

25. PARTY IDENTIFICATION AS A CROSS-NATIONAL CONCEPT: ITS MEANING IN THE NETHERLANDS

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... It is of interest to test the validity of the concept of party identification on Dutch data. . . . These data [are] derived from a three-wave panel study that covers three successive elections, the provincial elections in 1970, the parliamentary elections in 1971 and the parliamentary elections in 1972. A nationwide random sample ($N = 1,838$) was interviewed in 1970. Because of panel mortality this number was reduced to 1,266 in 1971 and to 972 in 1972. Full panel data are available for 834 respondents. In all three panel waves party identification was measured by this set of questions:

Many people think of themselves as adherents of a certain party, but there are also people who do not.

Do you usually think of yourself as an adherent of a certain party? (*If yes:*) Which party do you like best?

Some people are strongly convinced adherents of their party. Others are not so strongly convinced. Do you belong to the strongly convinced adherents of your party or do you not? (*If not an adherent?*) Is there any party that you are closer to than the others? (*If yes:*) Which? .

These questions are as similar as possible to the SRC questions. . . .

The Stability of Party Identification

An essential property of party identification is its long-term stability. On the one hand, the time between our first and last panel wave is too short to prove long-term stability. On the other hand, if we were to find that party identification is not even stable over such a short time, we can be sure that there is not long-term stability either. There is not objective criterion to define how stable party identification should be, especially not in a time of realignment. However, if party identification is a lasting psychological attitude towards a party that is relatively

Source: *Party Identification and Beyond*, Ian Budge, Ivor Crewe, and Dennis Farlie, eds. London: John Wiley & Sons, 1976. Reprinted with permission of John Wiley and Sons Limited.

Table 25-1 Stability of Party Identification and Vote Preference

	<i>Stable Vote Preference</i>	<i>Stable Party Identification</i>
1970-1971	80.3% ^a	76.1%
1971-1972	77.7%	74.6%
1970-1972	71.1%	62.6%

^a i.e. 80.3% of the people who voted both times voted for the same party in both elections.

insensitive to short-term factors and does not completely define the vote, it should be more stable than vote preference. Even in a time of realignment one should expect that party identification changes at a slower pace than vote preference.

In Table 25-1 the stability of party identification is compared with the stability of vote preference. Party identification is clearly less stable than vote preference. In all three combinations of the panel waves the turnover of party identification is higher than the turnover of vote preference. . . .

Now that we have found that party identification is less stable than vote preference, we should ask the question whether party identification is something more than an expression of volatile positive feelings toward a certain party at a particular moment, feelings caused by exactly the same circumstances that determine the vote. If this should prove to be the case it is very likely that party identification and vote preference are measuring one and the same phenomenon: the preference for a particular party at a certain moment.

Party Identification and Vote Preference

If party identification and vote preference are measuring the same phenomenon, party identification loses one of its most important functions. In the United States party identification has become such an invaluable analytical concept, precisely because it offers the opportunity to distinguish short-term factors from long-term influences. This made it possible to determine the role of candidates and issues in each election.

A distinction between long-term forces (party identification) and short-term forces can be made only when party identification and vote preference are really different concepts. A perfect congruence between party identification and vote preference means that the two are conceptually the same. It could mean that in a particular election no short-term factors are at work and that therefore everybody is voting according to this party identification. The more deviations there are between party identification and vote preference, the greater the role of short-term influences would be.

Counter-evidence to the hypothesis that there is no conceptual difference between party identification and vote preference is presented in Table 25-2. In all three years about 9 percent of all voters with a party identification voted for a

Table 25-2 Consistency of Party Identification and Vote Preference, Controlled for Strength of Party Identification

	1970	1971	1972
Strong adherents	98.3% ^a	98.5%	96.1%
Weak adherents	92.3%	92.9%	92.2%
Leaners	83.9%	86.5%	86.9%
Total	90.9%	91.7%	91.2%

^a i.e. of the strong adherents who voted in 1970 98.3% voted for the party they identified with.

different party than the one they identified with. This percentage is lower than any comparable figure in the United States. . . .

Party Identification and Vote Preference: Causal Sequence

The theory of party identification is very clear on the causal sequence of party identification and vote preference. Party identification is defined as a lasting psychological attachment towards a party, the relationship between party identification and vote preference being described as the relation between "the psychological state and its behavioral consequences" (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 122). Goldberg observes that a causal model in which party identification is causally prior to vote preference indeed fits data on American voting behavior (Goldberg, 1966). . . .

. . . Butler and Stokes have shown that party identification changes more often in Britain than the United States. Their conclusion is based upon a comparison of the relation between stability of party identification and the stability of vote preference in Britain and the United States among the same respondents over three time-points (Butler and Stokes, 1969, pp. 41-2). In both countries party identification was found to be more stable than vote preference, although there was more stability in the United States (92 percent) than in Britain (83 percent). There were a limited number of voters who changed their vote as well as their party identification, although in Britain this percentage was twice as high (13 percent) as in the United States (6 percent). In both countries the percentage of people who changed their vote preference but not their party identification was higher than the percentage who changed their party identification but not their vote preference. However, in the United States the difference was much more marked than in Britain. In the United States the ratio was 8:1, in Britain 2:1, which suggests that in Britain party identification is much less independent of vote preference than in the United States.

Table 25-3 presents similar data for The Netherlands. Stable vote preference means that a respondent voted for the same party in 1970, 1971 and 1972. Stable party identification means that a respondent identified with the same party in all three panel waves. There is a dramatic difference between the Dutch data

Table 25-3 Stability of Party Identification and Vote Preference in Three Dutch Elections

		<i>Vote Preference</i>		<i>Total</i>
		<i>Stable</i>	<i>Not Stable</i>	
<i>Party Identification</i>	Stable	61	6	67
	Not stable	10	23	33
	Total	71	29	100%

and the British and the American data. Not less than 23 percent of all the voters in this table changed their party identification as well as their vote preference at least once. (We did not go into the question of whether these changes were symmetric). The most striking finding in this table is the difference between the upper right-hand and the lower left-hand cells. While only 6 percent of the respondents change their vote preference without changing their party identification, 10 percent change their party identification without changing their vote preference. This finding is the exact opposite of what was found in Britain and in the United States. . . .

These findings very strongly suggest that party identification is not causally prior to the vote, but simply a reflection of the vote and therefore causally posterior to the vote. . . .