

9 Party Identification

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Introduction

Party identification is a key concept in the study of electoral behaviour and has been so since it was discovered and established by American scholars in the 1960s (Campbell et al., 1960). Early studies of voting behaviour understood party identification as an enduring psychological orientation or as a partisan self-image (Thomassen & Rosema, 2009; Blais et al., 2001). According to Dalton (2016), the concept can be defined as “an early-socialized, enduring, affective, psychological identification with a specific political party”. Miller and Shanks (1996) have highlighted the significance of family and early political socialization to party identification and even juxtaposed party identification with institutional religious attachment. Party identification can, hence, be described as a long-term, affective attachment to a specific political party, which guide the attitudes and behaviours of voters. Partisans have been found to support the same party from one election to another, and to be easier to mobilise to vote compared to non-partisans. Party identification can also guide voters to form opinions on complex political issues (Dalton, 2016).

In this article, we study party identification of the Finnish electorate in the 21st century. We use data from the Finnish National Election Studies to describe the development over time and to explain citizens’ attachment to the political parties present at the Finnish political arena. We begin with some introductory and theoretical considerations, which are followed by an empirical exploration of the trends over time regarding the extent to which the Finnish electorate has a sense of party identification, i.e., if they feel close any political party or not, and also with which party they tend to align. This primarily descriptive section is followed by an explanatory approach, where the variation of party identification is outlined using multivariate analyses. Here, the aim is to respond to the main research question in the chapter: what predicts party identification in today’s Finland and how this vary across parties? The variables and the research questions of our analyses will be discussed in more detail in the beginning of the explanatory section. Finally, the last section presents our concluding remarks.

A contested concept

The concept of party identification has strong roots in the American studies on electoral behaviour (Campbell et al., 1960; see Blais et al., 2001) and can be seen as particularly well suited to the bipartisan context of the United States. However, both the concept as such and the way it is operationalized have faced critique. Weisberg (1980) has, for example, questioned whether it is plausible to assume that citizens identify with one party only, and if it is reasonable to consider non-identifiers (independents) in the U.S context, as an opposite to partisans of either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. Further on, in the U.S. context, criticism has been put forward towards the primary focus of the concept. Morris Fiorina's (1981) seminal idea was to revise party identification to a concept summing up mainly cognitive evaluations of parties and their policy outcomes, which fit well to ideas on retrospective voting (Thomassen & Rosema, 2009). Such revision would considerably change the content of the original concept, which is heavily influenced by affective components of political socialization and long-lasting group membership (*ibid.*).

Perhaps the main criticism towards party identification as a concept has, however, come from the European multi-party context, where the usefulness of the concept has been questioned. In a study from the Dutch context, published already in the 1970s, the measure of party identification was found to be less stable than the measure of party choice (Thomassen, 1976), pointing towards party identification not being a particularly useful analytical concept when it comes to explaining party choice. This finding from the Dutch context has later been confirmed for other European countries as well, using early CSES data from 1996 to 2002 (Thomassen & Rosema, 2009).

Despite the criticism presented above, party identification has remained a central concept in the study of voting behaviour and is generally considered to be of relevance in understanding citizens' attachment to political parties. The vast research literature on party identification and changing voter alignments have demonstrated the overall usefulness of the concept when trying to understand people's affective tendencies in their political attachment and electoral choices (Campbell et al., 1986; Dalton, 2016). In European multi-party systems, party identification can primarily be understood as a robust indicator of political attachment. Being a strong party identifier also involves a self-image, relevant outside times of elections. Strong party identifiers might be party members as well, and for most political parties, the group with strong identifiers and party members are the core and stable supporters of the party, which provides the party with a baseline support in the elections.

Party identification in Finland

According to social identity theory, party identification is similar to identification with a social group (Dalton, 2016). It is hence not surprising that the reasons as to why voters identify with a certain political party are closely connected to the basic political cleavages and divides of the party system. Voters are likely to identify with a specific political party due to a strong sense of belonging with a social group

such which interests are particularly important for a specific party, such as the interests of farmers for agrarian parties or of the working class for social democratic parties (see Chapter 7). The timing of the formative years may also be important, as orientations and networks acquired during one's youth often tend to last through lifetime. To interpret party identification among Finnish voters, it is, therefore, necessary to connect our empirical analysis to some major characteristics of the Finnish party system, the historically dominating political cleavages and the more recent developments. A complementary presentation of this is also found in the introductory chapter of this volume.

Karvonen has noted (2014) that the main trends in political behaviour and developments of the Finnish party system correspond to what is found in many comparable countries. While the party system remained "frozen" longer than in some other Western countries, there has been apparent signs of change in the Finnish Parliamentary elections in 2011, 2015 and 2019. In 2011, the populist and nationalistic-populist Finns Party (PS) had its main breakthrough when they won 19 percent of the votes and increased its support with about 15 percentage points compared to the 2007 election. The Finns Party was also able to preserve its position in the following two elections (2015: 17.7 percent and 2019: 17.5 percent). The turmoil of Finnish party support became especially evident in 2019 when the Green Alliance (VIHR) made their "best ever" result in parliamentary elections with 11.5 percent of the votes. This was also the election at which, for the first time in the history of Finnish Parliamentary elections, none of the three traditionally dominating parties – The Social Democratic Party (SDP), the National Coalition Party (KOK) and the Centre Party (KESK) – managed to gather over 20 percent of the votes. The Social Democratic Party became the largest party by securing no more than 17.7 percent of the votes.

When it comes to old and new political cleavages of the Finnish party system and to dealignment or realignment of the electorate, several Finnish studies have suggested signs of change before the electoral development in 2010s. To describe this, Karvonen (2014) lists the studies of Sundberg (1999; diminished class voting and increased electoral volatility), Pesonen (2001; notable change in cleavage-based politics) and Paloheimo (2008). Paloheimo's study focused on changing political cleavages and divides of the Finnish party system, and it was based both on voter surveys and party platforms. Among other things, it demonstrated the growing importance of environmental issues and internationalization to the Finnish party system during early 2000s (see also Chapter 8). In addition, Westinen's more recent study on changing Finnish political cleavages (2015) presents quite similar conclusions. The growing importance of environmental issues explains the increase of support for the Greens, and criticism towards the EU, globalization and immigration the growing support for the Finns Party.

The development in party identification in the new millennium

In our analyses, we use a set of questions from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) which has been included in the FNES since 2003. The questions tap both whether one feels close to a particular party and the directional element

on to which political party one feels closest to.¹ To describe the Finnish trends of the strength of party identification, we use first a simple dichotomous variable on party closeness: “do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular party?” Response categories “yes” or “no” are considered valid responses whereas we treat those respondents who spontaneously reported “do not want to say” or “don’t know” as missing. Secondly, to point out the trends of the direction of the party identification, we use answers to the standard question, which has been posed only to those who have said that they feel close to some party: “Which party do you feel closest to?”

How do the trends of party identification develop according to the FNES data from 2003 to 2019? The results are reported in total and by various sociodemographic groups in Table 9.1. Despite the turbulence in the party system – with the three historically dominating parties in Finnish politics losing support and the

Table 9.1 Party identification among the Finnish electorate (% who feel close to some party)

	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019
%					
All	44	50	50	45	60
Men	43	49	52	48	59
Women	44	51	47	43	62
Born before 1960	50	61	56	53	62
Born 1960–1979	36	36	45	46	59
Born 1980–	33	39	43	34	58
No or short vocational education	42	48	47	41	58
Medium level vocational educ.	44	51	53	47	64
Polytechnic/University level	53	57	54	55	62
Finnish speaking	43	50	50	46	60
Swedish speaking	59	47	47	46	67
(n)					
All	(1241)	(1355)	(1261)	(1578)	(1398)
Men	(604)	(656)	(611)	(766)	(694)
Women	(637)	(699)	(650)	(812)	(704)
Born before 1960	(703)	(718)	(588)	(639)	(533)
Born 1960–1979	(417)	(426)	(389)	(495)	(439)
Born 1980–	(119)	(213)	(285)	(444)	(405)
No or short vocational education	(795)	(917)	(792)	(895)	(748)
Medium level vocational educ.	(404)	(259)	(249)	(366)	(321)
Polytechnic/University level	(139)	(180)	(219)	(315)	(323)
Finnish speaking	(1162)	(1265)	(1184)	(1464)	(1293)
Swedish speaking	(70)	(77)	(68)	(84)	(98)
<i>Statistical significance (Chi square test)</i>					
Gender					
Generation	***	***	***	***	
Education	*			***	
Language	*				

*= $p < .05$; **= $p < .01$; ***= $p < .001$.

Source: FNES data. The number of respondents is reported by groups in Tables 2–4.

Source: Finnish National Election Study 2003–2019.

Finns Party as well as the Green Alliance winning more votes – the share of party identifiers has not decreased since the turn of the new millennium, rather the opposite. While 45–50 percent of all respondents stated that they think of themselves as close to a specific party in the period 2003–2015, this share increased to 60 percent in the 2019 election. While the percentages reported in Table 9.1 should be interpreted with some cautiousness since they usually are based on a few hundreds of respondents, with a 95 percent confidence interval around ± 3 –4 percentage points, it seems clear that the period 2015–2019 has a stimulating effect on party identification in certain groups.

The campaign of the 2019 election was heavily dominated by issues tapping into the increasingly important GAL–TAN dimension (Hooghe et al., 2002), like the climate change and immigration. The election also followed a period with an ideologically distinct centre-right wing government, which deviated from the more common pattern with oversized and ideologically diverse government coalitions. These circumstances appear to have stimulated a slightly more polarized political environment (Kawecki, 2022), which appears to have increased the sense of party identification overall, but, in particular, in certain groups. Especially interesting is the strong increase among the youngest generation (+24 percentage points). This finding corroborates analyses of register data analysis demonstrating that in the 2019 election the turnout increased most, almost eight percentage points, among the youngest age group of 18–24-year-olds (Borg et al., 2020). It seems to be plausible that the most discussed topics of the 2019 election campaign, like the climate change (see Raunio, 2019), stimulated the interests of the youngest generation, which is also boosted feelings of party identification. It should, however, be noted that there was a distinct increase in party identification also in the generation between 1960 and 1979, among women and among voters with lower levels of education.

Table 9.2 presents data on what party the Finnish party identifiers feel close to. To clarify, the results show the distributions only for those respondents who have said in the survey that they feel close to a certain party. The aggregate (row) comparisons of

Table 9.2 Party identifiers and the election results by party and year, 2003–2019 (%)

	<i>SDP</i>	<i>KOK</i>	<i>PS</i>	<i>KESK</i>	<i>VIHR</i>	<i>VAS</i>	<i>RKP</i>	<i>KD</i>	<i>OTH</i>	<i>DK</i>	<i>Total</i>
Party identifiers											
2003 (n = 541)	26	14	1	26	10	9	5	5	1	4	100
2007 (n = 678)	21	22	4	24	11	7	4	3	2	2	100
2011 (n = 628)	19	20	15	16	7	11	4	4	2	3	100
2015 (n = 716)	15	17	12	20	9	9	5	4	1	7	100
2019 (n = 846)	16	14	18	12	12	11	5	4	3	5	100
Election results: % of the votes in parliamentary elections											
2003	24.5	18.6	1.6	24.7	8.0	9.9	4.6	5.3	2.8	.	100
2007	21.4	22.3	4.1	23.1	8.5	8.8	4.6	4.9	2.3	.	100
2011	19.1	20.4	19.1	15.8	7.3	8.1	4.3	4.0	1.9	.	100
2015	16.5	18.2	17.7	21.1	8.5	7.1	4.9	3.5	2.5	.	100
2019	17.7	17.0	17.5	13.8	11.5	8.2	4.5	3.9	5.9	.	100

Source: Finnish National Election Study 2003–2019.

the share of party identifiers and of the share of votes in the parliamentary elections point out that, at least when measured in the post-election surveys, the distributions of party identifiers are rather similar with the distributions of real electoral support. The two most popular parties are the same in all five time points. This might be interpreted to give support to the early critique towards the concept of party identification put forward by Thomassen (1976) – that in the European party systems and in the survey instruments, the party identification is not easily separable from the party choice in the elections.

The trend columns of party identification by individual political parties do, however, show considerable changes in the Finnish party identification since 2003. As in the election results, the biggest winner over the period 2003–2019, in terms of identification, is the Finns Party and the biggest loser is the Centre Party. Like in the election results, the growing popularity of the Finns party has decreased especially the shares of those who identify with the Social Democratic Party, National Coalition or with the Centre Party. All other parliamentary parties have maintained their positions in their shares among the party identifiers. Finally, the rise of the Finns Party seems to be at least as strong in the party identification landscape as in the real electoral support. Theoretically, this might promise relatively good electoral support for the party also in the forthcoming elections. The change from the least close parliamentary party in 2003 to the most frequently reported close party in 2019 deserves further analysis, which will be carried out in the next section.

Explaining party identification

In our explanatory analysis, we regress party identification of each of the eight main parties in the Finnish parliament on a specified set of variables, in order to identify what signifies partisans of the different parties. To increase the number of respondents, we use a merged dataset including the FNES data from the 2015 and 2019 elections. A separate analysis is run for each party with a dependent variable with the value one if the respondent identifies with that specific party and the value 0 if the respondent identifies with another party.

Our model consists of standard sociodemographic variables (gender and age), mother tongue, subjective class identification, area of residence and a set of attitudinal value orientations that are relevant in Finnish politics. All these factors have been important determinants of party support in Finnish politics (e.g., Paloheimo, 2005). Our attitudinal value-orientations are retrieved by a factor analysis consisting of a battery of 18 items regarding the future direction of Finland. While most other chapters in this book use the GAL–TAN dimension to describe variation in value orientations among voters of different political parties, our analysis applies a somewhat more detailed set of value orientations representing views in relation to traditional values, multiculturalism and equality, to point out significant differences between the eight parliamentary parties. The items included and the results of the factor analysis are presented in Appendix 9.1. In the following, we present and analyse party by party binary logistic regressions with the aim to see which factors that

are associated with identification of each of the eight parties. Parties are presented in the order of their size in the general election 2019.

Apart from the factor scores, all the predictors in the logistic regression models have been categorized. Reported in Table 9.3 are the exponentialized regression coefficients, i.e., the odds ratios between the category concerned and the reference category. For the categorical variables, the odds ratios are straight forward to interpret since it represents the odds ratio between the specified category and the reference category. Descriptions of the coding of the dependent and independent variables used in the analyses are presented in Appendix 9.2.

The Social Democratic Party

Starting with the largest party in the 2019 election, the Social Democratic Party, it becomes clear that partisanship is strongly associated with voters' left-right self-placement, i.e., their position on the traditional economic dimension. The probability for a voter to identify with the Social Democratic Party is twice as high among those placing themselves to the left compared to those who identify themselves at the centre of the left-right scale. The Social Democratic Party is, hence, seen as a distinct representative for left-leaning voters. Class identification does, however, not explain voters' identification with the Social Democratic Party in our analysis. It, hence, seems as if the party's previously strong connection to the working class, and image as a representative of the interests of the working class has dispersed. In contemporary Finland, Social Democratic Party has expanded its support within the middle class. Also, a large share of the public sector employees works in the area producing welfare services, professions in which a social democratic ethos is common.

The other value dimensions included in the model, i.e., traditional values, multiculturalism and equality do not differentiate the Social Democratic Party partisans in a distinct way from identifiers of other parties. With regards to the equality dimension, this is rather surprising, considering that these types of issues constitute an essential part of the Social Democratic Party's party manifesto. It, hence, seems as if some voters identify with the Social Democratic Party due to its egalitarian values, others due to its support on labour interests in the labour markets. It is also interesting to note that the overall performance (Nagelkerke R^2) of the model is relatively poor, which points towards the Social Democratic Party partisans being a less coherent group of voters based on the factors included in the analysis, compared those of other parties.

The Finns Party

The Finns Party is a distinct nationalistic and populist party. It is sceptical towards European integration, immigration and multiculturalism and it emphasises traditional values. In terms of economic policy, the party is, as the earlier party leader Timo Soini described it, a labour party without socialism. Since 2017 when the party was split and Jussi Halla-aho took over the position as leader of the party,

there has, however, been a shift towards the right in the party's economic profile and in the position of voters (Isotalo et al., 2019). In our analysis, which covers both 2015 and 2019, both the old and the new Finns Party are visible. Most of those identifying with the party position themselves at the centre or to the right on the left-right scale, but many consider themselves as belonging to the working class or lower middle class. In line with the political agenda of the party support for traditional values, and negative attitudes towards multiculturalism are all good predictors of identification to the Finns Party. The analysis also indicates that older voters (60 years or above) are less prone to identify themselves with the Finns Party compared to younger age groups, which is expected considering that the Finns Party has expanded substantially in a relatively short period of time, and that it is still a relatively new party.

The perhaps most interesting finding is that the overall performance of our model is better for the Finns Party than for the Social Democratic Party and Centre Party despite the rapid growth of the party's support and its relatively young age. There are, hence, both distinct socioeconomic factors and ideological reasons as to why voters identify with the Finns Party.

The National Coalition Party

The National Coalition Party is a typical right-wing, conservative party with roots going back to the early years of Finnish independence. Over the last decades the party has, alongside its right-wing economic policy emphasised international co-operation and been a strong proponent of a European integration. As expected, the strongest predictor of party identification with the National Coalition Party is voters' subjective position on the left-right dimension. There are, in fact, in the data, no instances of voters' placing themselves to the left or centre who identify with the National Coalition Party. We also find that support for multiculturalism is positively related with being a National Coalition Party partisan, while the opposite goes for issues related to equality, such as smaller income disparities, and less differences in development between different areas.

Socioeconomic factors are also highly relevant in differentiating National Coalition Party partisans from those of other parties. Here, we find that voters with middle or high levels of education are more likely to identify themselves to NC than those with low levels of education. The National Coalition Party is also a party which attracts voters from the more urban parts of Finland, and among voters that position themselves as members of the upper or upper middle class.

The overall performance of the model is better for the National Coalition Party than for any of the other main parties, which points towards that the National Coalition Party have a relatively distinct group of party identifiers. A typical voter identifying with the National Coalition Party is one with a middle or high-level of education and one that considers him- or herself as belonging to the middle or upper middle class. In terms of values he or she is distinctly right wing and in favour of multicultural pluralism.

The Centre Party

The Centre Party has historically been a defender of rural and agricultural interests with a centre-right ideological position. Despite the strong urbanization and decrease of the agricultural sector since the Second World War, the party has managed to keep its position as one of the three main parties in the Finnish party system, or at least they did so until very recently. A key explanation to the party's success is that they have managed to expand its support beyond those occupied in the agricultural sector to attract most voters in most occupations and social groups living at the countryside. The party has, hence, dominated in most parts of rural Finland, resulting in a strong socializing effect among voters residing in these areas and a much weaker support in suburbs and city centres.

Along with rural residence, a subjective position to the centre-right on the left-right scale is the most important factor explaining identification with the Centre Party. However, in contrast to voters identifying with the National Coalition Party, Centre party partisans tend to have low levels of education and to have a religious faith. Our model also indicates that the voters identifying with the Centre party are dispersed in terms of their position on the other value dimensions included, i.e., traditional values, multiculturalism and equality. In all these three value dimensions, Centre Party is divided into liberal and conservative fractions, with the liberal fraction being more common in the Southern parts of the country.

A typical voter identifying with the Centre Party is hence a rural resident, with a bourgeois and centre or right-wing identity, but with a low level of education, and one who considers him or herself as at least somewhat religious. The overall performance of our model for the Centre Party is the second poorest in Table 9.3. As in the case of the Social Democratic Party, internal diversity regarding both traditional values, multiculturalism and questions on equality results in a comparatively weak overall performance of the model.

The Green Alliance

As a young party, founded in the 1980s with the ethos to advance environmental issues, age, and perhaps even more so, political generations, are important factors when it comes to identifying partisans of the Green Alliance. The party has always attracted younger generations but with the ageing of the party and the high-profile founding members of the party, support has increased among the middle-aged population. As becomes clear in the analysis, the oldest age group (60 years and over) does, however, still have a low likelihood of identifying with the Green Alliance, more specifically one-third compared to the youngest age group (18–29 years).

On the left-right scale the Green Alliance partisans have a centre-left identity. Voters situating themselves at the ideological centre have a 1.6 times higher likelihood of identifying with the Green Alliance compared than those positioning themselves to the left, but a right-wing position does, on the other hand, decrease the likelihood of voters being Green Alliance partisans. The Green Alliance partisans are, however, a more distinct group of voters when it comes to liberal values

Table 9.3 Logistic regression models explaining identification to eight political parties

	<i>SDP</i>	<i>PS</i>	<i>KOK</i>	<i>KESK</i>	<i>VIHR</i>	<i>VAS</i>	<i>RKP</i>	<i>KD</i>
	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
Gender (man)	0.886	0.625 *	1.061	1.005	2.050 ***	0.694	2.110 (*)	2.116 *
Age (ref = 18–30)		***	***				**	*
Age 30–44	2.193 *	0.777	0.630	0.839	0.846	1.028	4.403 *	0.502
Age 45–59	1.879 (*)	0.690	0.928	1.225	0.669	1.438	2.179	0.354 *
Age 60	5.084 ***	0.321 ***	1.045	1.555	0.347 ***	0.765	2.183	0.183 **
Education (ref = primary)		*	**	***	**		*	
Middle level	1.106	0.664 (*)	2.329 ***	0.531 **	1.405	0.476 **	1.799	0.790
High level	0.483 *	0.585 (*)	2.275 **	0.576 *	1.670 (*)	0.484 *	1.945	1.315
Language Swedish (ref = Finnish)	0.949	0.000	0.056 ***	0.299 **	0.339 *	0.236 *	178.20 ***	0.442
Class id. (ref = working/ low middle)	0.744	0.354 ***	2.502 ***	2.116 ***	1.627 *	0.649 (*)	4.419 **	0.351 **
Left-right ideology (ref = left)		***	***	***	***	***	***	*
Centre	0.387 ***	3.793 ***		10.519 ***	1.622 (*)	0.153 ***	4.937 *	3.470 *
Right	0.095 ***	2.562 ***	8.898 ***	10.413 ***	0.326 ***	0.030 ***	4.229 *	3.816 *
Religiousness (ref = not religious)	1.091	0.875	0.602 *	1.841 **	0.960	0.476 **	0.538	10.398 ***

Place of residence (ref = rural)				***		***								
Suburb	1.075	0.968		3.413	***	0.408	***	0.738		0.986		0.425	1.005	
City centre	0.961	1.169		2.094	**	0.524	**	0.753		0.919		0.582	1.321	
Traditional values	1.188	2.250	***	1.026		1.136		0.403	***	0.724	*	1.072	3.216	***
Multiculturalism	1.014	0.388	***	2.090	***	0.909		1.895	***	1.012		3.427	***	0.835
Equality	1.053	0.916		0.497	***	0.986		1.113		1.541	**	1.401	1.373	
N	1337	1337		893		1337		1337		1337		1337	1337	
Nagelkerke R ²	0.257	***	0.364	***	0.451	***	0.264	***	0.352	***	0.388	0.694	0.279	***
Prediction percent	27		28		55		10		22		18	73	0	

Source: Finnish National Election Study 2015–2019.

Descriptions of dependent and independent variables including reference categories for the logistic regression models are presented in Appendix 9.1.

Exp(B) = Exponentiation of the regression coefficient, which is the odds ratio between the specified category and the reference category. As an example: among the age group 60 years and over, it is five times more probable that a voter identifies with the Social Democratic Party compared to the reference category which is the age cohort 18–29 years.

Measures on the level of statistical significance are calculated with Wald statistics using the following symbols for the levels of significance: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, (* $p < 0.10$). Prediction percent: Based on the logistic regression equation, the model calculates for each case in the data set the probability that the person identifies himself/herself to the Social Democratic Party. Cases where this probability is bigger than 0.5 are predicted to identify themselves to SDP. Cases where this probability is less than 0.5 are predicted not to identify themselves to SDP. The percentage share in the table is the share of cases with SDP identification that were also predicted to identify themselves to this party based on the logistic regression model.

(as opposed to traditional) and support for multiculturalism, which both significantly increase voter's likelihood to identify with the Green Alliance.

A typical person identifying to the Green Alliance is below 60 years of age, highly educated, have liberal values, supports multiculturalism and positions him- or herself at the centre-left on the left-right scale. Due to the more distinct ideological and value-oriented profile among those identifying with the Green Alliance, the overall performance of model for is better than for the Social Democratic Party and the Centre Party.

The Left Alliance

The Left Alliance is party with historical roots in the communist movement which today is positioned to the left of the Social Democratic Party in terms of economic policy. It is hence not surprising that a distinct left-wing position on the left-right scale is the single best predictor of identification with the Left Alliance. Relatedly we find that values related to equality increases the odds of being a partisan of the Left Alliance. Other statistically significant predictors are education, and religion, where low levels of education and atheism increase likelihood of a voter identifying with the Left Alliance. The overall performance of the model for the Left Alliance identification is better compared to the models for the Social Democratic Party and the Centre Party, the main reason being the strong and stable effect of a left-orientation on the left-right scale.

The Swedish People's Party

The Swedish People's Party is a party with a distinct political profile, which is also clearly visible among the voters identifying with the party. The most important issues in Swedish People's Party's (RKP) political platform concern the rights and interests of the Swedish speaking minority in Finland. The party also emphasises issues related to other minorities and has a distinct multiculturalist and internationally oriented profile. In line with the profile of the party, being a Swedish speaker is the dominant factor explaining identification with the Swedish People's Party. About two thirds of those having Swedish as their native language identify themselves with the Swedish People's Party. A Middle class or upper middle-class identification, a centre-right orientation on the left-right scale, and, as expected, support for multiculturalism also increase likelihood of identifying with the Swedish People's Party.

The overall performance of the model is comparatively strong. This is primarily due to one single factor, which is native language. If a Swedish speaker happens to have a bourgeois, centre-right world view, the Swedish People's Party is typically the natural political choice for him or her. For Swedish speakers with a distinct ideological left-wing orientation the Social Democratic Party has traditionally been an alternative. In more recent years, the Green Alliance has also attracted support among Swedish speaking voters, especially among younger generations.

The Christian Democrats

The Christian Democratic Party (KD) is a small centre-right party, generally attracting three or four percent of votes in general elections. No surprisingly considering the name of the party religiosity is the key factor explaining identification with the Christian Democratic Party. A traditional value orientation, a position to the centre or right and a working class or lower middle-class identification, also single out Christian Democratic Party partisans. Overall, however, the model performs very badly. This can be explained by the low number of Christian Democratic Party partisans in the data identifying, but perhaps more importantly, that many of the factors which characterise Christian Democratic Party partisans also differentiate partisans of some of the larger parties.

Conclusions

An affective attachment to a specific political party has proven important to understand electoral behaviour. While party identification as a concept has been criticised for being too closely relate to an actual vote choice, or even to be less stable compared to vote choices, and therefore to lack analytical value (Thomassen, 1976), others have claimed party identifiers are more easily mobilised and make out the core and stable supporters of a party, which provides the party with a baseline support at times of elections. Despite the recent volatility the Finnish party system, with the breakthrough of the Finns Party, and fluctuating support for the three traditionally big parties, the Social Democratic Party, the National Coalition and the Centre Party, the share of Finnish voters identifying with a specific party has been relatively stable since the turn of the millennium, and even increased in relation to the 2019 election. While 45–50 percent of all respondents stated that they think of themselves as close to a specific party in the period 2003–2015, this share increased to 60 percent in the 2019 election. This recent increase can perhaps be attributed to a more differentiated menu of viable parties being available to voters, primarily the Green Alliance and the Finns Party, and a slightly more polarised political climate (Kawecki 2022).

On a critical note, we observe that the trend in party identification relatively closely follows the development of the parties' electoral support. This can be interpreted as supportive of the critique raised by Thomassen already in the 1970s when he questioned the analytical value of the concept of party identification. There are at least two potential explanations to our observation. The first relates to the context in which the question is posed. It might be that post-election surveys are ill suited to measure the enduring and affective elements of party attachment due to the close connection to the election and the actual vote choice made. The second potential explanation is that the inherent meaning of party identification, or, as the question is phrased "being close to a specific party", has developed over time. The close connection to the actual vote choice might hence be due to generational change and other possible developments, causing the connotation of party identification

to vary across groups of voters. It is likely that the quality of party identification is changing and that for different political parties and sociodemographic groups the meaning and reasons for party identification vary a lot. For many members of the older age cohorts identifying with some of the traditionally dominating parties, like the Social Democratic Party and the Centre party, party attachment might still be related to group identification and maybe to life history with enduring and close feelings of attachment. For younger generations, and for partisans of the newer parties, party attachment can be related to new forms of identity politics and based on value dimensions and election specific issue-orientations rather than traditional class and socioeconomic cleavages.

Political parties have often been divided into class-based parties and value-based parties, with class-based parties advancing the interests of their core socio-demographic group of supporters, and value-based parties focusing on advancing a special value orientation in society such as environmental issues or nationalist interests (Tiihonen, 2022). Based on the explanatory analysis presented in this chapter, such an interpretation does, however, not receive support. We are hence not able to divide parties into class parties and value-based parties. Except for the Social Democratic Party, subjective class identification is an important factor when it comes to explaining identification with all parties analysed.

Ideological positions and value-orientations also matter a great deal for voters' party attachments, in patterns that align relatively well with the parties' profiles and key issues (see also Chapter 8). Based on subjective identification on the left-right scale, Finnish political parties can be divided into left-wing and centre-right oriented parties. Voters positioning themselves to the left are prone to identify either with the Social Democratic Party or the Left Alliance, while a position at the centre or to the right on the same scale causes voters to identify with one of the other six parties, with the Green Alliance partisans being more distinctly positioned in between the left and right.

While voters who identify with the Social Democratic Party and the Centre Party are divided on their attitudes towards traditionalism, multiculturalism and equality, the supporters of other parties have a clearer profile at least in one of these three value dimensions. Positive stance towards multiculturalism explains identification with the National Coalition Party, the Green Alliance and the Swedish People's Party, while the opposite is valid for voters identifying with the Finns Party. Positive stances towards traditional values, in turn, explain identification with both the Finns Party and to Christian Democrats, while more liberal voters tend to align with the Green Alliance and the Left Alliance. On equality-related values, the Left Alliance and the National Coalition Party represent polar opposites, where voters with pro-equality stands align with the Left Alliance and voters with opposite viewpoints tend to identify with the National Coalition Party.

Finally, as Swedish as native language is the most important factor explaining identification to the Swedish People's Party, we can conclude that both old political cleavages and new political divides explain the party identification of the Finnish electorate. While the socioeconomic left-right dimension along with geography, religiosity and language may have lost some of the explanatory power they held a

few decades ago, they remain important building blocks of voters' party identifications. At the same time, the new divides like attitudes towards environmental issues and climate change, immigration and euro-scepticism have caused new political divides to grow in political importance, and attach, as well as realign, members of the electorate towards the newer parties.

Note

- 1 The set of questions used here cover same elements as the classical Michigan operationalization but is not identical. The classical operationalization starts with a question on the direction (to which party the respondent identifies) and then continues with a question of the intensity of the identification by asking how strong identifier the respondent is. Then follows a third question on party closeness to those who still lack information on the strength of the identification (see Blais et al., 2001; Thomassen & Rosema, 2009).

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Appendix

Appendix 9.A1 Descriptions of dependent and independent variables including reference categories for the logistic regression models

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>
Closeness to a party	1 = Identifies to the party. 0 = Does not identify to the party
Gender	1 = Man (reference category). 2 = Woman
Age	1 = 18–29 years (ref. category). 2 = 30–44. 3 = 45–59. 4 = 60–
Level of education	1 = Primary level (ref. category). 2 = Middle level. 3 = High level
Native language	1 = Finnish (ref. category). 2 = Swedish
Class identification	1 = Working class or lower middle class (ref.). 2 = Middle class. upper middle class. or upper class
Left-Right self-placement	Left (0–4. ref. category). Centre (5–6). Right (7–10)
Religiousness	In the model regressing National Coalition, the reference category is centre, because there are no cases in the data identifying themselves both to the National Coalition and to the political left. 1 = Not at all or not much religious. ref. category. 2 = Rather or very religious
Place of residence	1 = Countryside municipality (ref. category). 2 = suburb. 3 = city centre
Traditional values	Factor scores of factor one in the factor analysis (see App. 9A2)
Multiculturalism	Factor scores of factor two in the factor analysis (see App. 9A2)
Equality	Factor scores of factor three in the factor analysis (see App. 9A2)

Appendix 9.A2 Factor analysis of eighteen value variables

	<i>Factor</i>		
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
V1 Finland with more entrepreneurship and market economy	.348	.026	.077
V2 A multicultural Finland with tolerant attitudes towards people coming from other countries	–.250	.609	.414
V3 Finland with a bigger role for Christian values	.575	.112	.014
V4 Finland with less differences in development between different areas	.180	–.011	.574
V5 Finland, where the special position of Swedish speaking Finns is taken into account	.202	.600	.065

(Continued)

Appendix 9.A2 (Continued)

	<i>Factor</i>		
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
V6 Finland. where men and women are more equal	.005	.170	.571
V7 Finland with a smaller public sector	.404	.059	-.045
V8 Finland. which strengthens the rights of sexual minorities	-.372	.377	.364
V9 Finland with lower taxation	.440	-.055	.077
V10 Finland with two strong national languages: Finnish and Swedish	.232	.592	.032
V11 Finland with more law and order	.413	.216	-.010
V12 Finland. where the position of the traditional nuclear family is strengthened	.771	-.030	.001
V13 Finland with more immigration	-.170	.633	.308
V14 Finland with smaller income disparities	.131	-.041	.611
V15 Finland less committed to the European Union	.365	-.248	.083
V16 Finland where more energy is produced by nuclear power	.251	.127	-.184
V17 Finland with fewer municipalities	.051	.221	-.032
V18 A more environmentally friendly Finland. even if it means low economic growth or no growth at all	-.106	.266	.377
Variance explained by factor percent	17.4	15.4	9.3

Each variable in the factor analysis varies from 0 (very bad proposition) to 10 (very good proposition).

Extraction method: Principal axis factoring; Rotation method: Varimax. Labels for the three factors: 1 = Traditional values; 2 = Multiculturalism; 3 = Equality.

Source: Finnish National Election Study 2015–2019.