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Disentangling Leaders from their Parties in Public Opinion

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
(PhD) in Comparative Politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations,
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Abstract

To what extent do views towards a political party inform evaluations of that party's leader? A substantial body of literature analyses the effects of both leaders and their parties in the electoral process, largely focusing on vote choice. While there are an increasing number of scholars who posit that we have underestimated the impact of leaders during elections, there is still surprisingly little research conducted on the process through which voters make up their minds about leaders. This process is important, because understanding it can further clarify the role that leaders play in people's political attitudes relative to parties. If voters' attitudes towards leaders and parties are substantially different then some of the assumptions that we make about public opinion are inaccurate. Furthermore, it has ramifications for the extent to which we should regard actions by individual leaders as having importance for public opinion. If voters do not frequently distinguish between party and leader then it is likely that the increasingly sizeable role leaders play in media coverage is unfounded. This thesis addresses public opinion towards leaders across three distinct but related papers. Firstly, given the decline of party identity in many democracies I show that there has been change over time in the way voters evaluate leaders. Secondly, drawing on recent research, I suggest that the way in which voters think about leaders is affected by whether a leader is new in the role or not. Finally, I utilise voter assessments of personality traits to provide evidence of the importance of leaders being perceived as warm rather than competent. These findings have implications for future research on the role of leaders in electoral politics and for how parties should understand the relevance of the appeal of their leaders to the public.

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1. Introduction

In contemporary democracies, political parties are the primary means through which many citizens find political expression. Due to mass enfranchisement from the 20th Century onwards, parties have been key in understanding public opinion towards a variety of issues. However, the way in which parties communicate their message at a national level or on the global stage is largely through their leader. Therefore, party leaders are often seen as a similarly important component to the functioning of electoral politics. This is especially true in recent years: with the advent and growing ubiquity of television and the internet there has been an increasing focus on the actions of individuals at the expense of institutions. As a result, public opinion towards parties and leaders and the extent to which one is seen to represent the other becomes key to understanding a multitude of political phenomena.

Although leaders have always featured in political science research, conceptualising and measuring public opinion towards parties has taken priority. It is only in recent years that a burgeoning literature has begun to look primarily at the causes and consequences of leader popularity. As a result, there is still much work to be done when it comes to understanding public opinion surrounding leaders. This is especially prescient when considering the substantial changes that have occurred in party politics over the last several decades: polarization, declining party identity, and volatility in election results. Understanding the role of leaders in this context will help us further understand the extent to which electoral politics has changed and what the future holds for public opinion towards parties and their leaders.

My thesis will examine this across three papers. More specifically, it will address the role of attitudes towards political parties in the process of how voters evaluate leaders over the last four decades. In line with research on ‘presidentialization’, I look at parliamentary democracies. This strand of research looks at the hypothesis that parliamentary democracies

increasingly resemble presidential democracies in their focus on the individual as the face of electoral politics (Poguntke and Webb 2005; Garzia et al. 2020). Additionally, the majority of democracies studied are in the Western world, largely due to data constraints¹.

I draw on both party identity and leadership theory to better understand public opinion towards leaders. The three papers are presented as separate chapters and approach the topic in distinct but related ways, employing appropriate observational data from a variety of sources. Chapter two focuses on long-term change in the determinants of leader evaluations. In chapter three I examine how parties changing leaders can alter voter perspectives. Finally, chapter four assesses the importance of leaders' traits alongside party preference when it comes to voters choosing their preferred leader. In this introduction I will put the question of how public opinion towards leaders is shaped into context and outline the structure and approach of the rest of the thesis. I will also summarize the individual contribution of each chapter, both to this thesis and to the wider literature.

1.1 Motivation

Party leader appeal is a phenomenon through which researchers and commentators try to interpret electoral politics. A recent example of this in parliamentary democracies is the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party in the UK. Presented in the media at the time as 'Corbynmania' and being driven by mostly younger voters, the rise of Jeremy Corbyn: a left-wing backbencher who had never held a cabinet position was often perceived in the media as explainable through his personal appeal, rather than political context or wider trends in public opinion during Labour's years in opposition (Cosslett 2019; Chakravarty 2018). Equally, Labour's defeat at the 2019 election, its worst return on seats since 1935, was

¹ With the exception of Israel, South Africa, and Turkey.

partially attributed to its leader's failings and unprecedented unpopularity with the wider electorate. Subsequent academic research has highlighted the importance of Corbyn's anti-capitalist stance in attracting former Labour voters that felt left behind by the ideological trajectory of the party (Dorey and Denham 2016; Whitely et al. 2019). Future studies will likely examine the claim that Corbyn was the primary cause of Labour's 2019 loss, as they did his impact on Labour's unexpected gain in seats in 2017 (Dorey 2017; Heath and Goodwin 2017; Mellon et al. 2018; Prosser et al. 2020).

Voters, the media, and researchers have good reasons to focus more on leaders than general political candidates. Leaders perform an important electoral function for parties and are uniquely situated to do so. They are the spokesperson of their party and the most visible figure articulating party policy (Aaldering et al. 2018). Leaders can therefore reinforce party preferences, but are also able to attract voters from opposing parties if they have sufficient personal appeal (Daoust et al. 2019). In this way, as the human face of an institution, they can complement and enhance a party's message, appealing to voters beyond the traditional base. On the contrary, an unpopular leader can both fail to reach new voters and turn off party voters, potentially impacting turnout (Silva et al. 2019; Silva and Costa 2019)

Consequently, elections are often thought of as grudge matches: one individual against another. As in many countries the parties in contention do not change dramatically from year to year, it is the leaders of parties who shape our collective memory of any given election. This is especially true when the leaders are unusual, as in the example given above. Therefore, this gives the impression that leaders have an oversized influence in electoral politics. This is shored up by the media, who often focus on this aspect of elections at the expense of other factors. There is substantial evidence that this has become more of a focal point over time (Rahat and Sheafer 2007; Adam and Maier 2010; Campus 2010; Balmas and Sheafer 2014; Holtz-Bach et al. 2014). For instance, using New York Times articles from 1952 to 2000, Gilens et al. (2007)

show that the attention shifted from policy content to character. Balmas et al. (2013) take a similar approach using six countries over period of 33 years. Their focus however, is how the media covers foreign leaders. They find that increasingly in stories that mention his/her country, state leaders are feature as the protagonist.

Even more recently, several studies have solidified the relationship between media consumption and the importance of leaders, this time in a largely European context (Aaldering 2018; Garzia et al. 2019; Van der Pas and Aaldering 2020). These studies also provide evidence that media focus can strengthen the role of leader evaluation in voters' decision making. For instance, Garzia (2017) uses data from the 2013 Italian parliamentary election to show that voters with high levels of exposure to television are more likely to use leader evaluations to inform their vote choice. Building on this and expanding their analysis to 13 European parliamentary democracies between 1974 and 2016, Silva et al. (2019) find that leader evaluations have a stronger impact on turnout for those with a television-based media diet. Additionally, Aaldering et al. (2018) use Dutch newspapers to suggest that both positive and negative portrayals of leaders have the desired effect on readers when it comes to electoral support, but that only the former are impactful during election time.

Despite the media placing increasing importance on the roles of leaders, there is still substantial disagreement amongst scholars regarding the significance of leaders relative to parties. This disagreement is noted in multiple books and edited collections on the topic (Thomassen 2005; Poguntke and Webb 2007; Karvonen 2010; Bittner 2011; Aarts et al. 2013; Garzia 2014; Lobo and Curtice 2014; Renwick and Pilet 2016; Rahat and Kenig 2018). In the wider literature there are broadly two camps: those who agree that leaders are increasing in relevance (McAllister 2007; Garzia 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Costa and Silva 2015; Garzia and De Angelis 2016; Silva et al. 2019; Silva and Costa 2019) and those who do not (Bartels 2002; Curtice and Holmberg 2005; Kriesi 2012; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2013).

Of course, this is a simplification and there are varying degrees of confidence within the literature. It is worth noting however, that no one disputes that leaders have at least some impact on voters' decisions and attitudes. An example of this is Curtice and Lisi (2014) who note that leaders do influence vote choice but that their effect is relatively small compared to party identity, party evaluation, and ideology. Equally, Bittner (2018) finds that leaders have always played an important role in vote choice in Canada, but that the effect of their personalities on vote choice is not larger than it had been in the past. The state of the research a decade ago on the impact of leaders on attitudes and behaviour is well summed up by Adam and Maier (2010, 228). During this review of the literature they claim: 'Existing research, however, points in the direction that candidate orientations have not gained in importance over time, and that they are far less important than is widely believed.'

However, the standard techniques of separating public opinion on parties and leaders, which usually consists of analysing the impact of both on vote choice (see Curtice and Holmberg 2005; Ohr and Oscarsson 2013; Curtice and Lisi 2014), has been brought into contention by more recent research (Takens et al. 2015; Lobo and Silva 2018). For instance, Garzia (2012) states that one of the key issues is that party identification is often treated as an exogenous variable. In other words, studies often assume that voters' attachment to parties is a stable determinant of vote choice, whereas this attachment can in fact be shaped by a multitude of factors, including the current leader of the party (Garzia, 2012, 177). Attitudes towards parties can be shaped by opinions towards leaders, as well as the more commonly acknowledged reverse of this causal relationship. Studies that focus on vote choice as the dependent variable and simply control for feelings toward both party and leader are possibly underestimating the potential for bidirectional effects between the two. Put simply, they are not considering the extent to which feelings towards a party could influence feelings towards a

leader and vice versa. As a result, the exact nature and variability of this relationship is not often considered.

This issue is compounded by some data restrictions. This is best illustrated by Bittner (2011), who compiles national election studies which include questions regarding leaders. Though the number is considerable, 93 at the time of publication, most studies include some version of feeling thermometers, typically asking respondents to rate leaders on a like-dislike scale. This measure is useful, but comparative research has used these scales not necessarily because of their theoretical utility, but because they are simply the most widely available measure. This has restricted studies of traits to largely rely on one country, or a small number. Even when traits are included, there is little consistency in questions asked both across and within studies, posing further problems.

While there are restrictions regarding traits, there is nonetheless a rich array of data available to scholars and it is more common than not for election studies to include questions on leaders. The problem then, is also to do with how this data has been used. This is largely because of the dominance of party identity in the literature; the continued focus on this has meant that variables concerning leaders are often included as controls, and not employed as the object of study.

Despite these limitations, there are several examples of studies focusing on leaders supposedly exhibiting influence over citizens as a result of their personal appeal, rather than that of the party they represent (van der Brug and Mughan 2007; Bos et al. 2012; Kriesi 2014). Although the study of populism, which often rests on the idea of the charismatic leader, is currently in ascendance, the history of leaders with strong personal appeal is as old as representative democracy itself. Parties' popularity and public perception of what they stand for ebbs and flows, and this is often attributable to external drivers, such as demographic shifts, economic factors, and issue salience (Clarke et al. 1986; Clarke et al. 1990; Tilley 2003; Evans

and Andersen 2006; Doerschler and Banaszak 2007; Dassonneville 2012; Stegmaier and Williams 2016; Westfall et al. 2017). However, the other variable, and one that parties are largely in control of, is the leader. As the individual at the head of the party changes, it is reasonable to expect that this will have an impact on public opinion, which in turn has consequences for electoral success.

This highlights the importance of leaders as an object of study, as opposed to political candidates in general. There is a considerable body of research that comes from examining attitudes towards political candidates that is both experimental (Sapiro 1981; Funk 1996, 1997; McGraw et al. 2003; Hart et al. 2011; Weaver 2012; Campbell and Cowley 2014) and observational (Kaase 1994; Rahn et al. 1994; Dolan 2004, 2008, 2010, 2014). This literature is largely American and focuses on congressional candidates. These studies are an invaluable resource when trying to understand public opinion surrounding individual actors in politics but it cannot be taken as given that these findings will transfer when we focus on leaders specifically. However, many of our theoretical assumptions of how people form attitudes towards leaders, are derived from this research. As a result, because studies do not often acknowledge that previous research has focused on candidates standing for different types of office and coming from a wide variety of contexts, it is unclear to what extent we are forming correct expectations regarding how voters evaluate leaders.

For example, focusing on American Presidential candidates from 1980-1992, Bartels (2002) provides evidence of the importance of party identity in shaping voters attitudes towards candidates' traits. He also signals the importance of ideology and economic assessments, confirming the idea that voters are on the whole predisposed to like or dislike a candidate dependent on these factors. This is a widely cited study within political science. For instance, when looking at the role of gender and partisanship in voter evaluations of US senators in 2010 and 2012 Pyeatt et al. (2016) reference Bartels with regards to the importance of party identity.

Equally, McDonald (2020) cites the same study when conducting an experiment on the impact of compassion on views towards candidates running for congressional office. Both studies show the importance of candidates' traits alongside the importance of party identity. However, neither analyse attitudes towards leaders and therefore it is difficult to extrapolate Bartel's findings to lower down the ballot. Consequently, we need more studies that focus on leaders in a wide variety of contexts in order to better understand the specificities of how public opinion towards them forms.

Furthermore, the focus on the US restricts how transferrable findings and theories regarding attitudes towards leaders are. Subsequent research makes clear that party leaders in presidential systems play a different, and often enhanced role with regards to electoral politics (Curtice and Hunjan 2013; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2013; Curtice and Lisi 2014), compared to their role in Western European democracies for example. Additionally, partisanship is generally much stronger in the US compared to Western European democracies and has not experienced the same decline.

Despite, the caveats that must be placed on research surrounding attitudes towards leaders, it is clear that they are heavily linked with their parties in the minds of voters. However, what is the extent of this association? Given recent findings that we could be entering an era of democracy where individuals are more influential than the institutions they represent, has the association between parties and their leaders changed over time? Finally, what aspect of leaders' personalities do voters most value, and is this enough for them to prefer a leader that is not from their preferred party? These are the series of questions that will primarily be answered, with my thesis reassessing the public perception of party leaders and considering potential consequences of this for both future research and representative democracy.

1.2 Public opinion and party leaders

A recent body of research, of which many of the above studies are a part, discusses the phenomenon of ‘personalization’, an evolution whereby individuals will become the main lens through which we interpret the political process, at the expense of institutions. Clearly, this is a broad body of research which accounts for several aspects of political science, including but not exclusive to media coverage, election campaigns, voting behaviour, and public opinion (Adam and Maier 2010). While this thesis will address the potential role that changing media coverage and campaign focus could exhibit on the role of party leaders, it is public opinion that will be the primary focus. As such, I will look at previous research on attitudes towards party leaders, highlighting gaps in our current knowledge.

There are various studies that address the extent to which voters perceive parties and leaders as related to one another. Recent findings (Somer-Topcu & Fernandez-Vasquez, 2017; Somer-Topcu 2019) suggest that voters are more likely to have accurate and homogenous views of a party’s policies if the leader of that party is new. Additionally, Garzia (2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2017) has attempted to readdress the role of leaders in electoral democracy; his findings suggesting that their influence on voters has previously been underestimated. This prior lack of attention, or acknowledgement, of leader effects has been cited by Garzia (2012: 176) as the gap between the common wisdom that leaders are an important electoral asset to their parties and the widely held view in political science research that their influence has been overstated.

Using leader evaluation as the object of study is still relatively uncommon in the literature. As stated above, leader evaluations are often used as independent variables or controls rather than outcome variables. That said, there is still a history of scholars analysing public opinion towards party leaders. This can be broadly split into two categories, studies that focus on the impact of voters’ characteristics on their perception of leaders (Esaiasson and Granberg 1996; Bittner 2011; Jou and Endo 2015) and those that focus on the impact of leaders’

traits on how they are perceived (Ohr and Oscarsson 2013; Laustsen 2017; Ksiazkiewicz et al. 2018)

Studies that analyse voters' characteristics often employ the theoretical framework that voters will evaluate leaders in a way that is cognitively easiest (Rahn 1993; Caprara et al. 2006). Humans meet and evaluate others on a daily basis, so it is relatively easy for them to apply this process to individuals whom they have never met; in this case, leaders. This is a process that relies on stereotyping, especially when individuals lack information on who they are judging (Fiske et al. 2002, 2007; Hayes 2011). In this case they rely on preconceived notions about the group they think their target belongs to, and apply these notions accordingly.

When this is applied to the context of politics, the group through which individuals are judged is primarily their party affiliation. There is evidence that this happens between voters (Iyengar and Westfall 2015; Westfall et al. 2015; Rothschild et al. 2017). For example, in the US, stereotypes exist regarding Republicans as being more competent and Democrats as being warmer; both groups adhere to these stereotypes when making claims about individuals from their own party or from the opposition (Eriksson and Funcke 2015). Unsurprisingly, this process also exists when it comes to evaluating leaders. Using both feeling thermometers and trait evaluations, scholars have demonstrated how perceptions of leaders are subject to respondents' views on their parties.

For example, Hayes (2005) develops a theory of trait ownership, expanding on Petrocick's (1996) theory of issue ownership. The latter proposes and tests whether voters reward presidential candidates for emphasising issues on which their party is perceived to be strong and their opponents perceived to be weak, finding that candidates can in fact increase their vote share if they perform strongly on issues voters believe they 'own'. For the Democrats this could mean being highly rated on social welfare issues, and for the Republicans being highly rated on foreign policy and defence issues. Hayes applies this to candidate traits, finding

that there is a direct link between issue ownership and expectations of leaders' personalities. Similar to in the previous paragraph where I discuss voters' opinions of each other, Republican leaders are generally perceived as stronger and more moral than Democrats who are perceived as more compassionate and empathetic. Hayes finds that if either party can make inroads on their opponent's trait ownership, they stand to gain at the polls. This theory has been transformational in our understanding of voters' relationship to leaders and has been applied numerous times since (Holian 2006; Hayes 2011; Meeks 2016; Goggin and Theodoridis 2017).

Given the symbiotic relationship between the public's perception of parties and the candidates they stand at elections, the impact of respondents' views towards a leader's party on how they evaluate that leader are relatively predictable: voters tend to evaluate leaders according to how much they like a leader's party. As Holmberg and Oscarsson (2013) show using the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), there is a strong correlation between party and leader evaluations. Using the same dataset, Tverdova (2010) shows that 80% of voters who feel represented by a party feel represented by a leader from the same party; Daoust et. al (2019) find that 83% prefer the leader from their preferred party. Although straightforward, this analysis presents the basic fact that it is extremely common for voters to view leaders and parties as one and the same. Understanding leader evaluations in this manner can broadly be understood as the party identification theory of leader evaluations (Garzia 2011).

However, studies also focus on how leaders' traits impact public opinion. Traits examined can be either objective or subjective. In other words, they can be characteristics which are exogenous to public perception such as: race (Colleau et al. 1990; Rosette et al. 2008), gender (Hoyt et al. 2009; Denmark et a. 2012), or experience (Sommer-Topcu 2017; Fernandez-Vazquez and Sommer-Topcu 2019). Or, they can be characteristics which exist only through other individuals' perception and expectation of a leader, with studies often

concentrating on trait dimensions of warmth and competence (Schlehofer et al. 2011; Vitriol et al. 2018). The former dimension concerns traits associated with a leader's personality and the latter concerns traits associated with a leader's job performance. Traits provide greater accuracy (Bittner 2011) but also situate leaders within their proper context: as an object that is defined by perceptions but also by a leader's own agency.

Research which understands leader evaluations through leader traits takes an approach which has many similarities with leadership theory. Here, leader evaluation is not treated simply as a by-product of party identity or other attitudes, but as a process which leaders have some control over and is affected by the environment under which the leader is operating (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007). Broadly speaking, leadership theory aims to understand a leader's role in both instigating organisational change and managing social networks (Dinh et al. 2014). Accordingly, this has prompted a number of different approaches, which to a greater or lesser extent include analysis of both leader and follower outcomes. In other words, leadership is understood at a variety of different levels of analysis.

If this concept is used in political science, it creates opportunities for original and insightful examination of the role of the leader in electoral politics. More importantly, a more complete model of the relationship between voter and leader offers a chance to resolve many of the disagreements in the literature surrounding the role and importance of leaders in electoral politics. For instance, by incorporating leader-traits and the extent to which respondents have paid attention to the campaign, Silva and Costa (2019) provide evidence that warm leaders can provide voters with an increased incentive to turnout to vote. Additionally, Funk (1996) suggests that voters' perceptions of a leader during a scandal can be influenced by the way in which the leader responds, and which personality traits they emphasise, but also respondents' levels of political information. As such, it is possible to place greater emphasis on the role of

the leader, as studies more recently have done, alongside an understanding of the importance of voters' perceptions and party identity.

Party identity is still clearly of primary importance when it comes to understanding voters' attitudes and behaviour. However, given the recent decline across many European democracies and increasing electoral volatility, it is important that scholars build a more complete understanding of attitude formation within electoral politics and the various short-term factors that could impact upon this. To this end, in the next section I outline an approach which combines party identification with leadership theory to better understand how voters evaluate leaders, and the factors that cause variation in this process.

1.3 Theoretical framework

This thesis employs a theoretical framework that draws upon both party identification theory and leadership theory in order to obtain a more accurate understanding of why voters like the leaders they do. In short, voters are likely to be heavily influenced by their preferred party when it comes to evaluating leaders. However, there are also factors outside of party affiliation that influence leader-follower relationships. This approach recognises that leaders are subject to, and able to control, 'the environmental conditions' that determine the success or failure of their leadership (Garzia 2011).

Classical party identification models such as the Michigan model (Converse et al. 1960) put party identity at the centre of both political attitudes and behaviour, with vote choice being a culmination of several factors in a causal chain. This approach to political attitudes and behaviour has been largely upheld in political science, where a social-psychological view has emerged. From this perspective party identification is shaped by demographic factors and becomes a psychological identity that is not necessarily reliant on formal membership or even consistent party support. There have been subsequent revisions to this model. For example,

Fiorina (1981) disputes the way the Michigan Model frames party identity as exogenous, claiming that instead, party identity is an accumulation of one's attitudes towards politics. Subsequent studies have lent further evidence to this (Weinschenk 2010; Garzia and De Angelis 2016). Nonetheless, party identity is still fundamental in studying both political attitudes and behaviour.

Given the power of party identification, little room is left for a meaningful or impactful relationship between voter and leader, as most interactions are moderated by preconceived notions about the party the leader represents (Bartels 2002). As Curtice and Blais (2001, 4) note, voters 'would tend to like a party leader, irrespective of their personal qualities, if that leader were the leader of their own party, and to dislike them if they were leading a different party'.

However, even in the American Voter, from which this model is taken, there is an acknowledgement that other factors can influence attitudes and behaviour (see Chapter 7). These are considered short term and can relate to scandal or other unpredictable incidents. Indeed, much subsequent literature has focused on how multiple factors can influence and moderate the impact of party identity (Westfall et al. 2015; Garzia and De Angelis 2016; Bankert et al. 2017) As such, it is not a deviation from these traditional models to acknowledge that party identity can be weakened or strengthened according to context and individual-level factors. However, this thesis aims to place leader evaluations in a more central role and show that the extent to which attitudes towards party and leader match can vary depending on a variety of factors.

In order to do so, all three chapters understand public opinion towards leaders by encompassing both voter perceptions *and* factors pertaining to the leader which are exogenous, such as their experience and party affiliation. This framework – that the relationship between voters and leaders is transactional – is drawn from leadership theory (Hollander 1992). The

transaction in this case is as follows: leaders have agency through which they provide followers with political assurances; as a result, voters reward them with heightened regard. This potentially culminates in voters lending the leader's party support at the ballot box.

There is a wider literature on personalization and partisan dealignment that addresses this tension between parties and leaders to varying degrees. It is here that the transactional framework mentioned above has been most developed, even if it is not referred to as such. Personalization is broadly defined as a 'development in which politicians become the main anchor of interpretations and evaluations in the political process' (Adam and Maier 2010). Partisan dealignment refers to the weakening impact of partisan cues on political attitudes and behaviour, this results in a public that is more equipped to seek political information from other sources (Dalton 2007). Though analysis of public opinion towards leaders and parties is present throughout political science, these two strands have the most relevance for this thesis.

In fact, it has become increasingly common for scholars to combine these two strands of literature. This is unsurprising: if parties have decreased in importance in terms of their impact on public opinion, then it is likely that another part of the political process has increased in importance. Party leaders are likely replacements for two main reasons. Firstly, they now have more direct access to voters through the media. Secondly, many media outlets focus more readily on individuals at the expense of institutions, providing further magnification of party leaders images. A number of recent studies combine dealignment and personalisation literature to reevaluate our understanding of the relationship between voters and leaders. For example, Rahat and Kening (2018) examine the relationship between party decline and personalisation. They find that the former accelerates the latter, although there is significant variation across countries. Similarly, Garzia et al. (2020), using data from 1961-2018 show that leader effects on vote choice increase as a result of declining party identity.

Consequently, in a dealigned electorate, leaders are not understood as simply conduits for their parties but have a considerable degree of agency in influencing how voters evaluate them. Leaders are distinct from parties in that they are individuals rather than institutions, and the literature on person perception in psychology demonstrates that there are strict rules governing how individuals evaluate others (Bruckmüller and Abele 2013). These processes are relatively cognitively easy for voters because they carry them out daily. As such, we can expect that, despite the strong incentive to simply evaluate leaders using the partisan cue and not distinguish them from the party they represent, voters will apply person perception to party leaders.

The transactional approach requires a constructivist perspective (Neisser, 1967), which will be applied in this thesis. Leaders are only relevant in electoral politics in terms of how voters perceive them. Understanding them as an exogenous factor which is only determined by the actions of a leader is unlikely to lead to productive analysis. The image of a politician is defined by the voter and should be analysed as such. Thus, by understanding how party and leader are entangled in the minds of voters we can better understand the role that leaders play in electoral politics.

In Table 1 I display how the theoretical approach is utilised and operationalised across the three papers. I use two measures of party association: party identity and party evaluation. This is to capture both long-term and short-term views towards parties, respectively. In chapters 2 and 3 I analyse interactions between contextual information and voter perspectives in order to demonstrate the importance of both with regards to understanding voter perceptions of leaders. In chapter 4, I look at the extent leader-traits can influence who a voter's preferred leader is across both centre-left and centre-right parties. In total, the focus on both contextual factors and voter characteristics provides a more complete picture of how voters form attitudes towards leaders.

Table 1. Chapter overview, theoretical information

Chapter	Explanation	Prediction	Outcome
2	Party identity Year of election	The predictive power of party identity on leader evaluation has declined	Leader Evaluation
3	Party evaluation New leader	Leader change impacts the relationship between party and leader in the minds of voters	Leader Evaluation
4	Leader traits	Leader-traits will determine which leader voters prefer	Party/Leader Congruence

1.4 Operationalisation, data, and methods

Before proceeding, I will clarify precisely what I mean by a party leader and how that has impacted choices made in this thesis. Additionally, I will provide rationale for the data that has been used in the three papers. The question of who the leader of a party is may seem a straightforward one, but the role of party leader can vary depending on the country. For example: in Germany, parties have a politician that acts as their candidate for chancellor and in addition to this they also have a chairperson or leader. These roles are not always fulfilled by the same person. For example, in 2013 Peer Steinbrück was the SPD's candidate for Chancellor, but not their party leader. These two examples demonstrate the difficulty, especially when conducting comparative research, of determining who is the leader of a party.

As such, I will outline two conditions that must be met for an individual to be considered the leader of a party in this thesis. Firstly, the individual should have a position of authority within the party or be a candidate for elected office. Secondly, the leader should be the candidate for head of the government. In parliamentary systems this individual is either simply deemed the leader of the party, or has been ostensibly named the candidate for the head of government. In terms of smaller parties who have no realistic chance of their leader being head of government, this is the individual who is either the spokesperson for the party or the one charged with any potential coalition negotiations.

The majority of surveys employed in this thesis ask questions about individuals broadly based on these two conditions. Where there are questions asked about more than one individual associated with a party, the above guidelines have been used in order to determine which one to include in the analysis. For example, to return to the 2013 German election, both Sigmar Gabriel and Peer Steinbrück are presented as options for respondents to evaluate. As the latter was the chancellor-candidate and a contender for a seat in the Bundestag, he is included in the analysis. However, if parties have dual leadership they are excluded from the analysis, as this presents potential conflict regarding which figure voters see as the primary leader of the party.

The leader, as defined here, is the individual that voters are most likely to perceive as the spokesperson of a party, whether they are officially categorised as leader or not. It is also the person who will, if elected, have the most influence on the direction of the party. As I am trying to identify what loosens or weakens perceptions of the bond between a leader and his party, this definition provides a strict test of that process. The leader usually has a high level of name recognition relative to other party politicians, and as such is already considerably associated with her party.

With regards to the data used in this thesis, the selection has been based on appropriateness to the questions each chapter addresses and precedent from other comparable studies. To better understand the data, why it has been used, and its use in other studies, below I have included a brief discussion of these points for each of the three papers.

In chapter 2, election studies from three parliamentary democracies: Germany, Norway, and Sweden have been pooled into one dataset. This is in order to analyse trends from 1979-2017. This approach has been taken in previous studies focusing on attitudes towards leaders over time (Garzia 2013; Silva et al. 2019). The analysis has been reduced to three countries because of the number of time-points it offers and the consistency in measures over time. Additionally, all three countries have strong centre-right and centre-left parties, which have

remained central to electoral politics across the period. As this chapter focuses on the role of party identity in how voters evaluate leaders comparing centre-right and centre-left parties, it was imperative that all three countries offer relative stability in this regard.

Chapter 3 expands the analysis by using the CSES. This dataset includes post-election surveys and a set of questions that are asked consistently across different countries. Much previous research has relied on this dataset to uncover patterns in political attitudes and behaviour, and it is a widely used resource for political scientists. Furthermore, due to the nature of the key independent variable, a wide sample size was required. Again, there is precedent for using the CSES for analysing attitudes towards leaders (see Curtice and Lisi 2014; Daoust et al. 2019).

Finally, chapter 4 takes a similar approach to chapter 2 in combining several post-election studies into one pooled novel dataset. For this chapter however, the data selection is not due to the length of time that these surveys have been administering specific questions, but due to the nature of the questions they include. Whilst many studies include a variety of questions on traits, as noted by Bittner (2011), they are not always consistent across studies. Therefore, this chapter takes its cue from previous studies (Costa and Silva 2015; Silva and Costa 2019) that combine trait questions into two dimensions, warmth and competence. Consequently, not only these dimensions, but the traits included within in them, have been used in previous research. I provide an overview of all datasets, countries and years included in Table 2.

Table 2. Chapter overview, empirical information

Chapter	Dataset	Countries	Years
2	GNES, GLES, NNES, SNES	Germany, Norway, Sweden	1979-2017
3	CSES	25 countries	1996-2016
4	AES, BES, GES, INES, ITANES, PES	Australia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, UK	2002-2013

This thesis uses the statistical software package Stata for all data analysis. This package provides a wide variety of statistical analysis tools and data visualisations that are suitable for the research questions included in this thesis. Appropriate methods have been used according to relevance for the type of data being analysed. For instance, multi-level models are employed in chapters 2 and 3 because of the number of elections analysed, whereas country-level fixed effects are used in chapter 4 to highlight the impact of each country in the model.

1.5 Contribution

The following sections highlight the contribution of this thesis to the wider literature, broadly outlining the individual contribution of each paper, whilst acknowledging that there is overlap because they all address a similar area of research. However, the structure of this thesis has been designed so that each chapter builds on the next, exposing and subsequently filling a series of gaps in our understanding. Firstly, I consider whether the role that party identity plays in how voters evaluate leaders has changed over time. Secondly, building on the work of Somer-Topcu (2019), I look at the role that leader changes play in the extent evaluations of leaders and their parties match. Thirdly, I focus on whether there is a specific trait that results in some voters preferring leaders not from their preferred parties. The state of the literature on each of these areas and how this provides the motivation for each paper will be discussed below.

Chapter 2

In addition to previous oversights regarding our understanding of how leaders and parties are connected in voters' minds, the other primary reason to reassess this relationship is because we live in a time of partisan dealignment. This has been well documented in the literature and has had notable effects on both turnout and vote choice (Dalton et al. 2002; Dassonneville et al. 2012; Dalton and McAllister 2015). As such, it is likely that it also has an impact on public opinion towards leaders. This is particularly prescient when you consider that party identifiers have constantly been shown to have more loyalty to the leaders of their own parties, and negative feelings to parties that are in direct opposition (Schoen 2007). So, party identity guides voters not just in terms of their party but also when it comes to other parties that they have varying degrees of ideological alignment with.

This chapter adds to a body of research that looks at the impact of party identity on views towards political objects. Literature on personalisation is predicated on the idea of change over time, and many studies purport to show strong evidence of this. However, because of the relatively low number of studies that focus on leader evaluations as an object of study outside of the US, little is known about whether attitudes towards leaders have shifted over the last few decades. I address this by using repeated cross-sectional data going back to the 1970s. The chapter also contributes to literature regarding the decline in party identification across many western democracies by looking at the consequences of this on attitude formation towards leaders (Dalton 2002; Dassonneville et al. 2012; Evans and Tilley 2012).

In this chapter I find that party identity is a strong predictor of leader evaluations. Separating results into both centre-right and centre-left parties I find that this is true for both parties. As such, it should follow that with a gradual decrease in party identity, as shown in the paper, the relationship between party identity and leader evaluations should have altered over

time. This is shown to be the case, but with mixed effects: centre-right identifiers are now more likely than centre-left identifiers to rely on their party identity when evaluating leaders.

Chapter 3

In chapter 3 I address the question of how entangled leaders and parties are in the minds of voters across numerous democracies using the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). We know from previous research that leader and party evaluations are strongly linked (Schoen 2007; Bittner 2011, Tverdova 2011; Daoust et al. 2019). However, given the extent to which parties are seen as the lens through which most other political phenomena are viewed, little attention has been paid to the variability of this relationship. This is important, because leader-follower relationships are transactional: evaluations of leaders are based not necessarily on objective facts but on subjective perception and expectations (Hollander, 1992). The assumption in the literature is often that leaders will exert different influences over voters depending on who the leader is. Building on previous research (Sommer-Topcu 2019; Sommer-Topcu and Fernandez-Vasquez) I look at the influence of leader changes on voter perceptions of leaders.

Previous studies that have looked at voter attitudes towards leaders often do so from the perspective of one democracy, usually the US. Using 25 parliamentary democracies, I use a comparative perspective to increase our understanding of how leaders have been evaluated across time and political context. In addition, while previous studies have looked at the consequences of a change in leader on voter perceptions, there has been no study looking at how this could impact views towards the leader herself. As such, I emphasise the importance of experience in the role when it comes to our understanding of whether voters perceive parties and their leaders as being one and the same.

I find that new leaders are less likely to be associated with the party that they represent. This means clearly over time, as leaders are in the job longer their image and the parties converge. Additionally, I find that voters who consider themselves to have a party identity are more likely to see party and leader as one. This is also true for voters at the more extreme ends of the ideological spectrum. These findings suggest that the extent to which party and leaders are seen as one and the same can vary across parties and countries. This means that treating these two variables as if they are exogenous from one another is problematic, given that they are not necessarily neatly separable to the same extent across different contexts.

Chapter 4

While leader evaluation feeling thermometers are useful because of their almost uniform inclusion across elections studies, they do not provide complete accuracy when it comes to how voters perceive leaders. With regards to this, chapter 4 uses six election studies that include a variety of trait questions to analyse which aspects of leaders' personalities voters are most drawn to. Using data from these six democracies, I construct two variables for warmth and competence. The former encompasses traits that are associated with character and the latter encompasses those that are associated with how good an individual is at their job. These are then used to show what would encourage voters to prefer leaders from a party that is not their preferred party.

Traits help us understand more accurately what voters think about individuals. Translated to a political context both these dimensions are employed as stereotypes relating to parties of differing ideologies. For example, in the US both Republicans and Democrats rate other individuals from the opposite party as more competent and warm respectively. At the level of political elites these stereotypes also exist (Fiske et al. 2002; Fiske et al. 2007; Bittner 2011), However, data restrictions have meant that much of the work done using these traits has

been conducted in the US, or on single cases, with some exceptions. Recent research suggests that warmth may be more important than previously thought (Costa and Silva 2015; Silva and Costa 2019).

A seldom question answered in the literature is whether it is common for voters to favour a leader from a party which is not their preferred one. This was answered most recently and directly by Daoust et al. (2019) who conclude that the majority of voters have congruent preferences. In other words, most individual's preferred leader represents their preferred party. However, this study does not include leader-traits as an explanation and therefore we have little understanding of how leaders can use their personality to increase the chances of voters having congruent preferences. Therefore, this chapter uses traits to understand how people choose their preferred leader, and whether this process differs for leaders of centre-right and centre-left parties.

In this paper I find that recent evidence of the underestimated impact of warmth is well-founded. For both centre-left and centre-right leaders warmth has a greater impact when it comes to voters preferring leaders from their preferred parties. Whilst competence is more important for those who prefer centre-left compared to those who prefer centre-right parties, warmth is still a significantly stronger predictor of remaining congruent. Predictably, party identity is more likely to result in voters having congruent preferences. However, once again I unveil a difference between the way that centre-left and centre-right leaders are evaluated.

2. Has How Voters Evaluate Party Leaders Changed?

2.1 Abstract

Studies have consistently found that traditional voting cleavages in contemporary democracies are in decline. This shift has weakened the influence of parties on political behaviour. While the effect this has on vote choice has been widely studied, less attention has been paid to the consequences for attitude formation. This has led to an ongoing debate surrounding whether party leaders now play a more important role in electoral politics. This paper seeks an answer to the question of how entangled parties and their leaders are in voters' minds by looking at the determinants of leader evaluations over time. Using three different repeated cross-sectional election studies between 1979 and 2017 from Germany, Norway, and Sweden, I provide evidence that party identity now has less of an impact when it comes to evaluating that party's leader.

2.2 Introduction

Political parties and their leaders are a fundamental part of all democracies. Although their influence and popularity are partially dependent on national factors, public opinion towards both can also be understood by applying a wider analytical framework that relies on human psychology and historical trends (Bittner 2018). For instance, when voters evaluate leaders, they are simulating an experience that is familiar: judging other people. To do this they often rely on stereotypes, especially when lacking complete information. Stereotypes that voters are likely to use when it comes to evaluating leaders are those associated with the party the leader represents. Considering this alongside the wider context of a decline in party identification, it is probable that the primary mechanism through which voters evaluate leaders is significantly weakened. This is likely to have resulted in a substantial change in the way voters make up their minds about leaders, compared with several decades ago.

Despite the prominence of leaders in campaigns and media coverage, or what Garzia and De Angelis (2016) call the ‘common wisdom’ that they have a central position in electoral politics (2016), the literature has largely focused on, and reinforced, the importance of parties (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Dalton and McAllister 2015;). This is evident in traditional models of voting behaviour, which place partisanship as the most important factor in a causal funnel that culminates in vote choice (Downs 1957; Campbell et al. 1960;). However, it has been hypothesised by many scholars that due to partisan dealignment and a media that is increasingly focused on individuals, leaders now matter more regarding how voters think and behave (Adam and Maier 2010). This is often referred to as the ‘personalization hypothesis’.

Nevertheless, the evidence is mixed and no real consensus has been reached, with both positive and negative findings (Holmberg and Oscarsson 2013; Lobo and Curtice 2015; Garzia and De Angelis 2016; Bittner 2018). In a recent example of the former, Da Silva et al. use repeated cross-sectional data to show that voters’ evaluations of leaders are having an increased

effect on their probability to turnout at elections (2019). Additionally, Garzia provides evidence that partisanship is increasingly defined by voters' evaluations of leaders (2012, 2013).

Despite this, many studies looking at determinants of vote choice have found that leader effects have not changed substantially over time. For example, Holmberg and Oscarson find a slight increase in the importance of leader evaluations in the USA and Sweden, a decrease in Canada, and no overall trend in Germany, the Netherlands and Norway (2013). Similarly, whilst emphasising the persistent importance of leaders in Canadian elections, Bittner finds no evidence in the increase in the effect of leaders' traits, namely competence and character (2018).

However, just because the aggregate effect of leaders on voter choice has not increased, this does not mean that leaders are still evaluated in the same way. The aim of this study is to answer the question of whether the determinants of voter's attitudes towards leaders have changed over time. Evidence of this would suggest that leaders' role in the political process has shifted. I answer this central question by using repeated cross-sectional election studies from Germany, Norway, and Sweden to evaluate the importance of party identity when respondents evaluate leaders. While the scarcity of questions on both leader and party evaluations spanning several decades has restricted the number of studies that could be included, those that have been enable a long-term analysis.

In this paper I find that although party identity is still a significant determinant of leader evaluation it is a declining influence. This is in line with the literature on partisanship, which shows that its functions have begun to alter in many European democracies due to the erosion of traditional cleavage structures (Jenssen 1999; Dassonneville et al. 2012; Hagevi 2015). My findings provide further evidence that the declining influence of parties goes beyond vote choice and now impacts the way voters perceive individual actors. This offers more potential for politicians to distance themselves from their parties and shape their own public image.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, I analyse the previous literature on leader evaluations and identify a gap in the literature surrounding both the deterrents and whether there has been a change over time. Second, I provide context for the cases of Germany, Norway, and Sweden. Third, I detail my theoretical expectations drawing from previous studies. Fourth, I outline the data used and the modelling strategy. Fifth, I present the results of my analysis. Finally, I offer a discussion of the findings and suggestions for future research. Specifically, I focus on the consequences for models that use leader evaluations to explain attitudes and voting behaviour.

2.3 Party identity and its consequences

Most studies that focus on leader evaluations in some capacity view parties as the basis on which other political behaviour is formed. This approach can be traced back to theories regarding causal inference presented in traditional models of voting behaviour such as in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960). Here, leader evaluations, along with other short-term factors that become more prominent during election campaigns, such as issues and performance assessments, are seen as a direct consequence of long-term partisan attachments (Campbell et al. 1960). Despite the growing literature on the personalization of politics, most subsequent studies are in accordance with this view (Curtice and Holmberg 2005; Karvonen 2010; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2013), with few exceptions (Kriesi 2012; Costa and Silva 2015). They compare the effects of leader evaluations and party evaluations, or identity, on vote choice. For example, King (2002) identifies a minority of elections between 1960 and 2001 in Canada, Germany, Great Britain, France, Russia, and the United States where the leader's personality made a difference to the outcome. Furthermore, he finds no clear trend over time. Similarly, focusing on Germany, Schoen finds that while in certain elections leader preferences are more powerful predictors of vote choice, there is no evidence of significant change (2007).

Therefore, there is a relative lack of evidence that the role of leaders in the electoral calculus has changed. In other words, many studies maintain that leaders are viewed no differently by voters now as they were in decades past: as substantially less important actors than parties. Given this, it is worth assessing why some scholars still have expectations regarding change over time and the possibility that previous approaches have overlooked a shift in how interrelated leaders and parties are in voters' minds.

The fundamental reason scholars have theorised and attempted to find empirical evidence for the increased importance of party leaders in the electoral process is due to the perceived decline in the influence of the political group compared to that of individual actors (Rahat and Sheaffer 2007, p.65). As Holsteyn and Andeweg state, there has been a shift from a 'structured to a more open model of electoral competition' (2010, p. 628). Party identity is rooted in multiple group memberships such as race, religion, and social class (Garzia, 2012, p.534). Much research has been conducted on the dealignment of these cleavages, with voters now using a new calculus to make their political choices (Dalton and Wattenberg 2002; Dalton 2012; Silva et al. 2019). For example, it was previously assumed that partisans should like the leader of their own party irrespective of their qualities, and dislike the leader of a different party (Curtice and Blais. 2001). A change in the stability of partisanship should lead to the weakening of this relationship.

There are two main explanations for why previous studies have failed to show evidence of this. Firstly, because there simply has been no change in the relationship between parties and leaders in voters' minds: although they are less influenced by parties when choosing who to vote for, they still see leaders through the 'perpetual screen' of party identity (Garzia 2012). However, given the erosion of the traditional cleavages on which party identity has been based, parties have subsequently developed a 'catch-all' mentality (Belucci et al. 2015). This has resulted in an electoral orientation that often includes a focus on leadership at a national level.

As such, I would contend that it is unlikely that voters evaluate leaders in the same way. More plausible is the second explanation, that there are methodological problems with previous studies. The recent work of Garzia outlines this. He claims that by controlling for party identification, studies are potentially underestimating the importance of leader evaluations on the vote: some of their impact may be misattributed to the party (Garzia 2012). Similarly, Barisione (2009) notes that leaders could be having an indirect effect that is not being picked up in conventional models: ‘The voter chooses a party he/she identifies with, or has some affection for, and that he/she has drawn closer because of its longstanding leader’. This provides justification for analysing the relationship between voters’ views towards parties and leaders in more detail.

As a result, there have been several studies that have sought to correct problems with previous work (Archer, 1987; Marks, 1993). For example, Midtbø (1997) looks at the determinants of party evaluations using panel data and finds that previous views towards leaders have an impact on what voters think of that leader’s party at the next election. This provides evidence that leaders can have an impact on political attitudes, alongside parties. Additionally, Baumgartner and Morris (2006) find that even when controlling for partisanship, negative assessments of political leaders can lower respondents’ subsequent evaluations. Finally, using counterfactual thought experiments, Holsteyn and Andeweg provide evidence that party leaders who decide to leave their party have the potential to take voters with them (2010). These studies help illustrate the potential for voters to both distinguish between and conflate leaders and the parties they represent.

Furthermore, due to the focus in the literature on other phenomena, most notably turnout and vote choice, leader evaluations have not often been used as the object of study. While it is common for studies to analyse the determinants of candidate evaluations (Funk 1996, 1997; Karp and Banducci 2008; Weaver 2012) and also, in presidential countries such

as the US, to focus on the appeal of presidential candidates (Goren 2002, 2007), there is not an extensive or coherent literature that takes a look at the psychological process of voters when assessing leaders. This is particularly the case with regards to parliamentary democracies. As such, it is possible that phenomena that are distinctly related to perceptions of leaders, are being overlooked in our analysis. Leaders are unlike other objects of political attitudes because they are individuals, and judging others is a process that most people engage in daily. As such, it is imperative that we understand attitudes towards leaders on their own terms, not simply as a cause of other related political phenomena. In the next section I look at the primary determinants of leader evaluations and establish how my approach can help us understand any wider change in voters' attitudes towards party politicians.

2.4 Determinants of leader evaluations

Candidate evaluations are traditionally understood as being shaped by views towards the candidate's party. Any reason for voters to question their party identity should lead them to judge candidates based more on their individual merits rather than on the party they represent. For example, Lupton et al. (2015) use survey data to show that respondents who discuss politics with individuals they disagree with display less partisan evaluations of candidates. Conversely, Gerber et al.(2015) find that providing respondents with party material in the lead up to an election results in more partisan evaluations of political figures . The evidence that parties play a causal role in partisan attitude formation suggests that leader evaluations should be subject to the same mechanism. Consequently, any weakening of party identity should result in less partisan evaluations of leaders, offering the potential for leaders to distance themselves from their parties in the minds of voters.

However, the use of leader evaluations as the outcome variable is limited to a small number of studies (Garzia 2012; Bittner 2011; Karvonen 2011; Schoen 2007). Therefore, our

understanding of the determinants of voters' attitudes towards leaders over time and across different contexts is limited. This is because most studies are cross-sectional and/or restricted to one country. In addition, many studies that look at how voters evaluate candidates more generally are limited to the United States (Schneider and Bos 2016; Gerber et al. 2015; Dolan 2014).

Those that exist all provide evidence of the importance of party attachment. Voters project their feelings about a party onto that party's leader. This has been captured by Bittner, who shows that there are both positive and negative effects of party identity. Centre-left party identifiers are likely to positively evaluate centre-left leaders but negatively evaluate centre-right leaders. The same pattern is true, but in reverse, for centre-right identifiers (Bittner, 2011, p.60). Additionally, Daoust et al. find that even when voters prefer leaders from parties they do not, most of the time voters end up supporting their preferred party (2019). Several studies have revealed the importance of more indirect measure of voters' feelings towards a party (Dolan 2008; Bittner 2011). In these studies, respondents' ideology is shown to be a significant determinant of leader evaluations. When measuring the distance between the ideology of a voter and a party, Peterson (2005) finds that this matters nearly as much as party identification when respondents evaluate leaders. Additionally, several year-to-year factors can have an impact on leader evaluations (Laustsen and Bor 2017). Other factors include, but are not restricted to, economic assessments, government performance, and the focus of the campaign (Garzia 2012; Schoen 2007).

The literature outlined above highlights the continued importance of parties in both attitude formation and voting behaviour. By focusing on the determinants of leader evaluations studies have provided substantial evidence that attitudes to parties and leaders are strongly linked, but with notable exceptions, there are very few studies that take a long-term view. As a

result, we have little understanding of how attitudes towards leaders have changed over time, which is one of the key questions of the personalization literature.

2.5 Germany, Norway, and Sweden as case studies

All three countries included in this paper display a decline in party identification; this can be seen in figure 1. They do however have different starting points, and different rates of change. Party identity is considerably higher in Germany and Sweden than in Norway. However, the rate of change in Sweden is considerably slower than in the other two countries. One possible reason for this is the transformation of traditional party identification into bloc-identification. Here, whilst identification with the parties is waning, it is reinforced by identification with pre-electoral coalitions, stabilising the party system and consequently party identity (Hagevi 2015).

The long-term decline in party identity is commonly attributed to the erosion of traditional voting cleavages (Scarrow 2004). In Germany for instance, the decline in union membership is likely to have had an impact on SPD support, and the decline in church-going an impact on CDU/ CSU support. As such, not only has there been a decrease in party identity, but those who consider themselves party identifiers are less representative of the general public (Dassonneville et al. 2012). Therefore, being a party identifier in the current era is likely to be different to being a party identifier several decades ago. Similarly, in Norway, party identifiers are now not only fewer, but also more likely to be volatile both with regards to attitudes and vote choice (Jenssen 1999). Furthermore, Sweden has experienced a more moderate decline in party identification yet studies have shown that this still has a substantial impact on behaviour (Strömbäck and Johansson 2007). However, there has been a decline in traditional party identity (Bankert et al. 2017) in favour of bloc identity. As there are several party leaders within any given bloc, this weakens the link between party and leader, and increases the likelihood

that identifiers will side with a leader that is not necessarily from the party they feel closest to (Hagevi 2015).

Indeed, there is some evidence of personalization in each of the three countries. Germany has traditionally been seen as a democracy in which parties are central, but with a dominant Chancellor who plays a key role in governance (Garzia 2013). Evidence suggests that the balance has shifted towards the latter with regards to electoral importance (Poguntke and Webb 2005; Biezen et al. 2012). In Norway, Jenssen and Aalberg (2006) show that leader popularity has a modest but robust impact on political attitudes. This is in addition to evidence of the long-term relevance of leaders even after they are no longer at the head of the party (Midtbø 1997). Finally, in Sweden, recent evidence suggests that prime ministers now rely less on their party and parliament and are thus able to form a more direct relationship with the electorate (Back et al. 2009; Aylott 2007).

The final area of similarity between the three countries is the differing impact of the collapse of party identity on centre-left and centre-right parties. The aggregate effect of this can be seen in figure 2, where centre-left party identity has decreased while centre-right party identity has increased. The financial crisis is likely to have had an impact on this, as it led to an increase in fortunes for centre-right parties across Europe (Downes and Loveless 2018) . The heterogenous nature of the decline in party identity is important when considering how the impact of party identity on leader evaluations has changed over time. This will be addressed alongside other expectations in the next section.

Figure 1. Percentage of party identifiers over time by country

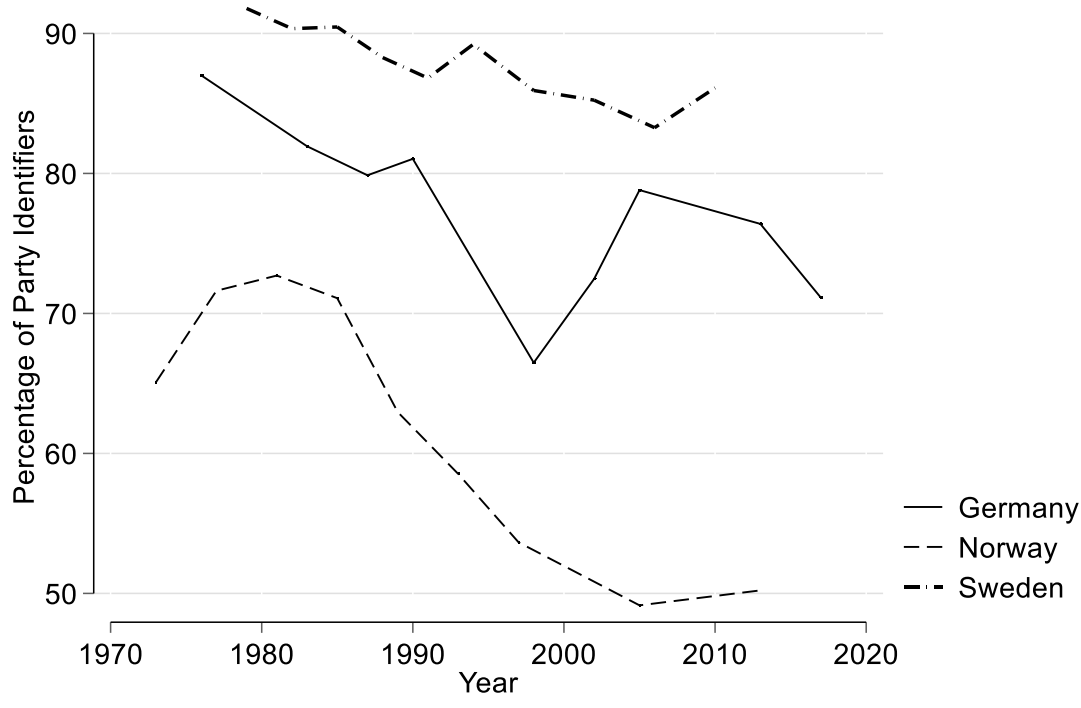
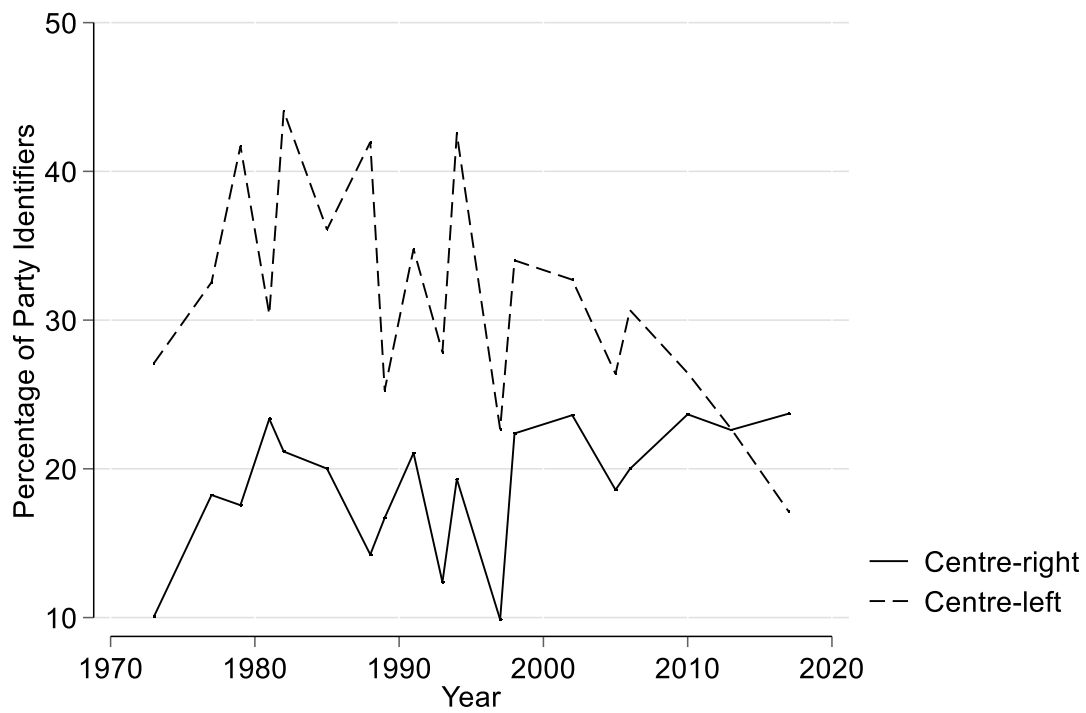


Figure 2 Percentage of party identifiers over time by party ideology



2.6 Expectations

Given the importance of voters' views towards a party in informing what they think of that party's leader, the decline of party identification in many countries presents us with the central puzzle of this study. As party membership declines and fewer people view politics through the lens of their party identity, this should disrupt many of the processes described above. For example, studies show that in countries where party identification is weaker, leader evaluations are stronger determinants of vote choice (Curtice and Holmberg 2005). Equally, van Holsteyn and Andeweg (2010) provide evidence that those with weaker party identity tend to regard leaders as more important.

The dealignment of traditional cleavages on which identity associated with mainstream parties is largely based, is likely to lead to the disentangling of leaders and parties in voters' minds. In other words, voters should be freer to choose leaders based on their individual merits, or other short-term factors brought to light in campaigns, rather than because of any bias towards a leader's party.

The main contribution this study aims to make is to update our understanding of the extent to which individuals rely on their view of the party when evaluating leaders by taking a cross-national and longitudinal perspective. Although parties are still key in our understanding of how people form political attitudes there have been few attempts to reconcile this with the developing literature on the role of party leaders. If individuals matter more now at the expense of institutions, then the relationship between leaders and parties in citizens' minds should have shifted.

As established in the literature review, what someone thinks of a leader's party is the most important predictor of what they think of that party's leader. My expectation is that this will hold for this study. This includes the more indirect measure of party association: how

ideologically close an individual is to a party. Thus, the more left-wing a respondent considers themselves to be, the more highly they will evaluate the leader of a left-wing party and vice versa.

In accordance with the personalization literature, party identity should now have a decreased impact on how people evaluate leaders. Although party identity should remain as the most important predictor of leader evaluation, each election year should exhibit a weaker relationship between parties and leaders in respondent's minds. Evidence of this process would lend more ballast to the theory of 'presidentialization': whereby parliamentary democracies are coming to resemble presidential democracies in terms of the importance of individuals (Adam and Maier 2010).

However, this effect should vary depending on whether voters identify with centre-left or centre-right parties. Given the fact that across these countries, centre-right identity has slightly increased over time, we would now expect the impact of centre-right partisanship on leader evaluations to increase. Contrarily, centre-left identifiers should be less reliant on their identity when evaluating leaders. This is in line with Schoen's (2007) findings that identity is instructive for both a voter's own party and the opposing party. As such, over time, those who identify with centre-right parties should feel more positive about their own party's leader and more negative towards centre-left leaders, with the reverse being true for centre-left identifiers.

2.7 Data and methods

This paper uses data from three national election studies in Germany, Norway and Sweden. Given these are parliamentary democracies, they are a sterner test of personalization. We would expect change over time to be limited in these countries due to the importance of parties and the relative lack of opportunity for leaders to distinguish themselves from their parties. All countries use a version of proportional representation and have a similar number of effective

parties, making them multi-party systems. However, the three countries also have centre-left and centre-right parties that are always in government in some form and have strong electoral bases. Additionally, party identity has almost continuously fallen in the last few decades, as shown in Figure 1. This is a trend that is representative of other Western European democracies (Dalton and Weldon 2007) and therefore enables me to test my theory that a context with lower levels of partisanship should result in less partisan leader evaluations.

Most importantly, these countries have been chosen because of availability of measures. Questions on both leader and party evaluations vary greatly over time, and one of the potential reasons for a lack of longitudinal analysis of leader evaluations outside of the US is due to this problem. These studies enable a long-term analysis of attitudes towards leaders. An approach that spans decades is pertinent to determine the extent of change in individual-level attitudes following the decline of traditional voting cleavages.

Parties are an important conduit for their leaders, however, studies have paid little attention to the party-specific effect of how citizens think about leaders. Those that use a cross-national perspective when trying to understand the importance of leaders often employ stacked-datasets where respondents' evaluations of leaders, rather than the respondents themselves, become the unit of observation (Curtice and Lisi 2015; Aldering et al. 2018). Although this enables a broad analysis, the specific details of the effect of parties is lost. For example, we know that people have a different form of attachment with mainstream parties compared to fringe parties. Partisanship is stronger and more developed for mainstream parties (Garzia et al. 2019). This results in 'horse-race' style coverage, where the leader's profile is prioritized above the party. As both leaders from the two main parties are in contention for the premiership, they are likely to rely on the profiles of their leaders (Mughan 2000).

To account for this, I focus on the two mainstream parties from each country: the Social Democratic Party, the Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union (CSU) for

Germany; Labour and Conservative parties for Norway; Social Democrat and Moderate parties for Sweden. As a result, party membership is large relative to the other parties and party identity is well developed. Again, this provides a more robust test of whether the relationship between leaders and parties has changed. Respondents' views towards parties should be more established and therefore less prone to fluctuation.

The dependent variable for each study is leader evaluation, measured on a scale of 0-10. This is the most common way of capturing feelings towards leaders and asks the degree to which a respondent likes a particular leader. Although evaluations of specific characteristics can offer a more detailed representation of attitudes towards an individual (see Bittner 2018), the same characteristics are not available for all studies both across countries and across time. Therefore, leader evaluations allow for a wider analysis. Parties with more than one leader have been dropped from the analysis due to potential conflict regarding which figure voters see as the primary leader of the party.

I operationalise association with a leader's party in two ways. Firstly using a binary variable to measure whether respondents consider themselves a party identifier or not. This is a stable measure of party preference that taps into long-term association. Here, party identity is defined in broad terms as party sympathy. This is because more detailed measures of party identity (such as strength) are not consistent across countries and years and would result in omitting a significant number of observations and would limited the temporal scope of the paper. Secondly, I account for a respondent's ideological proximity to the leader's party. This was constructed by subtracting respondents' self-placement on a left-right scale, from their placement of the leader's party on the same scale. It was then recoded so 0 represents no proximity and 10 represents complete proximity.

To account for contextual factors, I include year of Election ². All data is from the post-election waves of the individual studies, and therefore the result of an election and the nature of the campaign should have an impact on how close respondents perceive parties and leaders to be. In addition, I included controls for whether a leader is new or not, and for the vote share a party received. Firstly, leader change can have an impact on voters' perceptions, and there is considerable variation between parties in how often they field a leader that represented them at the previous election (Fernandez-Vasquez and Somer-Topcu 2017). For example, in Norway, the Conservative party fielded a new leader 87% of the time compared to the Labour party fielding a new leader 26% of the time. Secondly, although both centre-left and centre-right parties are well-established in all three countries there is considerable variation in their electoral success and consequently their size. As there is some evidence that voters evaluate leaders from smaller parties differently (Wagner and Weßels 2012), vote share as a percentage is used as a control.

Finally, I control for sociodemographic factors Age, Education, and Sex. Age is split into seven groups³ as exact age could not be included due to data restrictions. Sex is coded as (0) for male and (1) for female. Finally, Education is a three-stage variable that accounts for primary (1) secondary (2) and university (3) education.

In this paper, I employ multi-level random intercept models separately for all, centre-right, and centre-left leaders. Respondents are nested within individual elections in order to account for contextual variation.

² The timescales for Germany, Norway, and Sweden are 1980-2017, 1981-2013, and 1979-2010 respectively.

³ 18-22, 23-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-70, 71-80

2.8 Results

In Table 3 I have run two preliminary models, looking at the determinants of leader evaluations for all parties. As a result, this is a stacked data matrix where individual observations are not respondents, but leader*respondent combinations. To account for this I have employed a multi-level model where individual responses are nested within respondents, which are in turn nested within elections. The first of these models looks at the impact of both attitudinal and demographic variables. In model 1, as expected, both party identity and proximity have a positive and significant effect. In other words, if an individual identifies with or feels ideologically closer to a leader's party, then they are more likely to evaluate that leader positively.

Table 3. Determinants of leader evaluations for all parties

	(1)		(2)	
Pid	2.12***	(0.02)	11.90***	(2.81)
Pid x Year			-0.005**	(0.001)
Proximity	0.44***	(0.002)	0.44***	(0.003)
Vote Share	0.02***	(0.01)	0.02***	(0.0004)
Age group	0.05***	(0.0004)	0.05***	(0.004)
Education	0.01*	(0.0004)	0.01*	(0.003)
Female	0.11***	(0.01)	0.11***	(0.01)
Year			-0.02*	(0.01)
Wald χ^2	73996.22		73537.79	
N (Observations)	38,984		38,984	
N (Election)	23		23	

Note Random intercept model. Table entries are unstandardized coefficients with random intercepts at the election and respondent level.

p<0.05; **p<0.01; *p<0.001*

In the second model I add an interaction between party identity and year in order to measure whether there has been a change in the attitudes of party identifiers over time on the leaders of their parties. The negative coefficient for this interaction suggests that there has: the impact of party identity on leader evaluations has decreased with time.

However, while this confirms change, the purpose of this paper is to explore whether there has been a heterogenous effect across centre-left and centre-right parties. Consequently, separate models were created for evaluations of the leaders of the two mainstream parties; these are displayed in Table 4. Model 1 includes all variables described in the section above. Model 2 adds interactions between party identity and year of election, by centre-left and centre-right identifiers. Both test whether the extent to which party identifiers rely on their identity when evaluating leaders has changed over time.

Table 4. Determinants of leader evaluations for centre-left and centre-right leaders

Centre-left leaders	(1)		(2)	
Left Pid	2.17***	(0.03)	62.17***	(4.81)
Right Pid	-0.58***	(0.03)	9.78	(5.33)
Left Pid x Year			-0.03***	(0.002)
Right Pid x Year			-0.01	(0.003)
Proximity	0.37***	(0.006)	0.36***	(0.007)
Vote Share	0.008	(0.01)	0.004	(0.02)
Age group	0.05***	(0.007)	0.06***	(0.007)
Education	-0.03	(0.02)	-0.01	(0.02)
Female	0.07**	(0.02)	0.06**	(0.02)
Year			0.01	(0.02)
Wald χ^2	21788.53		22037.50	
N (Observations)	39,102		39,102	
N (Election)	23		23	

Centre-right leaders		(1)		(2)
Right Pid	1.73***	(0.03)	-12.26*	(5.49)
Left Pid	-0.91**	(0.03)	-95.18***	(5.00)
Right Pid x Year			0.007*	(0.003)
Left Pid x Year			0.05***	(0.003)
Proximity	0.45***	(0.006)	0.44***	(0.006)
Vote Share	-0.008**	(0.002)	-0.01***	(0.002)
Age group	0.13***	(0.007)	0.13***	(0.007)
Education	0.10***	(0.02)	0.08***	(0.02)
Female	0.04	(0.02)	0.04	(0.02)
Year			0.02	(0.02)
Wald χ^2	23528.97		24126.53	
N (Observations)	39,040		39,040	
N (Election)	23		23	

Note Random intercept model. Table entries are unstandardized coefficients with random intercepts at the election and respondent level.

** $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$*

In model 1, I again look at the cross-sectional determinants of leader evaluations. As expected, party identity has a significant positive effect. This is true for both centre-right and centre-left leaders where it is by far the strongest predictor of leader evaluations. Centre-right identifiers are more likely to evaluate the leader from their own party higher and the leader of the centre-left party lower and vice versa for centre-left identifiers. Proximity is also significant and in the expected direction: the closer a respondent is in terms of ideology to a party, the higher they evaluate the leader of that party. The predictive ability of both measures demonstrates the importance of the party when respondents evaluate leaders.

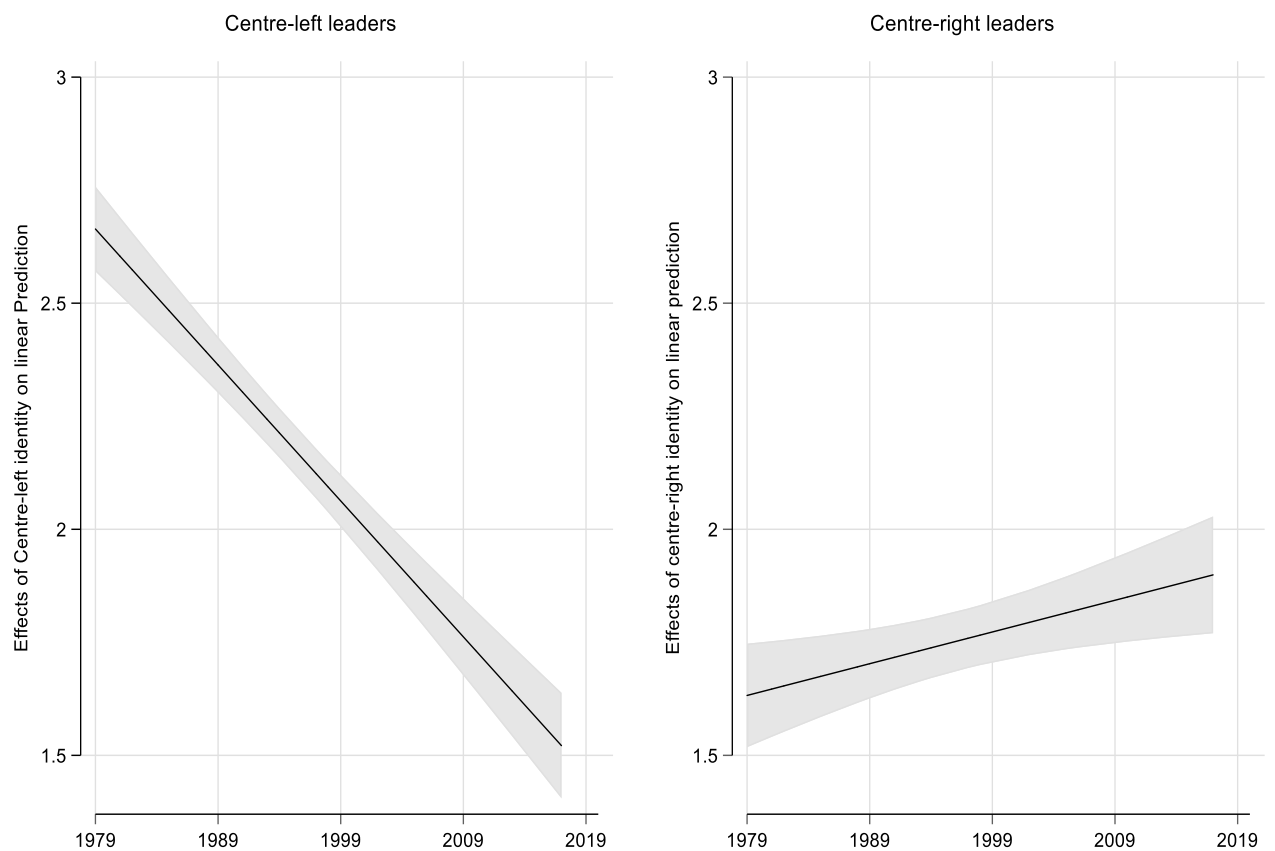
To test change over time I add interactions between year and party identity, as above. As expected, the findings indicate that the impact of party identity on voters' evaluations has undergone a transformation. Of the four interaction terms included, three are statistically

significant and in the expected direction. For centre-left leaders, centre-left party identity is now less likely to lead to a positive evaluation of the leader. However, centre-right party identity does not appear to be any more instructive. For centre-right leaders, having centre-right party identity is now likely to lead to a higher evaluation of the leader. Centre-left identify however, has led to increasingly positive evaluations of centre-right leaders over time, suggesting that identity is less instructive in attitude formation than it has previously been.

However, as figure 3 shows, there has been considerably more change in the role of centre-left party identity than there has in the role of centre-right identity. This perhaps goes some way to explain why centre-right identifiers are no less likely to evaluate centre-left leaders negatively now than in previous decades. This suggests that, by distinguishing between centre-left and centre-right party identity, we can obtain a more nuanced understanding of how the role of party identity in electoral politics is altering.

Overall, there is evidence to support my expectation that voters now feel freer to evaluate leaders based on their merits rather than what they think of a leader's party, but with the caveat that this applies to centre-left rather than centre-right party identifiers. Three of the four interaction terms are significant and in the expected direction and show a changing relationship between leader evaluations and party identity in three election studies over a period of 41 years.

Figure 3. Marginal effects of centre-left and centre-right party identity on leader evaluations



2.9 Discussion

Political parties are still the most dominant force in modern democracies when it comes to voters' political attitudes and behaviour. They provide a framework on which citizens can project their attitudes, often regardless of what the party stands for at that current time. A good example of this is party leaders. Although citizens may believe they have agency when judging leaders, the leader's party has a large impact on their opinion. Although this relationship is a relatively unexamined part of the political science literature, the number of studies on the topic has increased. Combined with the substantial evidence of the decline of party identity, there is an open debate surrounding the importance of leaders in contemporary democracies (Adam and Maier 2010).

Looking at centre-left and centre-right parties in three parliamentary democracies, this paper provides evidence that the instructive role of party identity when it comes to evaluating leaders is weakening. This specific focus provides a stern test for the notion that citizens' perceptions of the relationship between parties and leaders has changed. I use the same causal assumptions utilised in traditional voting models that party association comes first when citizens are forming political attitudes. This is alongside the strong evidence from the psychological literature on person perception that people project stereotypes onto an individual regardless of that individual's behaviour (Bittner 2018). Applying this model to leader evaluations would suggest that party evaluations are the most important determinant. When controlling for individual and contextual factors I show that the predictive power of party identity is in decline for centre-left identifiers but increasing for centre-right parties.

There are some caveats regarding these findings however. Firstly, as noted, the number of countries that could be looked at was restricted by a lack of appropriate questions over time. Therefore, although these democracies are representative of Western Europe with regards to general partisan decline, the findings cannot necessarily be applied to other democracies equally. Secondly, party identity is still the most consistently significant predictor of leader evaluation. Regardless of a respondent's demographic profile, the year of election, or ideology, party identity is still the most important determinant when it comes to evaluating that party's leader.

Nonetheless, this paper is one of the few to take both a comparative and longitudinal assessment of the determinants of leader evaluations. It provides evidence that the relationship between party identity and leaders is not necessarily stable across elections. This should have an impact on research regarding political behaviour.

I suggest three possible avenues for further research. Firstly, the extent to which this has been a historic process or is likely to continue should be assessed. Secondly, given the

differences in how centre-left and centre-right identifiers assess leaders, more attention needs to be paid to this distinction and potential consequences. Thirdly, the electoral implications of this process need to be better understood. Are leaders now more able to distance themselves from their parties and attract voters using their own profile?

To conclude, parties still matter greatly when voters evaluate leaders. However, there is some evidence to suggest that this process is weakening for centre-left party identifiers. The key task for the literature now is to further examine voters' attitudes towards parties and leaders in contexts where party identity is declining, and assess the consequences of this for our understanding of the role of partisanship in electoral politics.

3. Leader Changes and the Determinants of Voters' Perceptions

3.1 Abstract

There is a significant literature on the role of both parties and leaders in electoral politics and a broad understanding of the strength of the relationship between the two in voters' minds. However, less research has been done to determine if there is systematic variation in whether voters perceive a party and its leader as one and the same. I address this question by using the Comparative Study of Electoral System (CSES) covering 55 legislative elections over a time period of 20 years (1996–2016) to measure the impact of leader changes on voter perceptions. I find that new leaders are less likely to be evaluated according to the party they represent, with some evidence that maintaining the same leader over consecutive elections increases the association between leader and party.

3.2 Introduction

Angela Merkel has been the chancellor-candidate for the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in every election since 2005. Whereas, their main rivals the Social Democratic Party (SPD) have fielded a different candidate every time. There are examples across various democracies of parties who maintain the same leader over consecutive elections and parties who regularly change. Whilst recent research has shown that leader changes matter for how parties' policies are understood (Somer-Topcu 2017; Fernandez Vasquez and Somer-Topcu 2019), there is limited information on how they affect voters' perceptions of the relationship between party and leader. For example, are evaluations of Angela Merkel and the CDU more likely to align because of her longevity in the role compared to the instability of the SPD leadership?

This paper examines the determinants of voters' evaluations of party leaders. Although there is a substantial literature on this, little attention has been paid to how a change in leader could impact the evaluation process. We know that voters' opinions of a leader's party play a substantial role in how they evaluate that leader. However, we have a limited understanding of when party evaluations would matter more, or less, for leader evaluations across elections and countries. This paper offers a solution to this puzzle by accounting for leader changes.

There is currently a burgeoning literature on the importance of individual actors in electoral politics (Adam and Maier 2010). Key to this literature is the attempt to disentangle leaders and parties in the minds of voters (van Holsteyn and Andeweg 2010; Garzia 2013a, 2013b; Bellucci et al. 2015; Garzia and De Angelis 2016) This is an important task, because voting behaviour models often rely on the assumption that party and leader evaluations are exogenous. If accounting for leader changes shows there is spill-over between the two measures, this casts doubt on the relatively unimportant role leader effects supposedly play in the electoral calculus. Additionally, previous research (Wagner and Weßels 2012) has

suggested that congruence between party and leader is electorally beneficial for parties. So, understanding if parties can make changes to encourage this could have practical implications. Furthermore, as the leader is the person who will primarily represent the party, and in many contexts is competing to become prime minister, the extent to which voters associate her with their party has implications for how easy it may be for a leader to either embrace or reject their party's image.

The main expectation of this paper is that leader changes impact the extent to which leader and party are evaluated similarly. A party and its leader are connected in a variety of ways: leaders have an impact on their party's organization and policy stances, and feature heavily in election campaigns and the media. Evidence suggests that voters are keenly aware of this (Somers-Topcu 2017; Somers-Topcu & Fernandez-Vasquez 2017). However, research has also shown that leader changes can impact perceptions of both. This allows for the possibility that the extent to which leaders and their parties are perceived as connected can alter according to whether there has been a change in leadership.

To address these expectations, I use modules 1, 3, and 4 of the Comparative Study of the Electoral Systems (CSES) from 1996-2016 including 26 countries and 55 elections. Module 2 was omitted from the analysis because it does not include leader evaluations. This data is ideal for studying this topic as it enables comparison on a large scale over multiple elections. It also includes a relatively wide number of respondent characteristics that are theoretically appropriate to this topic, reducing the potential for estimation bias.

I show that while voters are very likely to evaluate parties at the same, or a similar level to leaders, it varies depending on whether the leader is new or not. Leaders who represented the party at the previous election are more likely to be evaluated at a similar level to their party. Additionally, I provide a further test of this by looking at leader evaluations over three consecutive elections and comparing parties that kept the same leader to those that changed at

each election. Here, I find that party and leader evaluations are more closely associated in the former case compared to the latter.

The paper is structured as follows. Firstly, I review the literature on parties and their leaders. Next, I establish my contribution to the literature by proposing the importance of leader change. Then, I outline my theoretical framework and use this body of literature to form my hypotheses. After this I introduce the data and methodology employed. Then, I move on to the findings in two stages: first discussing the effects of a new leader on voters' evaluations of them, and second, the variation in leader evaluations for parties that keep the same leader over three elections compared to those who do not. Finally, I discuss the implication of these findings and offer some suggestions for further research.

3.3 Parties and their leaders

Parties and their leaders are fundamental to the study of electoral politics and there is a substantial literature on both. Traditional models of voting behaviour, such as the Michigan Model, point to the importance of political parties for attitude formation and ultimately vote choice (Campbell et al. 1960). Multiple subsequent studies have confirmed these findings, often claiming the impact of other factors, such as leaders, to be minimal (King 2002; ; Karvonen 2010; Curtice and Hunjan 2013). For example, Holmberg and Oscarsson (2013) analyse the importance of party effects on vote choice in thirty countries, noting that they are so strong in some countries as to render leader effects trivial.

However, more recent studies provide evidence that leaders are potentially more important than previously thought (Evans and Andersen 2005; Poguntke and Webb 2005; Bittner 2018; Mellon et al. 2018;). The work of Garzia is particularly assertive on this point, claiming that previous studies have overlooked the extent to which there is reciprocal causation (Garzia, 2012: 177). In other words, the extent to which leaders could inform voters' views of

parties rather than the other way around has been underestimated. This body of literature points to the extent to which it is possible for party and leader to be entangled in voters' minds. There is a focus on parliamentary democracies, where the concept of "presidentialization" has been put forward. Here, scholars posit that parliamentary democracies are coming to resemble presidential democracies with regards to the power of leaders; potentially resulting in autonomy from the party and the personalization of the electoral process (Webb and Poguntke 2005; Silva 2019).

Regardless of the causal direction – whether leaders influence parties or the other way around – it is clear from the literature that leader and party are closely associated with one another and should therefore receive similar evaluations. It is not necessary to make claims regarding causal direction in order to analyse the extent of the relationship. Several studies use cross-sectional data to measure this, all reinforcing its strength (Tverdova 2010; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2013; Daoust et al. 2019). Wagner and Weßels (2012) suggest that party and leader evaluations are not competing but reinforce one another. Leaders regarded as the personification of their party are more likely to enhance the party message and therefore a match between leader and party is not only likely, but also desirable from the party's perspective.

Putting this into the context of surveys, if a voter rates a party 10 out of 10, it is highly unlikely that his evaluation of the party's leader would be 4, for example. Although it should be possible to maintain contrary views of a party and its leader, there is little reason for respondents to do so and evidence that in fact it is cognitively easier to see both as matching (Davies and Mian 2010). The way in which voters collect information reaffirms this viewpoint: parties and their personnel are repeatedly shown side by side (Wagner and Weßels, 2012). For example, the change in ideological position of the Labour party in the 1990s is often attributed to Tony Blair's leadership. Somer-Topcu and Fernandez-Vasquez (2017) provide evidence that

voters take notice of these changes, particularly when parties are led by a new face. This suggests that attitudes towards a party and its leader can move in parallel. Additionally, the persistence of partisanship reinforces the connection between institution and individual. Even when controlling for party evaluation and ideology, partisanship is dominant: right-wing identifiers prefer right-wing leaders and vice versa for left-wing identifiers (Bittner, 2011). Furthermore, leaders from different parties are often viewed as adversaries competing against one another, and widespread partisan loyalty increases this perception (Schoen 2007).

Wagner and Weßels (2011) use post-election studies to look at the relationship between leader and party evaluations in Germany from 1998 to 2009 and find a marked increase in the correlation coefficient (from 0.69 to 0.78). This demonstrates a coevolution of party and leader evaluations. Even if parties have a leader who is particularly liked or disliked at any given election, party evaluations usually fit accordingly. This is in line with findings by Tverdova (2010) who finds that of those who feel represented by a party and a leader, 80% feel represented by the leader of the party they feel represented by. Daoust et al.'s (2019) use three waves of the CSES to look at whether voters usually prefer the leader from their preferred party. They find that most voters have congruent preferences. In fact, there is no country where incongruent voters are the majority, although it ranges from around 35% in Switzerland to around 5% in Hungary.

In addition to observational studies, van Holsteyn and Andeweg (2010) use counterfactual thought experiments asking respondents to assess whether they would change their vote for a party if the candidate of that party changes. Although they do not focus on leaders, there is another way of measuring the relationship between party and person in the minds of voters. If they are strongly associated, then a different candidate should not have a substantial impact on vote choice because individuals that represent a party should all be viewed in a similar light. Accordingly, they find that most voters put party over person. This is

moderated by, predictably, party identification. Those who are party identifiers are more likely to stick with the party regardless of the candidate.

Given the decline in the number of party identifiers across multiple democracies however, many voters will now have to look elsewhere when it comes to evaluating leaders (Dalton 2012; Garzia 2013b). If party identity cannot be relied on to the same extent, then current evaluations towards parties, which are more likely to be informed by short-term factors, are likely to play a larger role. In a context where party identity is less commonplace, it is less likely to limit the effects of party evaluations on leader evaluations (Schoen 2007). Therefore, we can expect more unstable factors such as leader changes to feature in how voters perceive the relationship between party and leader.

Although leaders and parties are widely regarded as matching in the minds of voters, previous studies have either been limited to single or a small number of cases. Or, in the case of Daoust et al. (2019) the focus is different from what I intend in this paper. Their study focuses on what determines whether voters prefer a leader from a different party. In this paper I have a broader scope: what moderates whether voters regard party and leader as interconnected, not just for the party they prefer, but for all parties and leaders evaluated. In addition to this, studies often omit factors regarding the leaders which are exogenous to how voters perceive them. I draw on recent research (Somer-Topcu 2017; Fernandez-Vazquez and Somer-Topcu 2017) to show the role we can expect leader changes to play in the process of evaluating leaders.

3.4 Party leader changes and voter perceptions

As shown above, we would expect voters to rely heavily on their attitude towards a party when evaluating its leader. However, it is reasonable to expect that whoever the current leader is can impact the extent to which they are associated with the party. For example, using data from the

2011 Finnish election, Kestilä-Kekkonen and Söderland (2014) show that the popular leader of the True Finn party, Timo Soini, due to a concentration of power, was able to maintain unity amongst party candidates, leading to a coherent party message fashioned in his image. The party's initial success gives credence to Wagner and Weßel's (2012) notion that a party leader should be the personification of his party. In fact, a leader's longevity should in general speak to their popularity. If leaders are less popular than their parties then they are not likely to have a long tenure.

Current research on the extent to which voters change how they evaluate leaders from election to election provides an inconclusive explanation of why this is the case. Using data from German election studies, Schoen (2007: 329) suggests that elite actions may play a role: 'the minimal correlations between candidate evaluations in 1994 coincide with the nomination of a not very well-known politician by the Social Democrats.' Additionally, looking at the same country, Wagner and Weßels (2012) show fluctuation in the extent to which the means of party and leader evaluations match. Whilst they note that both change relative to each other across elections and between parties, they offer no systematic explanation as to why this is the case.

Therefore, it is probable that to make progress on our understanding of the extent to which parties and leaders are entangled in the minds of voters, more attention should be paid to the aspects of leadership that are exogenous to how voters perceive them. A simple measure of this is to look at how the nature of leader evaluations change when the leaders themselves change. This is pertinent, because if leader change can alter the underlying determinants of leader evaluations then not only does it show that voters are aware of the personnel change itself, but also of the consequences this can have upon the extent to which a leader is the product of her party. To dissociate leader and party in light of a leadership change is a rational perspective on behalf of the voter, because new leaders are less likely to have had time to make the institutional and programmatic changes that mould the party in their image.

Recent research has highlighted the overlooked importance of leader changes on voters' perceptions. For example, drawing upon data from seven parliamentary European democracies Somer-Topcu (2017) shows that when parties change leader, voter disagreement surrounding party policy decreases. In other words, increased attention on the leader and party following a change in personnel results in a renewed awareness amongst voters. In addition to this, Fernandez-Vasquez and Somer-Topcu (2017) apply the role of leader change to party ideology also finding that change can increase the accuracy of voter understanding of parties' ideological position.

This process can be applied to leader evaluations. A new leader brings with them a considerable amount of uncertainty when it comes to the direction of the party they lead. Furthermore, this uncertainty is compounded by the fact that new leaders are likely to attract more media attention (Gomibuchi 2001) and use this exposure to distance themselves from the party's direction under the previous leader. New leaders are also often appointed following electoral failure, increasing the likelihood that the new leader is going to want to distance themselves from certain actions that occurred prior to their appointment. As we know that leader change can affect voters' perceptions, they are likely to recognise that party and leader are not as aligned when a new person is at the head of the party. As such, hypothesis 1 has been formulated as follows:

H1: Voters are less likely to evaluate new leaders according to how they evaluate the leader's party.

It is reasonable to expect that the effect of having the same leader will increase from election to election. It can take time for leaders to instigate changes to the party organisation and programmes, therefore voter evaluations of party and leader may take several election cycles

to align. Contrarily, a new leader at every election offers less continuity to voters, and the media spotlight on a new face may encourage voters to assess party and leader differently. In addition to this, Schoen (2007) provides evidence that the repeated exposure of election campaigns brings attitudes towards parties and leaders into line with one another. Fielding the same leader at every election is likely to have the same effect, but over a longer period.

H2: The longer a party leader remains in office the more similarly voters evaluate them to the party they represent.

3.5 Data and methods

This paper uses three modules of the CSES, from 1996-2016. All surveys included in the CSES are post-election. Module 2 has been excluded because there is no question on leader evaluations. As I am interested in legislative elections in parliamentary democracies, countries that use presidential or semi-presidential systems have been excluded from the analysis. Subsequently, the data used includes 26 countries and 55 elections. These are listed in full in Appendix 1.

In order to measure the specific relationship between respondent and leaders across different parties, the data was then transformed into a stacked matrix. As a result, the units of analysis become respondent*leader combinations. As advised in previous studies, the models presented were estimated with clustered robust standard errors in order to account for intra-class correlation (van der Eijik 1996; Garzia and De Angelis 2016). In addition, a y-hat procedure was followed for the variables that are constant at an individual level: Knowledge, Party size, Age, Female, and Education. This is in accordance with the specifications advised in van der Eijik et al. (2006). All models using the stacked matrix are multi-level linear models

with random intercepts where individual responses are nested within individuals, which are nested within elections.

In order to capture voters' perceptions of party leaders, the dependent variable is a like-dislike scale where respondents are asked to evaluate leaders from 0-10. Furthermore, the two key independent variables measure party evaluation and leader change. The former is measured on the same scale as leader evaluation, with 0 representing completely negative and 10 representing completely positive opinions. The impact of a new leader is measured through the variable time since change, which is a count of the number of months since a party last changed leader. Information on leaders was obtained from relevant secondary literature and online newspaper archives. Parties with dual leadership were dropped from the analysis, as who voters consider the primary figure in those cases is harder to establish. Information on leaders was obtained from relevant secondary literature and online newspaper archives.

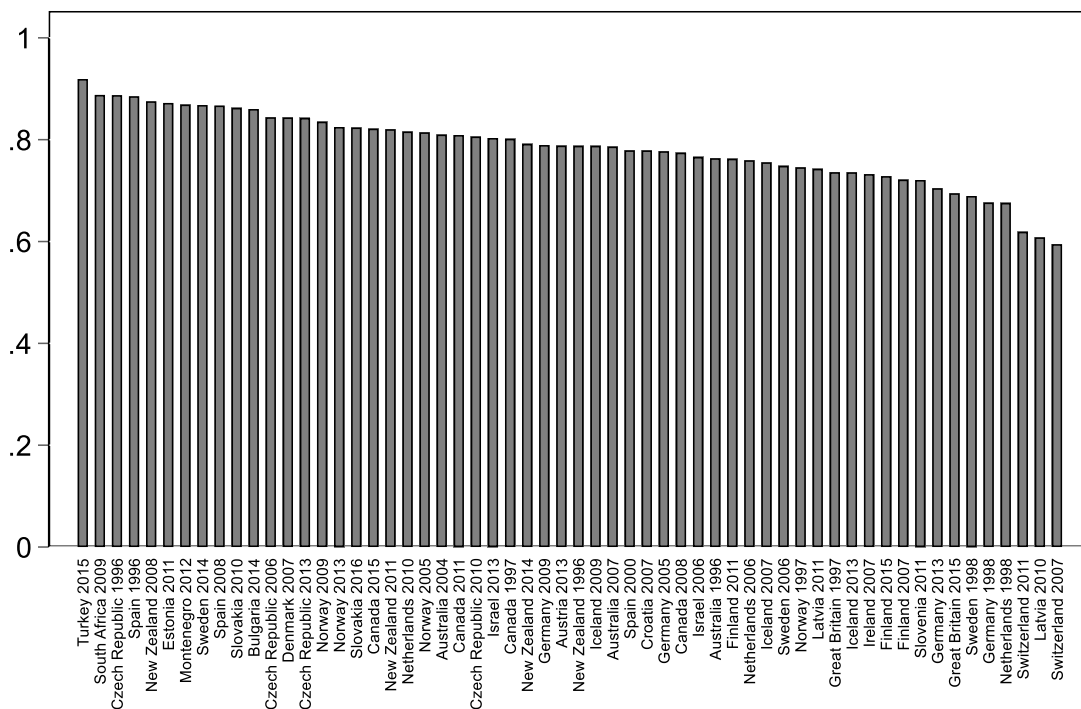
In addition to using hierarchical models, control variables have been included at both the individual and party level to account for estimation bias concerning the effect of both party evaluations and new leaders. Firstly, beyond party evaluation, party identity and ideological proximity are two additional ways in which voters are likely to use their opinion of the party to evaluate the party's leader. Party identity is simply a dummy variable where respondents have been asked the question "Which party do you feel closest to?". This was then coded accordingly for the party of each leader respondents evaluated. Ideological proximity was the result of subtracting respondents' own score on a scale of 0-10, where 0 represents furthest left and 10 represents further right, from the score given to parties on the same scale. This was then recoded so 0 represents no distance from the party ideologically, and 10 represents the most.

Political knowledge is included as a control as it is likely to factor in how much respondents know about, and therefore the extent to which they can accurately evaluate, a leader. Political knowledge scores are obtained from the number of correct answers to

questions in the CSES asking about the politics of the country the respondent is from. In modules 1 and 3 of the CSES a fewer number of questions are included compared with module 4. As a result, the scores have been standardized in order to compare across modules. Additionally, sociodemographic controls are included at the individual-level with age measured in years, education measured on a 5-point scale where 0 represents no schooling and 4 represents university education, and gender as a dummy variable with 0 for male and 1 for female.

Finally, at the party level, I control for party size. This is to account for the fact that parties of different sizes are often regarded differently by both voters and more importantly the media. As a result, leaders of smaller parties are less likely to receive attention, presenting the possibility that voters are unaware that there has been a change in leader. To control for this, I include a variable measuring the vote share for each party. Descriptive statistics on all variables are included in Appendix 2.

Figure 4. Correlation between party and leader evaluations in 55 elections



3.6 Results

Figure 4 shows the correlation between party and leader evaluations for each election included in the sample. The average correlation between leader and party is 0.78 with a standard deviation of 0.07. Correlations range from 0.91 in the 2015 Turkish election to 0.59 in the 2011 Swiss election. There are some countries where it is likely that the association between leader and party is generally lower, such as Switzerland, where for 2007 and 2011 correlation was 0.59 and 0.61 respectively⁴. Equally, there are also countries where correlation is likely to be generally higher, such as Slovakia, where correlation in 2010 and 2016 was 0.86 and 0.82 respectively.

Table 5. Percentage of Leaders rated less than, equally, or better than their party, by time in office

	Time in office			
	0-4 years	5-9	10-14	>15
Leader=Party	37.5	39.7	41.2	36.9
Leader<Party	29.9	25.6	24.6	25.4
Leader>Party	32.6	34.7	34.2	37.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 5 looks at the percentage of leaders that are evaluated at the same, lesser, and greater level as their parties by the length of time they have been in office. In keeping with expectations from hypothesis 2, 41.2% of leaders who have been in office between 10 and 14 years are evaluated the same as their party, compared with 37.5% of those who have led for less than 5 years. Additionally, leaders who are less popular than their parties are most common in the 0-4 year bracket. However, leaders who have been in office 15 years or more are in fact less likely than newer leaders to be perceived as matching their parties. This is perhaps due to a higher proportion (37.7%) evaluated as better than their parties and potentially speaks to a

⁴ This is probably due to the fact that questions in the CSES regarding party leaders in Switzerland are not based on actual party leaders, but members of the Federal Council.

link between longevity and wider popularity. Additionally, the sample size for leaders who have served more than 15 years is much smaller and unlikely to illicit reliable results.

To this end, I have constructed a multi-level linear model looking at the determinants of leader evaluations. The results of this can be seen in Table 6. First, as expected, party evaluation has a positive and significant impact on leader evaluations: the higher you evaluate a party the higher you are likely to evaluate that leader's party. This also applies to party identity, where identifying with a party increases the likelihood of giving the leader a higher evaluation. Furthermore, leader evaluations are in part explained by ideological proximity, where considering yourself as ideologically aligned with a party generally increases your favourability towards the leader of that party. One drawback of this data is that there is no separate ideological scale on which respondents can place leaders. Therefore, it is possible that the model is underestimating the extent to which ideology plays a role given that there are numerous examples of leaders whose ideological outlook differs substantially from their party mainstream.

However, it is possible to account for whether a leader is new or not, and in addition, how much time has passed since a party changed leader. The results suggest this has an impact on how voters evaluate leaders. When adding an interaction between party evaluation and time since leader change in Model 2, the coefficient is positive and significant at the 0.001 level. This suggests that the more time that passes since a party changed their leader, party and leader evaluations are more closely aligned. The interaction term is displayed in figure 5.

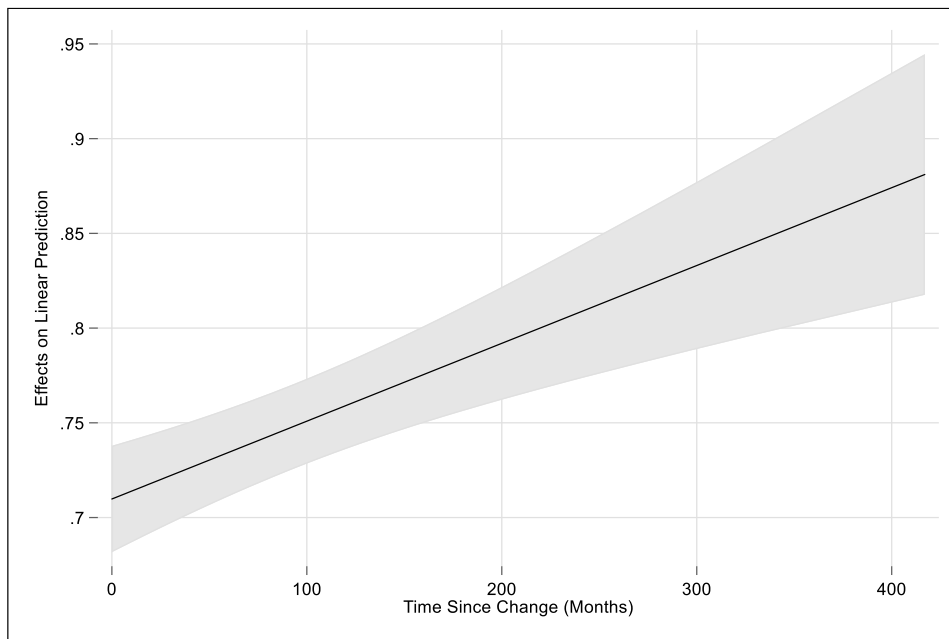
Table 6. Determinants of leader evaluations

	Model 1		Model 2	
Party	0.74***	(0.01)	0.71***	(0.02)
Time since change	0.001	(0.001)	-0.001	(0.001)
Party x Time since change			0.0004***	(0.0001)
Pid	0.29***	(0.086)	0.29***	(0.05)
Distance	-	(0.01)	-0.07***	(0.01)
	0.07***			
Knowledge	0.27	(0.25)	0.32	(0.25)
Party size	0.09	(0.09)	0.08	(0.15)
Age	0.77***	(0.10)	0.76***	(0.10)
Female	0.05	(0.12)	0.07	(0.13)
Education	0.09	(0.08)	0.09***	(0.08)
Constant	1.42***	(0.08)	1.57***	(0.08)
N (elections)	55		55	
N(respondents)	50,414		50,414	
N (observations)	201,656		201,656	

Note: Random intercept model. Table entries are unstandardized coefficients with random intercepts at election and respondent level. Clustered standard errors in parenthesis.

p<0.05; **p<0.01; *p<0.001*

Figure 5. Marginal effects of party evaluations



In order to further explore this relationship, I created a subsample of the CSES of countries where three consecutive elections are captured in which parties either kept the same leader or changed leader each time across the three elections. The countries and election years included are as follows: Canada 2008, 2011, and 2015; Czech Republic 2006, 2010, and 2013; Germany 2005, 2009, and 2013; New Zealand 2008, 2011, and 2014; Norway 2005, 2009, and 2013.

The Liberal party in Canada changed leader at every election, fielding Stéphane Dion, Michael Ignatieff, and Justin Trudeau. The leaders prior to these candidates all resigned due to poor election results. This is also the case for the SPD in Germany, the Civil Democratic Party in the Czech Republic, and the Labour Party in New Zealand. With regards to leaders who remained in office, this is usually due to one of two reasons. Firstly, due to increasing or consistent electoral success in the case of Steve Harper of the Conservative Party in Canada, Angela Merkel of the CDU in Germany, John Key of the National Party in New Zealand, and Jens Stoltenberg of the Labour Party in Norway. Secondly, because the party have performed

within the normal parameters of success. This is mostly applicable to leaders of smaller regional parties that achieve consistent but limited success, such as Gilles Duceppe of Bloc Québécois, Vojtěch Filip of the Communist Party in the Czech Republic, and Winston Peters of New Zealand First.

Figure 6. Correlation between party and leader evaluations over consecutive elections

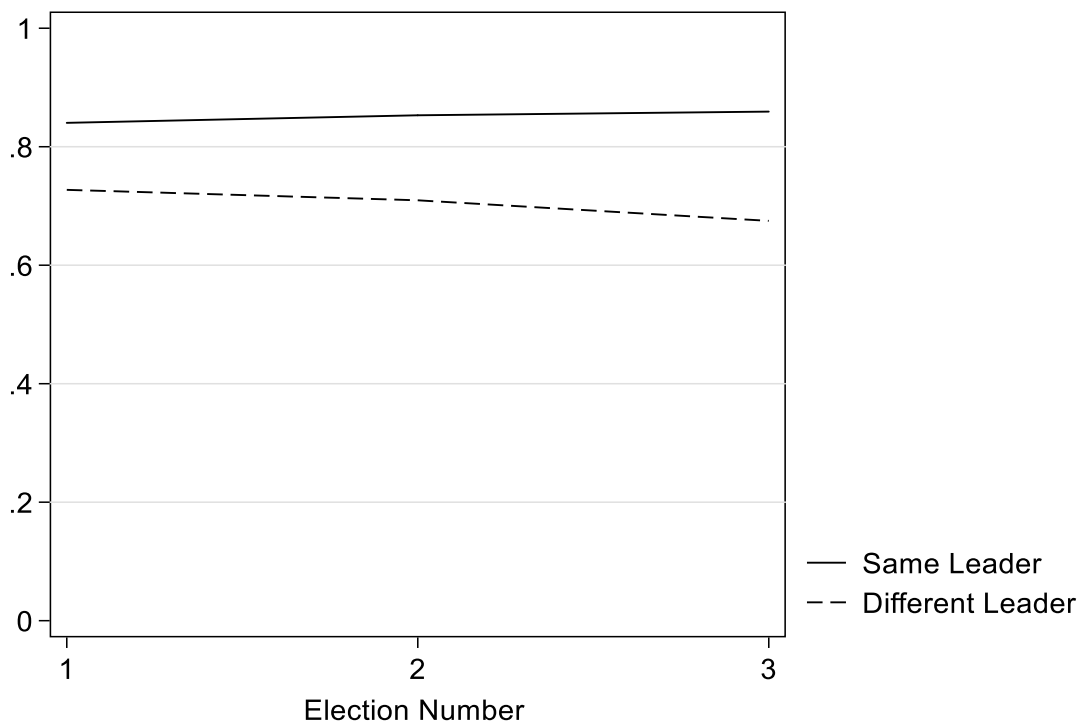


Figure 6 displays the correlation between party and leader evaluations over three consecutive elections for both parties that had a different leader at each election and those that had the same one. It suggests a slight increase from .84 to .86 compared to a decrease for parties with a different leader from .73 to .67. Even if this does not represent a genuine change over time, if parties keep the same leader then that person is, on average, more closely associated with their party compared to new leaders.

However, as noted above, leader change is closely linked to electoral success and as such it is important to account for change between elections according to other factors. Therefore, the previous model specification used in Table 6 is applied to three consecutive elections, split into two models to display the differences in the determinants of leader evaluations between those parties who kept the same leader and those who did not. The results of this are displayed in Table 7. They suggest that party and leader evaluations are more closely aligned when leaders remain the same. This is evident from the larger magnitude of party evaluations for parties that kept the same leader from elections 1 to 3. Furthermore, there is some evidence that party evaluations have a greater impact on leader evaluations over time, lending support to Hypothesis 2. The reverse is true for parties who change leader at every election. As a result, both models reaffirm the bivariate findings from Figure 6.

To summarize, leader changes have a significant impact on the extent to which leaders and parties are entangled in voters' minds. As previous studies have suggested (Sommer-Topcu 2017; Fernandez Vasquez and Sommer-Topcu 2017) voters' perceptions alter when parties change leader. My findings provide evidence that how voters evaluate leaders can change depending on whether the leader in question is new or not. New leaders are less likely to be judged according to the party they represent, and the reverse is true for leaders who stood at the previous election.

Table 7. Determinants of leader evaluations over three consecutive elections

	Same Leader					
	Election 1		Election 2		Election 3	
Party	0.73***	(0.02)	0.77***	(0.03)	0.79***	(0.02)
Pid	0.42***	(0.11)	0.20*	(0.09)	0.14	(0.17)
Distance	-0.08*	(0.03)	-0.05*	(0.02)	-0.07*	(0.03)
Knowledge	-0.01	(0.02)	-0.003	(0.04)	0.02	(0.02)
Party size	0.02	(0.01)	0.01	(0.008)	0.007	

Age	0.01**	(0.002)	0.006*	(0.002)	0.005**	(0.002)
Female	0.24***	(0.06)	0.09	(0.07)	0.12	(0.07)
Education	0.05*	(0.03)	0.04***	(0.007)	0.05	(0.03)
Constant	0.56**	(0.39)	0.81**	(0.26)	0.91***	(0.09)
N (elections)	5		5		5	
N(respondents)	5,668		5,305		4,915	
N (observations)	8,736		7,699		7,281	
New Leader						
	Election 1		Election 2		Election 3	
Party	0.69***	(0.03)	0.67***	(0.02)	0.62***	(0.03)
Pid	0.48	(0.31)	0.22	(0.19)	0.19***	(0.07)
Distance	-0.11***	(0.02)	-0.07***	(0.01)	-0.08*	(0.04)
Knowledge	-0.04	(0.03)	0.07	(0.06)	0.01	(0.02)
Party size	0.76***	(0.02)	-0.04**	(0.01)	0.34***	
Age	0.003	(0.003)	0.009***	(0.002)	0.007*	(0.003)
Female	0.05	(0.13)	0.21	(0.12)	-0.01	(0.04)
Education	0.04*	(0.03)	0.01	(0.04)	-0.04	(0.03)
Constant	-20.58***	(1.32)	2.18***	(0.25)	-6.77***	(1.55)
N (elections)	5		5		5	
N(respondents)	4,348		4,312		4,387	
N (observations)	5,306		5,366		5,523	

Note: Random intercept model. Table entries are unstandardized coefficients with random intercepts at the election and respondent level. Clustered standard errors in parenthesis.

p<0.05; **p<0.01; *p<0.001*

3.7 Discussion

Analysing the impact of leader changes in political science is not new. However, previous studies that aim to disentangle the complex relationship between leaders and parties in the minds of voters are surprisingly agnostic with regards to the impact of how long a leader has been in her post. In this paper I address the question of whether leader changes can alter the way in which voters evaluate leaders. While, given a change in personnel, we should expect the level of evaluation to change – usually for the better – little research has been conducted into how the process of evaluation changes. By looking at the impact of party evaluations on leader evaluations, I find that leaders who have previously represented the party at an election are more closely associated with that party. This means that newer leaders can expect a longer period in office to coincide with their image coming to ‘fit’ that of their party’s.

Along with the work of Garzia (2012, 2013a, 2013b) and other recent studies (Kriesi 2012; Costa and Silva 2015; Lobo and Silva 2018; Silva et al. 2019), these results cast doubt on the perceived unimportance of leaders in electoral politics. As I show, depending on whether a leader is new or not, party and leader evaluations can be more, or less, aligned. As such, the effect of a leader who has represented their party over several elections is likely to be underestimated by vote choice models, because of how closely their evaluations correlate with their party’s. Furthermore, leader changes need not be the only events that impact the voters’ perception of the relationship between leader and party: party splits, personal scandals, or the appointment of radical leaders are all possible avenues to explore when it comes to future research attempting to disentangle leader from party.

As these findings support previous research showing that leader changes can influence voter perceptions, there are a multitude of potential questions arising from this that require scholarly attention. For example, Wagner and Weßels (2012), pointed to the importance of leader and party matching when it comes to vote choice. My findings suggest that new leaders

are at disadvantage here: they are not perceived to fit their parties to the same extent as leaders who have spent a longer time in the role. However, if a party has become particularly unpopular a new leader could seize on their advantage of having some perceived distance from that party in order to turn its fortunes around. Regardless of the direction that future research takes concerning the role of leaders in electoral politics, it is clear that both voter perceptions *and* facts concerning the leader that are exogenous to this need to be taken into account to further our understanding of their place in voters' attitude formation and vote choice.

4. Evidence that Warmth is Most Desirable in Party Leaders

4.1 Abstract

There is little understanding of the determinants of incongruent preferences: why would voters prefer a leader not from their preferred party? This study aims to answer this question using a pooled dataset of election studies from six parliamentary countries. Previous literature has looked at determinants such as party identity, ideological extremity, sociodemographic characteristics and contextual factors. This study adds to this by evaluating the effects of leader traits across two dimensions: warmth and competence. I find that warmth is a stronger predictor of congruency than competency for voters who prefer centre-right parties and for voters who prefer centre-left parties. In addition, I find that higher perceived levels of competency lead to a decreased likelihood of holding congruent preferences. This is a novel finding that brings into question assumptions regarding the importance of competence as a leader-trait. I discuss the implications of these findings for understanding the appeal of leaders and their place in electoral politics.

4.2 Introduction

Party leaders are important to the electoral success of political parties. Recent research has addressed the role of party leaders (Adam and Maier 2010; Bellucci et al. 2013; Aaldering et al. 2017; Bittner 2018; Garzia et al. 2019; Daoust et al. 2019) in electoral democracy, with a substantial portion of the literature arguing that their importance is increasing at the expense of institutional attachments, or is at least greater than previously thought (Garzia 2012, 2013a; Garzia 2013b, 2013c, 2017; Costa and Silva 2015; Garzia and De Angelis 2016; Silva and Costa 2019). Although studies have often relied on ‘feeling thermometers’ or an approximate measure where leaders are ranked on a like-dislike scale, many have utilised personality trait evaluations (Bittner 2018). The latter have been used extensively in research on political candidates in general, and when applied to the context of leaders, allow scholars to answer questions such as: ‘What kinds of personalities do voters want as leaders of their country?’ (Laustsen 2017).

There are two primary questions that this study is addressing. Firstly, what traits could a leader have that would result in their voters rejecting them and favouring a leader from a different party. In other words, what would result in an incongruent preference: voters preferring a leader that is not from their preferred party. Secondly, how does this vary with regards to party ideology? Is it the case that expectations concerning trait preferences are correct: that the warmer the leader of a left-wing party is, the more likely that party’s voters are to favour that leader?.

Research into voters’ evaluations of leader-traits has been restricted by the lack of comparable questions across different surveys, despite evidence that they are both more informative and accurate than generalised like-dislike scales (Bittner 2018, 298; Silva and Costa 2019, 119). This has been particularly problematic when it comes to understanding cross-national patterns and as a result, studies looking at the role of leaders across multiple countries

have often used feeling thermometers (Tverdova 2010; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2013; Curtice and Lisi 2014; Formicelli 2014; Daoust et al. 2019). Nonetheless, some studies have managed to incorporate comparative design when studying traits (Bittner 2011; Costa and Silva 2015; Silva and Costa 2019)

Although there is a wider debate regarding perceptions of candidates in general that these studies engage with and enhance, they specifically answer questions surrounding party leaders' role in electoral democracy. Primarily, they demonstrate the utility of restricting the number of traits studied. This is based on previous work showing voters do not distinguish between the full spectrum of candidates traits (Silva and Costa 2019, 120) and as such, many similar recent studies have coalesced around using the 'Big Two' traits of warmth and competence (Bittner 2011; Ksiazkiewicz 2018; Vitriol et al. 2018).

Additionally, comparative findings demonstrate that there is a heterogeneous dimension to the importance of trait evaluation, with Bittner (2011) providing evidence that left-wing and right-wing leaders are evaluated higher on warmth and competence respectively. This correlates with most subsequent and previous studies on the impact of partisan stereotypes on trait evaluation (Caprara et al. 2006; Caprara et al. 2008; Bittner 2015; Curtice and Lobo 2015; Laustsen 2017). Furthermore, whilst confirming that both warmth and competence are important predictors of vote choice, Costa and Silva find that for both turnout (2019) and vote choice (2015) warmth is a more impactful trait for right-wing leaders.

Thus, these studies look at whether leaders are associated with certain traits depending on the ideology of the party they represent, and subsequently how these traits influence vote choice. However, they do not address what would persuade a voter to prefer a leader from a different party and have an incongruent preference. This is a crucial consideration, given the numerous elections in which a leader's personality is seen to appeal to voters who would

usually be hostile to the party the leader represents (Bean and Mughan 1989; Jenssen and Aalberg 2006; Mols and Jetten 2016; Johnston et al. 2019).

As a result of this gap in the literature, our understanding of which leader traits would result in voters rejecting their favoured party's leader and favouring a different person, having an incongruent preference, is limited. The most recent and obvious example of scholars answering a similar question is Daoust et al. (2019) who use the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) to examine the causes of incongruency in respondents' party and leader preferences. They find that incongruent voters are less likely to be partisan or at the extremes of the political spectrum. However, due to the nature of the dataset they use, they are not able to look at how leaders' personality traits may interact with these effects. The CSES does not include questions on leaders' traits, only generalised like-dislike scales.

This paper uses election studies from six parliamentary democracies: Ireland, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Australia, and the United Kingdom. These studies have been selected because of their inclusion of questions regarding leader-traits. As previous studies have noted, the lack of questions of this sort and the variation between studies in how they are worded makes comparative work challenging. As such, when looking at traits it is not possible to use comparative datasets such as the CSES, as previous research on party leaders has done with generalised like-dislike scales. Therefore, I have merged the aforementioned studies into a single database in order to test the impact of traits across different contexts.

I find that leaders who are perceived as warm are more likely to retain the support of their party's voters. Secondly, higher levels of competence can in fact result in voters favouring leaders from another party. There is a difference between centre-left and centre-right parties, where warmth is more important for voters who prefer the former compared to those who prefer the latter. The reverse is true for competence. These findings chime with the personalization

literature, where leaders' personality is hypothesised to be more important than their political attributes (Adam and Maier 2010).

The structure of the paper is as follows. In the first section, I look at previous literature on (a) the impact of leaders' traits and (b) congruence in preferences between parties and leaders. I then form three hypotheses based on this research. Secondly, I describe the data and methods that I am using in the paper. Thirdly, I present the results of the regression models. Lastly, I discuss the implications of my findings within the context of current research and suggest possible avenues for future research.

4.3 Heterogenous leader trait evaluations

Given that leaders are often competing for the top job, or at least an important say in the governing of the country, it follows that voters would want to scrutinize the personality of a leader to assess their suitability for governance. Additionally, judging someone's personality is a cognitive task that voters perform daily outside of politics (Rahn et al. 1990). As a result of this, it can be easier for voters to judge political objects based on personality (Capelos, 2010). This fact has formed the basis for a sizeable literature on the impact of leaders' personalities on their electoral chances (see Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier 2000; Hayes 2005; Bishin 2006; Fridkin and Kenny 2011; Graefe, 2013; Holian and Prysby 2014; Costa and Silva 2015; Bittner 2018; Ksiazkiewicz et al. 2018; Vitriol et al. 2018;). Silva and Costa (2019) even find evidence that warm leaders can increase the likelihood that voters turnout. These studies unanimously find that leader traits have an impact on vote choice, more so than the literature that uses leader like-dislike scales which tends to be more ambivalent on the role that leaders play (Adam and Maier 2010). This speaks to the greater accuracy obtained from using leader traits: they capture which aspect of a candidate voters prefer and are also less affected by endogeneity issues compared to leader evaluation scales (Silva and Costa 2019, 119).

As there is a long and established literature regarding the analysis of leader traits, it is relatively straightforward to trace the evolution of how they have been studied in political science. This is important given the key question of how many traits researchers should take into account when assessing how voters evaluate leaders. The overarching narrative is that studies began with a more divergent view of the number of traits that voters use but this has given way to increased convergence in recent years. For example, Brown et al. (1988) look at twelve traits based on the questions available to them in the survey data they use. However, these traits are collapsed into four groupings based on the typology established by Kinder (1986): leadership, competence, integrity, and empathy. This method has been refined even further: Funk (1999) combines leadership and competence but finds that integrity and empathy are distinct, with Holian and Prysby taking the same approach (2014). However, most studies have now coalesced around using two traits that distinguish between a leader's personality and their job suitability. These are commonly referred to as warmth and competence respectively (Costa and Silva 2015; Vitriol et al. 2018; Silva and Costa 2019), but also character and leadership (Lausten 2017; Bittner 2018).

There are two primary reasons for this transition from many traits to few. Firstly, research has coalesced around using the 'Big Two' trait dimensions of competence and warmth because social psychology studies show these to be the two universal dimensions of human social cognition regardless of context, with people differentiating others by either respecting (competence) or liking them (warmth) (Fiske et al. 2007). Research has demonstrated the utility of conceptualising trait evaluations across two dimensions when applied to the context of political leadership (Caprara et al. 2006; 2008). For example, Michel et al. (2013) show that these two dimensions underlie voter perceptions of whether a leader is charismatic or not. Therefore, both data availability and theoretical pertinence have led to a relatively unified approach amongst scholars.

Secondly, availability of data has typically been limiting when it comes to studying traits, especially when attempting comparative research. There is great disparity in the questions used by different surveys when asking respondents about leaders. Like-dislike scales are much more likely to be included, often at the expense of trait evaluations (Bittner 2018). Even when the latter are employed, the subject and wording of the questions vary greatly. This has underlined the need to simplify the traits used in both cross-sectional and longitudinal research (Silva and Costa 2019).

As a result, much is known about the impact of warmth and competence on various voter attitudes and behaviours. As stated above, studies have shown leader traits to be important when it comes to vote choice. In general, evidence suggests that traits from the competence dimension are stronger predictors of voting behaviour than warmth (Ksiazkiewicz et al. 2018; Vitriol et al. 2018; Graefe 2013; Bartels 2002) although there are some studies that take a contrary stance (Costa and Silva 2015; Bittner 2011). Additionally, there is recent evidence that warmth is particularly important when it comes to voters' decision to turnout (Silva and Costa 2019).

The relative impact of either trait dimensions only tells part of the story however, as partisanship and ideology have a large impact on perceptions of leader-traits, resulting in heterogeneous evaluations. Just as individuals use stereotypes to judge others in low-information contexts, they also use shortcuts when evaluating party leaders whom they do not necessarily have an in-depth knowledge of. In this political context, the shortcut is to perceive the leader through the lens of the party they represent (Lobo and Curtice 2015: 29). Research shows that voters do this with regards to other voters (Fiske et al. 2002; Fiske et al. 2007). For example, Eriksson and Funcke (2015) provide evidence that both Democrats and Republicans rate the average Democrat higher on warmth than competence and vice versa for the average Republican. This stereotyping process is then replicated when it comes to evaluating party

leaders, as evidenced by multiple studies (Hayes 2005; Capara et al. 2006; Bittner 2011, 2015; Holian and Prysby 2014). However, it is possible that these studies are mostly capturing stereotypic associations, whereby respondents on the left and right do not necessarily prefer competent and warm leaders respectively, but instead are simply relating these traits to their preferred leader because of the cue that a leaders' party label is providing (Bittner 2011; Erkişon and Funcke 2015). In addition, Haye's research on trait ownership (2005, 2011) shows that leaders gear their focus towards issues that their party is considered to 'own' in order to gain an electoral advantage. In other words, voters are encouraged to see a direct connection between a leader's personal attributes and the issues on which a leader's party is most positively associated with.

As a result, to better understand the process through which warmth and competence help voters make up their mind about party leaders, I propose an approach of focusing primarily on voters who have rejected their preferred party's leader in favour of a leader from a different party. By doing this we can increase our understanding of which leader-trait dimension is most important with regards to leader preference. This enables us to ask the question more directly of what voters want in a leader, rather than whether they simply associate certain traits with their preferred leader.

4.4 Determinants of congruent preferences

There is surprisingly limited research on the determinants of voters preferring a leader from a different party. Multiple studies have looked at the relative impact of parties compared to leaders and the correlation between the two. For example, using the CSES, Holmberg and Oscarrson (2013) show that the correlation between party and leader evaluations are strong, while Tverdova (2011) show that 80% of respondents who feel represented by a party feel represented by the leader from that same party. However, these findings do not tell us what the

determinants of a strong association between party and leader are. This is a key consideration because it indicates there are examples of voters preferring leaders from different parties and as such there is opportunity for party leaders to either maintain or lose current supporters. Given that party leaders are often competing for the top job of prime minister and previous evidence that they can have a substantial impact on vote choice (Bittner 2018), posing this question provides us with a greater understanding of when voters are more likely to stay onside.

To that end, Daoust et al. (2019) address this question directly, finding that the majority (83%) of voters have congruent preferences. Although there is variation between countries, in no country are incongruent voters the majority. As evidenced by multiple studies, party identification has a significant impact on political attitudes (Karnoven 2007; Bittner 2011; Garzia and de Angelis 2016). For instance, Curtice and Lobo (2014) demonstrate that in contexts with weak partisanship, the effects of leader evaluations on the vote are weaker. In accordance with this, party identifiers are more likely to hold congruent preferences because they display more intense preference and are therefore more likely to prefer the leader from their party. Similarly, those with more extreme ideological preferences are more likely to be congruent for a comparable reason: the intensity of their attitudes.

As a result, we now have insights into the determinants of congruent preferences on an individual level. However, there is a reason that correlation between parties and leaders is not perfect and that incongruent preferences exist: leaders' own traits have an impact on voters' perceptions of them beyond voters' perceptions of their party. Therefore, the research mentioned above does not provide any insight into leaders' role in whether voters prefer them or one of their opponents. This question can be answered by understanding what voters seek in leaders and by using appropriate measures of leader traits accordingly.

As discussed in the previous section, leader traits are commonly analysed on two dimensions: competence and warmth. Both have a significant impact on attitudes and

behaviour. However, few studies have considered the role of leaders' traits beyond their impact on generalized assessments or vote choice. As a result, we have a limited understanding of the wide variety of contexts in which leader traits can play a role in voters' decision-making process. For example, when Silva and Costa (2019) take the relatively novel step of analysing the relationship between leader traits and turnout, they find that warmth is more important than competence and that there is insufficient evidence that trait evaluations have a differentiated impact depending on ideology. These findings demonstrate the limits of previous assumptions surrounding leader traits: simply altering the object of study uncovers the previously underestimated impact of the warmth dimension.

Below are hypotheses derived from the literature on leader trait dimensions as discussed above. They predict the importance of both warmth and competence evaluations and an expected differentiated effect dependent on party ideology, but do not specify the importance of either trait dimension relative to each other given the conflicted picture presented in previous research.

H1: Higher Warmth evaluations are more likely to lead to congruent preferences

H2: Higher Competence evaluations are more likely to lead to congruent preferences

H3: Dimensions should have a differentiated impact depending on whether voters' preferred party is centre-left or centre-right

4.5 Data and methods

This paper utilises election study data from six different countries: Ireland (n= 2,183), Germany (n=1,626), Portugal (n=766), Italy (n=787), Australia (n=2,877), and the United Kingdom (n=3,255). These have been combined into one dataset for comparative analysis. The data that can be used for this study is limited because of the scarcity of questions on leader traits. As

such, studies were chosen according to whether they included both relevant trait evaluation questions and generalised like-dislike scales. The approach is similar to the technique employed by Silva and Costa (2019) and Costa and Silva (2015). In addition, the surveys included are from established parliamentary democracies and in all elections the leader is the main representative of the party in parliament and the party's candidate for prime minister, making them suitable for comparison.

The dependent variable measures whether respondents have a congruent preference or not (1 or 0) for both centre-right and centre-left parties. This is constructed using like-dislike scales (0-10). Respondents whose preferred leader is from their preferred party are coded as congruent, and respondents who prefer another leader are coded as incongruent. In accordance with Daoust et al. (2019) respondents with three or more preferred leaders or parties have been excluded from the analysis (7%).

As the focus of the analysis is the impact of leader-trait dimensions on voters' propensity to prefer one leader over another, only respondents who prefer parties with leaders that studies have asked trait questions about have been included in the dataset. These leaders and parties are displayed in the appendix. As questionnaires tend to only ask trait questions on the mainstream parties in their respective countries, this has resulted in only leaders of centre-left and centre-right remaining in the dataset. The one exception is Beppe Grillo and the Five Star Movement in Italy. As this party is not easily categorizable on the traditional left-right axis it has been excluded from the analysis (Costa and Silva 2015)

Table 8. Correlations of leader traits

	Warmth								Competence										
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	
1. Honest	1																		
2. In touch with people	0.60	1																	
3. Likeable Person	-	-	1																
4. Trustworthy	0.62	-	0.74	1															
5. Good communicator	0.45	-	-	-	1														
6. Has Charisma	0.42	-	-	-	0.52	1													
7. Knows problems	0.53	-	-	-	-	-	1												
8. Compassion	0.43	-	-	0.41	-	-	-	1											
9. Capable of governing	0.57	0.64	-	-	-	-	-	-	1										
10. Sensible on economy	-	-	0.64	0.68	-	-	-	-	-	1									
11. Strong and assertive	0.41	-	0.57	0.62	0.48	0.50	0.46	0.31	-	0.59	1								
12. Competent	0.37	-	-	0.86	-	-	-	0.37	-	-	0.45	1							
13. Responsible policies	0.64	-	-	-	0.46	0.44	-	-	-	-	0.47	-	1						
14. Strengthen economy	0.50	-	-	-	0.40	0.46	-	-	-	-	0.45	-	0.54	1					
15. Makes decisions	0.46	-	-	-	0.53	0.50	-	-	-	0.50	0.57	-	0.53	0.50	1				
16. Well prepared	0.48	-	-	-	-	-	0.48	-	-	-	0.50	-	-	-	-	1			
17. Responsive	-	-	-	0.71	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.71	-	-	-	-	1		
18. Intelligent	0.27	-	-	0.21	-	-	-	0.30	-	-	0.30	0.38	-	-	-	-	-	1	
19. Knowledge	0.34	-	-	0.30	-	-	-	0.29	-	-	0.34	0.41	-	-	-	-	-	0.66	1

In order to measure the extent to which leaders are considered warm or competent, individual traits have been coded into either dimension, and this is displayed in Table 7. Trait assessments are usually asked in the following manner ‘In your opinion, how competent is Tony Blair?’, although exact wording of course varies across studies. The variables of *Warmth* and *Competence* take the mean of respondents’ trait evaluations. There is considerable overlap between dimensions, as shown in Table 6. For example, competence and trustworthiness are correlated at a rate of 0.86. Equally, there are some weaker correlations within dimensions; intelligence is weakly correlated with competence and being strong on the economy at 0.30 and 0.38 respectively, despite intelligence usually being considered part of the competence dimension (Bittner 2011). However, as stated by Silva and Costa (2019), this is common in the literature as some traits are ambiguous and can have multiple associations across different dimensions. As evidenced in the literature review, studies have demonstrated that both dimensions have clear and independent effects, and as such are conceptually distinct from one another.

In addition to the key independent variables, multiple controls were included. Firstly, I account for attitudinal determinants of congruence. *Pid* is a binary measure of whether respondents consider themselves party identifiers or not. Strength of party identity cannot be measured due to there not being comparable measures across the different studies. As with, *warmth* and *competence*, this variable has been constructed separately depending on whether respondents identify with a centre-right or centre-left party. Additionally, *Extremism* measures how far to the left or right respondents are, recoding a 0-10 ideology scale so 0 is those at the centre and 5 is those at the extremes.

Finally, sociodemographic controls are included. The coding is as follows: education is a scale measuring the extent of a respondents’ formal schooling (0-3), *Female* measures gender

(1 for men 2 for women) and *Age* is a continuous measure of a respondent's age at the time of interview.

Table 9. Leader traits by country

Country	IR	G	P	IT	A	UK
Warmth	2002	2009	2009	2013	2013	2005
1. Honest	X		X	X	X	
2. In Touch with Ordinary People	X					
3. Likeable Person		X				
4. Trustworthy		X			X	X
5. Good Communicator			X			
6. Has Charisma			X			
7. Knows the Problems of Ordinary People				X		
8. Compassionate					X	
Competence	2002	2009	2009	2013	2013	2005
9. Capable of Governing Country Well	X					
10. Sensible Ideas about Economic Crisis		X				
11. Strong and Assertive		X	X	X	X	
12. Competent					X	X
13. Defends Responsible Policies			X			
14. Knows how to strengthen the economy			X			
15. Makes Decisions			X			
16. Well Prepared				X		
17. Responsive						X
18. Intelligent					X	
19. Sensible					X	

4.6 Results

In line with the findings of Daoust et al. (2019), for both those who prefer centre-left and those who prefer centre-right parties, the majority preferred the leader from that party. There is a clear difference between centre-left and centre-right however, where 76% of voters who prefer the former are congruent compared to 86% of voters who prefer the latter. Although incongruent preferences are the minority, they make up a non-trivial proportion of the sample. Furthermore, given that around 1 in 5 voters overall have incongruent preferences, understanding what leaders can do in order to ensure that those who prefer their parties also prefer them is likely to have electoral consequences. Especially given the potential importance of congruence for vote choice (Wagner and Weßels 2012).

Warmth and competence were regressed against congruent preferences using a logistic regression model. In order to account for differences along party ideology lines, respondents were separated into those preferring either centre-right or centre-left parties. For education and country dummies, the reference categories are no education and Ireland respectively. All results are displayed in table 10. In addition to this I have included preliminary models including generalized warmth and competence ratings for all leaders in table 10.

Table 10. Determinants of congruence, logistic regression

Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff.	Odds Ratio	Coeff.	Odds Ratio
Warmth			0.12 (0.04)	1.14**
Competence			-0.14 (0.04)	0.87**
Pid	0.25 (0.10)	1.29*	0.23 (0.08)	1.26*
Extremism	0.12 (0.03)	1.13***	0.12 (0.02)	1.12***
Secondary	0.44 (0.69)	1.56	-0.47 (1.07)	1.60
Primary	0.27 (0.67)	1.31	-0.31 (1.06)	1.35
University	0.19 (0.19)	1.20	-0.22 (1.06)	1.25
Age	0.003 (0.03)	1.00	-0.002 (0.002)	1.00
Female	0.05 (0.08)	1.04	-0.05 (0.07)	1.05
Germany	1.08 (0.19)	2.93***	1.09 (0.16)	2.98***
Portugal	1.04 (0.22)	2.84***	1.05 (0.25)	2.87***
Italy	-0.06 (0.16)	0.94	-0.006 (0.20)	0.99
UK	0.04 (0.13)	1.04	0.18 (0.19)	1.19
Australia	0.79 (0.13)	2.20***	-0.95 (0.13)	2.57***
n	5,158		5,178	

*Note: *** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$. Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parenthesis. Education dummies' reference category: none. Country dummies' reference category – Ireland.*

Model 1 in table 11 tests the determinants of congruence when excluding leader characteristics. As expected, for both centre-left and centre-right parties, party identity is significant and has the largest impact. Party identifiers are much more likely to favour the leader from their preferred party. Interestingly, this effect is over 3 times higher for centre-right (9.26) than centre-left identifiers (2.67). This could speak to greater agreement amongst respondents on the right but could also be a result of the specific parties and leaders included in the sample.

Table 11. Determinants of congruence by party ideology, logistic regression

Variables	Prefers centre-left party				Prefers centre-right party			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff.	Odds Ratio	Coeff.	Odds Ratio	Coeff.	Odds Ratio	Coeff.	Odds Ratio
Warmth			0.45 (0.06)	1.57***			0.25 (0.05)	1.29***
Competence			-0.22 (0.06)	0.80***			-0.12 (0.05)	0.89*
Pid	0.98 (0.08)	2.67***	0.75 (0.08)	2.11***	2.23 (0.11)	9.26***	2.09 (0.11)	8.06***
Extremism	0.03 (0.03)	1.03	0.02 (0.03)	1.02	0.01 (0.03)	1.01	-0.01 (0.03)	1.00
Secondary	-1.30 (1.07)	0.27	-1.38 (1.08)	0.25	0.16 (0.71)	1.18	0.11 (0.71)	1.11
Primary	-1.30 (1.06)	0.27	-1.38 (1.06)	0.25	-0.03 (0.59)	0.97	-0.10 (0.70)	0.92
University	-1.69 (1.06)	0.19	-1.79 (1.06)	0.17	-0.09 (0.70)	0.91	-0.15 (0.70)	0.86
Age	0.0001 (0.002)	1.00	-0.002 (0.002)	1.00	-0.003 (0.003)	1.00	-0.005 (0.003)	0.99*
Female	-0.004 (0.07)	1.00	-0.03 (0.07)	1.02	0.06 (0.08)	1.05	0.08 (0.09)	1.08
Germany	0.59 (0.18)	1.80**	1.18 (0.20)	3.27****	0.12 (0.19)	1.13	0.50 (0.21)	1.65*
Portugal	2.26 (0.24)	9.61***	2.93 (0.25)	19.00***	1.35 (0.22)	3.85***	1.77 (0.24)	5.89***
Italy	0.48 (0.18)	1.61**	1.24 (0.20)	3.46***	-0.33 (0.17)	0.72	0.24 (0.20)	1.27

UK	-0.57 (0.13)	0.57***	-0.26 (0.14)	0.77	0.47 (0.12)	0.62***	-0.35 (0.13)	0.70**
Australia	1.38 (0.15)	3.97***	2.58 (0.19)	13.13***	0.23 (0.12)	1.25	0.85 (0.16)	2.34***
n	5,653		5,649		5,181		5,165	

*Note: ***p<0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05. Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parenthesis. Education dummies' reference category: none. Country dummies' reference category – Ireland.*

In line with previous research, sociodemographic variables do not have a significant impact. Additionally, it is worth noting that there is great variation between countries. This points to the importance of context and the potential for the varying popularity of leaders and parties to impact the extent to which voters' have congruent preferences. This could result in variation between countries as evidence here, but also between elections within countries.

Adding the warmth and competence dimensions in model 2 sees the strength of the impact of *pid* reduced but it is still highly significant ($p<0.001$). Both dimensions have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable, providing further evidence of the importance of traits when voters evaluate leaders. Warmth has the higher odds ratio, suggesting that the traits in this dimension have, on average, a greater effect on whether voters favour the leader from their preferred party rather than another leader. The significant and positive direction of this variable confirms H1: higher warmth evaluations results in a higher likelihood of being congruent.

Notably, and contrary to H2, higher competence results in a reduced likelihood for voters to have congruent preferences. For both centre-left and centre-right leaders, there is a negative coefficient with an odds ratio of 0.80 and 0.88 respectively. At first glance this seems a surprising finding: that the more competent leaders are, the less likely they are to retain the support of their voters. However, not only does the superior importance of warmth correlate with some previous research (Costa and Silva 2015; Silva and Costa 2019) but in addition there is evidence that high competence can result in negative evaluations if individuals are perceived

to be overly egoistic (Cislak and Wojciszke 2008). As a further test of this, in A3 of the chapter 4 appendix I have constructed a ratio variable where competence is divided by warmth. The results here suggest that leaders who are considered more competent than warm are less likely to appeal to voters.

Finally, regarding H3, there is some evidence that those who prefer centre-right and centre-left leaders respectively are looking for different traits in their leaders. Competence is more important for those who prefer centre-right parties compared to those who prefer centre-left parties, with the opposite being true for warmth. However, they do not have opposing preferences, as some previous studies have suggested. Warmth is the most important trait dimension across both party types.

4.7 Discussion

In this study I looked at the determinants of congruent preferences between parties and leaders. Specifically, I built on the work of Daoust et al. (2019); combining their approach to this topic with the wider literature on leader-traits. As a result, I bring together two separate strands of research in order to assess the impact of leader-traits on whether voters have congruent preferences or not. In other words, are certain leaders more likely to keep their parties' supporters onside because of their personal qualities? Evidence presented here points towards the affirmative: even when controlling for party identity and ideological extremism, voters who prefer centre-right parties and voters who prefer centre-left parties are both persuaded by individual traits when it comes to which leader they prefer.

With high levels of congruency amongst respondents, this paper shows that parties are still highly significant when it comes to voter opinion in electoral politics. Simply put, if a voter has a preference for a party then they are highly likely to preference that same party's leader also. However, several studies have suggested that incongruent preferences are still a relatively

significant part of public opinion. Despite this, little research has been conducted into what determines congruency and that which has focuses exclusively on factors outside of the leaders' themselves.

My findings suggest that leaders' traits play an important role in keeping party supporters onside. Specifically, they reassert the importance that warmth plays in how voters form attitudes. If voters are to remain loyal to both party and leader, then it is personality-based traits such as 'honesty', 'trustworthiness' and 'being in touch with ordinary members of the public' that are likely to influence this compared with performance-based traits. This is true for supporters of both centre-right and supporters of centre-left parties, thus bringing into question previous assumptions regarding right-leaning voters preferring competent leaders and left-leaning voters preferring warm leaders.

Most notably I find that rather than increase the likelihood of having congruent preferences, high competence assessments decrease it. This is a surprising finding, given that trait evaluations are often viewed as another way for voters to demonstrate the extent to which they like a leader or not. As such, this presents a clear avenue for future research. Cislak and Wojciszke (2008) provided evidence that politicians perceived to be high in competence are more likely to be perceived as having high levels of self-interest. In other words, there may be negative implications to being perceived as highly competent. As a result, given that this trait dimension has largely been perceived as a positive one that complements and even supersedes warmth, scholars should focus on understanding in which contexts high competence is more likely to be damaging towards politicians. Additionally, research should test what the negative consequences of high competence are at the expense of being perceived as warm.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary

This thesis consisted of three papers providing evidence concerning the way parties and leaders are entangled in the minds of voters. I will briefly reiterate the structure of this thesis and the contribution each chapter makes. Firstly, I show that party identity has a strong impact on how voters perceive leaders and that it has increased over time for centre-right party identifiers. In addition, there is evidence of a decrease for centre-left party identifiers. This finding provides evidence that the hypothesis of change over time espoused by the literature on personalization is correct, but suggests that the picture is more nuanced regarding how this has affected different parties from different ideological families.

Secondly, I look at the impact of leader change on how voters use party evaluations to inform their opinions of that party's leader. Whilst previous studies have suggested that changing a leader can have consequences for how voters perceive the party, I show that the process by which they evaluate the leader changes also. In short, voters are less likely to see the new leader through the lens of the party. Over consecutive elections leaders become more associated with the party they represent. This chapter adds to previous research on the extent to which views towards party and leader are distinct from one another, and shows that this can be better understood by taking into account change in leader personnel.

Finally, I address the importance of leader-traits. Previous research has shown that party identity and ideology influence whether voters prefer the leader of their preferred party. However, the impact of traits has not been taken into account. As such, the contribution of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it provides evidence that leaders have substantial influence over whether voters hold congruent preferences: the leader they prefer is from the party they prefer. Previous research has suggested this is important for vote choice. Secondly, I add to a burgeoning literature that suggests that warmth is more important than competence when it

comes to voter attitudes and behaviour. Notably, I find that this is the case for leaders of both centre-left and centre-right parties and that high levels of competence are potentially damaging for leaders' reputations. The hypotheses tested in this thesis and subsequent findings are displayed in table 9.

Table 12. Overview of findings

Chapters	Hypothesis	Finding
2	Centre left party identity to have a decreased impact on how people evaluate leaders	Confirmed
	Centre right party identity to have an increased impact on how people evaluate leaders	Unconfirmed
3	Voters are less likely to evaluate new leaders according to how they evaluate the leaders' party	Confirmed
4	The longer a party leader remains in office the more similarly voters evaluate them to the party they represent.	Confirmed
	Higher Warmth evaluations are more likely to lead to congruent preferences	Confirmed
	Higher Competence evaluations are more likely to lead to congruent preferences	Unconfirmed
	Dimensions should have a differentiated impact depending on whether voters' preferred party is centre-left or centre-right	Confirmed

Across this thesis I use a combination of voter perceptions and factors that are exogenous to this to understand how leaders can achieve popularity in public opinion. I also combine understanding from scholars who place upmost importance on party identity (King 2002; Karvonen 2010; Curtice and Hunjan 2013; Curtice and Lisi 2014) and those who place importance on attitudes (Fiorina 1981; McDonald and Tolbert 2012; Garzia 2012) to provide further nuance in the debate surrounding the role of leaders relative to their parties. In its entirety this thesis argues for an increased level of scrutiny when considering the role of leaders in electoral politics, and in particular close analysis of how voters come to form opinions about them.

5.2 Future research

In this thesis I show that using leader evaluations as the dependent variable uncovers previously overlooked patterns in research. A focus on vote choice as the dependent variable (Archer 1987; Curtice and Holmberg 2005; Capara et al. 2008; Belucci et al. 2015) has reduced leader evaluations to another attitude that is considered exogenous to party identity or evaluation. Here I show that the relationship between voter and leader can change depending on both voter perceptions towards parties and leader agency. As such, I will suggest below that leaders are potentially underestimated in electoral calculus models, then I outline two major avenues for future research: the first drawing on observational data and the second using an experimental approach.

As stated previously, using leader evaluation to understand vote choice while controlling for party evaluation or identity, is potentially underestimating the impact of leaders. Given this, I would recommend the approaches taken in recent research by Garzia (2011; 2012; 2013a; 2013b) and other studies (Midtbø 1997; Holsteyn and Andeweg 2010; Lobo and Silva 2018) that use both methodological and theoretical approaches to separate party from leader. Although it is necessary to understand attitudes towards leaders, this focus is in itself a limitation. However, findings regarding the determinants of leader evaluations can be applied to other areas of research within political science and shed light on the extent to which attitudes towards leaders differ compared with attitudes towards other political objects.

Key to this is showing the way that leader evaluations can affect party identity, previously thought to be relatively stable. Additionally, vote choice models could more frequently introduce leader traits where available, as they offer a more accurate depiction of voters' attitudes towards leaders. In addition, the way in which leaders and parties match should more readily be used as an explanatory variable. This is especially true in contexts where it is likely to be theoretically relevant: for instance, where a new leader is seen as a radical departure

from the old one. This is likely to provide an understanding not just of the impact of individual leaders, but of systematic change resulting from specific choices that parties make about leaders.

With regards to observational data, in trying to take further into account those factors which are exogenous to voter perceptions, most surveys are restrictive when it comes to information about leaders. This discourages researchers from utilising this information and makes current research, even that included in this thesis, somewhat incomplete in its outlook. For example, studies which look at the impact of gender on candidate evaluations often have to manually code in gender, which again discourages from including this variables as a control in the initial analysis. As such, in absence of established surveys incorporating new variables on leaders it would be useful for researchers to establish a dataset that includes detailed information on party leaders. This has already begun with the Party Leader Database (PLD) which includes information on position specifics, length of term, electing body, education, gender, and age. Further information should be added to this list including but not exclusive to ideology, career background, party experience, and political activism.

Experimental studies are also likely to be important in any future understanding of public opinion surrounding leader. Observational studies are imperative to this area of research, but experiments have greater potential to uncover causal mechanisms. Based on findings from this thesis, I suggest that respondents are presented with candidates of differencing background and political approach in order to better grasp when party identity or party evaluation is called upon to evaluate leaders. In increasingly polarized democracies, vignettes are likely to be able to shed light on whether there are issues surrounding leaders, or actions that leaders could embark upon that would be likely to either divide or unite public opinion. This is also something that natural experiments could aide with, using actual leader responses to measure public response. All of this would go a long way to improving our overall understanding of

how leaders rally support with the public: when do they simply appeal to their party's supporters and when are they able to widen their base.

5.3 Implications for political parties

Parties and leaders are largely entangled in public opinion and it is unlikely that, even if the strongest assertions surrounding the increasing importance of individual political actors are correct, this will change substantially in the future. However, there are several findings in this thesis reveal the nuances in how voters think about leaders. As such, below I outline some potential implications for parties with regards to how they can moderate views towards their leaders.

Firstly, given that there has been some change over time with regards to how voters evaluate leaders, this gives leaders an opportunity to improve their popularity beyond voters that would usually be inclined to like them. It is currently unclear which factors have increased in importance, and imperative that future research expands our understanding of this. However, the reverse of this is also likely to hold true. As party identity is no longer such a strong predictor of whether voters will like the leader from their party, there is also more scope for leaders to lose followers from their own base. In increasingly volatile democracies this is likely to be a major challenge for leaders: they can no longer rely on their own voters to reinforce their popularity. Given the probability that there is also reciprocal causation here, and leaders can also influence feelings towards parties – this points to leader actions having substantial consequences.

Secondly, the timing of leader changes are likely to matter. If a party is particularly unpopular it is likely imperative that a change happens in order for parties to reap the rewards of a popular leader. If a leader overstays her welcome it is more likely that she will negatively impacts the party, potentially having long term implications Furthermore, there are potential

benefits of keeping a leader if that leader is individually popular and fits with the current party. When leader changes should be made largely rests on the timing of elections. In a snap election, an unpopular leader is unlikely to be particularly impactful if they have not had a long tenure with the party. However, if an unpopular leader is elected years before an election, this potentially allows for the negativity of the leader to increasingly reinforce negative feelings towards the party.

Thirdly, confirming findings of recent studies, traits that are associated with warmth are important for leaders. Leaders should focus on characteristics that demonstrate to voters that they are trustworthy, honest, and in touch with people. This is particularly important for centre-right parties, where leaders are consistently evaluated higher according to their perceived warmth. Most surprisingly, I uncover evidence that high levels of competence can lead to negative evaluations of leaders. This suggests that findings from psychology, where high competence can lead to individuals being considered cold, may carry over into the political sphere. In this case, it is imperative for parties' success that their leaders balance warmth and competence, with some emphasis on the former. High levels of competence are unlikely to atone for a lack of charisma, whereas, high levels of the latter may override low-levels of the former.

Leaders are clearly important for parties, and by adjusting methodology and theoretical frameworks research is increasingly showing this to be the case, putting political science research more in-line with the 'common wisdom' that leaders matter (Angelis and Garzia 2016). Leaders are an important conduit for parties, imperative in communicating policy, and can be used either as an advantage or disadvantage.

In general, attitudes towards leaders are somewhat comparable to attitudes towards other parts of the political sphere: policy platforms, campaigns, or parties for example. In these instances, socio-demographic factors and political context play a big part. As a result, study

leader evaluations can be utilised as one way of measuring how voters form political opinions. Nonetheless, it is also likely that because leaders have a substantial level of agency in moderating how voters' see them, leader evaluations are not always in accordance with general political attitudes. Therefore, as a significant part of public opinion, it is important for political science that attitudes towards leaders continue to be studied and that these findings are also implemented within the discipline and in other related fields.

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Chapter 2 Appendix

A1. Descriptive Statistics, Germany

Statistics	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	St. Dev.
Like/ Dislike CDU/CSU Leader	14,157	0	10	5.86	3.06
Like/ Dislike SPD Leader	14,130	0	10	5.97	2.82
Pid CDU/CSU	13,711	0	1	0.29	0.46
Pid SPD	13,711	0	1	0.30	0.46
Proximity CDU/CSU	14,911	0	10	7.43	2.26
Proximity SPD	14,911	0	10	7.79	2.13
Vote Share CDU/CSU	14,911	33	49	40.00	5.35
Vote Share SPD	14,911	21	43	34.62	6.64
New Leader CDU/CSU	14,911	0	1	0.47	0.50
New Leader SPD	14,911	0	1	0.68	0.47
Age Group	14,863	1	7	4.03	1.76
Education	14,852	1	3	1.75	0.76
Female	14,908	0	1	0.49	0.50
Year	14,911	1976	2017	1998.812	12.11

A2. Descriptive Statistics, Norway

Statistics	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	St. Dev.
Like/ Dislike Con Leader	12,195	0	10	6.25	2.50
Like/ Dislike Labour Leader	12,260	0	10	5.97	2.81
Pid Con	12,348	0	1	0.15	0.36
Pid Lab	12,348	0	1	0.25	0.43
Proximity Con	12,348	0	10	6.98	2.19
Proximity Lab	12,348	0	10	7.84	1.89
Vote Share Con	12,348	14	32	21.68	6.84
Vote Share Lab	12,348	31	41	35.43	3.01
New Leader Con	12,348	0	1	0.87	0.34
New Leader Lab	12,348	0	1	0.26	0.44
Age Group	12,348	1	7	3.83	1.72
Education	12,255	1	3	2.09	0.68
Female	12,348	0	1	0.46	0.50
Year	12,348	1981	2013	1994.967	9.99

A3. Descriptive Statistics, Sweden

Statistics	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	St. Dev.
Like/ Dislike Moderate Leader	17,872	0	10	5.63	3.25
Like/ Dislike SD Leader	17,872	0	10	6.00	2.95
Pid Con	17,872	0	1	0.39	0.49
Pid Lab	17,872	0	1	0.19	0.39
Proximity Moderate	17,872	0	10	6.07	2.62
Proximity SD	17,872	0	10	7.52	2.21
Vote Share Moderate	17,872	18	30	22.09	2.74
Vote Share SD	17,872	31	46	41.35	4.50
New Leader Moderate	17,872	0	1	0.33	0.47
New Leader SD	17,872	0	1	0.29	0.45
Age Group	17,872	1	7	3.90	1.76
Education	17,872	1	3	1.89	0.80
Female	12,348	0	1	0.46	0.50
Year	12,348	1979	2010	1989.81	8,56

Chapter 3 Appendix

A1. Countries and Elections

Country	Election Years
Australia	1996, 2004, 2007
Austria	2013
Bulgaria	2014
Canada	1997, 2008, 2011, 2015
Croatia	1996, 2006, 2010, 2013
Czech Republic	1996, 2006, 2010, 2013
Denmark	2011
Estonia	2007, 2011, 2015
Finland	2007, 2011, 2015
Germany	1998, 2005, 2009, 2013
Great Britain	1997, 2015
Iceland	2007, 2009, 2013
Ireland	2007 ²⁰
Israel	2006, 2013
Latvia	2010, 2011
Montenegro	2012
Netherlands	1998, 2006, 2010
New Zealand	1996, 2008, 2011, 2014
Norway	1997, 2005, 2009, 2013
Slovakia	2010
Slovenia	2016
South Africa	2009
Spain	1996, 2000, 2008
Sweden	1998, 2006, 2014
Switzerland	2007, 2011
Turkey	2015

A2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std Dev.	Min.	Max.
Leader	4.94	2.94	0	10
Time since change	71.42	69.44	0	417
Party	4.79	2.91	0	10
Pid	0.14	0.35	0	1
Distance	2.83	2.42	0	10
Knowledge	-0.08	0.99	-2.42	1.38
Party Size	20.19	10.58	1.2	65.9
Age	48.2	16.63	16	100
Female	0.47	0.50	0	1
Education	2.40	1.16	0	4

Chapter 4 Appendix

A1.

Variable	Coding
Congruence	1 Yes 0 No
Female	0 Male 1 Female
Age	Numeric age
Education	0 None 1 Primary 2 Secondary 3 University
Pid	0 Yes 1 No
Extremism	0 Centre 5 Extreme
Competence	Mean of respondents' leader competence evaluations
Warmth	Mean of respondents' leader warmth evaluations

A2.

Country	Political Party	Leader	Ideology
Ireland	Fianna Fáil	Bertie Ahern	Centre-right
	Fine Gael	Michael Noonan	Centre-right
	Labour Party	Ruairi Quinn	Centre-left
Germany	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU)	Angela Merkel	Centre-right
	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD)	Frank-Walter Steinmeier	Centre-left
Portugal	Partido Socialista (PS)	José Sócrates	Centre-left
	Partido Social-democrata (PSD)	Manuela Ferreira Leite	Centre-right
Italy	Popolo della Libertà (PPL)	Silvio Berlusconi	Centre-right
	Partito Democratico (PD)	Pier Luigi Bersani	Centre-left
	Scelta Civica (SC)	Mario Monti	Centre-right
Australia	Labour Party	Kevin Rudd	Centre-left
	Liberal Party	Tony Abbot	Centre-right
UK	Conservative Party	Michael Howard	Centre-right
	Labour Party	Tony Blair	Centre-left
	Liberal Democrats	Charles Kennedy	Centre-left

A3.

Variables	Coeff.	Odds Ratio
Competence/warmth	-0.17 (0.08)	0.87*
Pid	0.24 (0.10)	1.27*
Extremism	0.12 (0.03)	1.13***
Secondary	0.44 (0.69)	1.56
Primary	0.27 (0.67)	1.32
University	0.19 (0.19)	1.21
Age	0.002 (0.03)	1.00
Female	0.04 (0.08)	1.04
Germany	1.08 (0.19)	2.97***
Portugal	1.04 (0.22)	2.85***
Italy	-0.03 (0.16)	0.97
UK	0.10 (0.13)	1.10
Australia	0.87 (0.13)	2.39***

n 5,178

*Note: *** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$. Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parenthesis.*

Education dummies' reference category: none. Country dummies' reference category – Ireland.

Competence/warmth is competence divided by warmth. Therefore, higher values mean competence is rated higher than warmth.