structural issues the group itself faces, such as party cohesion, and has found significantly strong effects for this type of valence, especially during election periods (Abney et al. 2011). Since factors such as party competency and unity are heavily covered in the media (Clark 2009), unsophisticated voters should be able to use this metric to evaluate political parties.

The above discussion motivates the following, empirically testable, hypotheses. Given that politically sophisticated voters are more likely to pay the cost of gathering information about ideological proximity, I expect these voters to weigh these considerations more heavily than unsophisticated voters, who have not paid the cost to gather this information.

**H1) Politically sophisticated voters will place more weight on ideological proximity than will less sophisticated voters.**

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1 While there is evidence that party leaders played a less central role in early post-war elections (Klingemann and Taylor 1978), the growth of American-style campaigning in Europe is also associated with a growing recognition of prime ministerial candidates and an increasing personalization of party-centric politics, thus increasing the influence of this type of valence-related consideration over time (van der Brug and Mughan 2007; Schmitt and Ohr n.d.).
H2) Politically sophisticated and unsophisticated voters will place roughly equal weights on valence-related considerations.

**Research Design**

In order to examine the effects of political sophistication, valence, and ideological proximity on vote choice, I examine individual-level decision-making based on survey research in Germany. Germany features national election surveys that provide consistent and fairly comparable questions about ideological positions and valence items over several election periods, making this a promising testing ground for my hypotheses.

**Vote Choice:** The dependent variable of interest is a binary variable of self-reported party choice between the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) on the second ballot.\(^2\) My analysis focuses on the two largest parties in Germany, the SPD and the CDU. At least one of these parties has been in government and controlled the office of the Chancellor in Germany since the beginning of the post-war period. As such, these parties provide the clearest policy cues and performance indicators within the system, implying that these parties should be the easiest for most voters to evaluate. In order to analyze the roles of citizens’ ideologies and their valence-based considerations in shaping their voting decisions, I construct variables that capture the survey respondent’s relative ideological proximities to these two parties, along with the respondent’s evaluations of these parties’ valence-based attributes.

**Relative Ideological Proximity:** Relative ideological proximity is measured as the relative proximity of the SPD to the respondent minus the relative proximity of the respondent to the

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\(^2\) Germany features a mixed-member proportional system that allows individuals to cast a district level single member plurality vote on the first ballot and a state level proportional representation party vote on the second ballot. However, the PR element of the ballot, referred to as the second ballot, determines the actual distribution of seats in the *Bundestag* (Saalfeld 2005). As such, I focus on the respondent’s intended vote on the second, proportional representation ballot for these analyses.
CDU. In the original version of the survey, both voter self placement and perceived placement scales ran from 1 to 11. I have rescaled these measures to run between 0 and 1, where 0 represents the left most position on the ideological spectrum, and 1 represents the right most position. In order to correct for projection effects I calculated the overall mean perceived position of each party for each election year, and I then calculated the squared distance between the respondent’s left-right self placement and the mean placement of the party. In order to calculate relative proximity, I subtract the proximity of the CDU to the voter from the proximity of the SPD to the voter. The results range from -1 to 1, where -1 indicates the highest relative proximity to the CDU and 1 indicates the highest relative proximity to the SPD.

\[
\text{Proximity}_1 = \left[ - (\text{mean (SPD)} - \text{self})^2 \right] - \left[ - (\text{mean (CDU)} - \text{self})^2 \right]
\]

My measure of ideological proximity uses the quadratic loss function of relative party proximity, and uses the mean placement of the party per election year. (In the appendix I report supplementary analyses based on linear policy distance along with respondent-specific party placements). I expect that proximity will have a positive and significant effect on vote choice, but that the magnitude of the effect will be greater for politically-sophisticated respondents than for other respondents.

**Relative Valence Evaluation:** My valence measure is an index comprised of three factors that contribute to voter beliefs about the competence, unity, and integrity of political parties and leaders, including issue ownership, party leader sympathy and party sympathy.

My measure of issue competency takes the average of survey respondents’ competency evaluations of each party on three issues: law and order, environmental protection, and unemployment. These three competency evaluations cover a range of important policy issues that focus on political outcomes, as opposed to policy choices, thus making them excellent...
“valence issues” (Stokes 1963). These issues also appear across all five data points in the survey. Since voters use issue competency to evaluate party competency in general, I take the average competency rating for each party and use this as an overall measure of “issue competency.”

To measure party leadership evaluation, I take the leadership rating of the party leader for each party (Clarke et al. 2009). I measure party leader competency using the sympathy rating of the leader of the SPD relative to the leader of the CDU\textsuperscript{3}. In order to measure party organization evaluation, I use the sympathy rating for each party. My measure is the voters’ perceived sympathy with the SPD relative to the CDU\textsuperscript{4}.

In order to capture the overall latent effect of valence, the valence differential takes an average of the three valence factors for each party, and is scaled between negative one and one.

\[
\text{Valence}_i = \text{SPD}_{\text{index}} - \text{CDU}_{\text{index}}
\]  \hspace{1cm} (2)

In general, I expect that valence will have a strong positive effect on voter decision making.\textsuperscript{5}

**Sophistication:** My measure of political sophistication is a dummy variable that divides the sample into high sophistication and low sophistication groups, with high sophistication being the top thirty percent of the sample.\textsuperscript{6} It has been demonstrated empirically and theoretically that the top stratum of voters drive public opinion and shape party movement (Converse 1964; Erikson,

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\textsuperscript{3} A potential critique of my measure of party leader and party organization valence is that these evaluations of parties and of party leaders are in part evaluations of parties’/leaders’ policy positions, i.e., that these are partly policy-based as opposed to valence-based evaluations. However, to the extent this is true, this should bias my analyses against finding support for my second hypothesis, since my estimate that these party leader evaluations are weighed more heavily by sophisticated voters in my first hypothesis.

\textsuperscript{4} While this is not a perfect measure of party organization competency, it captures the general evaluation of a party and its general competency. I have tested this measure by comparing it to satisfaction with governmental competency for parties in government and have found that the measures correlate highly.

\textsuperscript{5} The three items load very strongly together, with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .84. However, in order to ensure that no one of these variables drives voter evaluations, I have run each valence variable separately and have found substantively and significantly similar results.

\textsuperscript{6} I have run a continuous measure of sophistication and have found substantively similar results. I prefer the dummy variable of sophistication because it increases the ease of interpretation and due to the high general levels of political interest, education, and knowledge in Europe (Andeweg and Irwin 2002).
MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Adams and Ezrow 2009). In order to capture the upper echelon of voters, I use an additive index and take those respondents who have the highest level of education, self reported political interest, the ability to correctly place the parties on the left-right scale (see Milazzo 2009; Stevenson 2009).

**Interaction Terms:** In order to evaluate whether political sophistication conditions the vote choice, I interact the ideological proximity variable and the valence differential variable with political sophistication. The ideological proximity and sophistication interaction term separates the effect of proximity into high sophisticated and low sophisticated groups (with low sophistication being the referent group), while the valence differential-sophistication interaction does the same with respect to political sophistication. My hypotheses imply that the interaction between ideological proximity and sophistication will have a positive and significant effect on vote choice, but that this will not be the case with respect to the interaction between valence differential and sophistication.

**Model Choice:** Using the 1976-1998 German National Election Studies from the European Voter Data Set (Thomassen 2005), I examine the effect of valence, ideological proximity, and political sophistication on vote choice. I estimate the parameters of the following binomial logit model:

\[
\text{Vote Choice} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{policy proximity} + \beta_2 \text{valence characteristics} + \beta_3 \text{voter sophistication} + \beta_4 (\text{sophistication} \times \text{policy proximity}) + \beta_5 (\text{sophistication} \times \text{valence characteristics}) + \varepsilon.
\]  

**Analyses of German Elections**

In order to evaluate how ideological proximity, valence and voter sophistication affect vote choice, I estimate a binomial logit model while pooling data from all German elections held
between between 1976 and 1998.\textsuperscript{7,8} I examine the relative valence and ideological position of the two largest parties, the SPD and CDU. In this model, my dependent variable is a binary choice variable, with CDU vote as the base category. All variables of interest are the difference between the evaluation of the SPD and the CDU. I have also run a multinomial logit analysis examining a three party model including the FDP and have found substantively similar results.

I present two models in Table 1. The first model, in the left hand column, excludes the political sophistication interaction. Examining model one in Table 1, both proximity and valence have a strong and statistically significant effect on vote choice. Holding all other covariates at their mean values, a respondent who moves from one standard deviation below the mean of relative ideological proximity (i.e., the respondent is closer to the CDU) to one standard deviation above the mean (i.e., the respondent is now relatively closer to the SPD) increases his probability of voting for the SPD by 33%. A similar increase in relative valence, however, leads to an increased probability of voting for the SPD of more than 60%, indicating that valence has a strong and positive impact on vote choice.

The second model, presented in the right-hand column, interacts both relative ideological proximity and relative valence evaluation with voter sophistication. Examining the second model, I find that, while both more and less sophisticated voters use proximity in their voting decisions, the most sophisticated voters weigh these considerations more heavily, i.e., the coefficient estimate on the \textit{proximity} \times \textit{sophistication} interaction is positive and statistically significant. In order to understand these results, it is useful to think of how change in proximity

\textsuperscript{7} Since ideology questions were not asked in 1994, this year is excluded.
\textsuperscript{8} My results currently include both East and West German respondents. In order to address concerns that regional differences are driving my results, I have run the analysis including and excluding East German respondents. Including East Germans does not significantly alter the effects.
and valence levels affects a typical voter. For a low sophistication voter, holding valence at its mean value, a one standard deviation increase in relative proximity from the mean proximity increases the probability of voting for the SPD by almost 14%. However, for high sophistication voters, a standard deviation increase in proximity increases the probability of voting for the SPD by over 30%, more than double the probability of low sophistication voters.

By contrast, the impact of valence on vote choice is not mediated by political sophistication, i.e., the coefficient estimate on the \( \text{valence} \times \text{sophistication} \) interaction is near zero and is not statistically significant. A low sophistication voter who is at the mean proximity value and who increases his relative valence evaluation of the SPD from the mean by a standard deviation is 38% more likely to vote for the SPD, while a high sophistication voter facing the same increase is only 41% more likely to vote for the SPD, virtually the same as the unsophisticated voter, i.e., political sophistication does not significantly mediate the impact of valence on citizens’ voting decisions. Overall, these estimates imply that while the politically sophisticated and unsophisticated attach roughly equal weight to their evaluations of party valence, the impact of ideological proximity is far greater among sophisticated voters.

In order to demonstrate this relationship visually, in Figure 1, I examine the average marginal effects of political sophistication over relative ideological proximity and valence. The left-hand graph shows the average marginal effect of sophistication over levels of ideological proximity, demonstrating that there is a significant difference between the politically sophisticated and unsophisticated over almost all values of relative ideological proximity. However, the right-hand graph in Figure 1, which displays the marginal effect of sophistication over levels of relative valence evaluation, illustrates that there is no significant difference between sophisticated and unsophisticated voters.
In order to interpret this relationship substantively, in Figure 2, I present the predicted probability of voting for the SPD relative to the CDU as relative ideological proximity and relative valence evaluation increase. The left-hand graph in Figure 2 shows the probability of voting for the SPD as relative ideological proximity to the SPD increases. The predictive power of relative ideological proximity is much greater for sophisticated respondents, indicating that these voters weigh these considerations to a greater extent than the less sophisticated. The right hand-graph, however, demonstrates that the probability of voting for the SPD based on relative valence evaluation is almost identical for politically sophisticated and unsophisticated respondents, providing support for my second hypothesis.

**Analysis of British and Dutch Elections**

In order to test the generalizability of these findings, I run similar analyses in two other European parliamentary democracies: the Netherlands and Great Britain. While Germany, the Netherlands, and Great Britain are all strong party systems, the Netherlands and Great Britain offer interesting institutional contrasts to Germany. Great Britain’s Westminsterian system includes two major parties, a strong centralized government, and elects its legislators using single member district plurality (Lijphart 1999). The Netherlands, by contrast, is a clear multi-party system, with high levels of power sharing, and elects its parliament using proportional representation with a very low threshold (Andeweg and Irwin 2002).

I use the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study Combined Survey to analyze the Dutch case, using the elections from 1986 to 2006. I examine the vote for the two largest parties in the Netherlands during the majority of this period, the Dutch Labour Party, the PvdA, and the
Christian Democratic Alliance, the CDA. Ideological distance is again measured using the difference between respondent’s left-right self placement and the overall mean placement of both the PVDA and CDA. Relative valence is measured as the difference between the valence of the CDA and the PVDA, which is constructed using the average of three measures of valence, including faith in the prospective prime minister, sympathy with the party, and government policy satisfaction. My sophistication measure is an index of a voter’s level of education, self-reported political interest, income level, and their score on a 12 point political knowledge quiz that asks voters to correctly identify political figures, and is coded as dummy variable separating the top 26.1% of sophisticated voters from the bottom 73.9%.

For the British case, I use the British Election Studies from 1987 to 2005. My dependent variable is vote choice for the Labour Party or the Conservative Party. Between 1987 and 1997, ideological distance is calculated using the position of the respondent and the position of the parties on four issue scales that relate to left-right concepts: taxation, income redistribution, nationalization, and unemployment, as prior to 1997, British election surveys do not ask general left-right placement. For 2001 and 2005, I use two scales to calculate the left-right position for respondents and parties: the traditional left-right scale and placement on taxation scale. In order to test the comparability of the two different scales, I have run the analyses in 1997 using both measures of ideological distance, and find substantively similar results. The valence score is created using a party’s average score on issue ownership, party leader competency, and party organization evaluation scales. Political sophistication is a measured as an index combining a voter’s self reported political interest and the number of correct responses to a political knowledge quiz, and is split into a dummy variable splitting the sample into the top 31.1% and bottom 68.9% of respondents.
Table 3 presents the results of these analyses. Examining the results for all three countries, once again I find strong support for my hypotheses. The Dutch results, presented in column 1 of Table 3, demonstrate support for both hypotheses. The positive and significant interaction between political sophistication and ideological proximity indicates that more sophisticated respondents weighed ideological considerations more heavily than their less interested counterparts. However, I do not find a significant interaction between valence and sophistication. Similarly, the positive interaction between political sophistication and proximity for Britain (see the RHS column in Table 2) indicates that sophisticated British voters weigh ideological proximity more heavily than less sophisticated voters, but there is no significant difference between these types of voters in regards to the weight placed on valence.

Overall, these findings support my hypotheses that politically sophisticated voters weigh policy proximity much more heavily than do unsophisticated voters, but that sophistication does not significantly mediate voters’ tendencies to rely on valence-related considerations.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper has important implications for both the study of voting behavior, democratic representation, and party strategy. In general, the findings of this paper are fairly positive for democratic representation. Voters respond to both party position and valence characteristics, implying that parties are held accountable for their ability to produce positive political outcomes.

However, my findings do not imply a universally positive story for representation. The politically sophisticated weigh ideological proximity much more heavily than do their less sophisticated counterparts. This differential implies that parties should target their policy platforms towards sophisticated voters, which may lead to the overrepresentation of these voters’ policy beliefs. However, this is problematic only if the politically sophisticated have
significantly different policy preferences than the less informed. T-test analyses of my data indicate that the mean left-right position of sophisticated respondents in Germany, the Netherlands, and Great Britain are significantly different than their less sophisticated counterparts, confirming that this indeed may be a problematic issue for democratic representation. Moreover, Adams and Ezrow (2009), find that parties respond generally to opinion leaders, i.e., to voters who report high levels of political interest and engagement, and that the mean position of these individuals is to the left of the median voter, indicating that parties may have taken this differential into account for their election strategies.9

While these findings have important normative implications, they also suggest a new theoretical understanding of representation. Since voter decision-making is conditioned by political sophistication, it may be misleading to consider only one form of representation. While the delegate model of political representation, which defines good representation as parties or candidates that reflect the policy preferences of their voters, has dominated our understanding of democratic representation, these findings indicate that it may be useful to re-examine the Burkian Trustee model, which argues that representatives should be, first and foremost, good stewards of government (W. E. Miller and Stokes 1963; Powell 2000). Generally, the politically sophisticated seem to act as if they prefer a political delegate who will ensure that the preferred policy of the voter is enacted. However, less sophisticated voters, who are less concerned by ideological position, may prefer a representative who is a good public servant, indicating that for these types of voters, a trustee model of political representation may better reflect their policy preferences. As such, just as different types of voters rely on diverse types of information when

9 While I do see a left-bias amongst the mean self-placement of the politically sophisticated in my sample, it is not significantly different from the politically unsophisticated.
making political decisions, they may also have different preferences about political representation.

My results have also only examined large mainstream parties in a political system. However, governmental parties and mainstream parties may behave in significantly different ways than niche parties (Adams et al. 2006; Meguid 2005), and voters may use different metrics when evaluating these parties. While I have applied my model to the FDP, the small centrist Liberal Party, third party voters may behave in significantly different ways from major party supporters. Future analysis should examine these differences in order to identify systematic patterns of behavior.

Voting is a complex process and different types of voters display different levels of engagement and information, and different types of political preferences. As such, models of voting choice must consider the sophistication of voters in order to produce fully generalizable results. My arguments and empirical findings imply that political sophistication mediates the weight that voters place on ideological proximity but not the weight that voters place on valence. In the end, theories of voting must account for the type of voter making a political decision if we want to have a thorough understanding of vote choice, political representation, and party strategy in party-centric systems.
Appendix 1

In Appendix 1, I present the results of alternative voting models, including a control for previous vote choice, and three additional codings of ideological proximity. In Model 1, presented in Appendix Table 1, I present the results of my analysis controlling for previous party support, with two dummy variables indicating whether a respondent previously voted for the SPD or the CDU, respectively, with other party as the referent group (Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005).

Moreover, in order to demonstrate that my substantive conclusions are not an artifact of my approach to coding ideological proximity, I present three additional codings of proximity, using both perceived party positions and absolute value differences. Model 2 presents my main model, using quadratic loss and mean party positions, while controlling for party support.

\[
Proximity_1 = \left( - \left( \text{mean (SPD)} - \text{self} \right)^2 \right) - \left( - \left( \text{mean (CDU)} - \text{self} \right)^2 \right) \tag{2}
\]

However, in order to ensure the robustness of my proximity measure, I also use three alternative measures of ideological proximity. Model 3 uses quadratic loss but uses respondent specific party placement. Models 4 and 5 specify linear losses, with Model 3 using mean party placement and Model 5 using respondent-specific party placement. There is mixed empirical evidence supporting both types of proximity considerations, so I include both in my analyses (Merrill and Grofman 1999: appendix 4.2).

The alternative concern is the debate between using respondent-specific party placements versus average party placement. The advantage of respondent-specific party placement is that it captures a voter’s perception about how close a party is to him, and his perceptions should drive
his vote choice. The problem with using respondent-specific party placement is the issue of bias and projection, in that survey respondents tend to adjust their party placements in order to rationalize their non-policy-related party evaluations (see Kedar 2009 for a discussion). As such, I present two operationalizations using average party placement by year, Proximity\textsubscript{1} and Proximity\textsubscript{2}, and two measures that use respondent-specific placements of the parties, Proximity\textsubscript{2} and Proximity\textsubscript{4}.

Proximity\textsubscript{2} = \left( \frac{-\left( SPD_{\,\,\,\text{perceived}} - \text{self} \right)^2}{\left( CDU_{\,\,\,\,\text{perceived}} - \text{self} \right)^2} \right) \quad (3)

Proximity\textsubscript{3} = \left( -\left| \text{mean}(SPD) - \text{self} \right| \right) - \left( -\left| \text{mean}(CDU) - \text{self} \right| \right) \quad (4)

Proximity\textsubscript{4} = \left( -\left| SPD_{\,\,\,\,\text{perceived}} - \text{self} \right| \right) - \left( -\left| CDU_{\,\,\,\,\text{perceived}} - \text{self} \right| \right) \quad (5)

In general, I expect that the significance and direction of the effect of proximity on vote choice will remain positive and strong regardless of the measure employed. However, I expect that the magnitude of the effect will decline when using mean vote share, since by correcting for bias I am decreasing the potential importance of this measure for individuals.

Examining Appendix Table 1, I find that my results are robust both to the inclusion of variables capturing party support and the four alternative measures of ideological proximity. In Model 1, I still find support for my two hypotheses, that reliance on ideological proximity is conditioned by political sophistication while valence is not, controlling for previous party support, indicating that my results are not purely an artifact of reliance on party identification. Model 2 presents my main measure of ideological proximity measure, using quadratic loss and mean ideological placement of the parties. Model 3 presents the model using quadratic loss and the voter perceived placement of the parties, while Model 4 and Model 5 present the same model
using the linear loss to calculate proximity. I find clear support for my hypotheses across these four models, indicating that my results are not driven by my measure of ideological proximity.

[Appendix Table 1 about here]
Appendix 2: Question Wording

German Question Wording

Leader Evaluation:
When you now use this scale from 1 to 11 again: please tell me how much you like or don't like some of our politicians. If you have not heard anything of a politician or you think you don't know enough about him/her, then please tell me. I start with Helmut Kohl: where on this scale from 1 to 11 would you place him, given that 1 means that you don't like him at all and 11 means that you like him very much.

What do you think of Gerhard Schröder?
1 = ‘Don’t like this politician at all’
11 = ‘Like this politician very much’

Party Evaluation

Now I would like to know what you think of our political parties. After I have read the name of a political party please rank it on a scale from 1 to 11. 1 means that you don't like this party at all, 11 means that you like this party very much. If I mention a party you have not heard of or you don't know very well, then please tell me.

I start with the CDU. Where on a scale from 1 to 11 would you place the CDU?

1 = ‘Don’t like this party at all’
11 = ‘Like this party very much’

Issue Competency

Irrespective of last Sunday's election outcome, which federal government would be more qualified to solve each of these problems to your satisfaction? A government led by CDU/CSU, an SPD-led government or a grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD?

Who would solve this problem to your satisfaction: Fight unemployment?

1 = ‘CDU/CSU-led government’
2 = ‘SPD-led government’
3 = ‘grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD’
4 = ‘no government (if mentioned spontaneously)’

Who would solve this problem to your satisfaction: Fight delinquency?

1 = ‘CDU/CSU-led government’
2 = ‘SPD-led government’
3 = ‘grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD’
4 = ‘no government (if mentioned spontaneously)’

Who would solve this problem to your satisfaction: Work for efficient environmental protection?

1 = ‘CDU/CSU-led government’
2 = ‘SPD-led government’
3 = ‘grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD’
4 = ‘no government (if mentioned spontaneously)’

Left-Right Placement

The terms 'left' and 'right' are sometimes used in politics. Where would you place your political standpoint on a scale, on which 1 means 'left' and 11 'right'?

1 = ‘left’
11 = ‘right’

When we now use this scale again: where would you place the CDU?

1 = ‘left’
11 = ‘right’

Dutch Question Wording

Party Evaluation

There are many political parties in our country. I would like to know from you how sympathetic you find these parties. You can give each party a score between 0 and 100. The more sympathetic you find a party, the higher the score you give. A score of 50 means that you find a party neither sympathetic nor unsympathetic. If you don’t know a party, please feel free to say so. Which score would you give the [party]?

0 = ‘Very unsympathetic’
5 = ‘Neither sympathetic nor unsympathetic’
10 = ‘Very sympathetic’

Leader Evaluation

I will now mention to you the names of possible candidates for the position of Prime Minister. Could you indicate how much faith you would have in each person as Prime Minister? How much faith do you have in Jan Peter Balkenende as Prime Minister? Please mention the number that applies to the candidate. If you do not know the candidate, do not hesitate to say so.

1 = ‘Very much faith’
7 = ‘No faith at all’

Issue Competency
With the help of this card, could you indicate how satisfied you are in general with what the government has done during the past four years?

1 = “Very satisfied”
2 = ‘Satisfied’
3 = ‘Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied’
4 = ‘Dissatisfied’
5 = ‘Very unsatisfied’

Left-Right Self Placement

Left-Right: It is often said of political beliefs that they are left or right. When you think of your own political beliefs, where would you place yourself on this line? Please tell the number that applies to you.

1 = ‘Left’
10 = ‘Right’

It is also said of political parties that they are left or right. Would you please indicate the degree to which you think that a party is left or right?

First the PvdA.

1 = ‘Left’
10 = ‘Right’

British Question Wording

Party Evaluation

Please choose a phrase from this card to say how you feel about the Conservative Party

1 = ‘strongly in favour’
2 = ‘in favour’
3 = ‘neither’
4 = ‘against’
5 = ‘strongly against’

Party Leader Evaluation

How good a job do you think Tony Blair will do as Prime Minister?

1 = ‘very good’
2 = ‘quite good’
3 = ‘not very good’
4 = ‘not good at all’

Issue Competency

Looking back to the general election in 1992 - the one where John Major won against Neil Kinnock. Would you say that since then unemployment has increased or fallen?

1 = ‘increased a lot’
2 = ‘increased a little’
3 = ‘stayed the same’
4 = ‘fallen a little’
5 = ‘fallen a lot’

Do you think this is …..
1 = ‘mainly the result of the Conservative Government’s policies’
2 = ‘for some other reason’

Looking back to the general election in 1992 - the one where John Major won against Neil Kinnock. Would you say that since then crime has increased or fallen?
1 = ‘increased a lot’
2 = ‘increased a little’
3 = ‘stayed the same’
4 = ‘fallen a little’
5 = ‘fallen a lot’

Do you think this is …..
1 = ‘mainly the result of the Conservative Government’s policies’
2 = ‘for some other reason’

Looking back to the general election in 1992 - the one where John Major won against Neil Kinnock. Would you say that since then the quality of education has increased or fallen?
1 = ‘increased a lot’
2 = ‘increased a little’
3 = ‘stayed the same’
4 = ‘fallen a little’
5 = ‘fallen a lot’

Do you think this is …..
1 = ‘mainly the result of the Conservative Government’s policies’
2 = ‘for some other reason’

Left-Right Placement:

Please look at this page. Some people feel that government should make much greater efforts to make people's incomes more equal. These people would put themselves in Box A. Other people feel that government should be much less concerned about how equal people's incomes are. These people would put themselves in Box K. And other people have views somewhere in between, along here [A-F] or along here.

In the first row of boxes, please tick whichever box comes closest to your own views about redistributing income.
1 = ‘a greater effort’
11 = ‘less concerned’

Now where do you think that the political parties stand?
First the Conservative Party. In the next row of boxes, please tick whichever box you think comes closest to the views of the Conservative Party.

1 = ‘a greater effort’
11 = ‘less concerned’

Please look at this page. Some people feel that government should nationalize many more private companies. These people would themselves in Box A. Other people feel that government should sell off many more nationalized industries. These people would put themselves in Box K. And other people have views somewhere in-between, along here [A-F] or along here [K- F]. In the first row of boxes, please tick whichever box comes closest to your own views about taxes nationalization and privatisation.

1 = ‘nationalise more’
11 = ‘sell off national industry’

Please look at this page. Some people feel that government should put up taxes a lot and spend much more on health and social services. These people would put themselves in Box A. Other people feel that government should cut taxes a lot and spend much less on health and social services. These people would put themselves in Box K. And other people have views somewhere in-between, along here [A-F] or along here [K-F]. In the first row of boxes, please tick whichever box comes closest to your own views about taxes and government spending.

1 = ’up taxes and spend more’
11 = ‘cut taxes and spend less’

Please look at this page. Some people feel that getting people back to work should be the government’s top priority. These people would put themselves in Box A. Other people feel that keeping prices down should be the government’s top priority. These people would put themselves in Box K. And other people have views somewhere in-between, along here,[A-F] or along here [K-F]. In the first row of boxes, please tick whichever box comes closest to your own views about unemployment and inflation.

1 = ‘back to work’
11 = ‘keep prices down’


Milazzo, Caitlin. 2009. “‘Getting it Right When it Counts: Constituency Competition and Voters’ Perceptions of British Party Positions’.” In Palmer House Hotel, Chicago, IL.


Schmitt, H., and D. Ohr. “Are party leaders becoming more important in German elections? Leader effects on the vote in Germany, 1961-1998.”


### Table 1: Logit Analysis of Vote Choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DV: Vote Choice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SPD v. CDU)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Proximity</td>
<td>3.483***</td>
<td>2.794***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.907)</td>
<td>(0.680)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Valence</td>
<td>6.962***</td>
<td>6.838***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.715)</td>
<td>(0.590)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophistication</td>
<td>-0.283</td>
<td>-0.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.192)</td>
<td>(0.186)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.172</td>
<td>-0.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.173)</td>
<td>(0.178)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.00197</td>
<td>-0.00178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00359)</td>
<td>(0.00366)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity x Sophistication</td>
<td>3.800**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.337)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valence x Sophistication</td>
<td>0.454</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.942)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.468***</td>
<td>0.471***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.123)</td>
<td>(0.135)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**N** 2770 2770

Standard errors in parentheses (Standard errors are clustered by election year)

*p* < 0.1  **p** < 0.05, ***p** < 0.01

**note:** Model presents unstandardized logit coefficients, where the dependent variable is a dichotomous variable measured as 1 if the respondent voted for the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and 0 if the respondent voted for the CDU (Christian Democratic Party). Proximity is measured using the quadratic distance between a respondent’s self placement and the mean position of the SPD each year, subtracted from the quadratic distance of the respondent’s self placement and the mean position of the CDU each year. Valence is measured as an average index of a respondent’s relative evaluation of the issue competency, political leader competency, and party competency of the SPD relative to the CDU. Political knowledge is a dummy variable separated into the top 30 and bottom 70% of the sample, and is calculated using an index of a respondent’s education, interest and correct party left right placement. Model 3 includes Vote in last election measures a respondent’s self reported vote in the previous election; model 3 excludes 1998 because the previous vote choice question was not asked. The model pools all election results from 1976 to 1998.
**Table 2: Logit Analysis of Vote Choice in the Netherlands and Great Britain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV: Vote Choice</th>
<th>Model 5 Netherlands</th>
<th>Model 6 Great Britain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative Proximity</td>
<td>7.252** (2.210)</td>
<td>6.137*** (0.574)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valence</td>
<td>4.118* (1.686)</td>
<td>7.131*** (0.946)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophistication</td>
<td>-1.874 (1.004)</td>
<td>-0.572*** (0.079)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity x Sophistication</td>
<td>9.956*** (0.377)</td>
<td>4.833** (1.515)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valence x Sophistication</td>
<td>4.065 (3.510)</td>
<td>0.745 (0.690)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.619 (0.979)</td>
<td>-0.710*** (0.210)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N | 1577 | 8457 |

Standard errors in parentheses (Standard errors are clustered by year)

**note:** Model presents logit coefficients. In the Netherlands model, the dependent variable is measured as 1 if the respondent voted for the PVDA (Dutch Labour Party) and 0 if the respondent voted for the CDA (Christian Democratic Association). In the Great Britain model, variable measured as 1 if the respondent voted for the Labour Party and 0 if the respondent voted for the Conservative Party. Proximity is measured using the quadratic distance between a respondent’s perceived self placement and the mean position of the left wing party, subtracted from the quadratic distance of the respondent's perceived self placement and the mean position of the right wing each year. Valence is measured as an average index of a respondent’s relative evaluation of the issue competency, political leader competency, and party competency of the two focal parties. Political knowledge is a dummy variable separated into the top 30 and bottom 70% of the sample, and is calculated using an index of a respondent’s education, interest, income and score on a political knowledge quiz. The models pool all election results and cluster the standard error by year.
## Appendix Table 1: Logit Analysis of Vote Choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Party Support</td>
<td>Proximity\textsubscript{1}</td>
<td>Proximity\textsubscript{2}</td>
<td>Proximity\textsubscript{3}</td>
<td>Proximity\textsubscript{4}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Proximity</td>
<td>1.278* (0.715)</td>
<td>2.794*** (0.680)</td>
<td>1.593*** (0.556)</td>
<td>1.712*** (0.356)</td>
<td>1.332*** (0.468)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valence</td>
<td>5.109*** (0.493)</td>
<td>6.838*** (0.590)</td>
<td>6.790*** (0.592)</td>
<td>6.811*** (0.570)</td>
<td>6.643*** (0.599)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophistication</td>
<td>-0.262 (0.270)</td>
<td>-0.278 (0.186)</td>
<td>-0.351+ (0.197)</td>
<td>-0.248 (0.168)</td>
<td>-0.353+ (0.196)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity x Sophistication</td>
<td>2.970* (1.617)</td>
<td>3.800*** (1.337)</td>
<td>3.851*** (1.228)</td>
<td>2.177*** (0.655)</td>
<td>2.391*** (0.500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valence x Sophistication</td>
<td>0.978 (1.175)</td>
<td>0.454 (0.942)</td>
<td>0.0532 (1.012)</td>
<td>0.389 (0.991)</td>
<td>-0.0786 (1.080)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.0204 (0.218)</td>
<td>-0.190 (0.178)</td>
<td>-0.168 (0.155)</td>
<td>-0.187 (0.179)</td>
<td>-0.178 (0.162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.00213 (0.00533)</td>
<td>-0.00178 (0.00366)</td>
<td>-0.00306 (0.00391)</td>
<td>-0.00178 (0.00360)</td>
<td>-0.00328 (0.00396)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU Supporter</td>
<td>-2.025*** (0.535)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD Supporter</td>
<td>0.460** (0.188)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.896*** (0.328)</td>
<td>0.471*** (0.135)</td>
<td>0.536*** (0.144)</td>
<td>0.454*** (0.129)</td>
<td>0.539*** (0.150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>2770</td>
<td>2770</td>
<td>2770</td>
<td>2770</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by election year

* *p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Note: Model presents logit coefficients, where the dependent variable is measured as 1 if the respondent voted for the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and 0 if the respondent voted for the CDU (Christian Democratic Union). Model 1 uses the proximity\textsubscript{1} measure and controls for previous vote choice. Model 2 presents the proximity\textsubscript{1} measure which measures proximity as the quadratic distance between a respondent’s self placement and the mean position of the SPD each year, subtracted from the quadratic distance of the respondent’s perceived self placement and the mean position of the CDU each year. Model 3 presents the proximity\textsubscript{2} measure, defined as the quadratic distance between a respondent’s self placement and his perceived placement of the SPD, subtracted from the quadratic distance of the respondent’s perceived self placement and his perceived placement of CDU. Model 4 presents the proximity\textsubscript{3}, which measures proximity as the absolute value distance between a respondent’s self placement and the mean position of the SPD each year, subtracted from the absolute value distance of the respondent’s perceived self placement and the mean position of the CDU. Model 5 presents the proximity\textsubscript{4}, which measures proximity as the absolute value distance between a respondent’s self placement and his perceived placement of the SPD, subtracted from the absolute value distance of the respondent’s perceived self placement and his perceived placement of the CDU. The model pools election results from 1976-1998.
FIGURES

Figure 1:

Note: Graph displays the average marginal effect of political sophistication over values of relative ideological proximity and relative valence attributes from Model 2 in Table 1, with 95% confidence intervals, with all other values set at their mean.
Figure 2:

Predicted Probability of Voting for the Social Democratic Party by Level of Political Sophistication

Note: Graph displays the predicted probability of voting for the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) over values of relative ideological proximity and relative valence evaluation, with all other covariates set at their means.