

Making 'Party Identification' More Versatile: Operationalising the concept for the multiparty setting

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Abstract

The conventional operationalisation of the concept of party identification is not appropriate for the multiparty setting. I offer new measures that facilitate multiple, and negative as well as positive, identities. Using survey evidence from Northern Ireland, these new measures are validated in a number of ways and their role in a comprehensive model of voting is illustrated.

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1. Introduction

Newly emerging democracies are typically adopting western European style multiparty parliamentary systems rather than US style two-party presidential systems. This increase in the importance of the multiparty context places even greater onus on comparative political analysts to develop and use concepts that are appropriate for the multiparty setting. In the field of comparative electoral analysis one key concept is that of 'party identification' (Campbell *et al.* 1960) and there is much debate as to whether the concept can be meaningfully exported from the two-party US context, in which it was originally elaborated and applied, to the multiparty setting. This paper seeks to make a methodological contribution to this debate. Using evidence from the multiparty case of Northern Ireland, I elaborate a new operationalisation of party identification which allows for a variety of types of identification. Unlike the measure that Campbell *et al.* applied to the US case (variations of which have been used in many national election studies and cross-national research projects), the new measures offered here facilitate multiple identities, and negative as well as positive identities, and are thus much more plausibly applicable to the multiparty setting.

Section 2 briefly defines party identification, highlights key limitations of the conventional measure, and offers a new battery of survey items to operationalise the concept in a more versatile way. Section 3 seeks to validate the new measures by addressing the following questions: to what extent do multiple, and negative as well as positive, identities actually exist?; are the new measures monotonically related to variables that party identification theory is

supposed to predict?; are the new measures significant predictors over and above the predictive power of the conventional measure of party identification? Section 4 then illustrates the new operationalisation of party identification at work in a model of voting in the multiparty setting. I show how the new measures of party identification, which at first sight might appear somewhat cumbersome, can easily be incorporated into a comprehensive model of voting by using ‘party utilities’ as the dependent variable and a stacked data matrix research design.¹ This approach explicitly disentangles the notions of utility and choice and uses as the dependent variable respondents’ directly measured party preferences (utilities). Essentially, the model that is elaborated addresses the question: to what extent does variation in the level of identification that voters have with each of the parties in the system account for the variation in the levels of electoral utility that voters derive from each party in the system (i.e. their propensity to vote for each party in the system). Finally, I discuss the implications of the findings for further research.

2. A new way of measuring party identification

The point of departure is the seminal discussion of party identification in *The American Voter* (Campbell *et al.*, 1960). The authors’ interest is in the long term stability of party support and they use the notion of party identification – citizens’ general and enduring psychological orientations towards the parties in the system – as a way of explaining this stability. They define party identification as follows (pp121-2):

In characterising the relation of individual to party as a psychological identification we invoke a concept that has played an important if somewhat varied role in psychological theories of the relation of individual to individual or of individual to group. We use the concept here to characterise the individual’s affective orientation to an important group-object in his environment. Both reference group theory and small-group studies of influence have converged upon the attracting or repelling quality of the group as the generalized dimension most critical in defining the individual-group relationship, and it is this dimension that we will call identification. In the present chapter the political party serves as the group toward which the individual may develop an identification, positive or negative, of some degree of intensity.

Some key aspects of this definition should be highlighted. The relationship between individuals and parties is psychological rather than behavioural. Thus, identification is not based on actions such as voting behaviour (although identification is expected to be strongly related to voting behaviour). Rather, identification is subjective and self-defined. Also, identification may be either 'positive' or 'negative', with individuals finding certain parties attractive and other parties repellent. Further, identity is not dichotomous but continuous: there is 'some degree of intensity'² to which individuals relate to certain parties positively and certain other parties negatively. This general definition certainly appears to be a very broad one, allowing for much variation in the way in which individuals relate to parties.³ However, the actual way in which this general concept is applied to the two-party US case by Campbell *et al.* (1960) is quite narrow. They ask respondents:

'Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?' Respondents identifying with one of the two parties are then asked: 'Would you call yourself a strong Democrat (or Republican) or a not very strong Democrat (or Republican)?' Respondents who identify as Independents in the initial question are asked: 'Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?'⁴

Weisberg notes that analyses of party identification in the US based on this measure 'have assumed that people are Republicans or Democrats or Independents, but not more than one of the above' (1999, p727). Weisberg argues that this Campbell *et al.* measure represents quite a limited operationalisation of their general concept of party identification as it does not facilitate the holding of multiple identities by individuals:

The American Voter did treat the concept of party identification in very broad terms, but the traditional survey questions do not make allowance for the possibility of multiple identification. Rather than testing for such a possibility, they assume it out of existence. (1980, p36)

Van der Eijk and Niemoller (1983) shared Weisberg's concern. In the context of the multiparty Dutch system, they explored the possibility of multiple (positive) party identities.⁵ It

emerged that approximately one third of all respondents (and approximately half of all identifiers) reported that they identified with more than one political party. Van der Eijk and Neimoller concluded that ‘the assumption that voters identify with only one party (if they do so at all) turns out to be false when subjected to an empirical test in the Netherlands’ (p338). Schmitt (2002) notes that since the van der Eijk and Niemoller analysis very little attention has been given to the notion of multiple party identities. On the basis of a much more conservative question wording, that did not explicitly ask about identifying with more than one party but rather left it to the respondent to volunteer multiple identities, Schmitt found that an average of 10 percent of respondents – in the 14 European countries studied – identified with more than one party. Schmitt states that ‘multiple party identifications are indeed a relevant aspect of partisanship. Noteworthy proportions of national electorates identify with more than one political party’ (p19).⁶

The basic point to emphasise here is that in party systems with several parties there are likely to be a number of parties that are not very dissimilar to each other and so ‘such multiple identification should not be surprising’ (Weisberg 1999, p727).⁷ Weisberg notes, for example, that people who identified with one of the Dutch Calvinist parties may very well also have identified with the other Dutch Calvinist party. He concludes that ‘there is enough variation in party systems around the world to expect many variations like this in particular countries’ (p727).

The particular case that is focused on in this paper (Northern Ireland) is, as well as being a multiparty system, also a deeply divided society. In such a context, there is likely to be more than a single party representing each side of ‘the divide’. One might thus have especially strong expectations of finding a sizeable number of voters who have multiple party identities. There are two main ‘Protestant’ (or ‘Unionist’) parties in Northern Ireland – the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) – and two main ‘Catholic’ (or ‘Nationalist’) parties, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and Sinn Fein (SF). It would indeed not be surprising at all if many citizens identified, to a greater or lesser extent, with both of the parties on ‘their side’ of the divide.⁸ If this expectation were not met – in other words, if it emerges from our

empirical investigation that there is, in fact, little evidence for multiple identities in the particular case of Northern Ireland – then this would cast quite some doubt on the usefulness of the concept of multiple party identities in other multiparty societies.⁹

In addition to arguing that the original measure of party identification prohibited multiple identities, analysts have also noted that it prohibited negative identities. Despite the emphasis in the original definition on both the negative/repellent and positive/attractive components of party identification, almost all analyses using the concept of party identification have focused on positive identification only. Maggiotto and Pierson (1977), however, sought to address what they saw as this ‘gap between the concept [of party identification] and the techniques used to measure it’ (p746). They argued that identification should incorporate attitudes to the opposition party as well as to the favoured party. The traditional measure of party identification, Maggiotto and Pierson suggested, taps positive identification only and they argue for ‘the addition of partisan hostility, an equally stable, long term affect’ (p765). Such an addition, the authors argue, increases our understanding of why certain voters are more likely than others to defect from their favoured party. Maggiotto and Pierson thus used measures that captured attitudes to both of the two main US parties.

In a similar vein, Richardson, in his discussion of the European context, states that partisanship may be ‘more appropriately considered a choice of a party within the context of the alternatives existing within a particular party system at a particular time’ and that, therefore, negative ‘hostility to parties other than favoured ones may be as important behaviourally as positive ties to liked parties’ (1991 p759). Richardson argues that because European party systems arose out of cleavage politics – deep divisions along religious, class or ethnic lines (Lipset and Rokkan 1967) – ‘interparty hostility may be a common component of European partisanship alongside positive feelings toward preferred parties’ (p761) and he thus advocates tapping levels of partisanship with all parties in the system.¹⁰

The notion of negative partisanship is likely to be particularly useful in the context of a deeply divided society. Northern Ireland is a classic case of profound cleavage politics at work. It is thus plausible that some citizens may be very hostile to a party or parties on the other side of ‘the divide’. Specifically, a great deal of unionist hostility is likely to be directed at the more extreme of the two nationalist parties (Sinn Fein). Similarly, many nationalists are likely to harbour a great deal of antipathy to the more hardline of the two unionist parties – the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). For some citizens, identifying strongly with one party on one side of the divide may be closely intertwined with identifying strongly against a party on the other side of the divide.¹¹ Again, as with the notion of multiple party identities, one has fairly strong expectations of observing negative partisanship in Northern Ireland. If negative partisanship is not observed in this case, then doubt may be cast of the widespread usefulness of the notion.

<FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE>

On the basis of these considerations relating to the possibility of multiple party identities, and negative and positive identities, I offer a battery of survey items – see Figure 1 – to measure party identification.¹² These questions have a number of novel elements. Respondents are asked about each party in turn – twice. First, they are asked to indicate the extent to which they think of themselves as either supportive of, or opposed to, each party. Second, they are asked to indicate the extent to which they feel close to, or distant from, each party. The ‘think of yourself’ wording is chosen as it is very similar to that used in the original measure of the concept. The ‘feel close to’ wording is used as closeness is used in the original measure and the notion of ‘feeling’ seems very much in line with the original definition of identification as an ‘affective’ orientation. Two survey questions are used for each party because for latent abstract concepts – such as party identification – the psychometric literature advocates a multi-item measurement approach.¹³ Here,

a respondent's level of identification with each party is calculated by summing the respondents responses to both of the identification questions relating to that party.

As well as being multi-item measures, these questions are also novel in that, following the above discussion, respondents may indicate – in relation to each party – a negative, neutral or positive identity. Also, because all parties are asked about, the respondent is free to report multiple identities. Importantly, the questions also emphasise two features that are fundamental to party identification theory. Party identification is self-reported; it is the respondent's subjective assessment of which party or parties they identify with, and the extent to which they identify with them, that is important (Campbell *et al.* 1960; Converse and Pierce 1985; Bartle 2003). Also, because it is a general and enduring orientation that is being tapped, the long term time horizon is emphasised. The phrases 'generally speaking' and 'usually' are used to prompt long term identification. In order to firmly emphasise the long term nature of identification the phrases are mentioned several times in the question and are also printed on the show cards (Converse and Pierce 1985; Bartle 2003; Blais *et al.* 2001; Timpone and Neely 1997).¹⁴

3. Validating the measures

The usefulness of these suggested new measures is now examined. First, the extent to which respondents do indeed have multiple identities, and negative as well as positive identities, is explored. Second, the extent to which the measures are monotonically related to variables of interest is assessed. Third, the extent to which the measures play a role in predicting relevant variables, whilst controlling for the affect of the conventional measure of party identification, is investigated.

3.1 How prevalent are 'multiple' and 'negative' identities?

I begin by creating, for each party, a variable that represents the extent to which respondents positively or negatively identify with that party. As noted, this variable is the sum of the

responses to the ‘feel close to’ and the ‘think of yourself as a supporter of’ questions (and consists of a 13 point scale, generated to run from negative to positive). The distributions of each of the resulting four scales – one for each of the four political parties – is presented in Figure 2. This shows that for each party, a significant proportion of respondents identify relatively positively with the party, a significant proportion identify relatively negatively with the party and a significant proportion do not identify either negatively or positively with the party. Of particular note is the high proportion of respondents who strongly negatively identify with Sinn Fein (34 percent). Sinn Fein also attract the lowest proportion of respondents positioned at the most neutral point on the scale (20 percent).¹⁵

<FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE>

For the purposes of examining possible multiple identities, I trichotomise each scale: 1-3 (negative identification), 4-10 (neutral), and 11-13 (positive identification).¹⁶ Table 1 explores whether respondents on each side of the divide (Catholics and Protestants) positively identify with more than one of ‘their’ parties and whether they negatively identify with any (or both) of the ‘other side’s’ parties. Some clear patterns emerge. A similar proportion of each community has multiple (positive) identities. Eighteen percent of Catholics identify positively with both of the ‘Catholic’ parties and 16 percent of Protestants identify with both of the ‘Protestant’ parties. Also, the proportion of each community identifying with neither of ‘their’ parties is not very dissimilar – 37 percent for Catholics and 44 percent for Protestants. The two communities are very different, however, when one looks at negative identification. Only 23 percent of Catholics negatively identify with both Protestant parties while half of Protestants identify negatively with both Catholic parties.

<TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

In terms of respondents who negatively identify with one of the parties from the ‘other’ community, the nature of this negative identity is similar in both communities. The hostility of each community is very clearly directed at the more extreme of the two ‘other’ parties. For example, almost one third of Catholics are uniquely hostile to the DUP (i.e. they negatively identify with the DUP but do not negatively identify with the UUP). In sharp contrast, only two percent of Catholics focus their hostility only on the UUP. Similarly, only one percent of Protestants negatively identify with the SDLP but not with SF, whilst over a quarter of Protestants negatively identify with SF only.

Overall, there is evidence of positive and negative identifications, and multiple identifications (both multiple positive and multiple negative identifications). Interestingly, there is more hostile or negative identification than there is positive identification, and this is particularly the case for Protestants, suggesting that for Protestants what you are against may be more important than what you are for.

3.2 Monotonic nature of the new measures

One way in which the validity of various party identification measures has been tested in previous research is by exploring the extent to which the different measures are linearly – or monotonically – associated with variables that party identification theory is supposed to predict (Petrocik 1974; Niemi *et al.* 1987; Keith *et al.* 1986; Blais *et al.* 2001). If intrasitivities are evident – in other words, if the association is non-monotonic – doubt may be cast on the validity of the measures. Blais *et al.* (2001), for example, use the relationship between party identification and party and leader ratings to explore the validity of various measures of identification. They describe their approach as follows:

... there is no clear expectation of the strength of the relationship between party identification and party and leader ratings ... There is an expectation about the shape of that relationship: the more strongly one identifies with a party, the more

positive the rating of the party and its leader. In other words, the relationship should be monotonic. (2001, p13, emphasis in original)

Here, I test whether the suggested new measures of party identification are monotonically related to party preferences, or at least more clearly monotonically related to party preferences than the conventional identification measure is. The ‘conventional’ measure of party identification that was included in the survey analysed in this paper was as follows:

Do you usually think of yourself as close to a party? If so, which party? Do you feel very close, fairly close or merely a sympathiser?¹⁷

The shape of the relationship between the party identification measures – i.e. both the new measures and the conventional measure – and vote intention in the Northern Ireland Assembly elections is now explored. In relation to the suggested new measures, I begin by collapsing the 13 point identification scale for each party into four categories – 12-13 (which I label ‘very strong positive identifier’), 10-11 (‘fairly strong positive identifier’), 8-9 (‘slightly strong positive identifier’), 1-7 (‘neutral or negative identifier’). For each of the four political parties, the new measures of identification are monotonically related to vote intention (see top half of Table 2). For example, the proportion of respondents indicating that they would vote for the DUP steadily – linearly – declines from 71 percent of those who very strongly positively identify with the DUP, through to 51 percent of those who fairly strongly positively identify with the party, 22 percent of those who only slightly positively identify with the party, down to only two percent of those who either are neutral about, or negatively identify with, the party. Similar monotonic declines are also evident for the other three parties. However, for the conventional measure of party identification, the picture is not so clear (see bottom half of Table 2). The relationship between party identification and vote intention is actually non-monotonic for the DUP and UUP. For example, 76 percent of ‘mere sympathisers’ with the UUP indicate an

intention to vote for the UUP while only 57 percent of ‘fairly close’ identifiers report an intention to do so.

<TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE>

In a further exploration of the shape of the relationship between the (convention and new) identification measures and voting, I use respondents’ reported propensities to vote for each of the main political parties. Specifically, respondents are asked:

We have a number of parties in Northern Ireland each of which would like to get your vote. How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties? Please tick the numbers on the scale below to indicate your views, where ‘1’ means ‘not at all probable’ and ‘10’ means ‘very probable’. How probable is it that you will ever vote for [each party is asked in turn]?

In relation to the new measures of identification, I begin by collapsing the 13 point identification scale for each party into seven categories – 12-13 (which I label ‘very strong positive identifier’), 10-11 (‘fairly strong positive identifier’), 8-9 (‘slightly strong positive identifier’), 7 (‘neutral’), 5-6 (‘slightly strong negative identifier’), 3-4 (‘fairly strong negative identifier’), and 1-2 (‘very strong negative identifier’). Seven categories are used so that there are three ‘positive’ categories that are comparable to the three positive conventional categories (‘very close’, ‘fairly close’ and ‘merely a sympathiser’). Additionally, one can explore whether the entire structure of the new measures – the full seven categories, just described, going from most positive to most negative – is monotonically associated with vote preference.¹⁸ It emerges – see Table 3 – that there is a clearly linear relationship, for all seven categories of the new measures, for each of the four parties.

<TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE>

In relation to the conventional measure of identification, a clearly monotonic relationship emerges for Sinn Fein (see Table 4). As one moves from the strongest level of identification ('very close') through to the weakest level of identification ('merely a sympathiser') there is a decline in the mean propensity to vote for Sinn Fein (declining from 10.0 to 9.2 to 8.2) and there is a low mean score of 2.8 for those who do not identify with the party at all. For the other three parties, however, the relationship is non-monotonic, most strikingly so for the SDLP.

<TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE>

Overall, these results are in line with many previous studies that have identified intransitivity-related validity problems with conventionally structured party identification questions (Petrocik 1974; Niemi *et al.* 1987; Keith *et al.* 1986; Blais *et al.* 2001). The new measures emerge as more consistently monotonically related to variables of interest than the conventional measure is.

3.3 Predictive capacity of the new measures

Another way of assessing the validity of the new identification measures is to test whether they act as predictors of relevant variables. More precisely, can the suggested new measures improve upon the predictive capacity of the conventional measure of identification? I investigate whether the new measures are significant predictors of propensity to vote for given parties, while controlling for the predictive capacity of the conventional measure. It emerges that identification (using the conventional measure) with a particular party is a statistically significant predictor of propensity to vote for that party (see Table 5). Also, even when controlling for the conventional measure, the new measure of identification with that party is a very strong predictor of propensity to vote for that party. Furthermore, for three of the four parties, variation in the extent to which respondents identify with other parties also plays a role. For example, in terms of propensity to

vote for the more nationalist of the two nationalist parties (Sinn Fein), negative identification with the more unionist of the two unionist parties (the DUP) is a significant predictor. Similarly, hostility to Sinn Fein is, controlling for other factors, a significant predictor of one's propensity to vote for the DUP. Hostility to Sinn Fein is also a significant predictor of support for the UUP.

<TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE>

Overall, it is clear that these new party identification measures are useful predictors of voting, adding information over and above that provided by the conventional measure. Identification with a party (using the new measures) predicts propensity to vote for that party while controlling for the relationship between the conventional measure of identity and propensity to vote. Also, identification with other parties predicts propensity to vote for a given party controlling for both the new measure of identification with the given party and the conventional measure of identification.

4. The new measures in a model of voting

In a model of voting, an analyst may use the concept of party identification in a number of ways. Some analysts may be interested in the direct impact of party identification on voting. Others may be interested in the extent to which party identification accounts for (or mediates) prior factors (such as social characteristics). Still others may be interested in the impact on voting – controlling for party identification – of variables more proximate to voting (such as party leader evaluation). This paper makes no strong claims about exactly where to place party identification in one's multi-stage model of voting. However, what it does now seek to do is offer a way of using the proposed new measures of party identification as independent variables, irrespective of exactly where in the causal chain one imagines party identification to be.

Crucially, I argue that when using party identification to explain voting behaviour in a multiparty system there are important advantages to using ‘party utilities’ (also called ‘electoral utilities’) rather than ‘party choice’ as the dependent variable. The party utilities approach is explicitly based on a Downsian two-stage model of voting (Downs 1957). Specifically, at stage 1 a voter calculates, for each party on offer, the electoral utility that she would derive from voting for that party. At stage 2 she votes for the party from which she derives the most utility. Standard models of voting – which use party choice as the dependent variable in a multinomial logit (or similar) research design – focus directly on stage 2 of this process. They explore differences between voters who choose party A, voters who choose party B, voters who choose party C, and so on. They use information relating to which party each respondent actually voted for as the dependent variable. What this conventional approach crucially does not do is directly measure the level of utility that voters derive from each party. In multiparty systems, it is likely that many voters have a nuanced set of preferences over the parties on offer.¹⁹ In the party utilities approach, it is variation in voters’ preferences over the full set of parties (i.e. the electoral utilities that voters derive from each party in the system) that one wishes to explain.²⁰ The notion of electoral utilities has been operationalised by van der Eijk and his colleagues by using the ‘party utilities’ (or ‘propensity to vote’) questions described earlier and used in Tables 3-5. Using these questions gives us information about the preferences of each voter over all the parties in the system (and not merely information about which party the respondent voted for).

I argue that using party utilities (or variation in voters’ preferences over each of the parties in the system) as the dependent variable allows analysts to use the notion of party identification in a more general – and therefore more theoretically interesting – way than is usually used. Typically, an analyst assesses the extent to which respondents’ party identification (or lack of party identification) with party A is a predictor of voters’ choice between parties A through E. Here, I move away from focusing on the relationship between a/ identification with specific parties and b/ voting for specific parties. Instead the question is broadened from the party

specific level to the party system level and what is explored is the relationship between a/ levels of identification with each of the parties in the system and b/ levels of electoral utility derived from each of the parties in the system (or propensity to vote for each of the parties in the system).

This discussion is now illustrated in a model of voting in Northern Ireland. The model offered here is meant as an example to illustrate our methodological and research design discussion rather than being primarily a key substantive contribution to the understanding of Northern Ireland politics. In the particular example used, I explore the extent to which party identification mediates the impact on voting of social characteristics (religious denomination) and national identity. I generate a stacked data matrix in which each respondent/party pairing is a separate case. In this example, each respondent appears four times in the stacked data set, once each for their propensity to vote for each of the four parties. There are three independent variables in the stacked dataset: religion, nationality and party identification. To create the independent variable for – for example – party identification I proceed as follows. First, in the unstacked dataset the four new party identification variables – i.e. the separate variables representing strength of identification with Sinn Fein, SDLP, UUP, and DUP – are used to predict propensity to vote for Sinn Fein, and the predicted values (y-hats) are saved. Then the same four variables are used to predict propensity to vote for the SDLP, and the predicted values are saved. And so on for the UUP and the DUP. The resulting saved variables are simply transformations of the original independent variables and may now be included in the stacked data matrix. Similar procedures are followed for the other two independent variables (religion membership and national identity).²¹

<TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE>

A single model based on the stacked dataset is reported in Table 6. This model addresses a quite general, or broadly defined, question: to what extent does variation in levels of

identification with each party in the Northern Ireland party system account for the impact of religion and national identity on variation in the electoral utilities that voters derive from each party in the system? In stage 1 of the model it emerges that religion membership and national identity explain 37 percent of the variation in the levels of electoral utility that respondents derive from the parties in the system, with religion membership a somewhat more powerful predictor than nationality. In stage 2 of the model, respondents' levels of identification with each of the parties in the system are introduced as an explanatory factor. It emerges that all of the impact of national identity on electoral utilities is mediated by party identification (the national identity variable loses statistical significance upon the introduction of the party identification variable). The impact of religion (as measured by the size of the coefficient) drops by over half but is still a strong and highly significant predictor. The party identification measure is easily the strongest predictor of all three independent variables and the three explanatory factors in total account for over half of the variation in the levels of utility that respondents derive from the parties. The interesting substantive tale to tell from this brief modelling exercise is that citizens' party identification plays a stronger role in mediating (or accounting for) the effect of national identity on vote than it does in mediating the effect of religion membership on vote. The key point to emphasise is that this very concise model may be contrasted with the much more ungainly model, laden down with a vast array of party-specific coefficients, that would have to be presented if the conventional party choice approach was adopted and the conventional measure of identification was used. Both in terms of the appropriateness of the research design and presentational elegance this way of using party identification in a model of voting has key advantages.

Furthermore, this approach also has advantages in comparative analysis. Imagine, for example, that one was analysing the influence of party identification on voting for all of Europe. One would begin by, as described above, creating a stacked data set for each individual country. One could then stack on top of each other these (country specific) stacked datasets and run a single analysis for all of Europe yielding a single co-efficient for the impact of variation in levels

of identification on variation in electoral utilities. As noted earlier, party identification could be used as a key predictor in itself, or as a control variable in a model that sought to tease out the impact of possible predictors such as economic factors or leader evaluation factors. Or an analyst might wish to explore voter heterogeneity in the relationship between party identification and voting and could, to address this, include in a single pan-European model a range of party characteristics, and party system characteristics. In a single analysis, questions such as the following could be simultaneously addressed: is the relationship between party identification and voting (i.e. party utilities) stronger for certain types of parties (older parties, bigger parties or whatever); is the relationship stronger in certain systems (such as highly divided systems with deep cleavage politics); is it stronger for certain types of voters (with particular levels of political sophistication)?

5. Conclusion

The aim here has been to focus on a single case in order to generate improvements in the operationalisation of a key concept in comparative electoral behaviour. Northern Ireland was focused on, not because of an interest in the politics of that country *per se*, but because Northern Ireland provides a challenging context in which to think through how one should put into effect the concept of party identification. Northern Ireland has a multiparty system and it is this feature that throws into stark relief the narrowness of the conventional approach to measuring and utilising party identification. Given, as noted earlier, that the trend for newly emerging democracies is to follow the multiparty parliamentary systems of western Europe rather than the two-party US presidential system, it is vital that the important concept of party identification can apply to the multiparty case. With a range of parties in a system, multiple identities, as well as positive and negative identities, are likely and may be key facets of the relationship between individuals and parties. Thus, wider applications of the measures offered here may yield interesting insights into voter-party relations in the multiparty setting.

ENDNOTES

¹ On the advantages of using this kind of dependent variable in studies of voting behaviour see, for example, van der Eijk and Franklin (1996), van der Brug *et al.* (2000), van der Eijk (2002), van der Brug and Fennema (2003), van der Brug *et al.* (2005), van der Eijk *et al.* (forthcoming), van der Brug *et al.* (forthcoming).

² Campbell *et al.* discuss party identification in terms of a ‘continuum’: ‘we use the word “continuum” because we suppose that party identification is not simply a dichotomy but has a wide range of intensities in each partisan direction’ (1960, p123).

³ This definition is quite distinct from that later elaborated by, for example, Miller (1991) and Miller and Shanks (1996) who regard identification in a clearly positive and categorical manner rather than in terms of a continuum. They see party identification as similar to religious affiliation: if one does identify with any party, then one identifies with either Party A, Party B (or Party C); similarly if one is religious, then one is either Religion A, Religion B or Religion C. One might think of being a football fan in the same way: a fan positively identifies with a single team (Leeds United, Chelsea or whoever). In contrast, the original Campbell *et al.* definition is followed in this paper as it allows for multiple, and positive as well as negative identities, and is thus more suitable for the multiparty setting. It should be noted that different definitions of the concept of party identification are neither ‘right’ nor ‘wrong’, merely more or less useful.

⁴ This question, with slight variation, has been asked in national election studies conducted in a wide range of countries as well as international surveys such as Eurobarometer, the European Election Study (EES) and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES).

⁵ Each survey respondent was asked: ‘Many people think of themselves as adherents of a certain party, but there are also people who do not. Do you usually think of yourself as an adherent of a certain party?’ If the respondent answered ‘Yes’, s/he was then asked: ‘Of which party? Would you consider yourself to be a convinced adherent of that party or do you consider yourself not to

be a convinced adherent?' If the respondent answered 'No' to the initial question, s/he was asked: 'Is there any party you feel more attracted to than other parties, or not? Which party is that?' Next, in order to tap possible multiple identities, the respondent was asked: 'Are there any other parties to which you feel attracted? Which party (or parties)?'

⁶ Norway emerged as the country with most multiple identifiers – 22 percent of all respondents – and the Czech Republic was next with 19 percent.

⁷ The notion of multiple partisanship is also used in a very different way to refer to the phenomenon of voters identifying with different parties at different levels of government. One might, for example, be a Democrat nationally but a Republican or Independent locally. For analyses on the US see, for example, Hadley (1985) and Niemi, Wright and Powell (1987); on Canada, see, for example, Uslaner (1989).

⁸ Consistent with this interpretation is the fact that vote transfers – when the single transferable voting system has been used in elections in Northern Ireland – between the parties on each side of the divide are very strong. See, for example, the discussion by Sydney Elliot at the following:

[Hhttp://www.ireland.com/focus/nielection/comment/1201.htm](http://www.ireland.com/focus/nielection/comment/1201.htm)

⁹ Note that there is, in addition to the parties already mentioned, a relatively small non-confessional party, The Alliance Party.

¹⁰ Crewe (1976), in the British context, tapped citizens' aversion to certain parties as well as their attraction to certain other parties. He identified what he termed 'polarised citizens' who are strongly in favour of their party and strongly opposed to the main other party. Also, in the context of the Republic of Ireland, Marsh (2003) investigated the possibility of negative as well as positive partisanship. On the importance of negative party identification in the context of former communist states see Rose and Mishler (1998).

¹¹ The notion of the importance of negativity is alluded to by Evans and Duffy who characterise the party system in Northern Ireland as one in which ‘support can be as much determined by what you reject ... as by what you actually accept’ (1997, 63).

¹² Given that there are long running time series in many countries using a conventional measure of party identification, many analysts may be reluctant to embrace a ‘new’ measure. However, Maggiotto and Pierson warn against reluctance to deviate from the traditional measure of the party identification concept: ‘one should not confuse the empirical indicators of a concept with the concept itself’ (1977 p747). This is in tune with Miller’s comment on Bartle’s attempts to improve the way identification is measured: ‘I am thoroughly in accord with your emphasis on question wording if it improves the validity of the question – even at the expense of disrupting the time series’ (Bartle 2003, p235, emphasis added by Bartle). Because of its brevity, it makes sense to retain the conventional measure – to preserve the time series – and include additional measures of identification (such as those offered here).

¹³ On the psychometric approach see: Nunally and Bernstein (1994) and Thorndike (1997). On the rarity of following psychometric procedures in political science see: Heath and Martin (1997). In relation to the advantages, in terms of enhanced reliability, of using more than a single item to measure party identification see Green and Schickler (1993). Also, more recent social psychological work on party identification that particularly focuses on social identity theory – to which the reference group theory that Campbell *et al.* were influenced by was a precursor – emphasises the use of multiple measures: see, for example, Greene (1999, 2002, 2004); for a recent review of the concept of social identity see Brewer (2001). Overall, it is quite remarkable that arguably the most important concept used in studies of electoral behaviour – party identification – has in almost all countries and in almost all cases been measured using a single item. While it is true that there are a number questions in the conventional party identification measure, responses to the different parts are usually used in combination ‘effectively giving a

single-item measure (since the individual has only one substantive value on the questions combined)' (Heath and Martin 1997). In contrast, in a multi-item scale the respondent's ultimate position on the generated scale is a function of a series of different scores on different substantive items being summed.

¹⁴ The survey in which these questions were included was the Northern Ireland element of the European Election Study 2004. This was a face to face survey with a nationally representative sample of 1582 respondents, based on a stratified random sample of households with 52 sampling points, and yielding a response rate of 62 percent. Full details of the survey – including the full questionnaire and the dataset are available on the EES homepage: [Hhttp://www.europeanelectionstudies.net/H](http://www.europeanelectionstudies.net/H) Note that the new party identification questions examined in this paper were only asked in Northern Ireland. The sample is very representative in terms of turnout at the European Parliament election: 51.7 percent in reality and 52.5 percent in the sample. In terms of party choice in the election (and in the sample) the distributions were: DUP 32.0% (31.6%), UUP 16.6% (23.6%), SDLP 15.9% (18.8%), SF 26.3% (19.7%), and other 9.3% (6%). Thus, in line with almost every other survey in Northern Ireland, there is an under-reportage of support for Sinn Fein. There is also an over estimation of UUP support and a slight overestimation of SDLP support. Therefore, the data used in this paper is weighted using a 'political weight' to account for these deviations from the real election result.

¹⁵ A conventional party identification question was also included in the survey (see section 3.2 for full wording). In response to the question: 'Do you usually think of yourself as close to a party?', the responses were as follows: Alliance 1.9%, DUP 16.8%, Sinn Fein 13.1%, SDLP 8.5%, UUP 15.0%, other party 3.2%, not close to any party 40.7% and non response 0.8%. Given that the suggested new measures take the form of 13 point scales for each party rather than a dichotomy (identify with this party or not), direct comparison of the distributions of the two measures is not straightforward.

¹⁶ This categorisation is obviously somewhat arbitrary. An alternative approach might be to distinguish between anti- (1-6) neutral (7) and pro- (8-13) on the basis that the neutral point appears quite distinct in each of the graphs in Figure 1. Or, one could make different categorisations for each party on the basis of an inspection of each particular graph. An advantage of the trichotomisation adopted is that relatively strongly positive (and negative) identifiers are identified and the categorisations are constant across parties allowing for the comparisons in Table 1 to be readily interpretable.

¹⁷ This is the European Election Study version of the conventional party identification question and, in terms of basic structure, this question is similar to the standard party identification question asked in many other election studies. First, the existence of an identity is asked (Do you usually think of yourself as close to a party?). Then the direction of identity is assessed (If so, which party?). Finally, the intensity of identity is assessed (Do you feel very close, fairly close...).

¹⁸ I use seven categories here rather than the four used in the upper half of Table 2. This is to avail of the fact that the comparator variable ranges all the way from strongly favourable (10=very probable that the respondent would vote for the party) to strongly unfavourable (1=not at all probable that the respondent would vote for the party).

¹⁹ A voter may despise party A (i.e. derive no electoral utility at all from party A), be moderately hostile towards party B (i.e. derive some electoral utility from party B), be positively disposed towards parties C and D (i.e. derive moderately high levels of electoral utility from both these parties) and be very keen on party E (deriving a very high level of utility from E). Imagine another voter who despises parties B, C, and D, is more or less undecided between parties E and A but slightly prefers E to A. Our two voters both vote for party E (and in a party choice/multinomial logit design would be assigned '1' for E and '0' for all other parties). However, our two voters are very different. There is no way that the first voter would countenance voting for A.

Yet, the second voter almost did vote for A. Both voters voted for the party that they derived the highest level of electoral utility from (party E) but their preferences over the parties varied greatly. In the party utilities approach, it is stage 1 of the 2 stage Downsian process that is concentrated on and the notions of utility and choice are explicitly disentangled and explicitly measured separately.

²⁰ A key assumption made by this approach, that should be empirically justified in the particular case under scrutiny, is that party utilities are very strongly linked to voting behaviour. Analyses of a range of European counties by van der Eijk *et al.* (1996) found that between 93 and 99 percent of respondents actually did vote for the party to whom they gave the highest (or joint highest) score in the party utilities question. In the dataset used in this paper, an almost equally strong link was found between a/the party that a respondent said that they would vote for if there was an election tomorrow and b/the party that they gave the highest score to in the party utilities questions. One hundred percent of Alliance Party supporters gave their highest (or joint highest) utility score to the Alliance Party, 94 percent of DUP supporters gave their highest (or joint highest) utility score to the DUP, and the figures for SF, SDLP and UUP are 92 percent, 90 percent and 89 percent respectively. The overall figure is 92 percent. (In addition to the works cited in endnote 1, for validation of party utilities as a dependent variable see: Tillie, 1995, and Oppenhuis, 1995).

²¹ As described by van der Eijk *et al.* (forthcoming): ‘When stacking the y-hats in the stacked matrix, the actual variable that is added to the stacked matrix is the deviation of the y-hat from its mean for the respective party. This encapsulates all explanatory power of the independent variable and prevents differences between parties in average utility from contaminating the effects of the newly created independent variable.’ Also, note the following about the measurement of the ‘national identity’ variables in the unstacked dataset. First, an ‘Irish identity’ variable is created which is a scale running from 0 (not Irish at all) to 1 (very Irish). The scale is

generated by summing respondents' scores on the following two self-placement scales: "I do not feel Irish at all" versus "I feel very Irish" and "I definitely do not think of myself as Irish" versus "I definitely do think of myself as Irish". A 'British identity' is a scale similarly generated from two further questions in which the term 'British' is used instead of 'Irish'. The national identity scale used in the analysis is the difference between a respondent's position on the British and Irish scales.

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Figure 1
Question Wording

(Think of Yourself as a Supporter of or Opposed to?)

And now a question about each of the political parties, religions and communities in Northern Ireland. We begin with the Alliance party. Some people usually think of themselves as supporters of the Alliance Party and other people usually think of themselves as opposed to the Alliance Party. Still others usually think of themselves as neither supporters of, nor opposed to, the Alliance Party. How about you? Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a very strong supporter of the Alliance Party, a fairly strong supporter of the Alliance Party, a slightly strong supporter of the Alliance Party, neither a supporter of nor opposed to the Alliance Party, slightly opposed to the Alliance Party, fairly opposed to the Alliance Party or very opposed to the Alliance Party?

[Respondent is shown a card with these seven response options on it. At the top of the card is written: Generally speaking, I usually think of myself as...]

And what about the Democratic Unionist Party – the DUP? And Sinn Fein? And the SDLP? And the Ulster Unionist Party? [Also asked about are ‘the Nationalist Community’, ‘the Unionist Community’, ‘Catholics’ and ‘Protestants’]

(Feel Close to or Distant from?)

And now another question about each of the political parties, religions and communities in Northern Ireland. We begin with the Alliance party. Some people usually feel close to the Alliance Party and other people usually feel distant from the Alliance Party. Still others usually feel neither close to nor distant from the Alliance Party. How about you? Generally speaking, do you usually feel very close to the Alliance Party, fairly close to the Alliance Party, slightly close to the Alliance Party, neither close to nor distant from the Alliance Party, slightly distant from the Alliance Party, fairly distant from the Alliance Party or very distant from the Alliance Party?

[Respondent is shown a card with these seven response options on it. At the top of the card is written: Generally speaking, I usually feel...]

And what about the Democratic Unionist Party – the DUP? And Sinn Fein? And the SDLP? And the Ulster Unionist Party? [Also asked about are ‘the Nationalist Community’, ‘the Unionist Community’, ‘Catholics’ and ‘Protestants’]

(Note that in the questionnaire these two batteries of questions are separated by about 30 items on demographics and other matters. Also note that it is just the items relating to the political parties that are analysed in this paper.)

Figure 2
Levels of identification with the main Northern Ireland parties

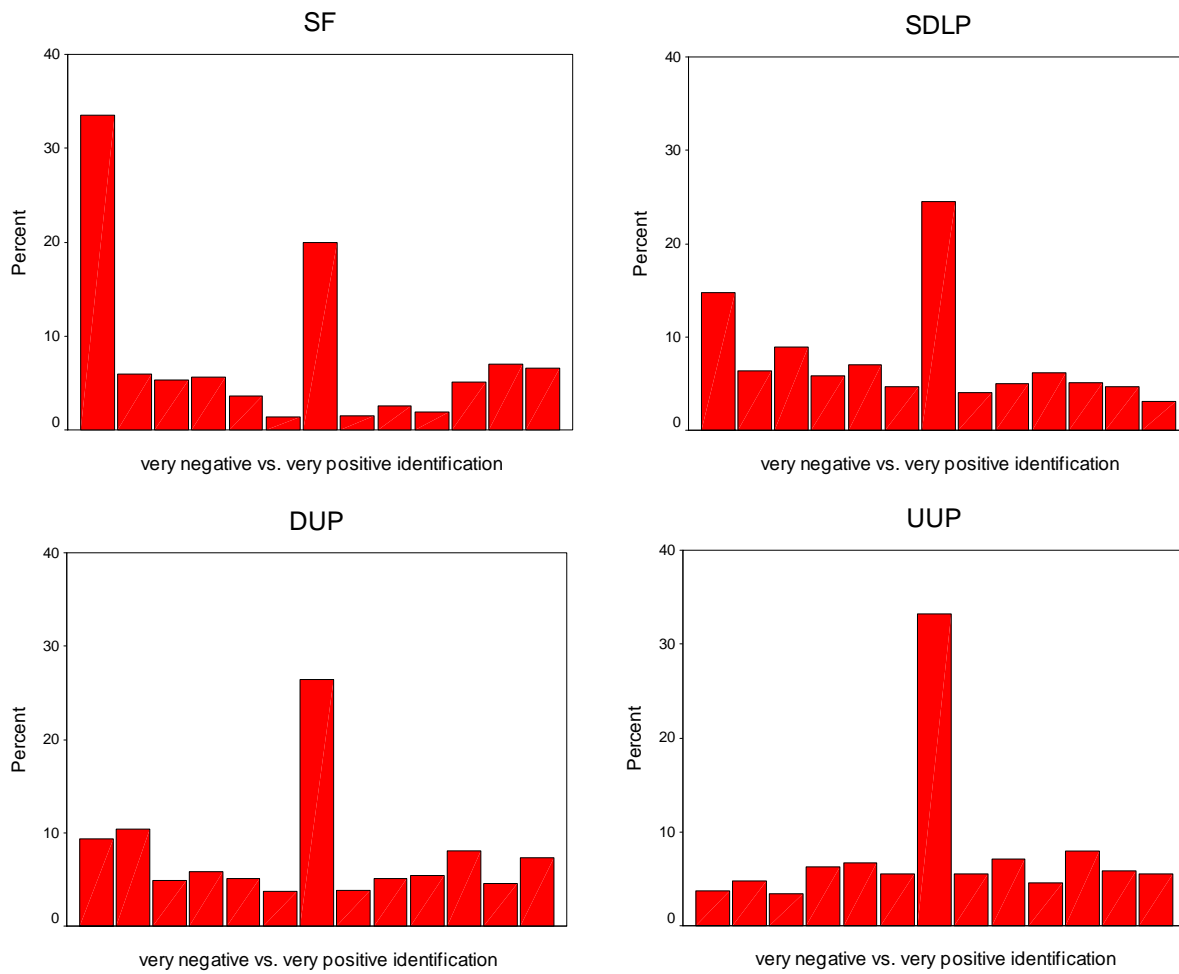


Table 1
Positive, negative and multiple party identifications in Northern Ireland

% of Catholics <i>positively</i> identifying with... (n=537)		% of Protestants <i>positively</i> identifying with... (n=822)	
SDLP but not SF	15.3	UUP but not DUP	19.1
SF but not SDLP	30.3	DUP but not UUP	20.5
Both	17.5	Both	16.0
Neither	<u>37.0</u>	Neither	<u>44.3</u>
	100.1		99.9
% of Catholics <i>negatively</i> identifying with... (n=535)		% of Protestants <i>negatively</i> identifying with... (n=807)	
UUP but not DUP	2.3	SDLP but not SF	0.9
DUP but not UUP	30.0	SF but not SDLP	25.8
Both	23.0	both	49.2
Neither	<u>44.8</u>	Neither	<u>24.3</u>
	100.1		100.2

note 1: percentages are weighted by 'political weight' to match the 2004 European Parliament election results and Ns are unweighted. This applies to all tables and graphs in this paper.

note 2: a respondent 'negatively identifies' with a party if, for that party, the respondent scores 1-3 on the 1-13 party identification scale which runs from 1 'strongly negative' identification with the party to 13 'strong positive identification' with the party. A respondent 'negatively identifies' with a party if, for that party, the respondent scores 11-13 on the 1-13 scale.

Table 2
Relating measures of party identification to voting intention:
Which party would you vote for if there were Assembly elections tomorrow?

NEW MEASURES OF IDENTIFICATION

	DUP	SF	UUP	SDLP
1. Very positive identification with	71.1	76.5	42.9	60.2
2. Fairly positive identification with	50.5	45.9	39.2	36.3
3. slightly positive identification with	21.8	15.6	21.7	7.2
4. neutral or negative	1.5	2.2	1.1	2.4

CONVENTIONAL MEASURE OF IDENTIFICATION

	DUP	SF	UUP	SDLP
1. Very Close identifier	93.0	89.7	75.0**	85.7**
2. Fairly close identifier	70.4	88.3	57.0	72.2
3. Merely a sympathiser	73.1*	45.5*	76.5	69.7
4. No id with the party	6.8	6.2	4.5	5.4

Note: 'very positive identification with' means a position of either 12 or 13 on the 1-13 identification scale, 'fairly positive identification with' means 10 or 11, 'slightly positive identification with' means 8 or 9 and 'neutral or negative' means between 1 and 7

* between 20 and 50 cases, ** less than 20 cases

Table 3
Level of identification with, and propensity to vote for, each party
(using ‘new’ measures of party identification)

	SF	SDLP	UUP	DUP
12/13 (very positive identification with)	9.3	9.1	7.6	8.7
10/11 (fairly positive identification with)	8.0	7.9	7.4	7.9
8/9 (slightly positive identification with)	6.1	5.7	6.2	6.0
7 (neutral)	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.0
5/6 (slightly negative identification with)	2.7	2.8	3.1	2.8
3/4 (fairly negative identification with)	1.8	1.9	2.2	2.1
1/2 (very negative identification with)	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.5

Note: mean scores reported, a higher score indicating a greater propensity to vote for the party in question. (See text for full wording of the ‘propensity to vote for’ question).

Table 4
Level of identification with, and propensity to vote for, each party
(using conventional measure of party identification)

	SF	SDLP	UUP	DUP
very close to	10.0	10.0**	8.0 **	9.5
fairly close to	9.2	8.3	7.9	8.0
merely a sympathiser with	8.2*	8.8	7.8	8.0*
no id with this party	2.8	3.4	3.8	3.4

Note: mean scores reported, a higher score indicating a greater propensity to vote for the party in question. (See text for full wording of the 'propensity to vote for' question.)

**=between 20 and 50 cases; ** less than 20 cases*

Table 5
Using the conventional party identification measure and
new party identification measures to predict propensity to vote for each party

	SF	SDLP	UUP	DUP
New Measures				
Positive identification with: (scales running from 0 to 1)				
SF	5.29*** (.33)	-.14 (.30)	-1.29*** (.28)	-2.08*** (.28)
SDLP	1.16*** (.34)	7.26*** (.34)	.58 (.31)	.17 (.30)
UUP	-.29 (.30)	.19 (.31)	6.46*** (.33)	-.70* (.33)
DUP	-.86** (.28)	-.40 (.27)	-.72* (.28)	6.00*** (.31)
Conventional Measure				
(No identity with this party=ref category)				
Very strong identity with this party	3.00*** (.34)	3.61*** (1.05)	1.51* (.65)	2.06*** (.35)
Fairly strong identity with this party	2.14*** (.30)	1.44*** (.35)	1.49*** (.24)	1.57*** (.21)
Sympathiser with this party	1.89*** (.50)	1.89*** (.31)	2.05*** (.27)	1.63*** (.47)
N	1527	1527	1527	1527
Adjusted r-square	.61	.53	.46	.58

Note: Figures shown are unstandardised regression co-efficients with standard errors in parenthesis. In each regression, the dependent variable is a 10 point scale representing respondents' propensity to vote for that particularly party, '1' means would never vote for that party and '10' means would definitely vote for that party. See text for full wording.

** .05 level, ** .01 level, *** .001 level of statistical significance*

Table 6
Impact of religious denomination, national identity and party identification on voting in Northern Ireland:
ols regression and stacked data matrix

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Religious denomination	.69 ***	.07	.29 ***	.06
National identity	.37 ***	.07	.02	.06
Party identification			.83 ***	.03
(Weighted) N	1449		1449	
Adjusted r-square	.37		.55	

Note 1: The stacked dataset has four times as many cases as the original unstacked dataset due to the fact that cases in the stacked dataset are respondent/party pairings and there are four parties. The stacked dataset is thus weighted down to the size of the original dataset (1582).

Note 2: this analysis was also conducted using robust standard errors. The more conservative of the two analyses is reported.

** .05 level, ** .01 level, *** .001 level of statistical significance*