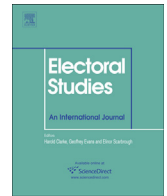




ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Electoral Studies

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/electstud

Do constituency candidates matter in German Federal Elections? The personal vote as an interactive process

Thomas Gschwend^a, Thomas Zittel^{b,*}

^a University of Mannheim, Department of Political Science, A5, 6, 68131 Mannheim, Germany

^b Goethe-University Frankfurt/Main, Department of Social Sciences, Campus Westend, PEG, Grüneburgplatz 1, Postbox 40, 60323 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 October 2012

Received in revised form 7 October 2013

Accepted 16 March 2014

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Personalization

Constituency campaigns

Personal vote

Voting behavior

Mixed-electoral systems

ABSTRACT

What are the electoral consequences of constituency candidates' campaign strategies? This paper focuses on the German case to theoretically and empirically explore this question. Theoretically, it perceives personalization at the voter level as the result of an interactive process involving both candidates and voters. It argues that voters need to be asked and mobilized to personalize their votes in order of doing so. Empirically it draws from a novel set of data for the 2009 German Federal Elections including voters and candidate data. On the basis of this data set we are able to show that the campaign behavior of constituency candidates matters for the perceptions and behaviors of voters.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. The personal vote in Germany's party democracy

What are the electoral consequences of constituency candidates' campaign strategies in German Federal Elections? Predominantly, students of electoral politics are skeptical in this regard, emphasizing the partisan basis of vote choices in German electorates. These are said to be facilitated by the long-term subjective identification of particular national coalitions of voters with particular national parties (Falter et al., 2000). For example, traditionally, unionized blue-collar workers are more likely to cast their votes for the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) while Catholics attending church on a regular basis are more likely to support Germany's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) (Müller, 1999; Pappi, 1973; Wessels, 2000).

In contrast to these skeptics, this analysis emphasizes the electoral significance of constituency candidates in Germany's party democracy. Particularly, it considers vote

choices to be affected by the campaign behavior of constituency candidates. This basic argument flows from three theoretical assumptions concerning the increasingly complex electoral context German voters operate in. First and foremost, voting behavior is being perceived as an interactive process involving candidates and voters. In this paper, we argue that voters personalize their vote choices if they are asked to do so. Thus, personalized voting is considered a result of personal vote seeking behavior at the candidate level in the course of election campaigns rather than an independent behavioral strategy at the voter level. Second, we consider both candidates and voters to be affected by incentives to personalize in campaign contexts flowing from Germany's mixed electoral system allowing voters to simultaneously cast a nominal and a party vote. Our third assumption emphasizes the significance of declining partisanship in German electoral politics. Past evidence suggests that German parties so far functioned as powerful mental images governing voters' selective acquisition of political information and political elites' campaign strategies as well. However, with decreasing partisanship voters and elites alike might be increasingly

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +49 69 798 36678.

E-mail addresses: gschwend@uni-mannheim.de (T. Gschwend), zittel@soz.uni-frankfurt.de (T. Zittel).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2014.04.010>

0261-3794/© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

willing to explore alternative means and strategies to structure the interactions of candidates and voters in campaign contexts.

It is important to note, that in this paper we do not assume a direct causal relationship between macro-level factors such as weakening partisanship and ballot structure on the one hand and micro-level processes such as voting on the other (Anderson, 2009). We rather assume indirect effects contingent upon voters and constituency candidates interacting in the course of constituency campaigns. From this perspective, decreasing partisanship and the opportunity to cast a nominal vote facilitate the personalization of vote choices at the constituency level. However, voters won't subscribe to this behavioral strategy if candidates fail to supply personalized types of campaign communication, thus, if voters are not actively encouraged to personalize their vote. This paper considers personalization to be an interactive process involving candidates and voters at the grassroots, lacking any traceable beginning and any linear and clear-cut dynamic as well.

The following sections aim to theoretically develop the argument just made and to test it on the basis of voter and candidate data for the German Federal Elections in 2009. The paper is structured in four main parts: We will first elaborate on why and how constituency candidates might matter for the choices of German voters; we will secondly present our data, our empirical model, and our hypothesis that we aim to test; in a third part, we will present our empirical findings; the paper fourthly closes with a short summary and a discussion regarding the implications of our findings for comparative research on personalized voting.

2. Why and how do candidates matter in German Federal Elections?

According to students of personalization candidates matter vis-à-vis parties and issues. Their research demonstrates positive effects on vote choices that however vary between elections, contexts, and candidates (Brettschneider, 2002; Brettschneider et al., 2008; Kaase, 1994; Ohr, 2000; Vetter and Gabriel, 1998). Despite its many merits, this literature provides only limited insights in the electoral effects of candidates. This is for two main reasons. First, it predominantly focuses on a constrained set of candidates at the federal level such as party leaders and candidates for chancellorship. Second, it hardly unveils those mechanisms explaining personalized vote choices. As a result, it is only able to explore the tip of the iceberg at best when it comes to the levels and sources of personalized voting behavior.

To gauge candidate effects in more comprehensive and less constrained ways, this paper focuses on a *subordinate (second) level of candidacy*, namely the constituency level. It considers constituency candidates of particular electoral relevance for three main reasons: First, constituency candidates are in close proximity to voters and thus enjoy privileged access to their electoral considerations via a multiple number of venues; second, in contrast to party leaders running for chancellorship, in Germany's mixed system, constituency candidates actually appear on the

ballot and thus formally stand for election on the basis of a nominal vote; third and most important, by focusing on the constituency level we are able to increase the number of observations and thus tap into a rich empirical source in exploring the role of the personal factor in electoral politics.

To further explore the mechanisms explaining personalized vote choices this paper particularly focuses on the campaign behavior of constituency candidates and related efforts to seek personal votes. Voters might vote for candidates for different reasons that need to be traced to eventually explain personalized vote choices. Most of the literature on personalization downplayed those causal linkages by simply paying attention to the relationship between survey-based candidate evaluations and reported vote intentions. This paper aims to unveil the sources of personalized voting by focusing on the campaign behavior of candidates and related efforts to seek personal votes. It aims to explore whether personalized voting is contingent upon candidates asking voters to personalize their vote choices.

2.1. Research on the electoral implications of constituency candidates in Germany

So far, constituency candidates and their campaign behavior received only passing attention among students of German electoral politics. Partly, this is due to early empirical observations emphasizing the centralized nature of German election campaigns and thus the irrelevance of the constituency level campaign operations. For example, Kitzinger (1960) in his study on the 1957 campaign emphasized the top-down approach adopted even in the most decentralized German party, the CDU. According to Kitzinger, in this party, local party elites were ready to accept intrusions in their domains "from above" for campaign purposes and to go along with centralized campaign strategies addressing national electoral coalitions. In light of these findings emphasizing the collectivist nature of German election campaigns, succeeding research did not see any point in further investigating the constituency level.

Past disinterest in constituency campaigns is also due to a particular reading of the German electoral system deemphasizing the behavioral implications of its candidate-centered features. Most students of electoral politics dismiss the behavioral effects of the input dimension of the German electoral system combining two different types of ballots, a nominal and a partisan one (Gschwend, 2007; Hennl and Kaiser, 2008; Kaiser, 2002). From this perspective, German voters are assumed to not make a distinction between the two tiers of the German electoral systems and to vote for parties rather than persons at both tiers (Nohlen, 2000, 318). The literature on this issue suggests two particular voter-level explanations for this commonly held assumption. The first explanation emphasizes the complexity of the German mixed system and resulting cognitive effects at the voter level. From this perspective, voters are not able to personalize their vote since they cannot tell the difference between the two tiers of election and thus understand the electoral opportunities available to them (Jesse, 1988; Kaase, 1984; Schmitt-Beck, 1993). The second

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7464203>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7464203>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)