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8 Value Dimensions and Party Choice in Finland

Kimmo Grönlund and Peter Söderlund

Introduction

Antipathy between the supporters of opposing political camps appears to be on the rise in Finland according to recent studies (see Chapter 10 in this book as well). Especially supporters of the Left Alliance (VAS), and to some extent supporters of the Green League (VIHR), have since the beginning of the 2000s gradually moved left on the left–right self-placement scale, while supporters of the populist Finns Party (PS) have moved to the right. Concurrently, differences between the two camps have deepened over cultural and moral issues (Isotalo et al., 2020). Another study, which examined the Finnish Twittersphere, observed the public being divided along party lines with regard to the socially salient issues climate politics, immigration, and income equality. The same two opposing political camps were detected in terms of the strongly aligned positions on climate politics and views on immigration. Supporters of the Green League and Left Alliance held opposite views to supporters of the Finns Party. An issue associated with left–right distributive politics formed a separate dimension where supporters of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) formed an opposition to supporters of the National Coalition Party (KOK) and the Centre Party (KESK) (Chen et al., 2021). The latter results imply that there has been a sorting of party supporters into ideological camps. Partisan sorting refers to a process where ideological and partisan identities are brought into agreement. Like-minded citizens are clustered into parties, and within these groups, there can be further issue alignment along multiple divisive issues within the population subgroups (Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008).

In this chapter, we set out to examine if there have been growing ideological differences between voters of different parties in Finland during the 2000s and 2010s. First, we describe how voters of different parties have positioned themselves along two ideological dimensions: the traditional left–right socioeconomic dimension and the GAL–TAN value dimension (i.e., Green–Alternative–Libertarian vs. Traditional–Authoritarian–Nationalist). Second, we will examine how strongly these value dimensions have predicted party choice. If there has been a group or party sorting of individuals along ideological lines, the relationship between ideological position and party choice should have increased. One reason could be that voters with similar political attitudes cluster into certain parties. Over time, broad

issue alignment may occur whereby partisans' attitudes are bundled together: a position on one issue corresponds with a certain position on another. The parties themselves may also over time begin to present coherent issue packages, and then refer to easily accessible general ideological orientations when they communicate with the voters (Lachat, 2008).

Social cleavages

To better understand how ideological orientations and issue positions might explain citizens' party choice, we revisit some key studies regarding cleavages and ideological voting. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) were the first to approach party system formation in Western Europe from a macro-historical perspective. The twin processes of the national and industrial revolutions resulted in four historical cleavages: centre-periphery, state-church, land-industry, and owner-worker. These cleavages reflected the primary existing divisions in society which created important preconditions for the emergence of parties and party systems around Western Europe at the turn of the 20th century. The content of the historical cleavages has been updated since. The traditional cleavages espoused by Lipset and Rokkan can in contemporary studies be measured as subnational resistance to the state (centre-periphery), religiosity vs. secularity (state-church), urban vs. rural (land-industry), and working class vs. middle class (owner-worker) (Knutsen & Scarbrough, 1995).

The concept of cleavage has also been the target of theoretical reconsideration (see also the discussion on the concept of cleavage in Chapter 7 on class voting). Bartolini and Mair (1990) understood a cleavage to necessarily include three elements: socio-structural foundation, collective identity, and organisation form. With regard to the first element, society is divided into homogeneous groups where each group shares some common characteristics (e.g., class, religion, ethnicity, and region) which forms the socio-structural foundation. Second, members in a particular social group must share a collective identity because they have similar values and priorities in one or more societal issues. Third, these issues are politicised and expressed through a common organisational structure such as political party.

All voting is, of course, not cleavage voting. Knutsen and Scarbrough (1995) presented a model of party choice in which they distinguished between structural voting, value voting, and cleavage voting. Structural voting means that members of some structurally defined social group vote for a party because they share the same social background but do not have common value orientations (e.g., members of an ethnic group vote for an ethno-linguistic party). Value voting occurs when value orientations alone guide party choice (e.g., people with postmaterialist values vote for a green party). Cleavage voting implies that social structure and value orientations matter: one's position in the social structure influences value orientations which then shapes party choice (e.g., members of the working class develop egalitarian and redistributive attitudes and, therefore, they support social democratic parties).

Processes of social modernisation and individualisation since the 1960s have contributed to a decline in long-term forces that tie voters to parties (Thomassen,

2005). With the reduced impact of stable social cleavages (i.e., social-structural factors) and traditional collective loyalties, vote choice has become more influenced by ideological orientations and issue preferences (Lachat, 2008). Henceforth, we focus on value voting which is represented by ideological orientations and the more concrete issue positions that fall under a value dimension. Theoretically, we can distinguish between value orientations, ideological orientations, and issue positions. These go from more general and enduring predispositions to more short-term attitudes depending. Long-term predisposition at least partially shapes attitudes towards current policy issues which have become salient during the election campaign (Shanks & Miller, 1991).

Cleavages and value dimensions in Western Europe

There have been various relatively durable conflicts or dimensions underlying political competition in countries across Western Europe. We have to bear in mind that there is variation between countries. Certain plural societies (e.g., Belgium and Switzerland) have been divided along several lines of cleavage such as religion, class, and language (Lijphart, 2012, 36), while other countries such as Sweden have been more one-dimensional with left–right positions on issues such as social equality and welfare being dominant (Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2013, 19–20). We also have to bear in mind that the dimensionality of the political space has evolved over time in Western Europe. Which value dimensions are then relevant if we want to study the salience of political divides? Historically, a dominant dimension has been the materialist left–right dimension, which drew attention to, for example, redistribution of income, size of the public sector, the privatisation of publicly funded activities.

For a long time in Western Europe, the socioeconomic left–right dimension was considered a sort of “super-issue” that would embed other issues as well (Thomassen, 2012, 13). In the 1970s, Ronald Inglehart began to notice a transformation in the political culture of advanced industrial societies that altered the basic value priorities. Younger generations increasingly adopted postmaterialist values that emphasised goals such as belonging, esteem, and free choice (Inglehart, 1971). This also involved a change from authoritarian to libertarian values. The New Left and Green parties in particular adopted values that emphasised tolerance, alternative lifestyles, and individual freedom. Their opponents, on the other hand, treasured traditional values in terms of cultural values, family norms, and national security (Kriesi et al., 2008, 12–13).

Various axes of competition have been suggested to capture cultural conflicts beyond Inglehartian post-materialism in modern electorates. Kriesi et al. (2008) emphasised two dimensions of conflict in Western Europe in the age of globalisation: a socioeconomic and a cultural conflict. The impact of economic issues on vote choice has decreased and cultural issues have become more important over time. With the rise of the cultural dimension, issues such as immigration and European integration have gained in salience. Rovny and Edwards (2012) conceptualised political competition in two dimensions: economic left–right and social traditionalism

vs. liberalism. The former includes policy positions on taxes, redistribution, and deregulation, while the latter dimension encompasses law and order, religious values, lifestyle choices, multiculturalism, minority issues, immigration, and national identity. Hooghe et al. (2002) introduced the GAL–TAN dimension.

Cleavages and value dimensions in Finland

Which cleavages have been represented by relevant parties in Finland? In terms of the classic cleavages of the seminal Lipset-Rokkan (1967) paradigm, the land-industry and owner-worker cleavages were important for the formation of the Finnish party system and the structure of voter alignments (see Introduction chapter of this book for more). Centre-periphery and state-church have only played limited roles (Karvonen, 2014). However, multiple cleavages have divided the population into politically relevant segments. Nine major party families – many of whose origins lie in the in the Lipset-Rokkan cleavage approach – have been represented in the Finnish Parliament since 1907. These include the socialist, social democratic, green, agrarian, religious, ethnic, liberal, conservative, and right populist party families.

Additional relevant cleavages within the Finnish electorate have, indeed, been identified in literature. Paloheimo (2008) defined seven politically relevant ideological cleavages in contemporary Finland: left vs. right, centre vs. periphery, national vs. international, elite vs. people, Finnish-speaking vs. Swedish-speaking, conservative vs. liberal moral values, and ecological values vs. materialist values. Based on Paloheimo’s research, Grönlund and Westinen (2012) used FNES data and identified six ideological conflicts in the parliamentary election of 2011. They were left vs. right, centre vs. periphery, national sovereignty vs. international alliances, the elite vs. people, Finnish-speaking vs. Swedish-speaking Finns and traditional values vs. postmodern values. In a similar manner, and using FNES data from the parliamentary election of 2019, Suuronen et al. (2020) showed that six ideological conflicts are relevant for differentiating voters of different parties. They are very similar to Paloheimo’s and Grönlund et al.’s lists of conflicts, but Suuronen et al. differentiated between immigration and moral values. Despite the complexity, focus in the empirical parts of the chapters will be on the two most dominant and salient political value dimensions in contemporary Western Europe: the traditional left–right dimension and the GAL–TAN dimension (see discussion below).

Descriptive trends

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate where the voters of different parties are located along different political value dimensions. As mentioned, the dimensional structure of the Finnish political space is complex since six or seven dimensions of political conflict tend to be of high or medium importance in Finland (Paloheimo, 2008; Grönlund & Westinen, 2012; Suuronen et al., 2020). Here, we identify and examine two dimensions which each consists of sets of issues. The reason for such a simplification is that the task would become “overwhelmingly complex

and intellectually incomprehensible” if we would look at all the issues separately (Rovny & Edwards, 2012, 57). Our first dimension is the traditional left–right dimension. Regarding the second dimension, we prefer the term GAL–TAN because it includes green values, while environmental protection does not automatically belong to the so-called cultural dimension according to Kriesi et al. (2008). Of the above-mentioned conflicts in the Finnish political space, nationalism vs. internationalism, the elite vs. people, and traditional vs. postmodern values are collapsed into the GAL–TAN cleavage in the analyses of the present chapter.

Our data are from the five most recent Finnish National Election Studies (FNES, see Technical appendix). More precisely, we use survey questions measuring voters’ policy preferences and combine relevant items to indices in order to capture the three value dimensions. Questions on political views were included in self-administered drop-off questionnaires from 2003 to 2011, and they were asked in face-to-face interviews after the elections of 2015 and 2019. One challenge is to find an appropriate number of survey items that can be combined into an index for each of the underlying value dimensions. Unfortunately, FNES has not asked identical questions on political values and issues over time. On a positive note, several questions on issue positions have been continuously replicated in three successive surveys: 2011, 2015, and 2019. These items are rated on a disagree–agree scale from 0 to 10. To expand the time series, we identify similar questions in 2003 and 2007 although there are considerable differences in the question wording and scale structure. Questions about issue priorities instead of positions were asked in the two latter surveys. Another challenge is to achieve acceptable internal consistency because the items are not too homogenous. As explained below, we created two indices, despite the rather low empirical internal consistency, because the items theoretically capture the different constructs.

First, *left–right* ideological position is an index generated from four items. These items reflect the degree to which the respondents prefer *a lower taxation level, more entrepreneurship and market economy, a smaller public sector, and smaller income disparities*. The latter is reverse-coded before being averaged into an overall score where lower values denote leftist positions and higher values rightist positions. The preferred size of the public sector was not asked in 2003 and no item on income disparities featured in 2007. Internal consistency is relatively low, in part due to a mix of positively and negatively skewed observed item responses. Guttman’s lambda 4 reliability coefficients, calculated separately for each survey, are around 0.5. However, we prefer to include an index consisting of multiple items that measure concrete policy positions instead of left–right self-placement which is a proxy for policy positions. Also, the index and the individual items are all positively and significantly correlated with self-reported left–right position.

Second, the *GAL–TAN* dimension (i.e., Green–Alternative–Libertarian vs. Traditional–Authoritarian–Nationalist) is created using items that elicit preferences regarding the *extent of immigration, commitment to the European Union, role of Christian values, status of sexual minorities, and eco-friendliness*. Lower index values indicate more liberal social values (GAL) and higher index values more conservative social values (TAN). Internal consistency is high in later elections as

Table 8.1 Respondents' average positions by election year

	<i>Left–right</i>		<i>GAL–TAN</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>(SD)</i>
2003	5.3	(1.6)	5.4	(1.5)
2007	5.3	(1.4)	4.9	(1.5)
2011	5.1	(1.3)	4.9	(1.6)
2015	5.6	(1.4)	4.9	(1.5)
2019	5.2	(1.5)	4.7	(1.6)

Guttman's lambda 4 reliability coefficient increases from around 0.5 in the two first elections to around 0.7 in the three last elections.

Empirically, we begin by presenting the mean values by election year to detect possible trends in terms of whether the Finnish population has ideologically moved in a certain direction over time. For each survey, we also include a crude measure of political polarisation, the standard deviation, which increases in size if groups of people gravitate towards opposing poles (Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008). Table 8.1 shows that in terms of the classic left–right dimension the electorate (including non-voters) has not moved steadily in a certain direction, nor has there been any major polarisation judging from the standard deviations which have not increased in size. Secondly, in terms of GAL-TAN, the Finnish electorate appears to have developed more green-alternative-libertarian values: from 5.4 to 4.7 points. However, there is no clear trend of polarisation along the GAL–TAN dimension because the standard deviation remains similar over time.

Another possibility is that groups of like-minded citizens are clustered into certain parties (i.e., partisan sorting). We, therefore, examine self-reported party choice in the five most recent Finnish National Election Studies (FNES). Respondents who voted for any of the eight major parties, which have been continuously represented in parliament since 2003, are included in the analysed samples. We calculate the mean scores for the three sets of value orientations among voters for different parties.

Figure 8.1 draws a map of the party voters' positions along the socioeconomic left–right dimension. The groups of voters line up in the way we would expect.¹ Respondents who voted for the Left Alliance (VAS) and the Green League (VIHR) hold the most leftist attitudes. Supporters of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) are located close to the middle of the scale. Somewhat right of the middle we find people who voted for the Christian Democrats (KD), Finns Party (PS), Swedish People's Party (RKP), and Centre Party (KESK). National Coalition Party (KOK) voters are socioeconomically farthest to the right. Overall, there is no clear trend of growing socioeconomic ideological differences between members of different parties. An exception is the more extreme position of Left Alliance voters in 2019. This shift is expected given a four-year reign of a bourgeoisie three-party government coalition that included the National Coalition Party, the Centre Party, and the Finns Party (later replaced by Blue Reform which split from the Finns Party).

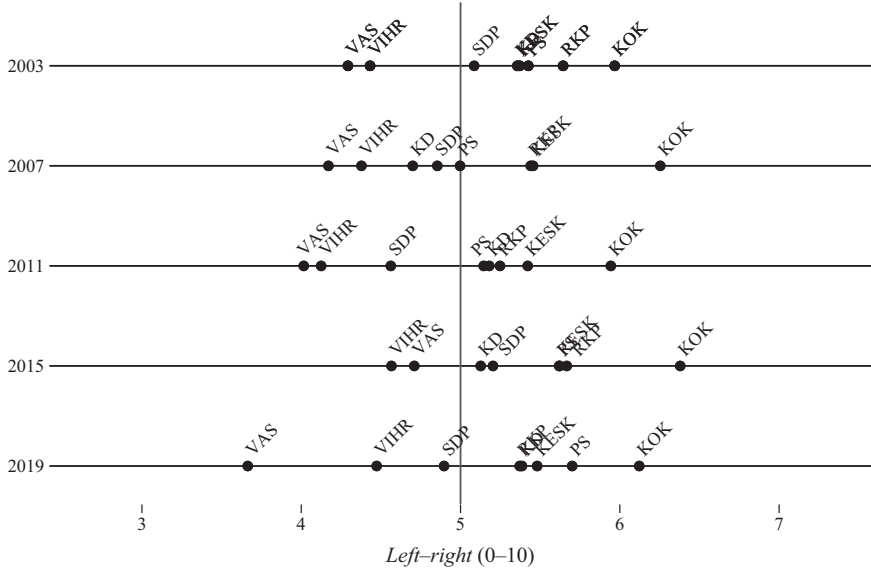


Figure 8.1 Voters’ average left–right positions by party choice.

Source: Finnish National Election Study 2003–2019.

Next, we examine how the parties’ voters are positioned along the GAL–TAN-dimension (Figure 8.2). The most liberal respondents tend to vote for the Green League (VIHR), followed by supporters of the Left Alliance (VAS) and the Swedish People’s Party (RKP). Upon closer inspection, not reported in any table or figure, supporters of the Green League have the most extreme values in the case of four of five items (all except attitude towards the European Union). People who voted for the Social Democratic Party (SDP), National Coalition Party (KOK), and Centre Party (KESK) are located in the middle ground with SDP and KOK being slightly more on the liberal side and KESK more on the conservative side. The most conservative voters are found among those who voted for the Christian Democrats (KD) and the Finns Party (PS). The GAL–TAN index apparently encompasses two sub dimensions on which the latter two parties’ supporters differ. In fact, voters of Christian Democrats exhibit more extreme attitudes in terms of the importance of Christian values and the status of sexual minorities in society, while those who voted for the Finns Party (PS) are particularly critical of more immigration and environmental protection. Both groups are critical of the European Union, however. We want to point out that Finns Party voters would have been located closer to the TAN extreme if the index would have included items that picked up nativist and authoritarian attitudes (such items are only included in some of the FNES surveys).

What can we say about the development over time? There are certainly no radical spatial shifts in party voters’ positions. We do observe that the groups of voters are more spread out in 2011 and 2019. Further, we see a development where two parties – the Green League and the Left Alliance – cluster together towards

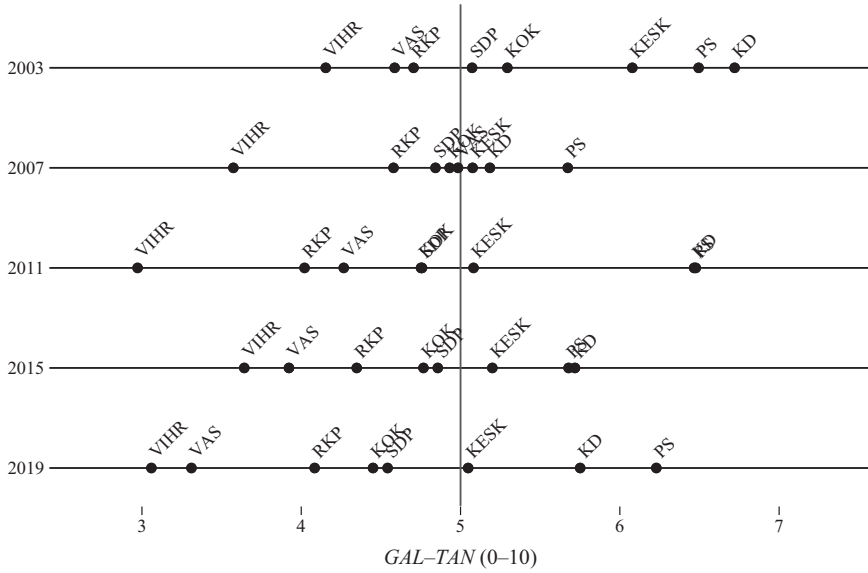


Figure 8.2 Voters’ average GAL–TAN positions by party choice.

Source: Finnish National Election Study 2003–2019.

the GAL end of the spectrum in the two recent elections. Three parties have also moved between half a point and one point away from the middle of the scale towards the GAL end: the Swedish People’s Party, the National Coalition Party, and the Social Democratic Party. Towards the TAN end of the scale, the aggregate scores for the supporters of the Finns Party and the Christian Democrats have varied extensively over time.

Explanatory analyses

To what degree are people’s political orientations correlated with their party choice? We begin this section by analysing the strength of the overall relations between the value dimensions and party choice, separately for each election. The dependent variable is party choice, a categorical variable with eight values (i.e., voting for any of the eight major parties). To measure how well the variables explain party choice, we report the pseudo-R-squared values (McFadden) based on multinomial logistic regression. This quantitative method is an extension of binomial logistic regression as the dependent variable may have more than two categories. In our case, the categorical dependent variable takes on eight values. Higher R-squared values indicate better model fit. The pseudo-R-squared values resemble R-squared values in the sense they may range from 0 to 1 although they cannot be interpreted as the explained variance in percent.

Figure 8.3 shows, first of all, the total explained variance when both value dimensions are included in the regression models. Then the value dimensions are

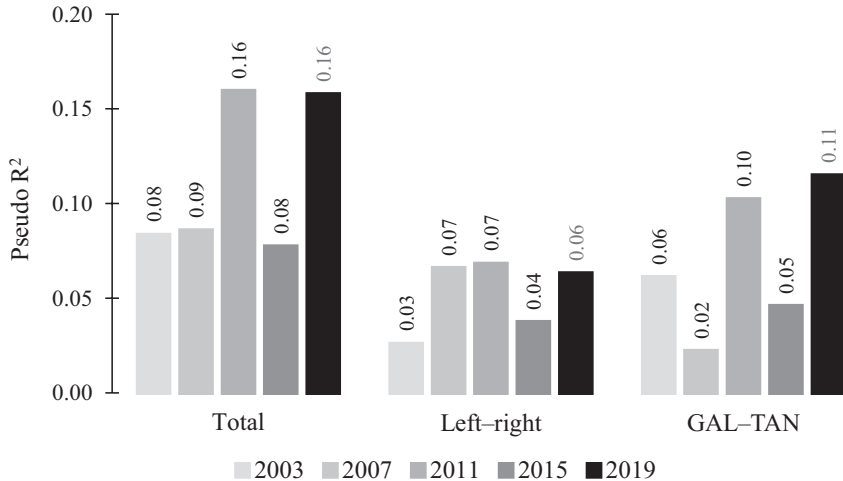


Figure 8.3 Explained variance in predicting party choice by election year.

Source: Finnish National Election Study 2003–2019.

included in separate models to assess their individual contributions. Left–right attitudes have lower explanatory power than GAL–TAN attitudes. Only in 2007 does the former trump the latter. The total explained variance is the highest in 2011 and 2019 when the GAL–TAN dimension contributes the most. As we saw earlier in Figure 8.2, the groups of voters were more spread out along the scale in these two years. In 2011, Finland’s participation in bailing out debt-laden European countries via the European Financial Stability Facility was hotly debated and many of the supporters of the True Finns (later the Finns Party) ardently opposed such measures. In addition, the fact that many voters with anti-immigrant attitudes and conservative values rallied around the True Finns contributed to greater polarisation. In 2019, immigration and climate change dominated the election campaign which surely contributed to why supporters of the Green League and the Left Alliance developed more extreme GAL attitudes and supporters of the Finns Party more extreme TAN attitudes.

We deepen the analysis by investigating how strongly each value dimension predicts party choice, controlling for the other value dimensions included in the analysis. Figures 8.4–8.5 report the average marginal effects (with 95 percent confidence intervals) over the whole series of election studies. These estimates, which are based on multinomial regression, *reflect the predicted change in likelihood of voting (expressed as percentage) for each party for a one-point increase in each value dimension (which may vary between 0 and 10)*. A point estimate to the left of the red vertical line means that the likelihood of voting for a party decreases (negative effect) as the score for a value dimension increases in contrast to a point estimate to the right of the red vertical line which implies that the likelihood of voting for a party increases (positive effect).

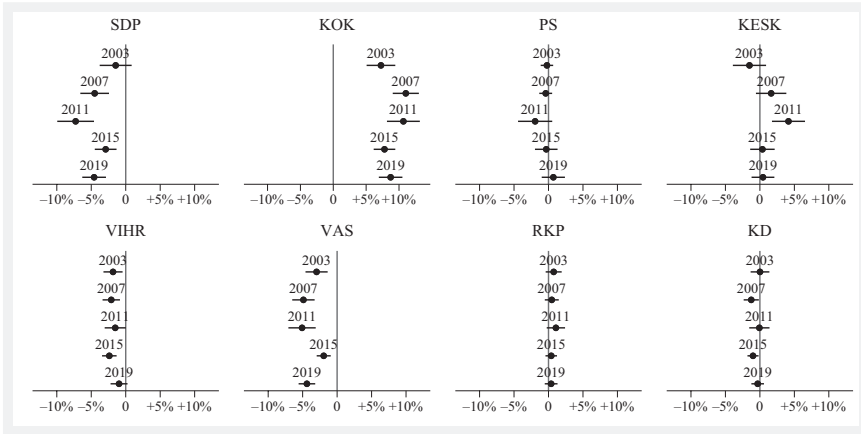


Figure 8.4 Predicted change in the likelihood of voting for each political party when a voter's position on the left–right dimension increases with one point.

Source: Finnish National Election Study 2003–2019.

In terms of the left–right dimension, a number of points stand out. First, being left-wing predicts voting for the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Left Alliance (VAS). The probability to vote for any of these two parties decreases substantially and significantly for each one-point increase in the left–right index (i.e., going from left to right on socioeconomic issues). The marginal effect is around five percentage points. Higher left–right scale values are also negatively linked to voting for the Green League although the marginal effect is relatively weak. Second, as people's attitudes shift towards the right, the likelihood of voting for the National Coalition Party (KOK) increases substantially. Here, the marginal effect is large, around ten percentage points. Otherwise, the left–right attitudes have no or weak effects on party choice, with the Centre Party in 2011 being an exception when there was a substantial positive effect. The graph also allows us to track possible longitudinal trends. However, it appears as if there are no clear trends in the sense that left–right socioeconomic position has become a stronger or weaker determinant of vote choice.

We proceed to chart how liberal and conservative social values affect voting behaviour. Figure 8.5 shows some familiar patterns based on the descriptive data above. People with lower scores on the GAL–TAN scale are likely to support the Green League (VIHR) with the marginal effects being close to five percentage points. Other parties that appear to draw support from more liberal voters, but to lesser extent, are the National Coalition Party (KOK) in the three most recent elections, the Left Alliance (VAS) and the Swedish People's Party (RKP). In terms of voters in the TAN end of the scale, we see that the likelihood of voting for the Finns Party increases by as much as between six and eleven percentage points. This applies for elections as of the 2011 election when the party saw their popular support increase dramatically to 15 percent. Other parties that attract people with conservative social values are the Christian Democrats (KD) and the Centre Party (KESK),

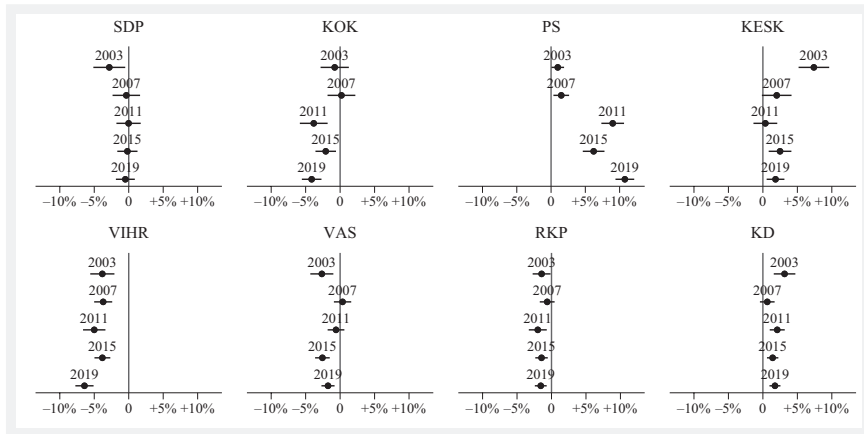


Figure 8.5 Predicted change in the likelihood of voting for each political party when a voter's position on the GAL–TAN dimension increases with one point.

Source: Finnish National Election Study 2003–2019.

but to relatively modest extent compared to the Finns Party. Overall, there are signs of partisan sorting in the sense that people with similar views on policy issues flock to certain parties. In other words, voters' positions along the GAL–TAN dimension were poorer predictors of party choice in the beginning of the 2000s compared to the most recent election.

Conclusions

Finland is a country with a fragmented party system with multiple moderately large and smaller parties. The voters may choose between political parties that represent various political issue positions or values. In this chapter, we studied two value dimensions and their impact on party choice in Finland: the traditional left–right socioeconomic dimension and the more recent value dimension ranging from GAL (Green–Alternative–Libertarian) to TAN (Traditional–Authoritarian–Nationalist). We showed that the average respondent has over time been stable in terms of the position along the classic left–right socioeconomic dimension. The voters of the Left Alliance were most to the left at all elections, except for 2015 when supporters of the Green League were slightly more to the left. Correspondingly, the voters of the National Coalition Party were always the ones most to the right. The average voters of the rest of the parties were logically positioned. Together with the voters of the Left Alliance, social democratic and green voters were to the left, whereas the rest of voters were positioned to the right. When it comes to GAL–TAN, a similar rather consistent pattern emerged. Green voters leaned most towards the GAL end of the dimension, followed by the voters of the Left Alliance and the Swedish People's Party. In the TAN end of the dimension, we found the voters of the Christian Democrats and the Finns Party.

This chapter initially referred to recent Finnish studies that have identified increasing polarisation between political camps (see also Chapter 10). Based on the measures used in this chapter, there was no clear trend of growing socioeconomic left–right ideological differences between voters of different parties. In terms of the GAL–TAN dimension, there were some indications of polarisation in the form of partisan sorting (i.e., like-minded citizens are clustered into parties) although we cannot claim that there have been radical spatial shifts in party voters’ positions over the two past decades. People who vote for the Green League and the Left Alliance cluster nowadays closer to the GAL end of the scale. To a smaller extent, the supporters of the more liberal minded parties the National Coalition Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Swedish People’s Party have shifted their positions closer to the GAL pole. Towards the TAN end of the scale, supporters of the Finns Party and the Christian Democrats have fluctuated over time so we cannot claim that their views have polarised.

Another aim of this chapter was to examine if political values have an impact on party choice. The results first suggested that the old cleavage between left and right still helps us to understand voting behaviour in Finland. Social structure in part influences values and values then influence the vote choice. But we have to bear in mind that the explanatory power of left–right attitudes was relatively low and has remained at a similar level over the past decade. Nevertheless, the results made perfect sense in terms of which types of attitudes correlated with party choice. Our findings were therefore also in line with the previous chapter on class voting where working-class voters’ had a clear tendency to vote for the two left-wing parties, the Left Alliance or the Social Democratic Party. Values to the right, on the other hand, increased substantially the likelihood of voting for the National Coalition Party. Voters’ left–right values did not as strongly predict voting for the remaining parties. Finally, a more important political cleavage is that between liberal and conservative moral values, in the present chapter captured by the broad GAL–TAN cleavage. The explanatory power of GAL–TAN attitudes has increased and trumped left–right attitudes in 2011 and 2019. GAL–TAN attitudes especially predicted voting for the Green League (GAL) or the Finns Party (TAN). Hence, distribution policies are joined by identity politics in the Finnish party system and the electorate.

Note

- 1 Since we had no values for the item on income disparities in 2003, every respondent was assigned the grand mean of the item at the next election (2.62). We did the same for the item on the size of the public sector (5.06) in 2007.

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