

Identifying Voters' Consideration Sets

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Abstract

Consideration Set Models (CSM) are becoming increasingly popular in electoral research. Since the predictive power of most standard models of voting behaviour is slowly diminishing, CSM are needed to meet the challenges of a highly individualized voting behaviour. In an era of dealignment and increasing proportions of party switchers and late deciders, the process of choosing a party is no longer a routine manifestation of group loyalty, but rather a real individual choice between considered alternatives.

This paper addresses key measurement issues in developing consideration set models: how to effectively identify citizen's consideration sets in multiparty systems. Some instruments tend to generate too large sets (include parties that are actually never considered), while others generate too small sets (do not include a party that was actually voted for). In this paper I evaluate a large number of different survey questions and techniques applied to isolate how many and what choice options are actually considered by voters close to Election Day. One tentative result is that the most recent instruments designed to meet the requirements of CSM tends to generate smaller sets than expected.

INTRODUCTION

Many well established explanatory models of party choice are waning as increasing proportions of citizens in established democracies display a highly individualized and volatile voting behaviour. Decades of electoral research have shown weakening ties between parties and voters, eroding social cleavages, increasing electoral volatility, and increasing proportions of late deciders (Dalton 2006; Thomassen 2005).

Consideration set models of party choice are becoming increasingly popular as an intriguing remedy to the many challenges of a highly individualized voting behaviour (Steenbergen and Hangartner 2008; Rosema 2006; Thomassen and Rosema 2008). Typically, the key assumption in consideration set approaches is that, at the time of elections, many voters actively consider voting for more than one party. Voters enter the election campaigns with an existing subset of alternatives from which they select a winning alternative. While earlier generations of citizens manifested group based interests or identifications by routinely supporting parties at elections, many voters in the 21st century engage in an actual decision process. Voters decide close to the elections, and the choice process takes place in a context of intense campaigning and information processing.

The full decision process is often conceived as a two step process, in perfect analogy with consideration set approaches in marketing and consumer behaviour research (Shocker et al. 1991; Paap et al. 2005; Kardes et al. 1993; Wright 1975; Shapiro et al. 1997): 1) the *consideration set formation* process where voters make an initial selection of supportable alternatives, and 2) the *final decision process* where voters make up their minds on what party to vote for (Steenbergen and Hangartner 2008; de Vries and Rosema 2008).

While the *size* (the number of considered alternatives) and *content* (the parties that make up the subset) of voters' consideration sets is assumed to be influenced by stable long term ideological predispositions, the information processing that precede the final party choice is presumed to be more influenced by short term factors (i.e campaign agendas, campaign events, debates, media coverage, and person-to-person conversation). The ultimate

goal is to develop explanatory models that successfully can predict the two processes of *consideration set formation* and *final party choice*.

CSM approaches hope to reconstruct the actual decision-making process more realistically than conventional models of party choice. For instance, we would like to incorporate insights from political psychology that individual voters face dissimilar decision-making processes and resort to divergent strategies for arriving at a final choice. The initial sorting of choice options, the discarding of inconceivable alternatives, can be seen as perfectly rational since having fewer choice options saves time and cognitive resources during intense campaigns when huge amounts of political information must be processed.

Consideration set models have multiple intellectual roots and inspirations. The basic idea that voters in multiparty systems have a set of parties for which they feel an affinity and might even vote for is not novel. In electoral research, similar approaches can be traced back to the well known critique against how the Michigan concept of party identification was adopted for analyses of voting behaviour in European multi party contexts (Thomassen 1976; Butler and Stokes 1969). And the main justification for pursuing a CSM-approach – the *voters begin to choose*-theme – was introduced already in the 1980s by Richard Rose and Ian McAllister (1986). A large number of analyses of multiple party identification, multiple party preferences, full party preference orderings and electoral utilities belong to the same tradition that tries to think beyond electoral choice as a single categorical variable (Tillie 1995; van der Eijk et al. 2006).

This paper summarizes findings and experiences from earlier research efforts on CSM conducted by scholars in the Swedish National Election Studies program. In addition, I explore a number of survey instruments that can be used as operational indicators to identify what parties are included in a voter's consideration set.

SHORT NOTE ON SWEDEN

The historical development of voting behaviour in Sweden is an excellent illustration of general trends towards a more individualized and fluent voting behaviour: Processes of Modernization and Individualisation have produced a dramatic transformation of Swedish voting behaviour in the last fifty years.

The proportion of party identifiers have dropped steadily from 65 percent in 1968 to 31 percent in 2006, and the strong identifiers are down to only 15 percent. Consequently, the proportion of party switchers between the national elections have climbed from 11,4 percent in 1956 to 37,1 percent in 2006, and party switchers during the election campaigns have risen from 5,5 percent in 1956 to 20,1 percent in 2006. At the same time, a steadily increasing proportion of Swedish voters claim they decide their party choice during the election campaign: 18 percent in 1964 and 58 percent in 2006 (Holmberg and Oscarsson 2007). Together with availability of high quality data, we think Sweden is a good case for developing and testing consideration set models.

The Swedish party system is still profoundly unidimensional. Left-right ideology structure most of the party competition, and tend to outperform all other factors in analyses of voting behaviour. Seven to eight parties compete regularly for support at national elections. A socialist bloc (Left Party, Social Democrats and the Greens) and a non-socialist block (Centre Party, Liberal, Christian Democrats and the Conservative party) compete for governmental control. The strong unidimensional tendency of party competition in Sweden affects directly the outcome of the initial consideration stage as voters' consideration sets tend to comprise parties that are neighbours along the left-right continuum.

CONSIDERATION SET FORMATION

The ultimate goal of CSM is to learn more about last-minute voting behaviour by modelling individual voters' decision processes during intense election campaigns. However, to do that we also need to study the initial process of consideration set formation: Why are some parties included in the set while others remain excluded? What factors are important when parties are included or excluded from a consideration set? When and how often are voters' consideration sets updated? Are voters' consideration sets stable across time?

From earlier analyses, we know that, at least in Sweden, ideological predispositions such as left-right orientations play an important role in consideration set formation. For instance, which parties are selected/not selected to be part of a consideration set turns out to fit excellent with a

simple dichotomous unidimensional unfolding model where parties line up from left to right. Most voters include neighbouring parties in their sets. It is fair to conclude that ideological proximity is the main driving force behind consideration set formation in this case (Oscarsson et al. 1997).¹

We have also learned from extensive panel studies that the size and content of Swedish voters' consideration sets are surprisingly unstable from election to election (Oscarsson et al. 1997). Only about 25-29 percent of Swedish voters leave their consideration sets totally unchanged as regards to *size* and *content* between elections, a proportion that is considerably lower than the stability of party identification (78-84 percent stable identifiers). Given the high stability of ideological predispositions (panel correlations of left-right self placements between elections range between $r=.72$ and $r=.80$ in the last three decades), one would expect a much higher durability and sturdiness in voters' consideration sets. These results inform us that the initial process of consideration set formation itself is probably quite dynamic and should not be neglected in CSM. Voters' consideration sets are not set. The initial process of selecting alternatives for a genuine consideration may well start all over again at the next election. Therefore, the formation of consideration set may be as important as the subsequent decision process in explanations of party choice. In addition, this also means that we cannot assume that consideration set formation takes place long before the intense election campaign. For some voters, the two processes may take place during the election campaign very close to Election Day.

¹ This study was based on voters' party evaluations measured with an eleven point dislike-like scale ranging from -5 (strongly dislike) to +5 (strongly like). Parties evaluated positively (>0) was included in a voters consideration set.

IDENTIFYING VOTERS CONSIDERATION SETS

I argue that the outcome of a consideration set formation process is very clear cut: a party is either included in the consideration set or is not included in the consideration set. Conceptually and analytically, we are dealing with a dichotomy: At the time of the genuine decision, either a party is a considered alternative to a voter or it is not.

Historically, a number of survey instruments have been suggested or applied in order to sort out *how many* and *which* parties are included in Swedish voters' consideration sets. This paper is a comprehensive overview of available options showing that different approaches and choice of indicators give very different estimates of consideration set size. With the indicators discussed in this paper, the average number of parties included in Swedish voters' consideration sets range between 1.3 and 3.2 parties (see the summary in table 2).

a) Party evaluations (SNES 1982-2006)

Because of high availability and comparability, many previous studies have used data on *voter evaluations of parties* to distinguish considered alternatives. Typically, all parties that are evaluated positively on a standard like-dislike scale or a feeling thermometer (or rated higher than some cut point) are being included in a voters' consideration set. At the one hand, parties that are evaluated negatively (or rated below the cut-point) have a close to zero probability to end up as a final party choice. Thus, we can rest assured that the final party choice is included in the consideration set. At the other hand, we have learned that this operationalization most likely overestimates the number of parties that are in fact seriously being considered as a party choice in the final stage of the decision process: In the Swedish context where investigators ask respondents to rate up to 10 parties, the average number of parties that are evaluated positively is persistently 3.0 or even higher. And over time, the consideration sets have become larger as more parties are rated positively by Swedish voters (see table 1).²

² The sudden drop in consideration set sizes in 2006 can be explained by the forming of the non-socialist four-party *Alliance for Sweden* two years before the election. Apparently, this event meant a much clearer divide in two political blocs in Sweden, which in turn affected voters' consideration set formation as consideration sets that included parties from both blocs

Table 1
Consideration Set Size measured as the number of parties
evaluated positively on a dislike-like scale, 1982-2005 (average).

	SNES 1982	SNES 1985	SNES 1988	SNES 1991	SNES 1994	SNES 1998	SNES 2002	SNES 2006
Average # of parties in set	2.8	3.3	3.3	3.7	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.1
n	2 174	2 255	2 080	1 957	1 968	1 642	1 809	1 841

Comment. Results are from Swedish national election studies 1982-2006. Parties rated positively on a dislike-like scale ranging from -5 (strongly dislike) and +5 (strongly like) and with a center 0 labelled “neither like nor dislike” have been included in a voter’s consideration set. To reach comparability over time, the New Democrats (1991 and 1994) have not been included in our computations. Thus, the number of parties within the consideration sets are based on voter evaluations of seven parties: Left Party, Social Democrats, Center Party, People’s Party, Moderate Party, Christian Democrats and The Green Party. Our analysis only includes interviews with those who have been evaluating all seven parties and, furthermore, been voting for one of the seven parties.

The estimates based on party evaluations have largely shaped our prior expectations of consideration set size. However, we also know that voters have a tendency to like more parties than they seriously would consider as a viable choice option. Positive evaluations do not necessarily mean that parties are being actively and sincerely considered. This constitutes a serious validity problem since we do not wish to include “dead” alternatives in the consideration sets. We only wish to include alternatives that we can show are part of a process of reflection, judgment, weighing of possibilities, careful examination and scrutiny.

A short example can give an idea on how party evaluations can form the basis of a CSM analysis. We used party evaluations on a dislike-scale to single out voters consideration sets in an extensive analysis of party choice in Sweden (Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004). We pooled data from all Swedish national election studies in the period 1982-2002. All parties evaluated positively on a dislike-like scale were included in the voters’ consideration sets. The data set was then stacked to form voter-party dyads. Dyads with parties that were not included in voters’ consideration sets were excluded from the analyses. The analysis included pre-election interviews with respondents that evaluated all seven parties. And respondents with less than two parties in the consideration set were excluded from the analyses. We ran a series of binary logistic regression models with party choice (0/1) as the dependent variable.

became rarer. This may serve as an illustration of how the strategic context before an election can affect the formation of consideration sets among voters.

Six binary independent variables were constructed in order to find the “tie-breakers”, i.e the comparisons of choice options that eventually made individual voters select a “winning” alternative among the parties in their consideration set: *ideological comparison* (1=the party is closer to the voter along the left-right dimension than any of the other parties in the voters’ consideration set), *instrumental voting/comparison of size* (1=the party is the largest within the voters’ consideration set), *comparisons of agenda* (1=the party is perceived to have the best policies on the issues the voter personally think is most important), *comparison of party leaders* (1=the party’s leader is evaluated more positively than the leaders of the other parties in the consideration set), *comparisons of momentum* (1=the party is enjoying the best positive trend in opinion polls during the election campaign), and finally, the *habit of voting* factor (1=the voter voted for the party in the two latest elections). In short, all independent variables showed significant direct effects except for the party leader comparison.

In the next step of the analyses we constructed a set of interaction variables to learn more about how *voters’ characteristics* (such as age, gender, political interest, party identification, political knowledge, left-right ideology), and *the characteristics of the decision process itself* (party set size, time of voting decision) interplay with the six determinants of party choice. To estimate their effects, the interaction variables entered one at the time in the models. As expected, familiar patterns emerged such as that habitual voting effects were stronger among older voters than among younger, that ideology comparisons have the largest effects among knowledgeable and interested voters, and so on. Effects of *ideological proximity voting* were strongest among the politically interested, the more media exposed and the more knowledgeable voters. Additionally, the more politically knowledgeable the voters, the more meaningful are the *agenda comparisons* for the likelihood of voting for a particular party.

The analyses also generated some new findings that need more attention in the future. For example, the *momentum effects* (i.e bandwagon/underdog effects) were shown to be significantly stronger among voters to the right than among voters to the left. Furthermore, the effects of *comparisons of size*, or instrumental voting, were stronger among the leftist than among the rightist voters.

b) Probability to vote-assessments (EES 2009)

Consideration sets can also be constructed with the increasingly popular probability to vote-questions (PTV). In the European Election Studies and in an increasing number of national election studies in Europe, respondents are asked to judge the probability that they will [ever] vote for party X on a 0-10 scale. PTV-instruments have proven their value in many comparative analyses of voting behaviour in the European multiparty setting (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; Tillie 1995; Oppenhuis 1995). However, PTV-instruments are problematic in regards to CSM since the cut-point (included/not included in the consideration set) need to be set arbitrarily or ad-hoc on the basis of extensive diagnostic analyses. Analysts are also tempted to set *different* cut-points in different polities since the number of parties and the probability scores given varies across countries (Dahlberg 2009; Oscarsson and Holmberg 2006).

The PTV-data that have become available so far highlights another important problem with identifying consideration sets: typically, most national election studies are post-election studies. Indeed, there is a high risk of low validity in measurement when asking respondents *after* the elections what parties they will *ever* consider voting for, without any reference to the election campaign. Preferably, consideration set instruments should be used in pre-election studies or in campaign panel studies that allow a closer and more valid examination of voters' final decision processes.

Preliminary data from the European Election Study 2009 for Sweden show that the average number of parties (8 included in the analysis) rated higher than the midpoint on the PTV-scale (5) is 2.2 parties, which is considerably lower than when using party evaluations.

c) Parties you might think of voting for (SOM 2000)

In many off-election surveys, the SOM-institute and some of the private polling organisations in Sweden have asked respondents to mention or check what parties they might think of (or even *imagine*) voting for [if today was Election Day]. The question wordings often do not include any time perspective or mentions of an imaginary election. Since voter's capabilities to imagine future possible action seem to be quite developed, the average consi-

deration set sizes usually gets quite large, especially if new challenger parties are mentioned explicitly. To give an example from this category (see table 2), the SOM-study 2000 asked respondents to check what parties they might think of voting for. This instrumentation also generates smaller consideration sets than party evaluations (2.1 parties).

d) Second best parties (SNES 1956-2006)

Evaluative measures of secondary party preferences have been applied in many studies since the dawn of European election studies. In Sweden, a question about the second preferred party has been included since the very first election study in 1956. Information about voters' second best party have been shown to predict party switching between elections and during election campaigns fairly (Oscarsson 1998). But party preferences are not the same as behavioural intentions. However, for longitudinal studies of voters' two party consideration sets, the use of second best parties may serve as an alternative. About 80 percent of Swedish voters are willing to answer a question of second best party, which gives us an average consideration set size of 1.8 parties (see table 2).

e) Additional parties you are choosing between (SNES 2006)

The SNES 2006 pre-election interviews included a new battery of questions designed explicitly to identify voters' consideration sets. After the standard question about voting intention in the upcoming election, we asked the follow up question: "Are there any other party or parties you are choosing between in this year's election?". We coded all parties that were mentioned. The question was repeated until the respondent answered "No". With this question, we hope to isolate what parties are currently part of an on-going decision process.

A normal ninety percent of the pre-election respondents were willing to tell what party they intended to vote for (or leaned to vote for) in the election. Among these, 61 percent explicitly told us that there were no additional parties that they were choosing between. In other words, at the time of the interview, only days or weeks before the 2006 election, six out of ten Swedish voters had a one party consideration set (and the real electoral choice become in practice whether to vote or not). Twenty four percent

mentioned one additional considered party. Thirteen percent had a three party consideration set, and only two percent said that there were four parties in their consideration set.

With this instrumentation, and very close to the election, the average number of parties in Swedish voters' consideration sets was estimated to 1.6 parties. This is a lower average than we expected given the dramatic rise in volatility in the Swedish electorate mentioned earlier. This could mean that voters consideration sets do not comprise that many parties to begin with, or perhaps that, at the time of the election campaign, a majority of voters have already peeled off most feasible alternatives from their set.

f) Did you consider voting for any other party (SNES 2006)

The post-election interview version of the consideration set question is part of the CSES³ Module III questionnaire: "Did you consider voting for any other party in the national election? Which party/ies was that?". Results show that voters' consideration set size average at 1.5 (see table 2), which in fact is very close to the pre-election estimate. As most election studies in the world are collected *after* the election, this result is a soothing confirmation that we should expect post election estimates to be quite accurate measures of consideration set size, i.e the number of parties included in voters' consideration set at the time of the final decision.

³ CSES=Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, a collaboration of about 40 national election studies program around the world. <http://www.cses.org>

Table 2
Average consideration set size using different operationalisations (Mean).

Data source	Indicator	Average consideration set size (# of parties)
SNES 2006	# of parties evaluated positively on an eleven-point like-dislike scale ranging from -5 (dislike strongly) to +5 (like strongly).	3.2
EES2009 Sweden	# of parties rated higher than 5 on an eleven point probability to vote-scale. Q: <i>“What number from 0 to 10 best describes best how likely it is that you will ever vote for party X?”</i> Eight parties included in the analysis.	2.2
SOM 2000	<i>“Which party or parties would you might think of (imagine) voting for if there was an election today?”</i>	2.1
SNES Internet Campaign Panel 2006	<i>“Which party or parties do you consider voting for in the national elections [in 2006 / September 17th]?”</i> Ten parties included in the analysis.	1.6-1.9
SNES 2006	<i>“Which party do you like second best?”</i> Follow up question to respondents that volunteered a best party. Ten parties included in the analysis.	1.8
SNES 2006 Pre-Election Interviews	<i>“Are there any other party or parties that you are choosing between in this year’s election”</i> (Yes/No). <i>“What party is that?”</i> (Question is repeated until respondent answer No). Ten parties included in the analysis.	1.6
SNES 2006 Post-Election Interviews	<i>“Did you consider voting for any other party in the election? Which party/ies was that?”</i> Ten parties included in the analysis.	1.5
SCB/PPPS 2006 May+ August/September Pre-Election	<i>“Which other parties do you consider voting for?”</i> Follow up question to respondents that declared a voting intention. Seven parties plus “other” included in the analysis. Follow up question to respondents without a vote intention: <i>“What parties are you hesitating between?”</i> Follow up question to respondents not willing to declare a voting intention. Seven parties plus “other” included in the analysis.	May: 1.4 Aug/Sep: 1.3
SNES 2006	Actual voting behavior (ticket splitting). If two different parties were voted for in local and national elections, both parties are included in the voters’ consideration set.	1.25

Note: SNES=Swedish National Election Study 2006 (face to face interviews; rolling two wave panel between elections; sample split in pre- and post election interviews; pre-post election panel) (<http://www.valforskning.pol.gu.se>); EES2009=European Election Study 2009; SOM 2000=The National Survey from the SOM-institute at University of Gothenburg (<http://www.som.gu.se>). SNES Internet Campaign Panel=six wave websurvey with selfrecruited respondents. SCB/PPPS=Statistics Sweden official Political Party Preference Survey panel 76 with interviews in three waves (May, August/September and November 2006).

g) Parties you consider voting for (SCB/PPPS 2006)

In collaboration with the SNES research group, the authority *Statistics Sweden* included for the first time questions about considered parties in their official Political Party Preference Survey (PPPS). In conjunction to all national elections, the telephone survey is in fact designed as a three wave panel study: 1) a pre-election survey in May, 2) a special methods test survey collected during the election campaign in August/September, and 3) a post-election survey in November). The consideration-question was introduced in the May survey as a follow up question to the standard questions about vote intention. The question read: “What other parties do you consider voting for?”. Respondents that were unwilling to mention a vote intention or said that they were still undecided (about ten percent) were instead asked the question “What parties are you hesitating between?”.

Taken together, the average consideration set size was estimated to 1.4 in the May survey and slightly lower, 1.3, in the August-September survey collected during the election campaign. Again, this is a lower estimate than when using party evaluations to identify consideration sets.

h) Parties you consider voting for (SNES Internet Campaign Panel 2006)

In the SNES Internet Campaign Panel (a six wave websurvey with a total of 3 500 self recruited respondents), we repeatedly asked a randomly selected subgroup of the panel participants about “Which parties do you consider voting for in the national elections 2006?” (see table 3). In this group, consideration set size was stable around 1.9 parties during the panel recruitment and throughout the two first weeks of the election campaign. As expected, in the last two weeks the number of parties considered voting for decreased to 1.71 and 1.56 as voters begin to reject alternatives from their consideration sets. Most notably, the Liberal party was excluded from many voters’ consideration sets after September 3, when media started to report about high Liberal party officials knowing about party members had repeatedly logged onto the Social Democratic party’s internal network, retrieving (and actively using) secret information about campaign strategies. The proportion of panel

participants that considered voting for the Liberal party dropped nine percentage points after the scandal.⁴

Table 3 Proportion of Internet Campaign Panel respondents saying they consider voting for different parties, Average consideration set size, and Party Choice 2006 (Percentages, Means)

	Soc					Chr					Average consideration set size (# of parties)
	Left	Dem	Green	Center	Lib	Dem	Con	SD	JL	Fem	
Recruitment	14	25	16	19	35	18	45	6	6	6	1,89
Vecka 34	13	25	14	18	35	19	43	6	6	6	1,83
Vecka 35	14	26	16	20	34	22	43	5	6	5	1,94
Vecka 36	12	23	15	20	28	17	41	5	4	6	1,71
Vecka 37	12	21	13	17	25	16	39	4	4	4	1,56

Party Choice	Soc					Chr					Other	Sum	n
	Left	Dem	Green	Center	Lib	Dem	Con	SD	JL	Fem			
September 17	8	14	7	11	12	7	31	3	1	2	4	100	609

Kommentar: Results are from 2006 Internet Campaign Panel (e-panelen). Question: "Which party or parties do you consider voting for in the 2006 national election? Please check all parties you consider voting for". The web questionnaire displayed check boxes for the seven parties in the Swedish Riksdag, three challenger parties Junelist (JL), Swedish Democrats (SD), and Feminist Initiative (Fem), and two empty boxes for "Other parties". Ten parties were included in the analyses of consideration sets. The large number of respondents voting for "Other parties" in the bottom half of the table are mainly votes for the Pirate Party.

i) Actual behaviour

In Sweden, since 1970, an electoral system with simultaneous elections at local, regional and national elections is employed. Although the three types of elections cannot be said to be part of the same decision process, there is still a growing tendency for ticket splitting that, at least indirect, may indicate that there is indeed an increasing proportion of voters having a real consideration set, i.e. having two or more parties that they are choosing between. In the 2006 elections, twentyfive percent voted for different parties at the local and national elections (=1.25 parties in the consideration sets).

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

We conclude that the newer survey instruments tailored to the CSM approach generate quite small consideration sets, also when measured very close to the elections. Depending on the timing of the surveys, consideration set sizes varies between 1.5 and 1.9 parties. This means that half of the electorate or more do not seem to have more than one party that they

⁴ More detailed analyses (Oscarsson and Holmberg 2008) have shown that the social democratic party did not gain much from being a victim of morally and politically questionable behaviour. One explanation to the small effects is that many voters accused the Social democrats of over using the scandal for their own purposes in the election campaign. Alternatively, the Social democrats were suspected of being the first hand source of the news story and that they deliberately chose to make it public fourteen days before Election Day.

actively consider voting for. And most of those who do have only two parties they are choosing between. In other words, they have about the same choice situation as a voter in a two party system.

The newer instruments generate more conservative estimates of consideration set size than when using party evaluations. Because relatively few voters do really consider more than one party, one could argue that the CSM approach cannot (yet) be universally applied for all voters, and perhaps not even for a majority of voters. Still, we must remember that the aim of CSM is to find ways to better explain the outcome of individual voter's decision process that takes place close to the elections and do include more than one party. This is an important research endeavour even if the CSM can be applied only on a subgroup of the electorate.

One way of making CSM even more universally applicable in the future is to construct indicators that will enable us to also include the choice option of *non-voting* in voters' consideration sets (Oscarsson and Rosema 2008). Whether non-voting is in fact a seriously considered alternative to some voters, and therefore need to be included in a consideration set, will soon be investigated more thoroughly. In the SNES 2009 European Parliament Election Study (a large face-to face post election study currently in the field), we have included questions that make it possible to include non-voting as a considered choice option in voters consideration sets.

The journey towards a more cohesive theoretical framework for CSM has only just begun. In this paper, we have tried to summarize and evaluate some available *survey instruments* that can be used to identify the parties that individual voters are truly considering voting for shortly before the elections. But there are of course also other crucial tasks on the research agenda. To closely monitor and model the decision processes of individual voters, *new types of data collection* such as intense campaign panel studies need (again!) to be designed and carried out (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944). Lastly, CSM-approaches need to be integrated with existing sophisticated *choice models* not often applied in political science (c f Steenbergen and Hangartner 2008; Gilbride and Allenby 2006; Wilson and Steenbergen 2007). This way we will be able to explain better why an individual voter with parties XYZ in her consideration set eventually choose to vote for party X.

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