

Old and new models in electoral research. Comparative perspectives

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In electoral research newer models for understanding electoral choices are frequently used in addition to older models which were developed in the first decades after WWII. The older traditional models focused on the role of social structure, political issues and value orientation in determining party choice. The role of party identification has also played a significant role in this respect, even though its adoption in Europe was not straightforward.

These models have come under criticism due to the increasing dealignment in the electorate. Social structure has lost its capacity to determine party vote to the same degree as previously. The old issues and values such as economic left-right and religious-secular values have also become less important at least according to some research.

However, we also see tendencies of realignment. New socio-structural variables such as gender and - in some countries - sector employment, have become significant predictors of party choice. It is still true that social class variables continue to determine party choice, but partly in other ways than in the traditional class cleavage model. New political issues and values (often associated with New Politics) have increased in importance.

Newer models of electoral research are preoccupied with more short-termed factors and information-processes perspectives. The impact of media and professionalised campaigns, the role of political leaders and the role of the economy for voting behaviour have for example been focussed upon more frequently, but the theoretical models that can help understanding cross-national and temporal variation in the importance of these factors are still in their infancy.

One of the main consequences of party dealignment is that political actors are increasingly evaluated by their performance. From that perspective, more attention has been devoted to issue politics, as perceived ability to handle key issues becomes an important determinant of elections results. Within such a framework for electoral competition, the role of accountability in electoral research has become more relevant.

An important trend in recent electoral research has been the goal of contextualising voters' choices. Individual voters are studied as embedded in and interacting with the social, institutional and structural contexts in which they live and act. Contexts are relevant for the format of party competition, the organisation of the media system, the electoral system of course, and the like.

Panels in this proposed section will use older and/or newer models of voting behaviour based on cross-national research. Studies addressing methodological issues raised by contextual analysis, research on accountability as well as old and new models are also welcomed. Panels that try to combine insights from the old and new models will be

prioritised, i.e. how long-termed and short-termed factors interact in producing the electoral decision and the election outcome.

Possible panel organisers and titles

Hans Rattinger

Models of voting behaviour in German federal elections

Hermann Schmitt

The electoral cycle revisited