PART I – INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Chapter 1: Introduction

Why do people vote as they do? That is the central question of this research. Why do voters support one candidate or party rather than another? This question is not new and many answers have already been given. Nevertheless, our understanding of voting behaviour is still limited. In a sense, today it appears even more limited than some decades ago. The explanatory power of models based on social characteristics, like religion and social class, has strongly decreased. The same holds for models based on ideology and policy preferences. We must therefore turn to other approaches. One possibility is to adopt a psychological approach. The core idea in this approach is that to understand why people vote as they do, we must understand what goes on in their mind.

Voting is often regarded as comprising two decisions or questions: whether to vote or abstain, and for whom to vote. Although both decisions may be related, in psephology (the study of voting) both decisions are often regarded as independent. This research adopts the common approach and focuses on for whom people vote. Hence, in this study the question is why people vote as they do, given the fact that they vote. Furthermore, this study defines vote choice in terms of parties, as in most democracies political parties play a key role. This means that the research question may in practice be phrased as why people vote for (a candidate of) a particular party.

Because all voters use similar brains, the psychological processes that underlie voting are presumably not fundamentally different across voters, elections, countries, or time. Nevertheless, from the perspective of electoral research, the Netherlands is particularly interesting. One reason is that in terms of so-called psychologi-
cal models of voting the Dutch case was found to be special, because the models
could not be applied well. Among Dutch voters party identification (a key concept in
psychological models) and electoral choice could not be distinguished meaningfully
and the major psychological model was therefore considered not useful. The Dutch
case may also be considered interesting because recent elections brought some eye-
catching changes. The most amazing event was arguably the fact that in 2002 a new
list of candidates headed by Pim Fortuyn, who was assassinated nine days before the
election, entered parliament with 26 seats. This made them the second-largest party.
A final reason why the Dutch case is an appropriate one for this study, is that data for
analysis are available. The surveys of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies
(DPES) in 1986, 1994, 1998, and 2002 included questions on the basis of which key
ideas developed in this research can be tested.

Chapter 2: Psychology in voting theory

The work by the commercial polling agencies, which in the 1930s collected indi-
vidual data about electoral behaviour on a large scale for the first time, laid the foun-
dation for major voting studies in the United States. The first was The People's Choice
(1944) by Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues from Columbia University. The aim of
this study was to examine the psychological process of opinion formation, but the
authors ultimately concluded that vote choice could be explained well on the basis of
social characteristics, among which socio-economic states, religious affiliation, and
residence (urban versus rural). The mechanisms that link those social characteristics
to vote choice were discussed more elaborately in their second study, Voting (1954).
In Europe the related ideas that Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan set out in
Party Systems and Voter Alignments (1967) are particularly relevant. They showed that
in the Netherlands in the 1950s the impact of social characteristics, in particular reli-
gious affiliation and church attendance, was very strong. These studies fit the socio-
logical approach, which is characterised by its focus on social characteristics or
group belonging as determinants of voting behaviour. From a psychological point of
view the question is how social characteristics are transformed into vote choices. In
methodological terms: what psychological variables are influenced by social charac-
teristics that thereby indirectly have an impact upon vote choice?

In reaction to the Columbia studies, Angus Campbell and his colleagues from
the University of Michigan published The Voter Decides (1954) and The American Voter
(1960). The sociological approach could not explain voting well, the Michigan schol-
ars argued, and the focus should be shifted from social to psychological characteris-
tics. The essence of the Michigan theory, which is considered the major representa-
tive of a psychological approach, is the idea that voters have 'pictures in their heads'
and that these pictures determine for whom they vote. The nexus between the pic-
tures and the vote consists of the notion of psychological forces, which operate be-
because the pictures are evaluated. The images are experienced as positive or negative. In *The American Voter* this was captured by the notion of partisan attitudes (evaluations concerning candidates, policies, and group benefits), which are influenced by voters' party identification, which in turn is determined by social characteristics. In the analyses partisan attitudes were constructed on the basis of voters' policy preferences and remarks about the candidates. Party identification was operationalised by asking voters whether they usually think of themselves as a Republican, a Democrat, or an independent.

From a psychological perspective, it is important to note that the partisan attitudes should not be regarded as an indication of how the voter's mind is organised. The distinction was made for analytical purposes only. Hence, the Michigan studies are psychological in the sense that their explanation of voting behaviour is based on the information in voters' minds. However, they are not psychological in the sense that they describe mental processes that underlie voting, or that the concepts used are psychological entities. Another observation is that in social psychology attitudes are usually conceptualised as positions on a dimension that ranges from very positive to very negative, whereas partisan attitudes are positions on a dimension that ranges from strongly pro-Republican to strongly pro-Democratic. It is also worth noting that Jacques Thomassen (1976) showed that in the Dutch context party identification, which was operationalised by asking voters whether they think of themselves as an adherent of a particular political party, could not be distinguished meaningfully from vote choice, like in the United States. Furthermore, Coes van der Eijk and Kees Niemöller (1983) pointed to another problem: in the Netherlands voters identified with more than one party, which in their view is incompatible with the concept of party identification.

An economic approach is usually distinguished as a third approach. *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) by Anthony Downs is regarded its major representative. According to his theory, voters seek to maximise utility, which they receive from policies adopted by the government. Rational voters evaluate each policy adopted by a party, transform these single evaluations into an overall evaluation for each party, and finally compare their overall evaluations of the competing parties to make their vote choice. However, because voters can never become fully informed about all policies, they may use ideology as a short cut. Downs assumed that parties take stands on many issues, which all can be plotted (and thus averaged) on the left-right dimension. Voters then simply vote for the party that is closest to them. Downs also mentioned the possibility that voters develop the habit to vote for a particular party, or that they rely on the judgement of somebody else. Although Downs argued that his theory was not a psychological theory, but only explains how voters would behave if they were to act rationally, in terms of three different methods distinguished for the study of voting (studying external events, studying social settings,
and studying psychological variables) his theory clearly fits the ‘psychological approach’.

Although the approaches distinguished breath very different atmospheres, they complement rather than contradict one another. At the same time, theories of voting share a set of assumptions about how the minds of voters work. Together these make-up what may be called the psephological paradigm. One of these assumptions is the idea that all voters make up their mind in a similar fashion and hence that all voters fit one single causal model (assumption of causal homogeneity). Furthermore, models of voting by and large have as an underlying assumption that voters make their choice by simply picking the most positively evaluated party or candidate (assumption of a sincere vote). Additionally, it is usually assumed that how much voters like or dislike parties or candidates depends on the images of parties and candidates and their appraisal of these images. Yet another assumption is that the set of characteristics that matter with respect to how voters feel about parties or candidates is the same across all of them (assumption of causal homogeneity in bases of evaluation). Finally, the last shared position concerns not what models of voting say about how voters decide about for whom to vote, but what they do not say. What is missing in particular, is a view on what decision-making mechanisms operate.

**Chapter 3: Attitude-behaviour models and voting**

Attitudes have long been regarded as one of the main concepts of social psychology. Two main reasons are that attitudes influence perception and direct behaviour. Because of this, when studying voting behaviour from a psychological perspective, the attitude concept may be considered important.

The question how to define an attitude, is not easy to answer. Despite many decades of research on attitudes – or perhaps because of it – there has not been a single agreed-upon conceptual definition. When the notion of attitudes was introduced, they were primarily conceived of as ‘towards something’, not ‘a state of somebody’. Later definitions differ from the original conception and attitudes became to be viewed as individuals’ readiness to respond in a certain way. Milton Rosenberg and Carl Hovland (1960) made an influential contribution by elaborating upon the kind of responses that attitudes evoke. They argued that attitudes cannot be observed and measured directly; only the responses they evoke can. These responses, they argued, fall in three categories: affective, cognitive, and behavioural. They also concluded that for most researchers the affective component has been central. Since, several leading scholars have come to similar conclusions, namely that affect is central. The term evaluation is often used as a synonym. Alice Eagly and Shelly Chaiken’s (1993: 1) definition of an attitude, which is widely used today, speaks about “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular
entity with some degree of favor or disfavor”. Evaluation in terms of favour versus disfavour has become the central element in the definition of an attitude.

Behaviour can be explained on the basis of attitudes towards the objects related to it. The general finding is that if the attitude towards an object is more positive, behaviour ‘in favour of the object’ is more likely. Much research on the relationship between attitudes and behaviour has been done within the framework of specific attitude-behavioural models. Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen’s (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action has generally been regarded as the most important model. In essence it states that individuals base their decision to perform certain behaviour on their assessment of the consequences of performing the behaviour. In the Theory of Reasoned Action attitudes concern evaluations of the performance of specific behaviour (involving an object). Russell Fazio (1986) emphasised that behaviour is often not the result of such conscious deliberations about the consequences of behaviour. Instead, many kinds of behaviour are more or less automatically evoked by positive attitudes towards the object of the behaviour. Alice Eagly and Shelly Chaiken (1993) emphasised that these two models are not mutually exclusive. Their own model suggests, when applied to the electoral context, that individuals may vote for a certain party simply because they like that party well, but also because they habitually vote for that party, because they identify with voting for that party, because they think they are supposed to do so (or feel obliged to), or because they evaluate positively the consequences of voting for that party.

Attitude-behaviour research on voting leads to a number of conclusions. The single most important one is that attitudes towards parties and candidates go a long way in explaining the vote. How people vote appears to be determined strongly by the degree to which they like or dislike the competing parties or candidates. A second set of related conclusions concerns the research design and statistical method used to analyse the impact of attitudes. When behaviour concerns a choice among a set of alternatives, like voting, it is important to focus not on the attitudes independently, but on their mutual relationships. The basic hypothesis is that voters vote for the party (or candidate) towards which they hold the most favourable attitude. This attitude object may be referred to by the notion of a preference. Another conclusion is that there is a difference between the question whether voters prefer parties and whether they intend to vote for them. Attitudes towards parties and candidates can thus be distinguished meaningfully from voting intentions, which mediate the influence of attitudes on behaviour. A final conclusion is that voting, like other behaviour, may result from different psychological processes. Voters may rely on their attitudes towards the competing parties or candidates and simply vote for the one they like best, but voters may also elaborate upon the consequences of their behaviour, for example in terms of the outcome of the election. Other ways in which voters may make a choice is by relying on a habit or following the advice of someone else.
PART II – A PSYCHOLOGICAL-PSEPHOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS

CHAPTER 4: THE SINCERE VOTE MODEL

The question why people vote as they do is answered in this chapter by presenting the sincere vote model. The introduction of the concept of a sincere vote is generally credited to Robin Farquharson. In *Theory of Voting* (1969) he sought to fill a gap in social choice literature, namely its neglect of strategies that voters may employ in order to obtain a desired outcome. In order to be able to analyse such strategies, he used the notion of ‘sincere voting’ as a point of departure. Farquharson noted that “the simplest assumption which can be made about the behaviour of voters is that their votes are directly in accordance with their preference scales” (p. 17). Such behaviour he referred to as ‘sincere voting’. In some cases this kind of behaviour is not advantageous to a voter, since voting another way would have resulted in a more preferable outcome (preferable from the perspective of the voter). Voters may then adopt a strategy other than voting sincerely. This is commonly known as ‘strategic voting’. This study proposes to define a sincere vote not in terms of the outcome of an election (as alternative distributions of the seats, like Farquharson did), but in terms of voters’ preferences regarding the competing parties. A vote is defined as sincere if it is cast in favour of the party that a voter prefers, that is, evaluates more positively than any other party.

The sincere vote model is directed at explaining why in a specific election individuals vote for (a candidate of) a particular party. According to the model, the single most important concept to explain voting behaviour is that of attitudes towards parties. Which party people vote for depends on how much they like or dislike the individual competing parties. In line with the idea that evaluation is a central aspect of attitudes, we do not speak about ‘attitudes towards parties’, however, but about ‘party evaluations’. To specify how party evaluations determine voting behaviour the model includes two additional concepts: party preferences and voting intentions. What matters is not how much a party is liked as such, but whether or not it is liked more than the other parties. So party evaluations have to be focused on in terms of how by their configuration they form party preferences. The party preference consists of the party (or parties) that a voter evaluates most positively. When voters are faced with an election, they form a voting intention in accordance with their party preference. Voting intentions concern the plan to vote for (a candidate of) a particular party in a specific upcoming election. At what moment voters decide for whom to vote, and thus form a voting intention, may vary across them. The model presumes that when voters stand in the polling booth, the only thing that they do is transforming an existing voting intention into voting behaviour. Taken together, this means that voters will vote for the party they evaluate most positively. This can be referred to as the ‘sincere vote hypothesis’. Variables that are not specified in the model (ex-
ogenous variables) are presumed to influence voting behaviour primarily through their impact on party evaluations. Obviously, the question arises why voters evaluate parties with certain degrees of favour or disfavour. This question will be treated in Chapter 6. In the sincere vote model party evaluations are merely taken as a given.

Some additional comments with respect to the concepts of the model and the relationships between them are in order. First, with respect to party preferences a distinction can be made between single and multiple party preferences. If voters evaluate one party more positively than all others, we speak of a single party preference. Voters may also evaluate more than one party most positively; in that case we speak of a multiple party preference. Second, with respect to party preferences a distinction can further be made between direction and strength. Which party voters prefer may be referred to as the direction of the party preference. How much this party is evaluated more positively than any other party may be referred to as the strength of the preference. Third, party evaluations, party preferences, and voting intentions may change across time. Consequently, if intentions are measured some time before the election, discrepancies may occur in the voting intention–voting behaviour relationship. A final matter concerns the notion of a sincere vote. Voting behaviour is called sincere if the vote is cast for a party that the voter evaluates most positively, that is, if party preference and voting behaviour are in line with each other. Because voters may have other reasons than strategic considerations to vote for a non-preferred party, the opposite of a sincere vote is referred to as a ‘non-sincere vote’ – the terminology does deliberately not speak of ‘insincere’ in order to emphasise that the notions sincere and non-sincere are merely analytical constructs.

Chapter 5: Vote choice heuristics

According to the sincere vote model, voters’ choices at the polls can be explained on the basis of their evaluations of the competing parties. However, there is more to voting than merely comparing party evaluations. The aim of this chapter is to shed light on what more there is by focusing on the different choice mechanisms voters may use. The view presented is based on two assumptions. First, it is assumed that voters do not weigh all the pros and cons involved in their choice, but rely on simple decision rules, or heuristics. The second assumption is that there are a number of heuristics that voters may make use of (assumption of causal heterogeneity).

The essence of human behaviour, according to many authors, is that it is goal-oriented. Voters may then be hypothesised to think about the future and base their choice on their evaluations of possible election outcomes. We may refer to such possible outcomes as ‘prospects’ and to the evaluations of these outcomes as ‘prospect evaluations’. The corresponding choice mechanism may be referred to as the election outcome preference heuristic. This may involve the partisan composition of the government, who becomes government leader, the size of parties, and policies adopted.
Second, voters may base their choice on feelings about the performance of the incumbent government. The corresponding decision rule is simple: if individuals are satisfied with the performance of incumbents, they vote for them; if they are dissatisfied, they support the opposition. This choice mechanism may be referred to as the incumbent approval heuristic. Third, voters may choose on the basis of their evaluations of the competing parties. According to the corresponding heuristic, voters simply vote for the party they like best. Because in this research that party is referred to as the party preference, this may be referred to as the party preference heuristic. In some elections, like presidential elections, the focus is on candidates. In that case voters may be hypothesised to rely on their evaluations of those candidates. According to the corresponding candidate preference heuristic, voters simply vote for the candidate they like best. This heuristic may also be used in party-centred elections. Rather than elaborate upon for whom to vote at every election, voters may develop a habit of voting for (candidates of) one particular party. When faced with an election, these voters transform their voting habit into still another vote. We may refer to this choice mechanism as the voting habit heuristic. Finally, voters may base their choice on the endorsement of a particular party or candidate by someone else – specific individuals, groups, or organisations. If voters base their choice on such an endorsement, we may refer to the choice mechanism as the endorsement heuristic.

How prospect evaluations, government evaluation (incumbent approval), party evaluations, candidate evaluations, voting habit, and perceived endorsement are related to one another, and how they can be fit into a single model of voting, is shown in the heuristic model of voting. The model states that a voting intention may originate in any of the six phenomena distinguished. This fits the principle of causal heterogeneity. Additionally, the model states that government evaluation, party evaluations, and candidate evaluations may also influence voting intentions indirectly, namely through their impact on prospect evaluations. There are various other factors that have often been used to explain voting; for example, social characteristics, policy preferences, and ideological positions. According to the model, such factors do not influence voting intentions directly. Therefore, they are not included in the model and referred to as exogenous variables. This means that any influence of such factors on voting intentions is assumed to be mediated by the concepts in the model.

The heuristic model of voting is related to the sincere vote model in three ways. First, the heuristic model indicates that party evaluations may influence voting intentions directly (through the use of the party preference heuristic) as well as indirectly (through their impact on prospect evaluations and the use of the election outcome preference heuristic). Second, the heuristic model indicates what decision rules voters with multiple party preferences may employ in order to choose between the parties they evaluate equally positively. Third, the heuristic model indicates what more there is to voting than simply expressing one’s party preference. The heuristic model of voting may thus be used to explain non-sincere voting.
Chapter 6: Three models to explain party evaluations

If voting behaviour is influenced strongly by voters' evaluations of the competing parties, as the models presented in the preceding two chapters suggest, the question is why voters like or dislike parties. This chapter discusses three models that may be used to explain party evaluations.

One way to explain party evaluations is to construct a model on the basis of the psephological paradigm, the orthodoxy that characterises voting research (discussed in Chapter 2). Such a model is referred to as the orthodox model of voting. Although the model is directed at explaining voting behaviour, it may also be used to explain party evaluations, because the model explicitly includes those evaluations. The phenomenon to be explained in this model is an individual's voting behaviour. In line with the assumption that voters support the party they like best (the assumption of a sincere vote), voting behaviour is determined by overall evaluations of the parties. This shifts the question to why voters evaluate parties as they do. According to the model, this depends on both perceived characteristics of the parties and characteristics of the voter. Party characteristics are not just perceived by voters, they are evaluated as well. How voters evaluate party characteristics depends on their personal characteristics.

Milton Lodge and his colleagues (1989) put forward an alternative view in the impression-driven model of candidate evaluations, also known as the on-line model. According to the model, whenever voters process information with respect to a candidate, they update an overall evaluation of the candidate, a so-called running tally. The key argument is that the information on the basis of which evaluations of candidates are adjusted may well be forgotten, while the impact on the evaluation lasts. Consequently, there need not be a match between the information with respect to a candidate stored in voters' memory and the way they evaluate that candidate. With respect to parties we may formulate an alternative model of voting by combining the on-line model with the idea that voters vote for the party they evaluate most positively. The difference with the orthodox model concerns what is being evaluated: perceptions stored in memory, or information that has been processed but which need not be stored in memory.

A third model overcomes several limitations of the orthodox model and the on-line model and takes into account the role of emotions. According to the model, party evaluations are formed as well as changed on the basis of temporary emotional responses that result from information-processing in working memory. When individuals process information, they automatically evaluate the information. In as far as such temporary emotional responses are attributed to political parties, they may lead to an adjustment of the evaluation of that party and thus have a lasting impact. The model indicates that the information that leads to an emotional response may be information perceived (for example, by reading a newspaper or speaking with
friends), but also information retrieved from long-term memory. The latter is also automatically evaluated. The model is referred to as the emotion-integration model of party evaluations, because party evaluations are regarded as a result of emotions experienced with respect to parties; these emotions are integrated by individuals into general evaluations of the parties.

PART III – ANALYSIS OF FOUR DUTCH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Chapter 7: Empirical test of the sincere vote model

In this chapter the sincere vote model is tested empirically by applying it to the Dutch parliamentary elections in 1986, 1994, 1998, and 2002 on the basis of data from the respective Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES). The main part of the DPES consisted of two face-to-face interviews with a large sample of voters. A first wave of interviews was held in the weeks preceding the election, while a second wave was held shortly after the election. Questions concerning party evaluations and voting intentions were asked in the pre-election interview; questions regarding respondents’ actual voting behaviour were asked in the post-election interview.

To measure party evaluations, respondents were shown a card with a horizontal line with at equal distance eleven numbers, which ranged from 0 to 100 (all multiples of ten). The score of 0 was labelled “very unsympathetic”, the score of 50 was labelled “neither sympathetic, nor unsympathetic”, and the score of 100 was labelled “very sympathetic”. In this research answers have been transformed into an eleven-point format by rounding off the figures to the nearest multiple of ten. The measures regarding the individual parties can be combined to determine the direction as well as the strength of voters’ party preference, including whether voters had a single or multiple party preference. The interview also contained questions concerning respondents’ voting intentions. First, they were asked whether they intended to vote in the upcoming parliamentary election or not. If they said they intended to vote, they were asked which party they intended to vote for. The latter question is used in this research as a measure for voting intention. How voters actually voted, that is, their voting behaviour, was determined by asking voters in the post-election interview.

The sincere vote model makes predictions about two relationships: voters are expected to form a voting intention that favours the party that they evaluate most positively, and they are expected to vote according to their voting intention. Consequently, voters are expected to vote for the party they evaluate most positively. Among voters with single party preferences, between 85 and 92 per cent intended to vote for the party they evaluated most positively. Among voters with multiple party preferences the figures are fairly similar (around 90 per cent). Furthermore, in each
Summary

About 85 per cent of the voters cast their vote for the party they intended to vote for when interviewed, while about 15 per cent ultimately voted for another party. For voters who did not know yet for whom they would vote when they were interviewed before the election (undecided voters), we may hypothesise that they voted in line with their party preferences. However, the number of ‘undecided voters’ who behaved as expected was rather low compared to the figures concerning ‘decided voters’: up to 46 per cent voted non-sincerely.

How strong is the support for the sincere vote model when it comes to explaining voting behaviour directly on the basis of party preferences for the electorate as a whole? In each election, a large majority voted for the party they evaluated most positively. However, this number decreased from 85 per cent to 72 per cent. Moreover, while in 1986 the voting behaviour of 68 per cent of the voters could be accurately predicted on the basis of the ratings provided, this figure decreased to 46 per cent in 2002. The other voters either voted sincerely but had a multiple party preference, due to which their choice could not be predicted, or they voted non-sincerely. Most striking is the increase in the number of voters who voted non-sincerely: from 15 per cent in 1986 to 26 per cent in 2002. Furthermore, in this period the number of voters who had a multiple party preference increased from 20 per cent to 36 per cent. So, although overall the support for the sincere vote hypothesis is strong, across the years the strength of it declined.

Additional analyses show that voters with strong party preferences were less likely to form non-sincere voting intentions than voters with moderate party preferences, who in turn were less likely to form non-sincere voting intentions than voters with weak party preferences. Voters with multiple party preferences took an intermediate position. Regarding the relationship between voting intentions and voting behaviour, the findings show that voters with strong party preferences were most likely to stick to their voting intention, followed in turn by those with moderate, weak, and multiple party preferences. So party preference strength plays the hypothesised role. The increase in the number of voters with a non-sincere voting intention, however, was not merely the result of changes in the strength of party preferences (the mean strength of party preferences considerably decreased in the period examined). Across all four categories non-sincere voting intentions became somewhat more likely across the years.

CHAPTER 8: THE NON-SINCERE VOTE

The central question in this chapter is why voters prefer to vote for another party than one they evaluate most positively. In this context the vote choice heuristics discussed in Chapter 5 may be particularly useful. Except for the endorsement heuristic, the heuristics discussed can be analysed on the basis of measures available in the surveys upon which this research is based. The findings indicate that if voters intended
to vote for a party they did not evaluate most positively, often they preferred this party to participate in the future coalition, were satisfied about the performance of the government in which that party participated, liked the leader of the party best, or had already voted for the party in the previous election.

The relative importance of each heuristic, as well as the degree to which they collectively explain non-sincere voting intentions, has been examined by performing logistic regression analyses. In each year coalition preferences influenced non-sincere voting intentions significantly: if voters’ coalition preference did not include their party preference, the chance of a non-sincere voting intention was considerably larger. The impact was largest in 1986 and 2002. The effect of government satisfaction was not significant: once the impact of the other concepts is taken into account, non-sincere voting intentions could not be explained better by including measures of incumbent approval. Party leader evaluations influenced non-sincere voting intentions in three of the four years (the absence of an effect in 1986 may be a methodological artefact, because several party leaders were not included in the survey). On average, the impact of party leader evaluations was somewhat weaker than that of coalition preferences. Previous vote choice also had an effect. In each election, voters who had voted for their current party preference in the previous election were considerably less likely than other voters to have a non-sincere voting intention; voters who before had voted for another party were more likely to have a non-sincere voting intention. The analyses suggest that previous vote choice contributed to the explanation of non-sincere voting intentions more strongly than any other phenomenon. With respect to this latter finding, however, a warning of caution is necessary: due to false recall the impact of previous vote choice may be overestimated. A final observation is that the strength of party preferences played the hypothesised role. As the strength of voters’ party preference increased, the chance on a non-sincere voting intention decreased.

A second question that is focused on in this chapter, is how voters choose between parties of multiple party preferences. Perhaps they do by using government preference, incumbent approval, candidate preference, or voting habit as a tie-breaker. First it was analysed whether it was possible for voters, in principle, to use the corresponding heuristics to break the tie. The analysis indicates that government preferences could often not provide a solution, because voters preferred a government coalition that included two or more of the preferred parties. Incumbent approval was mostly neither of much use, either because voters were not satisfied or dissatisfied with the government, or, if they were (dis-)satisfied, because they preferred two or more government or opposition parties. The candidate preference heuristic and the voting habit heuristic, on the other hand, both provided a majority of voters the opportunity to break the tie. The next question is whether in the cases where the heuristics could have been used to break a tie, voters formed a voting intention as expected on the basis of that heuristic. With respect to two heuristics the
corresponding figures are as high as 80 per cent: the government preference heuristic and the voting habit heuristic. Although the support for the idea that the incumbent approval heuristic and the candidate preference heuristic are used to break ties is less strong, a majority of voters who could use this heuristic intended to vote as expected on that basis. This suggests that some voters may have used these heuristics to break ties.

Chapter 9: Explaining Party Evaluations: A Traditional Approach

In each of the elections analysed, voters mostly voted in line with their party evaluations. If party evaluations determine voting behaviour so strongly, the question arises why voters evaluate parties with certain degrees of favour or disfavour. The ideas presented in Chapter 6 unfortunately cannot be tested on the basis of the surveys upon which this research is based. This does not mean that party evaluations cannot be explained at all. The least that can be done is to attempt to explain party evaluations on the basis of concepts that have traditionally been used to explain voting behaviour and which have been included in election surveys: social characteristics, policy preferences, ideological positions, government satisfaction, and party leader evaluations.

Voters' religious identity had a strong impact on their evaluations of the Christian Democrats and, especially among voters with a strong Protestant identity, on their evaluations of the orthodox Protestant parties. Evaluations of D66, GreenLeft, and Socialist Party were sometimes also affected by voters' religious identity, while evaluations of the Labour Party, Liberal Party, and List Pim Fortuyn were virtually unaffected. The impact of social class identity was limited with respect to all parties. The impact of policy preferences also differed across parties. With respect to the Labour Party and Liberal Party the issue of income inequality mattered most, while the influence of the asylum seekers issue was only slightly weaker. Evaluations of the Christian Democrats and D66 were not affected that strongly by opinions on any issue, although various issues mattered somewhat. The evaluations of GreenLeft the Socialist Party were affected fairly strongly by several issues, in particular those of asylum seekers and income inequality. With respect to the orthodox Protestant parties the euthanasia issue strongly mattered, and with respect to List Pim Fortuyn opinions about asylum seekers did. The latter effect is the largest found of issues with respect to any party in any year. The only factor that had a relatively similar impact across parties, was ideological disagreement in terms of left-right. In general, evaluations of the various parties were affected fairly strongly by perceived ideological disagreement. The impact of government satisfaction varied across parties in a particular way. Among government parties satisfaction and dissatisfaction usually had a fairly strong impact, while evaluations of the opposition parties were not af-
fected much (an exception concerns the Labour Party in 1986). In each election, the strongest effects found involved the prime minister’s party.

Given the differences across parties in the size of the effect of various factors, it is no surprise that a similar observation can be made regarding the explanatory power of the multivariate model that combines the aforementioned factors. In particular, evaluations of the Labour Party, Liberal Party, and Christian Democrats could be explained well in 1986 (explained variance was about 50 per cent), while in later years the model performed less well (explained variance varied between 20 and 35 per cent). Figures regarding the other parties did not deviate much, except that evaluations of D66 could be explained poorly when they were in opposition (explained variance equalled 13 per cent).

The explanatory power of the model that combines the various concepts provides a baseline against which the impact of party leader evaluations can be assessed. Incorporating party leader evaluations in the model improved the explanatory power substantially. The extent to which it did, varied between 15 per cent with respect to evaluations of D66 in 1998 and 46 per cent with respect to evaluations of List Pim Fortuyn in 2002. One might be tempted to conclude that party leader evaluations were thus the single most important determinant of voters’ feelings towards political parties. However, a warning of caution must be given. These effects may result from an opposite causal direction, namely from party evaluations to party leader evaluations. One finding in particular suggests that the impact of party leader evaluations is overestimated in the analyses presented. According to the results party leader evaluations also strongly influence evaluations of the orthodox Protestant parties. At the same time, evaluations of those parties strongly correlated, which suggests that they must have a similar basis. On the basis of the available data we cannot estimate accurately how large a role party leader evaluations play.

PART IV – CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER 10: A PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY OF VOTING

The picture that emerges from this research is that of voting behaviour as the result of a two-stage process. In the first stage, voters process information and this leads to the formation and change of images of the government, parties, and candidates; voters also form an image of what upcoming elections are about and who endorse a particular party or candidate. Furthermore, in this stage voters form and change evaluations of the government, parties, candidates, and possible election outcomes (prospects). In the second stage, voters make a decision about for whom to vote on the basis of their party evaluations, candidate evaluations, government evaluation, prospect evaluations, perceived endorsements, and voting habit. They do so on the
basis of simple decision rules or heuristics. Concepts traditionally used to explain vote choice, such as voters’ social characteristics, ideological positions, or policy preferences, have an impact on voting if they influence the concepts specified in the two-stage model.

The analyses that underlie the two-stage model of voting challenge several of the assumptions that jointly make up the psephological paradigm. First, the assumption of a sincere vote, according to which all voters simply vote for the party they like best, has been examined rigorously by testing the sincere vote model. The findings show that this assumption is false. A considerable amount of voters preferred to vote for another party than one they evaluated most positively. Second, the assumption of causal homogeneity, according to which all voters decide in the same way, has been challenged. It has been argued that voters may decide on the basis of different heuristics. The analyses show that vote choices cannot all be understood from the perspective of a single heuristic, not even the heuristic that underlies virtually all models of voting (party preference heuristic). However, virtually all vote choices can be understood from the perspective of at least one heuristic. Third, the assumption of homogeneity in bases of evaluation has been challenged. Parties are usually assumed to be liked and disliked for the same reasons. The analyses show that the extent to which voters’ social identity, policy preferences, perceived ideological agreement with parties, and satisfaction with the incumbent government affected their party evaluations, clearly differed across those parties. Contrary to what models of voting often assume, the bases of evaluation are not the same across parties.

Arguably, one of the most important implications of this research concerns the conceptualisation of partisanship. The Michigan scholars initially saw partisanship as one of the factors that influenced the vote directly, but in The American Voter (1960) they argued that partisanship had to be seen as an indirect determinant of vote choice. They conceptualised it in terms of identification. European electoral research has traditionally treated voters’ feelings towards the political parties in the same way. According to the view presented in this research, partisanship should be considered a direct determinant of vote choice. Furthermore, this study proposes to conceptualise partisanship in terms of evaluation. The analyses presented show that if partisanship is treated in the way proposed, various problems associated with the party identification concept may be overcome. The problem identified by Thomassen (1976), namely that party identification and vote choice cannot be distinguished meaningfully, does not apply to party evaluations. Furthermore, the problem of multiple identifications, which Van der Eijk and Niemöller (1983) pointed at, does not apply to the party preference concept, or to its measure. Another matter is whether partisanship needs to be included in a model of voting. The finding that the concept of party identification cannot be applied to the Netherlands, has led several scholars to conclude that we should focus on identification in terms of social groups or in terms of ideology. It should be questioned whether this is the best strategy. Political
parties are such central objects in the electoral process, that how voters feel about them cannot be ignored if one wants to understand their behaviour. The only question is how the influence of those feelings on voting behaviour has to be analysed. This study has provided an answer to that question.

REFERENCES


