

Are Party Leaders Becoming More Important in German Elections?

Leader Effects on the Vote in Germany, 1961-1998

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## Abstract

This paper explores the evolution of leader effects on the vote. The laboratory in which this is done is the German Federal Republic (after re-unification: West Germany), and the time horizon is roughly the last four decades. It is argued that leader effects on the vote have their place in a “realistic” model of representative democracy, and that they are expected to increase due to processes of partisan dealignment and personalisation of politics. While earlier German research could not identify a secular increase in leader effects on vote choices, we do find some hints in this direction. Developments are not linear though, and dramatic events and the political actors on stage after 1983 seem to have reversed earlier trends to some degree. Methodological issues are also taken up. A strategy for the simultaneous analysis of vote choices in multi-party systems is proposed, and an ‘ideal’ research design for the identification of leader effects on the vote is identified – if only at the very end of the paper.

## 1. Introduction

Political leaders, as we use the term, are contenders for central political office.<sup>1</sup> They do not play much of a role in contemporary models of representative democracy. The *Responsible Party Model* does not even have them in its list of actors. On stage there are just parties and voters. The basic normative model is simple. A plurality of homogenous parties compete for votes by propagating policies which they promise to enact in case they should win and be able to form a government after the election. This is the supply side of the representative process. The demand side is characterised by voters who have policy preferences, are knowledgeable about the policy offers of the competing parties, and finally vote for the party whose policy offers come closest to their own preferences. If assumptions are met and promises realised, a government will finally be installed which represents the policy preferences of a majority of voters fairly well (APSA 1950; Kirkpatrick 1971; Thomassen 1991, 1994; Miller et al. 1999; Schmitt & Thomassen 1999).

There seems to be no need for political leaders. On the contrary, leader effects on the vote are ‘scary business’ for many.<sup>2</sup> They smell undemocratic. As Carmines and Stimson (1980:79) have put it: “The common – indeed, universal – view has been that voting choices based on policy concerns are superior to those based on party loyalty or candidate images. Only the former represent clearly sophisticated behavior. Indeed, the policy oriented vote is a defining characteristic of that mythical specimen, the classic democratic citizen.”

Many stipulations of the *Responsible Party Model* are in accordance with the economic theory of voting behaviour and party democracy (Downs 1957). This theory has been heavily criticised for its unrealistic assumptions, in particular with reference to the limited capabilities of voters to live up to the roles ascribed to them. Starting probably with Berelson et al. (1954), numerous studies have portrayed voters to know rather little about the specifics of the policy offers issued by the competing parties. These studies typically conclude that the policies of political parties can not possibly explain how voters choose between them. Empirical analyses have found policy preferences – be they determined in the ‘smallest distance or the directional tradition – to be comparatively poor predictors of party choice (e.g. Schmitt 1998, 1999).

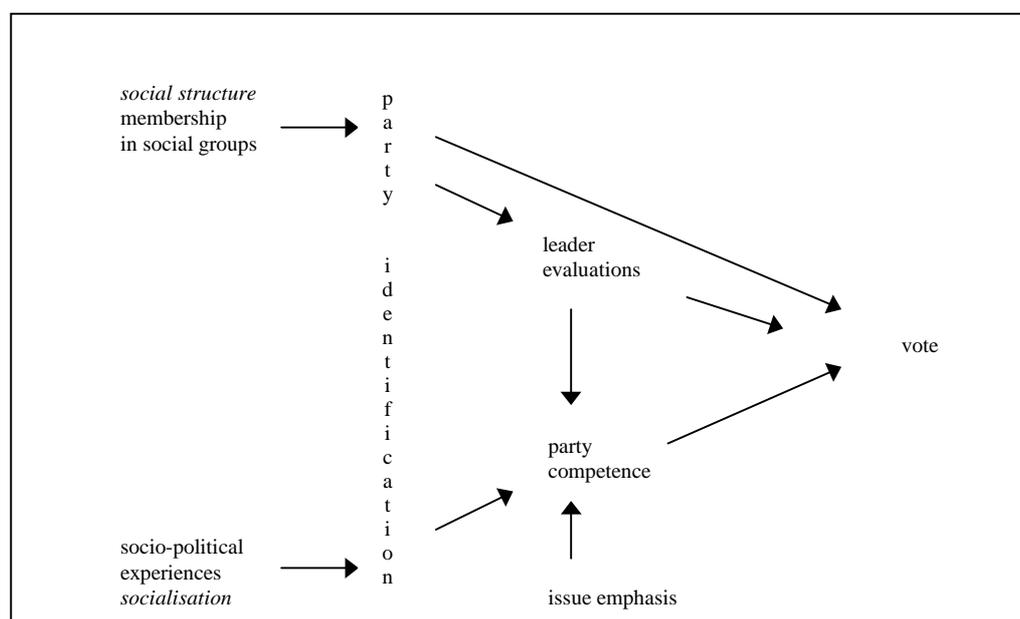
Berelson *cum suis* took this as evidence of the fact that the survival and functioning of democratic systems depends on the responsibility and accountability of their political leaders. In their so-called “realistic theory of democracy,” the role of the voter is reduced to the selection of competing (groups of) political leaders. And if that is what is at stake, leader effects on the vote should dominate any other. Others have tried harder to rescue issue effects. There are two interrelated ways of doing this. One is to re-conceptualise issue effects. The other is to

integrate them in a broader model of vote choice. We review both of them and start with conceptual questions.

There is no theoretic reason why issue effects on the vote should be tied to specific policies. They can as well originate in voters' more general problem perceptions and their selective attribution of competence for solving these problems to the competing political actors, i.e. political parties and their leaders. In this view, voters are not expected to choose the party whose policy positions come closest to their preferences, but the one who emphasises the "right" problems (i.e. those they themselves are most concerned about) and who seems to be capable to do something about them (see e.g. Stokes 1966, 1992; Budge and Farlie 1983a, 1983b; Budge et al. 1987; Schmitt 1998, 1999). If this process works well, a government will be finally installed which attributes high priority to the concerns of a majority of voters and 'does something about them'.

The latter aspect – doing something – brings political leaders back in a modified model of contemporary political representation.<sup>3</sup> In the end it is people, not parties, that do things. We propose that the (lack of) issue competence that voters attribute to political parties is a result of three factors: (a) the general partisanship, or party identification, of voters; (b) the issue emphasis of political parties which needs to be backed, in order to be credible, by an appropriate record of problem solving activities in the past; and (c) the perceived capability of party leaders "to do something about" the central political problems, which in turn might depend on perceptions of their honesty or trustworthiness, and of their effectiveness.<sup>4</sup> Figure 1 gives a graphical illustration of this.

Figure 1  
A Variant of the Social-Psychological Model of Vote Choice



The basic structure of Figure 1 adapts of course the classic social-psychological model of party choice (Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes 1960). All we add is a specific view on the nature and origin of issue orientations, and a link between leader evaluations and issue orientations.

In this paper we will not try to estimate the full model for any particular election. Rather we will concentrate on the diachronic development of one arrow: the one that links leader evaluations and the vote. We first report on a growing literature that gives reason to believe that this effect is growing over time. Then we inspect the results of prior research into leader effects on voting behaviour in Germany. We go on by presenting our data base and a strategy of estimating leader effects on the vote. We finally introduce our findings and come back, in a concluding paragraph, to the larger questions raised in the beginning.

## 2. Why leader effects on the vote should have increased

Changing leader effects can result from changes in one or more of the components of Figure 1, and from changes in the causal relationships of these components. To get an idea which factors are the most likely candidates for change, we refer to the scholarly debate on a suggested *personalisation of politics* (Wattenberg 1991; Kaase 1994; Lass 1995; Brettschneider 1998; Klein & Ohr 2000a, 2000b; Ohr 2000).

A central argument in this debate refers to the decline of long-term party attachments and its impact on vote choice. According to the logic of the social-psychological model, processes of partisan dealignment should give short-term factors such as issue orientations and leader evaluations more weight and importance. To the degree to which long-term party attachments are in fact eroding (cf. for nuanced accounts Schmitt 1989 and Schmitt & Holmberg 1995), voters are in need of functional equivalents which can provide them with plausible criteria for their vote choice without inflating their information- and decision costs. Leadership traits, especially their personal qualities, might be able to fill the gap and gain greater importance for the electoral process. Voting behaviour might thus become more personalised.

Partisan dealignment and its possible consequence, the increasing importance of leader evaluations for the vote, are situated on the demand side of the political process. Personalisation of voting behaviour may also relate to processes on the supply side of politics. Over the last years political leaders are said to have received more attention in the system of mass communication. In particular, the weight that political leaders receive in the broadcasting of the mass media appears to have risen.

It has also been argued that the politics of advanced industrial democracies have become increasingly complex,<sup>5</sup> and that mass media are deliberately trying to reduce this complexity by personalising political communication (Grande 2000). This would not be possible without the emergence, rapid diffusion, and (still) growing importance of television over the last half century (cf. Keeter 1987; for Germany Berg & Kiefer 1996 and Schulz et al. 2000).

Political issues covered by TV are likely to be introduced by the political actors in charge. Television focuses on human beings because it needs faces in order to “come across”.<sup>6</sup> No other medium is able to reveal the multitude of politicians' nonverbal attributes as directly and authentically as television: facial appearance, style, clothing, the way of arguing, even body language. Personalisation is said to be supported by drastic changes in the media system since the Eighties (cf. Pfetsch 1992; Schulz et al. 2000). In Germany as elsewhere, a great number of private TV channels has entered the stage. As a result of this, political broadcasting has rapidly changed towards ‘infotainment’ (= information + entertainment) in which the ‘human touch’ of politics is especially prominent.

As a consequence of these developments, the mass media in general and television in particular turned into “... the principal means by which political parties project themselves and shape their popular images” (Bean & Mughan 1989: 1165). Political communication of the parties became mediated (Kepplinger 1998, Schulz et al. 2000). Political parties had to respond to an increase of the importance of TV for political information (Radunski 1981). They did and do this – among other strategic changes – by means of issue and event management, negative campaigning, and, last but not least, personalisation of political messages (cf. Schulz et al. 2000). Not the least important aspect of parties’ attempts to personalise political communication is the promotion of leaders’ qualities in election campaigns. The personality of German chancellor candidates is more and more the focus of centrally planned and co-ordinated election campaigns (Lass 1995: 12).

Personalisation of political communication reduces information costs for the individual voter (Keeter 1987). While it may be difficult for many and prohibitively costly for some voters to assess the different parties' issue competence directly, they might find it easier to evaluate political leaders according to their knowledge, trustworthiness, physical appearance, and eloquence in television debates (Popkin 1991). From these impressions voters may infer, in a rather roundabout way, a competence judgement for the parties in question. This is what the arrow from leader evaluations to party competence in Figure 1 refers to.

In short, the personalisation literature suggests that leader effects on voting behaviour have increased over the last decades. Mainly two developments are said to be responsible: partisan

dealignment and the personalisation of political communication. Before we go on testing this proposition empirically, we will give a short summary of the findings of German empirical research on the subject matter.

### 3. Earlier research on leader effects on the vote in Germany

Personalisation hypotheses are dynamic hypotheses. Testing such hypotheses makes longitudinal analyses spanning extended periods of time inevitable. In Germany, such longitudinal analyses of leader effects on vote choices are rather scarce. This may be due, in part, to the fact that leader effects in a parliamentary system as Germany are commonly assumed to be less important than in presidential systems. It is therefore "... probably the under-institutionalisation of the electoral dimension of political leadership in Germany which has resulted in a scarcity of systematic and long-term candidate information in German electoral research" (Kaase 1994: 221). This paucity of empirical evidence has also to do with data availability. Very few comparable indicators of leader evaluations are available over a long time span. This reflects, of course, the fact that political leaders have not been in the centre of past German electoral research.

Leader evaluations can only affect vote choices if leaders are known and if orientations towards them do exist in the electorate. Knowledge of leaders and of their qualities is an important precondition for their impact on the vote (Vetter & Gabriel 1998:75). There are some indications that knowledge of leaders has in fact grown over time (Lass 1995). Recent analyses on the national election 1998 ( Brettschneider 1998; Klein & Ohr 2000a, 2000b, 2000c) show that nine in ten German voters have detailed perceptions of the top leaders. These evaluations are also fairly complex as voters are able to distinguish between different dimensions of the leaders' image. It appears that the cognitive preconditions for strong leader effects on German voting behaviour are met.

A mere handful longitudinal analyses have been published over the last two decades which try to determine leader effects on the vote (cf. Norpoth 1977; Klingemann & Taylor 1977; Jagodzinski & Kuehnelt 1990; Vetter & Gabriel 1998). The overall message is either negative or mixed. Kaase in his review of the empirical literature states that "... there is no secular trend pointing to a systematically growing importance of politicians in the evaluation of political parties ... " (1994: 222). Hence, the predominant understanding for the German post-WW2 electoral history is "... that it is the specific combination of candidates and political context which defines the candidate impact for each individual election ... " (Kaase 1994: 222). In a recent analysis based on pre-election studies covering all German elections between 1961 to

1998, however, candidate effects on the two party vote turn out to have systematically increased (Ohr 2000). There, candidate effects proved to be especially strong for the elections of 1994 and 1998, and by far the strongest leader effect was estimated for the last election of September 1998.

Summing up, the empirical evidence on leader effects and their development over time in Germany is not altogether clearcut. Whereas earlier studies underline that each election is shaped by a peculiar combination of issue and candidate effects, more recent evidence suggests an increasing weight of political leaders for the voting decision.

#### 4. Data base and strategy of analysis

##### 4.1. Data base

The series of German election studies based on representative mass surveys dates back at least to the federal election of 1953, if not to the very first *Bundestagswahl* of 1949.<sup>7</sup> We base our research on post-electoral surveys, because reliable measures of voting behaviour (rather than behavioural intentions) can only be obtained after the event. More specifically, we have chosen to analyse post-election surveys which contain at least the following core variables: information on the position of voters in the social structure, in particular (but not only) with respect to the two basic cleavages class and religion; a measure of voters' party identification; voters' evaluations of the relevant parties<sup>8</sup> which contested a particular election; voters' evaluations of these parties' political leaders – i.e. the party chairperson or candidate for chancellorship if the two roles are not held by one and the same person; and the party choice of voters measured as vote recall.<sup>9</sup> Proceeding that way we arrive at a more or less uninterrupted time-series spanning eleven *Bundestagswahlen* between 1961 and 1998.<sup>10</sup>

##### 4.2. Strategy of Analysis

Party choice is the dependent variable in most analyses of electoral behaviour. It is both a nominal and an ipsative variable, as voters in almost all political systems are only allowed to choose one party. From a substantive point of view, this causes two major problems. First, explanatory statements about party choice imply an intra-individual comparison of parties which, in multi-party systems, cannot be observed when only analysing actual party choice. Secondly, when analysing party choice one regularly runs into a problem that arises from (sometimes exceedingly) small numbers of respondents who voted for small parties.

#### 4.2.1. Party preference as an alternative dependent variable

These problems can be solved by relying on the electoral attractiveness of, or preference for, a political party as the dependent variable. This variable is a characteristic that can be measured for all parties, irrespective of their particular traits and irrespective of the political system in which they are located. One way of doing this is asking voters directly. Respondents to the European Election Studies of 1989, 1994, and 1999, for example, have all been asked *Please tell me for each of the following how probable it is that you will ever vote for this party?*, after which they were presented with the names of the relevant (in the Sartorian sense) parties in their system. This instrument overcomes the restrictions of the more usually employed question about actual voting behaviour, which does not allow respondents to report the extent of their electoral preferences for all parties. Moreover, the 10-point scale used allows a continuous expression of these preferences, rather than a merely dichotomous one.

These “probability to vote” questions were not included in the questionnaires of the series of German post-election surveys. However, they can be substituted by another measure that is derived from the more conventional like-dislike scales. While these like-dislike scales constitute another – if less direct – approach to the electoral attractiveness of political parties, they do not, in their original form, amount to a straightforward measure of party preference. Too many other considerations have an impact on one’s liking or disliking of a party, in addition to its electoral attractiveness.

We will therefore transform these like-dislike scores into ‘party preference points’ (ppp’s). This can be done by comparing for each respondent the like-dislike scores of each possible pair of relevant parties and by attributing a preference point for the ‘winner’ of each comparison (i.e. the party with the superior like-dislike score). In the case of ties, a preference point shall be given to each of the two parties under comparison. The resulting ppp’s range from 0 to  $\langle \max n \rangle$ , whereby  $\langle \max n \rangle$  is the number of relevant parties in the system minus 1. ‘0’ is the score for the party that was defeated in each comparison and is preferred least, and  $\langle \max n \rangle$  is the score of the party that has been preferred over all others.

The whole approach rests on the assumption that respondents will eventually vote for the party which they prefer most; that the second-highest preference score appears as second choice, and so on. This view is well-founded. It can be shown that over 90 per cent of those who prefer one party over all others (i.e. with  $\langle \max n \rangle$  of ppp’s) vote for this party.<sup>11</sup> This suggests that party preference scores for most parties are reasonably accurate reflections of actual vote intentions. As a consequence, by analysing the former one arrives at valid conclusions about the latter.

While the conceptual distinction between relative party preferences and the vote is obvious, we know much less about the empirical consequences of substituting the latter by the former. It will therefore be useful in the present paper, to determine leader effects on both party preferences and on dichotomous vote choices and compare the results.

#### 4.2.2. The simultaneous analysis of party preferences and vote choice

These preferences would normally be represented in a data matrix as different variables, one for each party, which cannot easily be analysed simultaneously. However, the really interesting thing are determinants of party preference and of the vote in general rather than those for a specific party. Analysing these preferences one by one would obscure individual-level inter-party variation, as such a design focuses exclusively on the variation between individuals. An adequate analysis of these scores requires a research design in which inter-party (intra-individual) and inter-individual variance is accounted for simultaneously. This can be realised by rearranging the original data into a so-called stacked form: viewing each preference score given by a voter as a separate case to be explained. In this way, each respondent is represented by a number of cases in the stacked data set – as many as the number of parties for which s/he gave a preference score, or for which such a score can be derived. The stacked data set can be analysed in the same way as any normal rectangular data matrix. Appropriate identifiers allow characteristics of individual respondents and of parties to be added as explanatory or control variables. The independent variables have to be defined in an appropriate manner before they can be included in the analysis, but once this has been done, the stacked data matrix allows to examine the dependent variable using familiar and straightforward methods of analysis, such as multiple OLS regression.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, measurements ‘within’ a respondent are more similar than those ‘between’ different respondents. In technical terms, the error terms will be not be independent. This violates one of the classical assumptions of most statistical models. One can get a handle on this by way of multi-level analysis.<sup>13</sup> However, as correlated errors will just result in somewhat biased standard errors and leave regression coefficients virtually unaffected, there is no doubt that we identify accurate solutions by sticking to multiple OLS regressions for party preference and to multiple logistic regressions for the vote.

#### 4.2.3. Three different views on the results

We will present the results of our analyses in three steps. The first is descriptive and charts voters’ perceptions of German party leaders over roughly four decades. In a second step, we

display ‘gross’ effects of leader evaluations on party preferences and the vote; party specific and overall correlations are given and possible trends over time in these effects are explored.

Third and finally, we try to isolate true or ‘net’ effects of political leaders on party preferences and the vote. This is done by controlling for effects of other known and measured factors. From the inventory of effects that was proposed in Figure 1, all but party competence measures are available for most elections; these therefore have to be disregarded in the empirical analysis.<sup>14</sup> Probably the most conservative way to determine ‘net’ effects is to calculate the proportion of additional variance in party preferences and in the vote which can be attributed to leader evaluations after causally prior variables, that is: social structural factors and party identification, accounted for their share of variance.<sup>15</sup>

## 5. Results

### 5.1. German party leaders in public opinion

Using survey evidence for a look back over nearly 40 years of electoral history is an amazing experience. Dramatic historical events like collapses and reformations of coalition governments unmistakably have left their traces in these surveys. This cannot but strengthen one’s trust in the validity of the data base. Table 1 identifies the partisan composition of the different governments, the leaders of the parties that were represented in parliament, the heads of government, and the attractiveness of the various political leaders.

Party leaders’ mean evaluations vary considerably over time, between parties, and from one leader to the next. Two SPD chancellors lead the hit parade with an identical score of +2.7: Willy Brandt in 1972 (after he survived the “vote of non-confidence” [*konstruktives Mißtrauensvotum*] organised by Rainer Barzel and the CDU/CSU), and Helmut Schmidt in 1980 (in his electoral confrontation with the conservative-populist CSU leader Franz-Josef Strauß). There are only three other mean scores at or above + 2.0: those of Ludwig Erhard in 1965, Helmut Kohl in the re-unification election of 1990, and again Helmut Schmidt in 1976.

Leaders of smaller parties are generally less positively evaluated (or maybe: positively evaluated by fewer people) than those of the two big parties. A notable exception to this rule are the FDP leaders Walter Scheel and Hans-Dietrich Genscher who enjoyed extraordinary positive scores during the period of SPD-FDP coalition governments. Never again reached FDP party leaders those high levels of approval after they had switched back to the CDU/CSU in 1982/3. Nor did the leaders of the then oppositional SPD. Rudolf Scharping in 1994 did particularly poor against a weak chancellor Helmut Kohl, and the score of Johannes Rau (who now serves as President of the Federal Republic) in 1987 was not much higher.

Table 1  
German Party Leaders in Public Opinion, 1961 – 1998

election of	1961	1965	1969	1972	1976	1980	1983	1987	1990	1994	1998
prev gov't <sup>1</sup>	c-l-r	c-l	c-s	s-l	s-l	s-l	s-l	c-l	c-l	c-l	c-l
next gov't	c-l	c-l <sup>2</sup>	s-l	s-l	s-l	s-l	c-l	c-l	c-l	c-l	s-g
party leaders' names <sup>3</sup>											
SPD	Brandt	Brandt	<i>Brandt</i>	<i>Brandt</i>	<i>Schmidt</i>	<i>Schmidt</i>	Vogel	Rau <sup>4</sup>	Lafontaine	Scharping	<i>Schröder</i>
CDU/CSU	<i>Adenauer</i>	<i>Erhard</i>	Kiesinger	Barzel	Kohl	Strauß	<i>Kohl</i>	<i>Kohl</i>	<i>Kohl</i>	<i>Kohl</i>	Kohl
FDP	Mende	Mende	Scheel	Scheel	Genscher	Genscher	Genscher	Bangemann	Lambsdorff	Kinkel	Gerhart
Grüne	-	-	-	-	-	-	*	*	*	Fischer <sup>5</sup>	Fischer <sup>5</sup>
PDS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Gysi	Gysi <sup>5</sup>	Gysi <sup>5</sup>
party leaders' mean rating (-5 to +5) <sup>6</sup>											
SPD	1.3	0.4	?	2.7	2.2	2.7	1.1	0.5	1.0	0.2	1.1
CDU/CSU	1.6	2.2	?	-0.1	1.8	-0.6	1.9	0.7	2.1	0.3	-0.1
FDP	-0.5	0.0	?	1.5	1.8	2.5	0.1	0.4	0.9	-1.1	-1.2
Grüne	-	-	-	-	-	-	*	*	*	-0.4	-0.2
PDS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-3.1	-1.4	-2.4

Notes: (1) Letters indicate coalition parties: c = christian democrats = CDU/CSU; l = liberals = FDP; s = social democrats = SPD; g = greens = Bündnis 90/Die Grünen; r = refugees = GDP/BHE. (2) This coalition broke and a 'grand coalition' between CDU/CSU and SPD was formed. (3) Heads of subsequent government in italics; if party leaders were not running as 'chancellor candidates', the latter are cited and included in the analyses. (4) In the post-election survey available, the SPD party chairman Vogel was evaluated rather than Rau who run as SPD candidate for chancellorship; in the analyses we take the Vogel ratings as SPD leader ratings. (5) People indicated are not elected party chairpersons (*de jure*), but party leaders in public recognition (*de facto*). (6) These analyses are based on weighted data in order to secure representativity of samples. '?' = not ascertained; '-' = party did not exist/was not yet relevant; '\*' = collective party leadership.

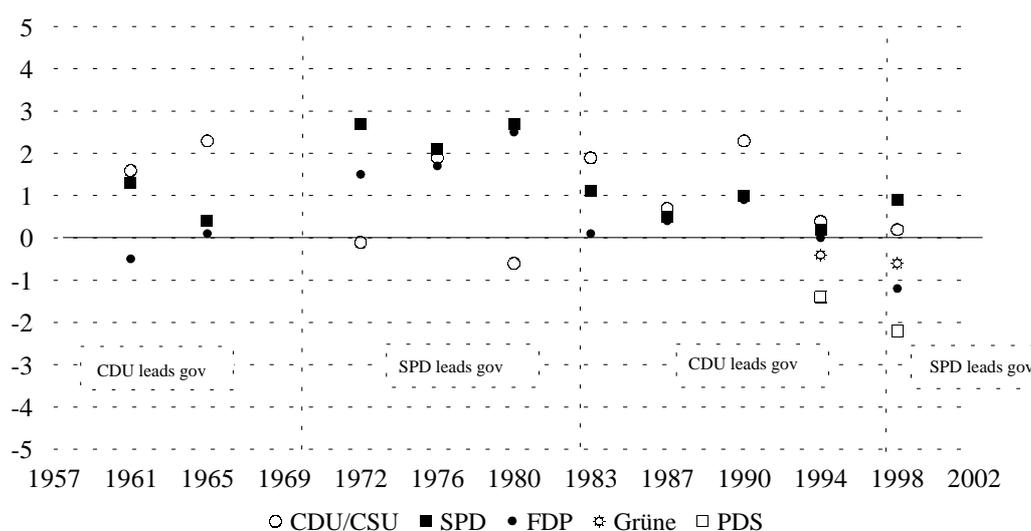
Source: German Post-Election Studies (1990 and later: West-German samples only).

Helmut Kohl has the longest record as a chancellor candidate; between 1976 and 1998 he contested six elections. If there is a trend in his mean evaluations, it is one of declining attractiveness. There is one break in his otherwise almost linear decline: in 1990 (when he enjoyed unprecedented levels of popularity due to his energetic role in the re-unification process; in 1980 he had to step back in favour of Franz-Josef Strauß). This observation seems to suggest that positive evaluations of political leaders tend to erode with increasing tenure.

There is another observation of a more general nature. Chancellors – either newly elected or reaffirmed – are always ahead of any other political leader contesting that particular election (Figure 2). Distances are largest in 1965 (Erhard beats Brandt), 1990 (Kohl beats Lafontaine) and 1972 (Brandt beats Scheel and Barzel comes in only third), but they are visible in each single election study analysed here. This can be read in at least two different ways. One interpretation would stress a honey-moon effect according to which there is nothing as successful as the success, and nobody as “winning” as the winner of an election. The superiority of chancellors would result from a social-psychological regularity in public opinion formation. The other understanding would take it as a matter of fact and attribute electoral victories, *inter alia*, to the elevated attractiveness of the leader of the winning party. One way of testing these alternative interpretations would be to compare post-electoral scores with those secured before the election result became known. We will come back to that phenomenon below.

Figure 2

## Party Leader Ratings, 1961 - 1998



Note: Displayed are mean scores ranging from 5 ("like very much") to -5 ("don't like at all"). Leader ratings were not asked in 1969.  
Source: Table 1.

## 5.2. ‘Gross’ effects of leader evaluations on party preferences and the vote

Not only are big parties’ leaders more positively evaluated than small parties’ leaders, they also have a heavier impact on party preferences and on the vote (Table 2). A straightforward bivariate correlation analysis shows that relative preferences for and vote choices in favour of small parties are hardly determined by these parties’ leaders. There are few exceptions to this rule. One is the extraordinary effect of Hans-Dietrich Genscher on FDP preferences in 1983 which seems to justify *post festum* his change of coalition partners ahead of that election.<sup>16</sup> We know that FDP preferences in particular do not linearly translate to FDP votes (Schmitt 1998), and the fact that Genscher evaluations affected the FDP vote only little suggests that many Christian Democrats celebrated Genscher and the FDP – but liked the FDP not quite good enough to finally vote for it.

Table 2  
‘Gross’ Effects of Party Leader Evaluations on Party Preferences and on the Vote, 1961 – 1998  
(figures are bivariate Pearson correlation coefficients)

election of	1961	1965	1969	1972	1976	1980	1983	1987	1990	1994	1998
ppp’s x party leader rating											
SPD	.53	.51	a	.68	.64	.56	.63	.49	.54	.41	.43
CDU/CSU	.46	.50	a	.66	.66	.68	.68	.68	.70	.63	.53
FDP	.37	.27	a	-.15	.22	.35	.66	.37	.32	.28	.35
Grüne	-	-	-	-	-	-	b	b	b	.45	.51
PDS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.14	.45	.41
Overall	.51	.49	a	.60	.57	.59	.68	.55	.69	.55	.56
vote x party leader rating											
SPD	.48	.58	a	.61	.63	.52	.57	.49	.50	.56	.50
CDU/CSU	.48	.52	a	.61	.65	.65	.64	.61	.57	.65	.46
FDP	.28	.25	a	-.07	.22	.32	.18	.21	.16	.18	.29
Grüne	-	-	-	-	-	-	b	b	b	.36	.32
PDS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	c	.30	.21
Overall	.48	.53	a	.49	.53	.44	.53	.48	.50	.52	.47

Notes: Analyses are based on unweighted data-sets of post-electoral surveys of the series of German Election Studies – see Table 1 for details. In the stacked analyses reported under ‘overall’, the green party stacks have been set ‘missing’ for the elections of 1983, 1987, and 1990, because no green leader rating could be secured in these studies; the analytic alternative of substituting the missing green leader rating by an average score of the leader ratings that were secured in those studies produced strange results and was discarded. ‘a’ = not ascertained; ‘b’ = collective party leadership; ‘c’ = too few cases; ‘-’ = party did not exist/was not yet relevant.

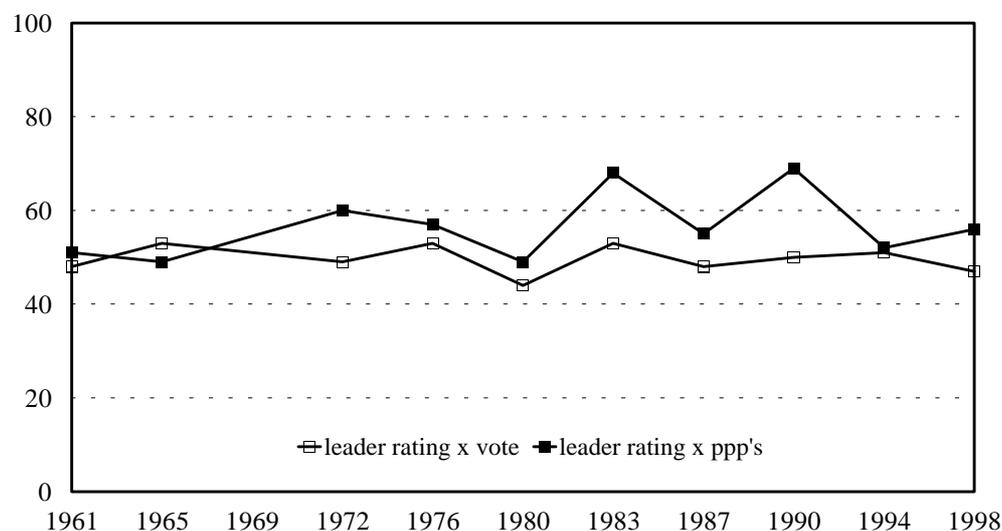
Generally, it is the two big parties’ leaders that have a really massive ‘gross’ effect on both party preferences and the vote. The most plausible explanation for this refers to the eminent role of these parties’ leaders in the German electoral system. They are formally installed<sup>17</sup>

‘chancellor candidates’ and it is clear for every voter that after the election one of the two competitors will serve as head of government. Supporting one of the big parties with one’s second vote (the so-called chancellor vote [*Kanzlerstimme*]), therefore, has some remote remembrance to the direct election of a head of government. And this might be the reason why leader evaluations are particularly mighty predictors for party preferences of and vote for SPD and CDU/CSU.

The advantage of *simultaneous analyses of party preferences and the vote* (‘stacked analyses’) is to go beyond party specific analyses and to envisage the party system as a whole. The results of such simultaneous analyses are given in the two ‘overall’ rows of Table 2. It becomes evident that the overall gross effect of party leaders on party preferences and the vote is very similar to that found with big parties: they very much determine the overall picture. What we find as well is that leader evaluations are somewhat stronger related to party preferences than to the vote. Leader evaluations have a particularly strong gross effect on party preferences when leaders have actually ‘done something’ – like the change of the government coalition in 1983, or German re-unification in 1990.

A final observation refers to changes over time. Figure 3 displays the evolution of overall effects for both party preferences and the vote. It becomes apparent that there is not much of an increase in the effect of leader evaluations on the vote. Things look slightly different with regard to party preferences: there the effects of leader evaluations seem to be somewhat on the rise. But we refrain from celebrating this as a major new insight: it remains to be seen how these ‘gross’ effects develop if other effects are controlled for.

Figure 3  
How Party Leader Evaluations Affect Party Preferences and the Vote



Note: Displayed are bi-variate correlation coefficients (Pearson) from the overall analysis reported in Table 2. Leader ratings were not asked in 1969 so that for this election no effect can be computed.

### 5.3. Estimating 'true' leader effects

Leader evaluations, party identifications, party competence attributions, and the vote are heavily interrelated concepts. All of them are, in addition, affected by predispositions that originate in social-structural locations of voters (cf. again Figure 1). There is no doubt, therefore, that bivariate correlations between leader evaluations and party preferences and the vote considerably overestimate the 'true' importance of leader effects. In this paragraph, we try to isolate such 'true' or 'net' effects of leader evaluations on party preferences and the vote. In order to not again overestimate them, we will follow the most conservative approach possible. Applying the so-called  $\Delta R^2$  strategy, net effects of leader evaluations on party preferences and the vote are computed by estimating the proportion of additional variance explained by leader evaluations after controlling for the effects of social-structural factors and party identification.<sup>18</sup> This will be done for individual parties and, by running *simultaneous analyses* on the stacked data set, for the party system as a whole. We will also look into the question of whether these net effects have changed over time.

The results of our multivariate analyses are reported in Tables 3 and 4. What are the principal messages? First, it is evident that evaluations of political leaders do have an important impact on party preferences and vote choices in German elections even after social-structural effects and party identification are controlled for. Even with this very conservative strategy, we find net effects that are significant statistically and important substantively. This certainly justifies the recognition of political leaders in the classic social-psychological model of voting behaviour. Secondly, net effects of evaluations of major parties' leaders are more important than those for the smaller parties. Again, the 1983 Genscher effect on FDP preferences stands out as a major exception here. This underlines our findings from the bivariate correlation analyses.

Thirdly, leader effects by definition are of a short term nature. Elections differ from one another. They vary with respect to issues, party strategies, the general political climate, and not least the political personnel. Those variations are likely to affect the role which political leaders can play for electoral decisions. If we concentrate on changes over time, it thus comes as no surprise that the picture is fairly complex. Party specific analyses show everything but a clear monotonic increase of leader effects on the vote. In this perspective, the analysis of almost four decades of German electoral history cannot pin down much of a personalisation process of voting behaviour. Rather, the conventional wisdom on leader effects in Germany seems to be confirmed once more: elections differ from one another, and trends are hard to identify (e.g. Kaase 1994).

Table 3  
 Net Effects of Leader Evaluations on Party Preferences, 1961 – 1998  
 (figures are R square changes from stepwise OLS regressions)

election of	1961	1965	1969	1972	1976	1980	1983	1987	1990	1994	1998
SPD soc str	15	a	b	16	19	12	10	14	09	05	04
SPD PID	+ 22	a	b	+ 24	+ 30	+ 30	+ 32	+ 24	+ 26	+ 16	+ 14
SPD leader	+ 07	a	b	+ 15	+ 09	+ 11	+ 14	+ 07	+ 10	+ 07	+ 07
CDU soc str	08	a	b	22	20	13	11	14	12	15	10
CDU PID	+ 27	a	b	+ 31	+ 30	+ 36	+ 23	+ 20	+ 21	+ 20	+ 17
CDU leader	+ 05	a	b	+ 09	+ 09	+ 12	+ 19	+ 20	+ 21	+ 12	+ 12
FDP soc str	03	a	b	03	02	02	06	08	06	06	07
FDP PID	+ 13	a	b	+ 03	+ 13	+ 11	+ 06	+ 07	+ 03	+ 02	+ 11
FDP leader	+ 07	a	b	+ 02	+ 02	+ 07	+ 35	+ 08	+ 05	+ 05	+ 06
Grüne soc str	-	-	-	-	-	-	c	c	c	11	10
Grüne PID	-	-	-	-	-	-	c	c	c	+ 08	+ 09
Grüne leader	-	-	-	-	-	-	c	c	c	+ 11	+ 13
PDS soc str	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	d	07	04
PDS PID	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	d	+ 04	+ 02
PDS leader	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	d	+ 12	+ 13
overall											
soc str	24	a	b	25	17	14	19	14	59	40	35
PID	+ 17	a	b	+ 17	+ 24	+ 25	+ 18	+ 17	+ 06	+ 06	+ 07
leaders	+ 05	a	b	+ 08	+ 08	+ 13	+ 20	+ 12	+ 04	+ 06	+ 08

Note: Analyses are based on unweighted data-sets of post-electoral surveys of the series of German Election Studies – see Notes to Tables 1 and 2 for details. Party preferences are regressed on social-structural factors first, then on social-structural factors and party identification, and finally on social-structural factors, party identification and leader evaluations. Displayed are, for each party and overall, the increase in per cent of explained variance for each step. 'a' = party ID not ascertained; 'b' = neither party ID nor leader ratings ascertained; 'c' = collective party leadership, no green leader rating ascertained; 'd' = no respondents with party ID PDS in 1990; '-' = party did not exist/was not yet relevant. Refer to the notes of Table 1 for further explanation.

We have already pointed out, though, that party specific analyses turn a blind eye to an important part of variation. One assumption of party specific analyses is that voters of a given party would only evaluate the leader of that very party. This may be true in some cases. Quite often, however, choosing one party also expresses the degree and intensity to which the leader of a competing party is *rejected*.<sup>19</sup> To the degree that this is an accurate reflection of how voters arrive at their party choice it becomes apparent that we must not ignore this intra-individual variation (as we do in party specific analyses).

We therefore maintain that estimating leader effects with stacked data is a more appropriate strategy of analysis. In comparing party specific with overall results (which are based on the analysis of stacked data), it should be noted that the latter are not simply 'averages' of the former. Rather, in addition to incorporating the variation between respondents for each party, the variation of leader ratings 'within' each individual is explicitly taken into account. It may

Table 4  
 Net Effects of Leader Evaluations on the Vote, 1961 – 1998  
 (figures are changes in Pseudo R square from stepwise logistic regressions)

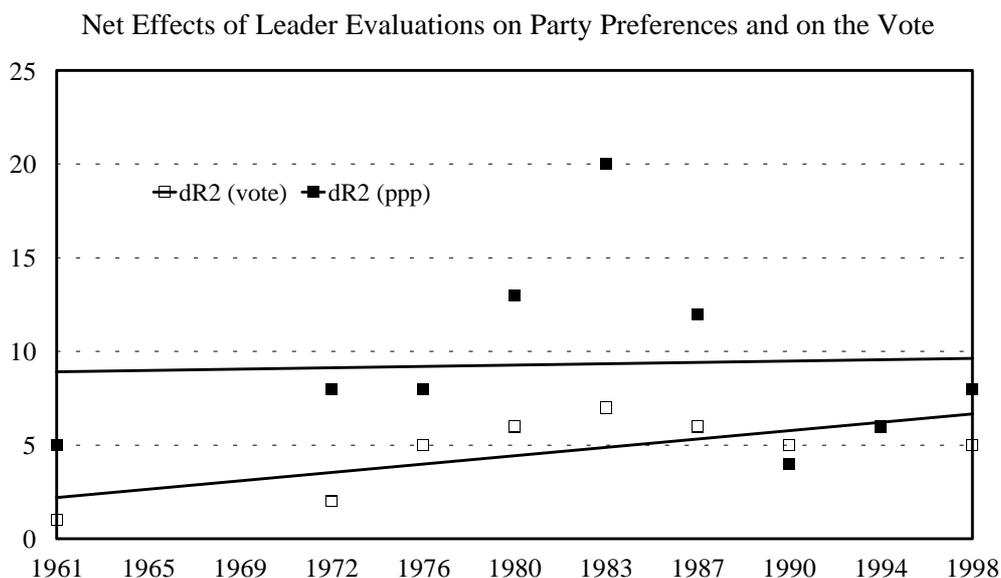
election of	1961	1965	1969	1972	1976	1980	1983	1987	1990	1994	1998
SPD soc str	13	a	b	18	16	08	06	12	09	06	07
SPD PID	+ 49	a	b	+ 32	+ 46	+ 41	+ 36	+ 33	+ 39	+ 36	+ 25
SPD leader	+ 01	a	b	+ 06	+ 06	+ 05	+ 10	+ 06	+ 05	+ 10	+ 06
CDU soc str	11	a	b	18	18	14	09	10	11	09	08
CDU PID	+ 48	a	b	+ 39	+ 39	+ 40	+ 40	+ 35	+ 34	+ 43	+ 30
CDU leader	+ 02	a	b	+ 05	+ 08	+ 10	+ 09	+ 09	+ 08	+ 06	+ 06
FDP soc str	10	a	b	06	06	02	05	09	03	07	06
FDP PID	+ 29	a	b	+ 13	+ 34	+ 21	+ 28	+ 25	+ 17	+ 08	+ 32
FDP leader	+ 01	a	b	+ 01	+ 03	+ 09	+ 03	+ 03	+ 02	+ 04	+ 05
Grüne soc str	-	-	-	-	-	-	c	c	c	21	15
Grüne PID	-	-	-	-	-	-	c	c	c	+ 26	+ 21
Grüne leader	-	-	-	-	-	-	c	c	c	+ 04	+ 03
PDS soc str	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	d	18	05
PDS PID	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	d	+ 25	+ 02
PDS leader	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	d	+ 11	+ 25
Overall											
soc str	20	a	b	25	26	15	20	19	27	26	25
PID	+ 40	a	b	+ 26	+ 36	+ 33	+ 32	+ 29	+ 26	+ 27	+ 21
Leaders	+ 01	a	b	+ 02	+ 05	+ 06	+ 07	+ 06	+ 05	+ 06	+ 05

Note: Analyses are based on unweighted data-sets of post-electoral surveys of the series of German Election Studies – see Notes to Tables 1 and 2 for details. Party preferences are regressed on social-structural factors first, then on social-structural factors and party identification, and finally on social-structural factors, party identification and leader evaluations. Displayed are, for each party and overall, the increase in per cent of explained variance for each step. ‘a’= party ID not ascertained; ‘b’= neither party ID nor leader ratings ascertained; ‘c’= collective party leadership, no green leader rating ascertained; ‘d’ no respondents with party ID PDS in 1990; ‘-’ = party did not exist/was not yet relevant. Refer to the notes of Table 1 for further explanation.

well be therefore, that an overall pattern of leader effects deviates markedly from party specific patterns.

Figure 4 illustrates the overall net effects of leader evaluations on party preference and the vote. While the increase over time is somewhat steeper for the net effect of leader evaluations on the vote, both trend lines actually have a positive slope. Therefore, our analysis does not only support the conventional wisdom of highly election-specific leader effects. There are also indications for a gradual increase of leader effects over time. These linear trends, however, are based on relatively few cases (=elections) and the fit with the data – in particular for the preference equations – is not too impressive.

Figure 4



Note: Party preferences and the vote are regressed on social structural factors and party identification first, and then on leader evaluations. Displayed are proportions of additional variance explained by leader evaluations. OLS regressions were run for party preferences, logistic regressions for the vote. PID was not asked in 1965 and 1969, leader ratings were not asked in 1969, so that the effects for both elections cannot be computed.

Source: Tables 3 and 4.

There is no doubt, however, that net leader effects are clearly increasing between 1961 and 1983. This holds for both party preferences and the vote. The 1983 election – called to endorse the change of government brought about by FDP and CDU/CSU leaders – marks a culminating point of net leader effects. Since then, the net impact of leader evaluations on party preference and the vote is decreasing. Over the whole period covered, net leader effects on party preferences are weakest in the election of 1990. Effects on the vote are also meagre, although the decline from 1983 to 1990 is not as striking as in the case of party preferences. It seems obvious that the election of 1990 was not about leaders, but about the ‘super issue’ of the German unification – its ideological desirability, its economic feasibility, and its political consequences. For both party preference and the vote the net impact of leader evaluations is again somewhat stronger in 1994.

There is one aspect in Figure 4 which we need to come back to: the 1998 effects. All our findings point in the direction that net leader effects on the vote – both for the major parties and overall – are smaller in 1998 than in the previous election. This is indeed a surprising finding which stands in clear contrast to the (more or less impressionistic) evaluations of the 1998 campaign. According to those, the election of September 1998 represents a culmination point on the way towards further personalization. The governing CDU/CSU put the incumbent chancellor Helmut Kohl in the centre of their campaign. The SPD as well almost exclusively focussed their campaign on Gerhard Schroeder as their chancellor candidate. In the months before the election Schroeder received a tremendous media coverage which some did not dare

to call ‘hagiographic’ (Falter 1998). Quantitative content analyses confirm these impressions by demonstrating that both the chancellor and his competitor received greater television attention during the 1998 campaign than their counterparts in 1994 (cf. Genz 1999). If the election campaign in 1998, then, was in fact more personalised than the one in 1994, one would have expected an increase of net leader effects on the vote and certainly no decline from 1994 to 1998.

#### 5.4. The 1998 pre-post-puzzle

When pre-election studies are utilised one finds exactly this: evaluations of chancellor candidates affected 1998 vote choices stronger than those in 1994 (cf. Ohr 2000; Schulz et al. 2000). One way to understand this discrepancy is to attribute it to systematic differences between pre- and post-electoral surveys.

Differences in leader effects on the vote estimated before and after one and the same election can originate in the measurement of leader evaluations or in that of vote choices. In a strict sense, pre-election surveys establish mere vote *intentions*, while actual voting *behaviour* can only be measured (by way of survey research at least) after the event – in post-election surveys.<sup>20</sup> The problem is that behavioural intentions and actual behaviour may not coincide.<sup>21</sup> It was due to this discrepancy that we choose to base our analysis on post-election surveys.

Before the election, when vote intentions are not yet completely determined (or ‘crystallised’), short-term factors such as leader evaluations may have a particularly sizeable effect upon them. In the extreme, they may be found to move parallel with still unstable vote intentions. Measurements taken in pre-election surveys may therefore produce systematically inflated – to some unknown degree – leader effects on vote choices.<sup>22</sup>

Leader evaluations as measured in post-election studies, on the other hand, may be coloured – again to some unknown degree – by the outcome of the electoral race. Shortly after the event, the winners of the election are ubiquitous – smiling from every TV screen, kissing wives, being happy, planning ahead. It seems unrealistic that voters are not impressed by those pictures. Thus, there are reasons to believe that leader evaluations measured in post-election surveys deviate from what we may call the ‘true’ leader evaluations that were prevalent at the time when a final decision was taken as to which party to vote for.

To the degree our reasoning describes real-life political processes, the estimation of leader effects on the vote will be disturbed both in pre-election surveys (because it is not behaviour that is measured) as well as in post-election surveys (because it is not true leader evaluations).

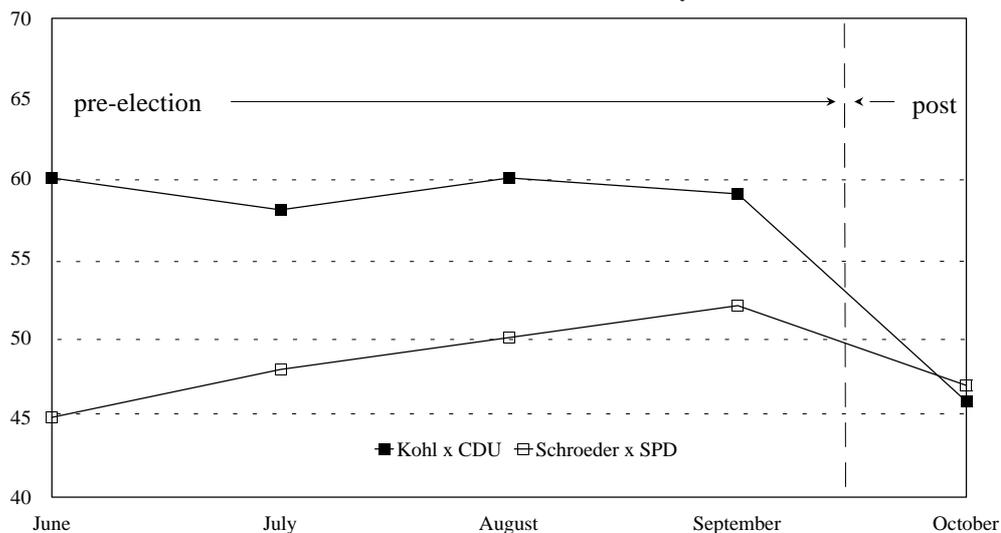
In an ideal research design, we would thus be able to confront leader evaluations measured at the time when most voters did arrive at their final voting decision (i.e., shortly before the election) and actual voting behaviour measured after the event.<sup>23</sup>

Let us now turn to the *Bundestagswahl* of September 27th, 1998, and compare leader effects on the vote before and after the election. The result of the election was a landslide victory for the oppositional SPD. For the first time, a federal government was based on a *red-green coalition* after the election. As regards political leaders, Gerhard Schroeder suddenly was the one who did it; and the formerly monumental Helmut Kohl was now defeated. It is obvious that leader evaluations *after* the election had a quite different ‘object’ than those *before* the election. And one would not be surprised if the effect of leader evaluations on the vote would have systematically changed as a result of the election outcome.

If we just rely on an inspection of ‘gross’ leader effects on the vote (intention before the election, recall thereafter) as they are available from the *Politibarometer* surveys of the *Forschungsgruppe Wahlen*, this is what we find (Figure 5). Evaluations of the incumbent, Helmut Kohl, on CDU/CSU vote intentions in the months before the election were up at about  $r=.6$ , while evaluations of the defeated former chancellor on the CDU/CSU vote dropped to  $r=.46$ . The pattern for the challenger/winner Gerhard Schröder is very similar, although on a somewhat lower level.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 5

Gross Effects of Leader Evaluations on the Vote:  
Results from Pre- and Post-electoral Surveys in 1998



Note: Displayed are bi-variate correlation coefficients (Pearson) \* 100. Source: Politibarometer, ZA-Nr. 3160; only West German samples are analysed.

What is the result of all this? First, it seems likely that the ‘true’ leader effects on the vote in 1998 are higher than those we estimated on the basis of a post-election survey. Secondly, the optimal design to study leader effects on vote choice might be to rely on vote recall as a measure of voting behaviour on the one hand and pre-electoral leader evaluations which are collected as close as possible to the time when most voters arrive at their voting decision on the other hand. In short: party vote – or relative party preferences for that matter – should be measured after the election, leader evaluations immediately before the election.

## 6. Summary

We started off by an effort to put leader effects on the vote in a conceptual framework: they are meant to affect party choice directly and indirectly by contributing – together with other factors – to voters’ competence attributions towards political parties. Rather than trying to estimate the full causal model as illustrated in Figure 1 for a few elections, we decided to focus in this paper on the direct link between leader evaluations in as complete as possible a diachronic perspective.

We continued by reviewing the literature on the question of why leader effects on the vote ‘should have increased’. There are mainly two arguments: one points to the fact that party attachments are declining in many places, and the other to the growing personalisation of politics in general and of political communication in particular. A review of another literature revealed that earlier research typically found no secular increase in the effects of political leaders on the German vote.

This might be due to the fact that up until very recently not much research has been done in this field. However, methodological intricacies could also have caused these nil returns. We therefore addressed the question of how one can analyse vote choices in multiparty systems in such a way that voters’ preferences towards and evaluations of the different parties, their policy record and their candidates can be simultaneously taken into account. Such a strategy is described and the empirical work has been based upon it.

Turning from procedure to findings, we have four very basic insights to offer. It should be realised that they originate from a parliamentary system of government based on a multi-party system of moderate pluralism (Sartori 1976) and with some tradition of minimum-winning government coalitions. These insights might not hold in other contexts, and future research must explore how institutional and cultural factors intervene into and impact on the relationship between leader evaluations and vote choices.

The first insight is big and small parties. Leaders of big parties are both more positively evaluated and have a larger impact ('gross' and 'net') on party preferences and vote choices. There are exceptions to this rule, which boil down to dramatic actions of small parties' leaders such as government coalition break-ups. This is not to say, however, that big parties' leaders enjoy their advantage independently of their individual record. We found signs that (big parties') political leaders' evaluations are declining as a function of increasing tenure.

The second is about leader evaluations (their 'popularity') and party preferences and the vote. We found that very popular leaders – like Willy Brandt in 1972 or Helmut Kohl in 1990 – are also very attractive electorally. This holds for all parties with regard to relative party preferences. The relationship between popularity and the vote is less clear. It seems that leader evaluations do not translate as easily to the vote than they do with regard to relative party preference scores.

The third is about trends over time. It is true that every election is particular. Having said that, however, our analysis of four decades of German electoral behaviour identifies indications of a positive trend in leader effects on party preferences ('gross analysis') and on the vote ('net analysis'). We have seen no trend pointing in the reverse direction indicating declining leader effects. It should be noted though that not everything is 'secular increase' and that there are clear seasonal steps. After 1983, in particular, things have become more variegated. Reasons for this might well be very 'local': a not too popular chancellor, rather weak opponents from the major opposition party, a changing party system, and perhaps not least important: a new generation of political leaders that is deprived of the charms of a previous life outside of politics (Wildenmann 1989).

Our fourth and final insight is about methods. It is again quite simple: methods matter. Would we have looked just in party specific trends, we would be less certain about the moderate increase which we identify in leader effects on German voting behaviour. Would we have looked in pre-electoral surveys only, we would have arrived at a still different conclusion. All this underlines the need to talk about methods and strategies of analyses – ideally *before* one talks about substantive conclusions.

## 7. Notes

<sup>1</sup> This draft paper is part of an ongoing research effort on the *Changing Impact of Political Leaders on the Vote* which involves researchers from altogether eight nations: André Blais, Elisabeth Gigendil, Richard Nadeau, and Neil Nevitte from Canada; Dieter Ohr and Hermann Schmitt from Germany; Kees Aarts from the Netherlands; Bernt Aardal from Norway; Edurne Uriate and Francesco Llera from Spain; Sören Holmberg and Hendrik Oskarson from Sweden; and Martin Wattenberg from the US. The preparation of the German data file profited from valuable research assistance provided by Kai Mühleck and Petra Streitz.

<sup>2</sup> When we presented a rough draft of this paper at a research meeting in Enschede last May, Sören Holmberg half-jokingly suggested that growing leader effects on the vote in Germany are ‘scary business’.

<sup>3</sup> Political leaders – in the form of constituency candidates – were in the very centre of historically earlier models of political representation like the pre-democratic *Republican Model* of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the pre-party democracy *Radical Model* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Finer 1985).

<sup>4</sup> This is where the ubiquitous survey instruments on trust in political leaders, their knowledge about ordinary peoples’ concerns, their honesty etc. become relevant not only (and probably not even primarily) for the assessment of the legitimacy of democratic regimes (e.g. Listhaug 1995, Mayer 2000), but also for empirical analyses of the effectiveness of the representative process.

<sup>5</sup> Due to the ongoing process of regional integration in Europe, this is probably most clearly visible in the multi-level policy of the European Union (e.g. König, Rieger & Schmitt 1996).

<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that political issues are neglected in television. However, this medium makes it very difficult to disentangle the content of communication - political issues - and its source – political leaders.

<sup>7</sup> Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann recently gave a pre-electoral survey to the Cologne Archive which covers to some degree this important first election after World War I.

<sup>8</sup> In the framework of the present study a party is „relevant“ if it managed to win, in the election under study, five or more percent of the valid vote. All other parties are disregarded, lumped together in an “other party” category, etc. Only evaluations of and preferences towards relevant parties are considered in the stacked data analysis to which we turn later.

<sup>9</sup> Additional variables are measures of political involvement (frequency of political discussion, interest in politics, TV news consumption), of the timing of party choice, and of ideological orientations (left-right self and party placements). Core and additional variables have been harmonised with respect to labels and codes and integrated in one large data file. A number of technical (study ID, respondent ID, weights, etc.) and context variables (like party size and governmental role) were harmonised and integrated as well.

<sup>10</sup> The data base consists of the following individual studies: ZA 0057 for 1961; ZA 0341 for 1965; ZA 0426 for 1969; ZA 0635 for 1972; ZA 0823 for 1976; ZA 1053 for 1980; ZA 1276 for 1983; ZA 1536 for 1987; ZA 1919 for 1990; ZA 2601 for 1994; and ZA 3073 for 1998. The post-electoral wave has been analysed in the case of campaign panel studies.

<sup>11</sup> This leaves room for tactical voters who vote for a second preference in order not to spoil their vote altogether. This seems to be a rather prominent feature of British voting behaviour (e.g. Fisher 2000), but tactical voting is certainly not restricted to plurality systems.

<sup>12</sup> The pioneer study for this approach is Van der Eijk, Franklin, et al. (1996). Also instructive are Oppenheim (1995), Schmitt (1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b), Tillie (1995), Van der Eijk, Franklin & van der Brug (1999).

<sup>13</sup> With a metric, or at least quasi-metric dependent variable such as party preference the Hierarchical Linear Model (Bryk & Raudenbush 1992; Snijders & Bosker 1999) would be the adequate statistical model. For dichotomous vote choice a logit specification of the multi-level model would be appropriate. Both variants of the multi-level model can be estimated with programmes such as HLM or Mln.

<sup>14</sup> Party competence measures are only included in about half of the election studies analysed. What is worse is that – in contrast to other central concepts – no “standard” way of asking this emerged over the course of studies. The various operationalisations are hardly equivalent.

<sup>15</sup> In addition to this  $\Delta R^2$  – strategy, concurrent multiple regressions were run for both party preferences (OLS) and the vote (logistic regressions), and unstandardised regression coefficients were determined. Results do not differ from those obtained with the  $\Delta R^2$  strategy, and we can therefore restrict our presentation to the latter.

<sup>16</sup> It was Genscher who, out of fears for electoral setbacks for the FDP and together with Lambsdorff and others, engineered the break of the social-liberal coalition government and re-established a Christian-liberal government.

<sup>17</sup> In the history of the Federal Republic, almost all incumbent chancellors stood for re-election. It is therefore mostly the major opposition party which is confronted with the problem of selecting a chancellor candidate. While recruitment patterns vary somewhat between the two parties and over time, there is no doubt that choosing the chancellor candidate is mostly an elite bargain. Primaries as a selection tool are occasionally discussed but hardly used (Nick 1992). For a candidate from the major opposition party, incumbency and renewed electoral success as head of one of the *Laender* governments seems to be a *conditio sine qua non*. Party leaders are said to have a prerogative. The formal election at a national party congress is usually of a more acclamatory nature.

<sup>18</sup> The strategy which is applied to determine social-structural effects on the vote is described in some detail in Schmitt (2000a). Remember that indicators of party competence attributions are not included in many studies and that those that are available are hardly comparable.

<sup>19</sup> Think of, e.g., a traditional CDU voter who voted FDP in 1980 because he could not support the candidature of Franz-Josef Strauß.

<sup>20</sup> Vote recall is known to be the more accurate the closer a survey is placed after the election. It may be distorted, particularly after close races and a triumphant victory, when everybody ‘remembers’ to have contributed to the victory and wants to be part of it (‘bandwagon effects’). Overall, however, vote recall is the most reliable indicator of actual electoral behaviour that survey research has to offer.

<sup>21</sup> Between the expression of a voting intention in a pre-election survey and the behavioural act on election day a great deal can happen: voters may be activated, converted, or reinforced during the election campaign; see e.g. Lazarsfeld et al. 1948; Finkel 1993.

<sup>22</sup> The over-estimation might be the greater the larger the temporal distance between a pre-election survey and the forthcoming election is and hence, the less crystallized vote intentions are.

<sup>23</sup> For about a handful German elections, such a design can be estimated based on short-term panel surveys (so-called campaign panels). This of course hinders cross-temporal comparisons.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that this sudden drop of leader effects on the vote is not reflected in similar drops of these leaders popularity.

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