Leader or Party?

Evaluating the Personalization of Politics Thesis*

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Abstract

It has become almost a political science truism that elections have become more personalized. However, the empirical evidence to support this proposition is more mixed. This paper presents new evidence to test the personalization of politics thesis. First, we avoid the problems of endogeity that have hampered prior research by distinguishing between leader motivated and other types of voters. Second, we overcome the limitations of previous studies by using the CSES Integrated Module Dataset, which covers over 100 elections in 30 states over a 20 year time period using exactly comparable measures. The results show that around 6 percent of voters are motivated by the leader in how they cast their ballot, with a modest increase over the two decades of the surveys. We find little evidence that the rise in mass communications has driven personalization, or that the political system matters. By contrast, declining partisanship and disaffection with democracy appear to be the most important factors. The findings have important implications for how we understand the electoral significance of leadership in elections.

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There has been an ongoing debate about the impact on the vote of leader-motivated as opposed to party-motivated voting. This debate, usually characterized as the personalization of politics,[1] has been stimulated by the decline in the influence of social structure on vote choice and weakening party identification. In the European democracies especially, social structure is of much reduced electoral significance (Dalton, 2002; Knutsen & Langsaether, 2018). This trend has been noted particularly with respect to social class, and the class/party link has experienced a consistent decline since the 1960s (Evans, 1999; Nieuwbeerta, 1995). Weakening party identification is also widely observed, especially in the United States, and has affected all but a handful of countries, notably those in Scandinavia (Berglund, Holmberg, Schmitt, & Thomassen, 2005; Dalton, 2002; Johnston, 2006). Taken together, these changes have generated much debate about what may be emerging to replace them as drivers of the vote.

One explanation is that evaluations of individual candidates and the party leaders are replacing social structure and party identification to form a new voting paradigm. In this interpretation, the rise of television has focused the public's attention on the personal characteristics of the leaders, which are then used by voters as a heuristic to guide vote choice. At the same time, a plethora of other changes have also converged to focus attention on political leaders. These include a more educated and critical electorate; structural changes within political parties; rapidly evolving political communication technologies; and partisan dealignment (see Barisone, 2009).

The prevailing narrative is that these long-term changes in social structure have interacted with short-term events to enhance the impact of political leaders on the vote. Impressionistic research has argued that this trend is well underway – some describing it as the 'presidentialization of politics' (e.g., McAllister, 2007; Poguntke & Webb, 2005) with the focus on individual political actors at the expense of parties, leading to the view that 'leader centeredness' (Webb & Poguntke, 2013) now permeates politics. In sum, it is assumed that leaders matter more now than in the past and that they have a direct and significant impact on the vote.[2]

Notwithstanding its normative attractions, the empirical evidence to support leader-motivated voting is mixed.[3] The research findings have varied depending on the countries and the time periods under examination, the methodologies and the models that have been applied, and the institutional and political context of the particular countries (Barisone, 2009; Costa-Lobo, 2017;

Karvonen, 2010). A particular challenge has been to disentangle leader motivated voting from party motivated voting. In practice, partisanship is strongly correlated with voters' assessments of party leaders, so that leader assessments may simply reflect attitudes towards the party. If that is the case, leader motivated voting may merely be a byproduct of partisanship rather than independent of it (Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011). In order to arrive at a robust measure of leader motivated voting, it is necessary to devise a means to take into account party assessments.

Despite the plethora of research on the personalization of politics, then, key questions remain. First, while some voters appear to be leader motivated, its extent is unknown. Moreover, there is the related issue of disentangling leader and party assessments. Second, personalization theory implies that leader motivated voting should not only be occurring but that it should be increasing, especially as education levels continue to rise, televised leaders' debates become more frequent, and social media becomes more prominent. Third, these changes should be occurring across all societies. While comparative evidence of leader effects is becoming more plentiful (Aarts, Blais, & Schmitt, 2011; Costa-Lobo & Curtice, 2015; Garzia, 2014), over-time cross-national studies which use consistent measures remain scant.

Using the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems Integrated Module Dataset (CSES IMD, 2018) which includes data from 70 elections across 30 states from 1996 until 2016 and data on over 300 leaders and parties, we break new ground in several respects. First, we measure the level of leader motivated voting while disentangling its effect from party. We find leader motivated voting occurs among about 6 percent of voters and while this is important, its effect is secondary to voters motivated by the party or by the leader and the party simultaneously. Second, we examine changes in leader motivations overtime and find that leader motivated voting displays a modest increase since 1996. Third, we test a series of hypotheses to account for leader motivated voting and find that the social background and political attitudes of voters are the most important predictors; the design of the political system and political communications have little impact net of other things.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section outlines the theory and current literature on leader motivated voting. From this overview of the current research, we then advance eight hypotheses to account for leader motivated voting. The third section outlines the data and measurement, while the fourth section examines the patterns of leader and party motivated voting across the countries and time periods under examination. In the fifth section we present the detailed

results, using multilevel modelling, while the final section discusses how the findings modify what we know about the personalisation of politics.

Theory and Previous Research

While the personalization of politics has always been, by definition, integral to a presidential system, it is now widely seen as emerging in parliamentary systems as well. Its origins are frequently traced to the 1960s and 1970s, when the government of the day began to be named after the prime minister rather than the party; the election of Pierre Trudeau in Canada in 1968 and Margaret Thatcher in Britain in 1979 are often cited as evidence of the change. An influential early study by Bean and Mughan (1989) on Australia and Britain addressed this emerging trend. They found that the leaders of both countries directly affected vote choice, after partisanship was taken into account, suggesting a distinct electoral effect for personalization. Other studies conducted about the same time reached similar conclusions about the impact of leaders on vote choice, net of party effects (Hayes & McAllister, 1997; Wattenberg, 1991).

Most of these early studies were based on cross-sectional analysis and were usually restricted to a small number of countries; cross-national, longitudinal empirical analysis was mostly lacking. This gap in the literature has led scholars to question whether there really is a trend towards the personalization of politics, which they have regarded as primarily based on little more than impressionistic evidence. At the same time, scholars have also noted a shift towards personalization in particular countries. In a comprehensive literature review combined with an analysis of selected parliamentary democracies, Karvonen (2010, p. 106), while seeing no overall trend toward personalization, concludes that 'there are many indications that persons have become more prominent in both electoral and executive politics in many countries'. Similarly, Bittner (2011, p. 139) conducts a cross-national longitudinal analysis of seven countries to conclude that 'leaders play an important role in the individual vote calculus, and they also have a discernible effect on the distribution of votes in an election'. In a study of elections in Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands, Garzia (2014) comes to a similar conclusion. Single-country studies, such as those conducted in Britain (Heffernan & Webb, 2007; Mughan, 2000) find a general shift toward personalization, though not a consistent linear trend. In one of the most comprehensive studies, Curtice and Holmberg (2005) come to a contrary view. After analyzing six European democracies from 1961 to 2001 they find little evidence that leaders have become electorally more critical.

A crucial question is whether or not the personality of a leader has changed a specific electoral outcome. In the most important cross-national study to address this question, King et al (2002, p. 216) conclude from an analysis of nearly 50 elections that 'it is possible to say in the cases of scarcely more than a handful that their outcomes probably turned on voters' differing perceptions of the personal qualities and traits of the principal party leaders and candidates'. Other studies, using several measurement approaches, have reached similarly skeptical conclusions regarding the direct or pivotal impact of leaders (e.g., Aarts, Blais, & Schmitt, 2011; Gidengil & Blais, 2007). However, other studies have argued that when measured appropriately, leaders can and do have an influential impact on the vote (Bittner, 2011, 2018; Costa-Lobo & Curtice, 2015; Garzia, 2014, 2015). In sum, the academic evidence for leader-motivated voting is mixed; much depends on the countries and the time period that are examined, and the methodology that is applied.

One key to evaluating the personalization of politics thesis is understanding the interaction between changes in party identification and leadership. With parties being increasingly named after their leader, it has been argued that an attachment to the leader may be simply a new form of partisanship and not a substitute for it. While partisan dealignment is a complex process, one generally agreed outcome is that it focusses attention on short-term factors within the election campaign, one of which is leadership. There is evidence from cross-sectional studies that dealigned voters are more likely to be swayed by leader characteristics in their vote choice; failing to take dealignment into account in a voting model therefore risks attributing greater explanatory power to leaders than would otherwise be the case (Mughan, 2009). Garzia (2012) argues that increasing education coupled with dealignment has resulted in leaders effectively 'personalizing' party identification, so that not only do leaders have a direct effect on the vote through their personalities, but they also have a direct effect through their association with partisanship.

A variety of institutional changes within political systems may also be aiding the personalization of politics (Balmas, Rahat, Sheafer, & Shenhav, 2014). First, changes in the structures of political parties now place more emphasis on both the importance and the independence of leadership positions. Leaders now exert more influence within the organizations of their respective parties, and are less constrained by other internal rule- and policy-making bodies. Leaders are also more independent if they are elected to government. Many parties have introduced rule changes which entrench their leaders against possible challengers and secure their position when the party is in government (Poguntke, 2016; Rahat & Kenig, 2018).[4] These changes

are at the heart of the argument that parliamentary systems have become presidentialised, by virtue of placing much greater emphasis on the role of leaders and providing them with greater organizational and policy autonomy from their respective parties (Poguntke & Webb, 2005).

A second factor that may shape the personalization of politics is the design of electoral institutions and the size of the party system. Majoritarian electoral systems, with smaller numbers of parties, may focus more attention on the leader. Events such as leaders' debates often include only the major party leaders and subject them to intense public scrutiny, to the exclusion of the leaders of minor parties. Similarly, frequent national elections may cause voters to seek an easily accessible heuristic to guide their vote, particularly if the party system is volatile. In this context, leaders become the obvious means by which voters can identify parties and their respective policy positions (Kriesi, 2011).[5]

A third change has been in the nature and role of political communications. The rise of television from the 1960s onwards, with visual images focussing greater attention on the personalities of the party leaders, has arguably been a major driver of the personalization of politics (Mughan, 2000). Adam and Maier (2010, p. 40) for example, find little evidence for personalization in Germany until the advent of televised leaders' debates involving the two main party leaders in 2002, after which the leaders increased in electoral importance.[6] In turn, this change in political communications has fed the demand among voters for a more personalised basis to electoral competition, with greater attention to the personal lives, circumstances and appearance of leaders (Takens, Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof, & van Atteveldt, 2015). More recently, the rise of the internet and social media have made it possible for leaders to communicate directly with voters through such platforms as Twitter and Facebook, further emphasizing leader personalities (Gunn & Skogerbø, 2013).

While the extant research tends to be based on small numbers of countries and/or short time periods, there is evidence that personalization has grown in importance since the 1970s, even if it has not been sufficient to alter many electoral outcomes. Two sets of related changes appear to favour greater personalization, one at the level of the individual voter and one at the level of the political system. At the micro level there has been increased education, the decline of party identification and the interaction between partisanship and leadership. At the macro level, there have been changes to rules and procedures that affect parties, elections and legislatures. Within this broad category we can also include the revolution in political communications, driven by

relentless changes in technology. In the next section we operationalize these factors into testable hypotheses.

Hypotheses

The previous section has identified a series of possible explanations which may explain the personalization of politics. The first hypothesis, however, relates not to explanation but to aggregate patterns, and more specifically to changes in personalization overtime. Much research has argued that personalization has been increasing; we would therefore expect to find that pattern reflected in the 20 year time period covered by the CSES surveys. The first hypothesis is therefore:

H1: Leader motivated voting will increase overtime.

Turning to the explanations for the personalization of politics, these can be grouped into the micro (voter) level and the macro (political system) level. At the individual level, it is argued that a more educated and cognitively mobilized electorate may combine with other changes (such as the rise of television and the internet) to see electoral contests as a competition between competing political leaders. The research shows that possessing a tertiary education has a significant impact on voting behaviour through the accumulation of cultural capital (van der Waal, Achterberg, & Houtman, 2007). At the same time, cognitive mobilization is often linked to party dealignment, insofar as better informed voters may rely less on a party heuristic to guide their vote (Dalton, 2007) but cf (Albright, 2009). A decline in partisanship is therefore one possible explanation for leader motivated voting. Education and partisanship lead, respectively, to the second and third hypotheses:

H2: Voters with higher education are more likely to be leader motivated voters.

H3: Voters who have weaker partisanship are more likely to be leader motivated voters.

Another individual level explanation relates to the rise of populism. While populism is a complex phenomenon, at its core is the idea that a corrupt elite are acting in their own interests, and not on behalf of the population. The most viable approach to challenging this elite is a charismatic leader who can mobilise the general population to remove them from power; most manifestations of populism are therefore associated with 'flamboyant and strong political leaders' (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2014, p.378). One possible explanation for the personalization of politics

is therefore dissatisfaction with democracy and a sense of powerlessness in making it accountable to ordinary citizens. This leads to the fourth hypothesis:

H4: Voters who are dissatisfied with democracy are more likely to be leader motivated voters.

The remaining hypotheses relate to the variations in the institutional characteristics of the political system. These macro factors can influence the level of personalization in several ways, the most important being in the design of the electoral system and the size and distribution of the party system. A majoritarian as opposed to a proportional electoral system is more likely to result in a two party system, which in turn may focus more attention on the leaders than would be the case in a multiparty system. We might also expect that the level of polarization within the party system could also be important. When parties are more polarized, voters will be more party motivated, since the main factor distinguishing between them will be their policies. On the other hand, when the parties are less polarized, and voters have less ability to distinguish between their policies, voters will be more leader motivated. This leads to three hypotheses:

H5: Voters in majoritarian electoral systems will have higher levels of leader motivated voting compared to voters in proportional representation systems.

H6: Voters in party systems with fewer numbers of parties will have higher levels of leader motivated voting compared to voters in multiparty systems.

H7: Voters in party systems where the political parties are less polarized will have higher levels of leader motivated voting.

The revolution in political communications has arguably had a profound effect on politics across all of the advanced democracies. The visual images that television relies on have focused greater attention on political leaders and their personalities. In turn, voters find it easier to hold a leader accountable for government performance rather than a party. More recently, the rise of the social media has made it possible for voters to follow the daily activities and thoughts of their political leaders in a most immediate and intimate way. This leads to the eighth and final hypothesis.

H8: Voters in countries with larger numbers of televisions and higher internet access will have higher levels of leader motivated voting compared to voters in countries with fewer televisions and lower internet access.

Research Strategy

Identifying leader-motivated voters. In order to distinguish leader-motivated voting from other types of voting, we identify four categories of voters, based on the party the voter reported voting for, her ratings of the party leaders, and her ratings of the parties. These categories are designed to differentiate voters based on whether or not they used their feelings about the leaders and the parties to guide their vote. Our classification is made possible by reference to three questions in the CSES (see Appendix for question wording). The first is the reported vote of the individual. The latter two are questions measuring the likeability rating given by the respondents to the parties and leaders contesting the election.

The four categories are summarised in Table 1 and are defined as follows. Leader motivated voters are defined as those who ranked the leader of the party they voted for as their (joint) favourite but the party itself is not ranked as their (joint) favourite. Party motivated voters are those who ranked the party they voted for as their (joint) favourite but not the party's leader as their (joint) favourite. Leader and party motivated voters ranked both the party and the leader of the party they voted for as their (joint) favourite. The fourth category is for voters who were motivated neither by the leader nor the party and who did not rank either the party or the leader of the party they voted for as their (joint) favourite or respondents who straight-lined answers (for similar approaches see (Blais & Gschwend, 2010) with respect to strategic voting and (Quinlan & O'Malley, 2018) concerning leaders).

Table 1: Classification of Voters

Vote motivation	Definition
Leader	Votes for party when they rank the party leader as their (joint) favourite but party itself is not ranked as their (joint) favourite
Party	Votes for party when they rank the party itself as their (joint) favourite but not the party leader as their (joint) favourite
Leader and party	Votes for party when they rank the party leader as their (joint) favourite and the party itself as their (joint) favourite
Neither leader nor party	Votes for party when they rank neither the party itself as their (joint) favourite nor the party's leader as their (joint) favourite

An example illustrates how this classification works in practice. Taking two hypothetical voters who voted Labor in the 1996 Australian election, we classify them as follows. There were four

main party leaders (Keating, Howard, Fischer, and Kernow) and four parties (Labor, Liberal National, and Australian Democrat) in the 1996 election. The first voter assigns the following ratings to the leaders: Keating—9; Howard—2; Fischer—2; Kernow—5. The voter's preferred leader is therefore Keating. The voter assigns the following ratings to the party: Labor—7; Liberal—2; National—1; Australian Democrat—8). The voter therefore prefers the Australian Democrats and is classified as a leader-motivated voter since she voted for the party whose leader she preferred, not the party she preferred. The second voter assigns the following ratings to the leaders: Keating—8; Howard—4; Fischer—3; Kernow—5; the voter's preferred leader is therefore Keating. The voter then assigns the following ratings to the party: Labor—7; Liberal—4; National—2; Australian Democrat—6). The voter's preferred leader is Labor. Hence the voter is a party and leader motivated voter since she voted both for the party and leader she preferred.

Data. Our data come from the CSES Integrated Module Dataset (CSES IMD) (2018) which combines all four CSES modules into one harmonized dataset and includes data from 174 elections across 55 states collected between 1996 and 2016 covering over 400 leaders and parties. Since our interest is in the impact of leaders as a voting cue, we exclude presidential elections since they are by definition already personalised and restrict the analyses to parliamentary elections. In addition, we include only countries which are members of the OECD in order to exclude less economically and politically developed countries.[7] The relevant like/dislike questions about leaders and parties were not asked in module 2, conducted between 2001 and 2006. The classification of voters depends on respondents casting a party vote in the election, further reducing the sample. With these various restrictions, the final analyses are based on 30 countries covering 79 national elections and include 89,513 respondents.[8]

Independent variables. Social background is measured by gender, age, tertiary education and household income. Political attitudes are measured by partisanship. Ideology is based on the respondent's self-placement on the left-right scale. We also include satisfaction with democracy and political efficacy. At the country level, a wide range of variables were initially included in order to take into account differences in political institutions and political communications.[9] To measure the characteristics of the political system, plurality electoral systems are included, with electoral systems using PR or are mixed representing the excluded category. The effective number of parliamentary parties is derived from Laakso and Taagepera (1979). The level of polarization within the party system uses Dalton's (2008) measure which combines vote share, party position

and the number of parties. The political communication variables are the number of television sets per household and the percent of households reporting use of the internet for the country and survey year in question. Finally, to control for possible time period effects, dummy variables are included for two of the three modules.[10]

In terms of analysis, when observations within a sample are clustered, the data violates the assumption of observational independence. Consequently, the hierarchical nature of the CSES IMD data requires a multilevel strategy and we therefore define two levels of analysis: citizens (micro-level) that are nested in elections (macro-level). Since our dependent variable is dichotomous, we estimate multilevel logistic regression models.

Table 2: Variables, Definitions, Means

Variable	Scoring	Mean
Individual level		
Social background		
Gender	1=female, 0=male	.52
Age	Deciles	4.97
Tertiary education	1=yes, 0=no	.24
Political attitudes		
Partisan	1=yes, 0=no	.53
Left-right self placement ideology	From 0 (left) to 10 (right)	5.29
Satisfaction with democracy	From 1 (not at all satisfied) to 5 (very)	3.40
Political efficacy	From 1 (no difference) to 5 (big difference)	3.98
Country level		
Political system		
Plurality elections	1=yes, 0=no	.25
Effective number of parliamentary parties	Number	3.60
Party system polarization	Scale	3.49
Political communications		
Television	Number of TV sets per household	1.79
Internet	Percent households with internet	64.36
Controls		
Module 1	1=yes, 0=no	.27
Module 3	1=yes, 0=no	.39

Means are based on the countries listed in endnote 8, n = 89,513.

Source   CSES IMD 2018.

Types of Voters

The distribution of the four types of voters shows that leader-motivated voters are the smallest group among the 30 countries at 6 percent. Those who were motivated more by party make up 18 percent, three times the size of those who are motivated by the leader. This is clear evidence that party is a more potent motivator of voters than the leader. Voters whose leader and party choice are in alignment are by far the largest group, as we might expect, numbering 63 percent, while the respondents whose leader and party choice did not align with their vote constitute 13 percent.[11] Our proportion of leader motivated voters, at 6 percent, is about half that estimated by Daoust et al (2019) who, also using the CSES, find that around 17 percent of voters prefer the leader of another party. The difference between their estimate and the figure presented here is accounted for by our stricter definition of what constitutes a leader motivated voter.

Table 3: Types of Voters

Type of voter	Percent
Leader motivated	6
Party motivated	18
Leader and party motivated	63
Neither leader nor party motivated	13
Total	100
(N)	(89,513)

See Table 1 for definitions of categories.

Source   CSES IMD 2018.

The likelihood that a voter will use the party rather than the leader as a guide to casting a ballot is shown in Figure 1, by means of subtracting the proportion who preferred the party from the proportion who preferred the leader. In all but one of the 30 countries, more voters preferred the party than the leader, by an average of 11 percent. However, the range across the countries is considerable. The Scandinavian countries are the most party-focussed with around one-fifth preferring the party over the leader. At the other end of the scale, the difference between party and leader voters in France is zero, just 1 percent in Turkey, and 3 percent each in Spain and Hungary.

Figure 1: Party Minus Leader Voters by Country
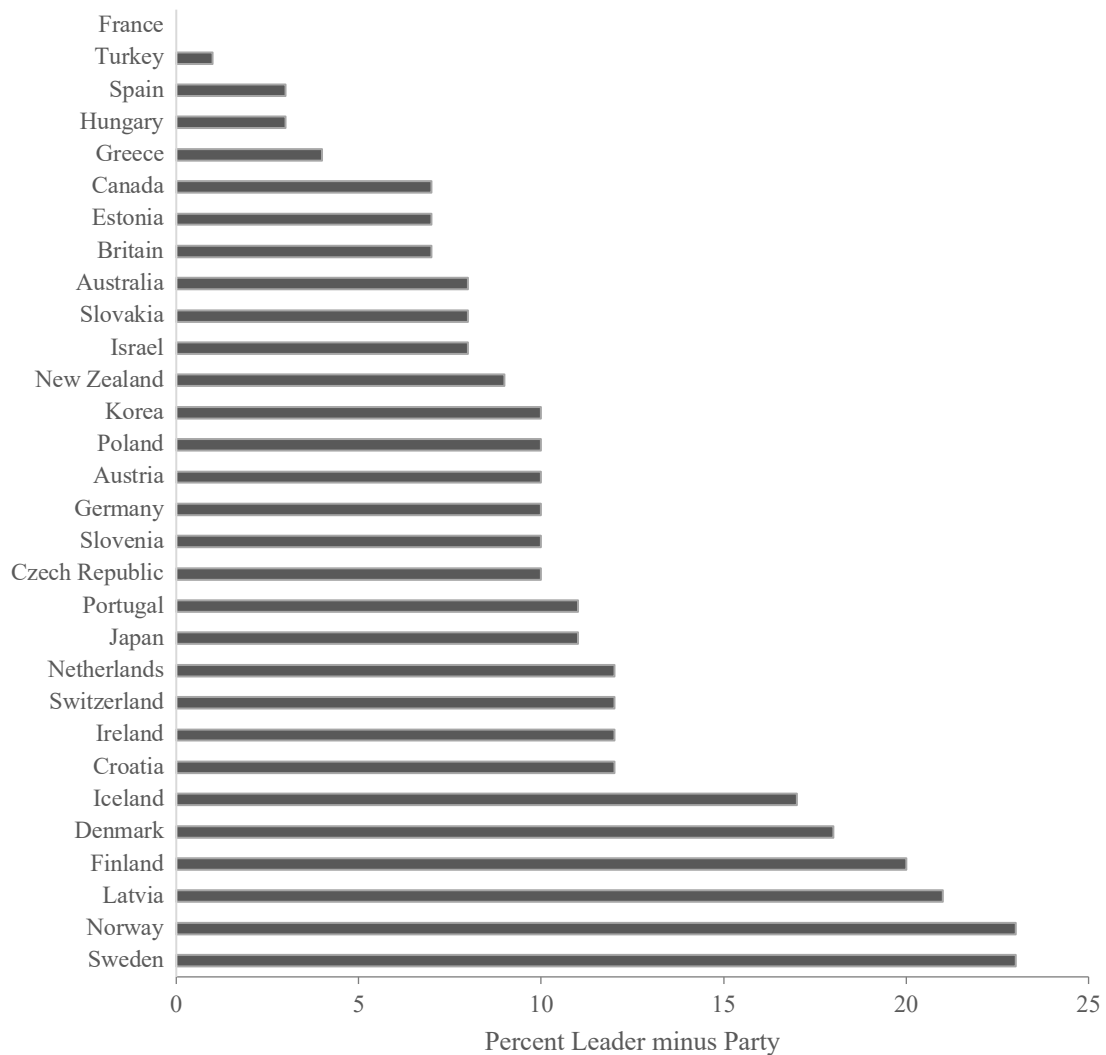
Figures are the percent party voters minus the percent party voters. See text for definitions of categories.

Source   CSES IMD 2018.

Results

A central argument in the personalisation of politics thesis is that long term structural changes within the advanced democracies has created the conditions for leaders to become more important in shaping the vote. Our first hypothesis is that leader motivated voting will increase overtime. Figure 2 tests this hypothesis by plotting the proportion of leader motivated voters in elections between 1996 and 2016. If we are to see support for the personalization thesis, we should observe an increasing trend in leader motivated voters over time. The results provide modest support for the hypothesis. Over the period, there is an increase of just under 2 percent in the proportion of

leader motivated voters. While this is a small change, in the context of the 6 percent of voters overall who are leader motivated, it is more significant. The evidence therefore supports the first hypothesis.[12]

Figure 2: Leader Voting, 1996-2016
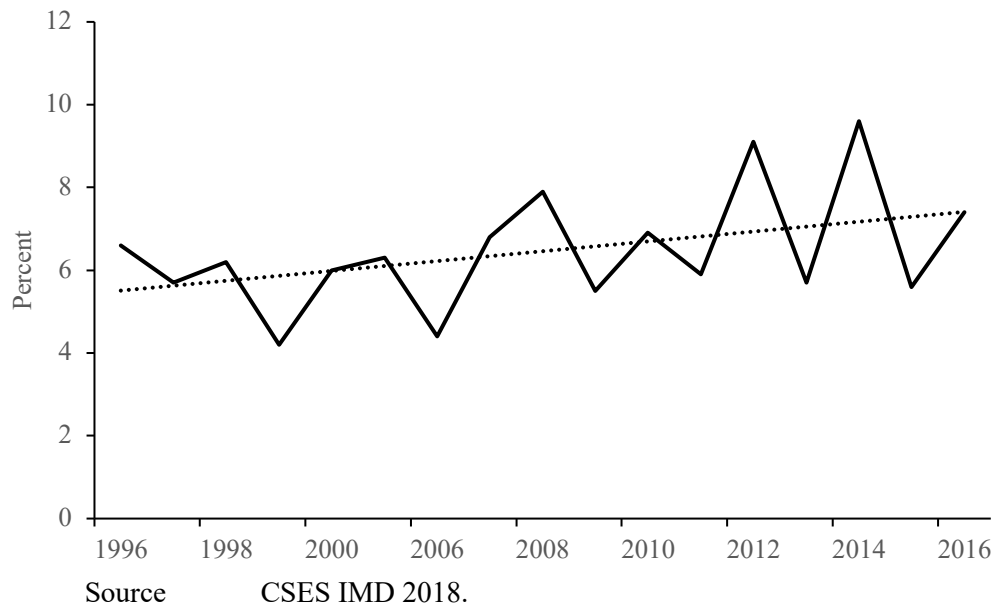
One possible explanation for the relatively modest increase in leader motivated voting is the relatively short time period under examination. Most of the research which supports the personalisation of politics thesis sees the process as having occurred over a more extended time period, with its origins in the 1960s and 1970s and the subsequent growth in political reporting on television. Garzia et al (2018), for example, identify a longer term trend starting from the 1960s. Equally, however, other scholars, also including a range of countries over an extended time period, see no discernible trend (Curtice and Holmberg, 2005; Kervonen, 2010). The current dataset only begins in 1996, but it does have the advantage of including a much wider range of countries than has been analysed hitherto.[13]

To test the remaining hypotheses, we estimate a multilevel logistic regression model. Three models are presented in Table 4, all of which predict leader motivated voters from three groups who are not leader motivated. The first model contrasts leader motivated voters with all other voters; model 2 contrasts leader motivated voters with party motivated voters; and the third model contrasts leader motivated voters with those who rated both the leader and the party as their favourite.

[Table 4 about here]

The first two groups of variables, social background and political attitudes, measure individual-level effects, while the remaining two groups of variables, the political system and political communications, measure country and election-level effects. The first hypothesis predicts that higher education is responsible for the rise in leader motivated voting. The results reject the hypothesis; beyond a small effect (in the opposite direction to that predicted) in model 2, there are no statistically significant effects for tertiary education. We do, however, find strong and consistent effects for the other two social background variables in predicting leader voting. Women are more likely to be motivated by a leader, as are older voters. The effect of gender probably reflects the fact that women have traditionally been less interested and less knowledge about politics than men; while many of these differences have declined as women equal, or surpass, men in their levels of education and labour force participation, small differences remain (Dassonneville and McAllister, 2018). With less political information, a leader's personality may provide a more ready heuristic to guide the vote than a party. The effect for older voters may be a consequence of their greater support for populism (Hobolt, 2016), which we test in the fourth hypothesis.

The second group of individual-level factors relates to political attitudes. The third hypothesis predicts that voters with weaker partisanship will have a greater likelihood of leader voting. The results show a strong and consistent effect across all three models so the hypothesis is supported. Indeed, partisanship is the most important predictor among the independent variables in all three models. There is support for the hypothesis that leader motivated voters are more likely to be dissatisfied with democracy, and that they have lower levels of efficacy. Dissatisfaction with democracy is a significant predictor of leader voting in one of the three models, while lower levels of efficacy are a significant predictor in two of the three models. We therefore find reasonable support for the fourth hypothesis.

The remaining hypotheses relate to variations in country-level characteristics. We find that neither the electoral system, measured by whether it is a plurality system or not, nor the effective number of parliamentary parties, are associated with being a leader motivated voter or not, leading to the rejection of the fifth and sixth hypotheses. But we do find that as ideological polarization increases, voters are less likely to be leader motivated. This is in line with our expectations that leader voting is more likely to be triggered by a lack of differentiation between the parties. Therefore we find strong support for the seventh hypothesis.

Our final set of variables concerns the impact of the communication context in terms of television use in the country and degree of internet penetration. We find no evidence that television ownership has any association with being a leader motivated voter. And while there is no consistent effect for internet penetration correlating with being a leader motivated voter, there is a negative relationship

between internet use and being a leader voter compared with being a party voter. We therefore reject the eighth hypothesis. Given the emphasis placed in the research on communications as a driver of the personalization of politics, this result may seem anomalous. It may be, however, that the expansion of television and internet use and its normalization does not discriminate between our categories of voters. Moreover, our variables simply measure aggregate levels, not the extent to which these media are used for political communication.

Conclusion

At a practical level, understanding leader motivated voting is valuable because of the authority and responsibility that prime ministers are imbued with. Political parties (and the media) devote considerable attention to who leads them; much of what the public sees about the political process is seen through the lens of the leader. Voters like personalization, as it is easier to hold a personality accountable for decisions rather than an abstract entity such as a political party. There is also a normative dimension to the personalization of politics. Some scholars argue that if the electorate is too focused on leaders in determining who governs, it can result in an undue emphasis being placed on style and personality, and not enough on substance and competence (D'Arma, 2015). Consequently, understanding the extent of and reasons for leader motivated voting has important practical and normative implications.

The research on the personalization of politics to date has had two disadvantages. First, a continual problem has been the confounding of leader and party, and the difficulty in distinguishing between them empirically. Second, most studies have been cross-sectional analyses based on one country, and where comparative, longitudinal studies have been conducted they have been limited both in space and time. Our research has overcome these problems. By distinguishing between leader and party motivated voters by how they cast their ballot, we have avoided the endogeneity problems that has affected other research. And by analysing a wide range of parliamentary democracies over an extended period we have provided the first comprehensive test of personalization at the voter level.

Our results are three-fold. First, the level of personalized voting, at least at the voter level, is relatively modest, at 6 percent of voters; the majority of voters (63 percent) take the leader and the party into account equally. Nor does the level of leader motivated voting vary much between the 30 countries in our analysis: the highest is Slovenia, at 9 percent, and the lowest is the Czech Republic, at 3 percent. This finding challenges the prevailing narrative that leaders are decisive in winning elections; they may be in closely fought contests, but their impact is much less than that of the party.

We find modest support that personalization has increased; overall, leader motivated voting has increased by slightly less than 1 percent for each of the two decades analysed. While hardly a major shift, it is nevertheless a clear trend and has to be put in the context of the relatively small proportions of leader voters.

Second, our findings shed new light on what may be driving the trend towards the personalization of politics. Contrary to much of the literature, there is little evidence that changes in political communications are behind the trend. At the level of the political system, only the polarization of the party system appears to matter. By contrast, the social characteristics of voters and their political attitudes are much more important. Declining partisanship is a key explanation, as Garzia (2012; Garzia and De Angelis, 2015) have noted. As voters become more weakly aligned to parties, they seek an alternative heuristic to guide their vote, with the leader becoming an obvious substitute. The individual-level findings also reveal that leader voters are less satisfied with democracy and less efficacious, as well as being older. These findings intersect with the recent literature on populism, which shows that political disaffection has led some voters to search for a leader who can reform their country's politics. While it is impossible to test this with the data at hand, it may be that the trend in increased leader motivated voting has been driven by the same factors that account for the rise of populism.

Appendix

In order to create the four category classification we rely three questions in the CSES, as follows. For all three modules, the question about the parties was: 'I'd like to know what you think about each of our political parties. After I read the name of a political party, please rate it on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that party and 10 means that you strongly like that party. If I come to a party you haven't heard of or you feel you do not know enough about, just say so. The first party is [PARTY A].' The question about the leaders differs between module 1 and 3. In module 1 the question was: 'And now, using the same scale, I'd like to ask you how much you like or dislike some political leaders. Again, if I come to a leader you haven't heard of or you do not know enough about them, just say so. The first political leader is LEADER A.' In module 3 and 4 the question was: 'And what do you think of the presidential candidates/party leaders? After I read the name of a presidential candidate/party leader, please rate them on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that candidate and 10 means that you strongly like that candidate. If I come to a presidential candidate/party leader you haven't heard of or you feel you do not know enough about, just say so. The first is [LEADER A].'

Political attitudes are measured as follows. Partisanship is based on the questions: 'Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular party?' with a follow up question for those who answered no: 'Do you feel yourself a little closer to one of the political parties than the others?' We also control for a respondent's self-placement on the left-right ideology scale. In addition to partisanship the model also includes satisfaction with democracy and efficacy. The satisfaction with democracy question is: 'On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in [country]?' Efficacy is measured by the question: 'Some people say that it doesn't make any difference who is in power. Others say that it makes a big difference who is in power. Using the scale on this card, (where one means that it doesn't make any difference who is in power and five means that it makes a big difference who is in power), where would you place yourself?'

A wide range of country-level variables were initially included in order to take into account differences in political institutions, political communications. To measure the characteristics of the political system, plurality electoral systems are included, with electoral systems using PR representing the excluded category. The effective number of parliamentary parties is derived from Laakso and Taagepera (1979). The political communication variables are the number of television

sets per household and the percent of households reporting use of the internet for the country and survey year in question.

Endnotes

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[1] Another frequently used term is the 'presidentialization of politics'(Poguntke & Webb, 2005). This has generated a debate about the accuracy of the term (see Dowding (Dowding, 2013) [2013] and Webb and Poguntke [2013]). Other terms include 'institutional presidentialization' (Maddens & Fiers, 2004) and or 'presidential parliamentarism' (Hazan, 2005).

[2] Evaluations of the literature can be found in Adams and Maier (2010), Baristone (2009), Garzia (2011, 2017) Karvonen (2010), McAllister (2007).

[3] Perhaps the most balanced reviews of the evidence appear in Karvonen (2010) and Costa-Lobo & Curtice (2015).

[4] Most notable are the Australian Labor and Liberal parties following leadership coups against their sitting prime ministers. Between 2010 and 2018 there were no less than five changes of a sitting prime minister.

[5] The difficulties in choosing a prime minister in a volatile multiparty system resulted in Israel introducing the direct election of prime minister in 1996. The inherent difficulty in directly electing the head of the executive within a parliamentary democracy led to its abandonment in 2003 (Rahat and Sheafer, 2007).

[6] Germany introduced leaders debates in 1972. They included the leaders of all parties represented in the Bundestag. The unwieldly nature of the debates led to them being discontinued. They were resurrected in 2002 when they included only the leaders of the two major parties, the Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Party (Anstead, 2016: 9)

[7] The countries that were excluded because they were either presidential systems or not members of the OECD are: Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Hong Kong, Kenya, Lithuania, Mexico, Montenegro, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Serbia, South Africa, Taiwan, United States and Uruguay.

[8] The countries (together with the years the surveys were conducted) are Australia (1996, 2007, 2013), Austria (2008, 2013), Canada (1997, 2008, 2011, 2015), Croatia (2007), the Czech Republic (1996, 2006, 2010, 2013), Denmark (1998, 2007), Estonia (2011), Finland (2007, 2011, 2015), France (2007), Germany (1998, 2005, 2009, 2013), Greece (2009, 2012, 2015), Hungary (1998), Iceland (1999, 2007, 2009, 2013), Ireland (2007, 2011),

Israel (2006, 2013), Japan (1996, 2007, 2013), Korea (2000, 2008, 2012), Latvia (2010, 2011), Netherlands (1998, 2006, 2010), New Zealand (1996, 2008, 2011, 2014), Norway (1997, 2005, 2009, 2013), Poland (1997, 2005, 2007, 2011), Portugal (2009, 2015), Slovakia (2010, 2016), Slovenia (1996, 2008, 2011), Spain (1996, 2000, 2008), Sweden (1998, 2006, 2014), Switzerland (1999, 2007, 2011), Turkey (2011), UK (1997, 2015).

[9]   Other country-level variables that were included in preliminary analyses included effective number of electoral parties, an additional measure of efficacy, and the Polity IV and Freedom House ratings.

[10]   Including a variable for the year of the survey reaches the same substantive conclusions. However, because the module was considered more relevant than the survey year, we included it instead.

[11]   For a party and leader to be included in our data, party and leader data had to be available for both. In circumstances where this did not occur, these cases were excluded.

[12]   The corresponding change in the proportion of party motivated voters shows a similar substantial decline, of around 2 percent per decade, which accords with patterns of dealignment.

[13]   Daoust et al (2019, p.7), using the same dataset as is used here, find 'no time trend regarding both the proportion of incongruent voters and the proportion of those voters who support the leader'.

Table 4: Explaining Leader Motivated Voting

	Model 1 Leader vs others		Model 2 Leader vs party		Model 3 Leader vs both	
	Est	(SE)	Est	(SE)	Est	(SE)
Social background						
Female	.113**	(.033)	.113*	(.038)	.112**	(.034)
Age	.051**	(.010)	.090**	(.010)	.047**	(.010)
Tertiary education	.020	(.040)	-.098*	(.046)	.036	(.042)
Political attitudes						
Partisan	-.558**	(.036)	-.321**	(.040)	-.792**	(.037)
Left-right self-placement	-.026	(.007)	-.008	(.009)	-.034**	(.007)
Satisfaction with democracy	-.025	(.016)	-.002	(.018)	-.045*	(.016)
Political efficacy	-.083**	(.015)	-.026	(.017)	-.124**	(.016)
Political system						
Plurality elections	.227	(.155)	.326	(.180)	-.267	(.187)
Effective number of parliamentary parties	.037	(.037)	.047	(.043)	.081	(.044)
Party system polarization	-.219	(.052)	-.145*	(.060)	-.268**	(.060)
Political communications						
Television	-.036	(.165)	.158	(.191)	-.065	(.196)
Internet	.002	(.003)	-.013*	(.004)	.006	(.004)
Controls						
Module 1	-.044	(.204)	.655*	(.236)	.147	(.242)
Module 3	.079	(.106)	.020	(.122)	.165	(.125)
Intercept	-1.690	(.451)	.185	(.520)	-1.224	(.533)
Elections	70		70		70	
Individuals	65,015		15,628		44,931	

Coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses) of random intercept models. * $p<.01$, ** $p<.001$.

Source   CSES IMD 2018.

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