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*Déjà Vu All Over Again: * A Comment on the Comment of Converse and Pierce*

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What is the “standing decision” rule that guides the French voter? Party or ideology? Converse and Pierce (1993), commenting on their 1986 volume, say that “the tilt of our diverse tests actually favored party.” Our tests point in the opposite direction, favoring ideology (Fleury and Lewis-Beck 1993). This disagreement is but a part of a larger debate in the literature on explanations of French electoral behavior. We hope, by reviewing key aspects of the disagreement, light will be cast on broader concerns. We begin with the modeling issue, then take up the matter of data and measures. We conclude with analysis of a newer, and perhaps better, data set from the 1988 elections. In that analysis, we offer a straightforward examination of the basic question: Are there more ideological identifiers or party identifiers in the French electorate? As shall be seen, there are many more ideological identifiers.

MODELING

We formulated a simultaneous equation model of the vote to allow the possibility that party influences ideology and vice-versa. The results suggest that the effect of ideology on vote is more than twice that of party. To estimate that model we applied an instrumental variables approach, in a two-stage least squares (2SLS), as spelled out in the text and accompanying footnote 1 (to facilitate replication). Converse and Pierce (1993) object, saying that this analysis is “distinctly unpopular among leading professional statisticians.” However, 2SLS and, more broadly, instrumental variables estimation, is standard fare in leading econometrics texts (Kmenta 1986; Pindyck and Rubinfeld 1991). Further, it is explicated in different social science quantitative methods monographs, often with direct application to cross-sectional survey data (Asher 1983; Berry 1984). There are many examples from American election survey research that employ simultaneous equation models, estimated with 2SLS, or instrumental variables more generally (Jackson 1975; Page and Jones 1979; Markus and Converse 1979;

*With apologies to Yogi Berra.

Markus 1992). Our particular strategy was inspired by Fiorina (1981, appendix B), in his construction of party identification instruments for American data. As he observes, "if simultaneity clearly exists, what can one do except to measure variables as precisely as possible, specify equations as carefully as possible, and go forward?" (Fiorina 1981, 189).

Data

The data used to estimate the model came from the 1967 French National Election Study (FNES). These data have the limits of any cross-section, and we would much have preferred panel data. Speaking of their panel data, Converse and Pierce (1993) say they "released them for public archiving many years ago, and regret that resources to carry this out have not been found." We, too, regret that they have not been publicly archived. For one reason, it is impossible for other researchers to replicate results and independently assess data quality. Therefore, we had to rely on the data reports from Converse and Pierce (1986). With regard to the quotation that "by any reasonable standards" the panel response rate was "precariously low" (Converse and Pierce 1986, 801), they do state that "the quote presented is accurate." However, they complain that we ignore their conclusion that "the material was not marred with any notable bias." They also complain that we ignore "a large range of longitudinal analyses discussed in detail in PRiF [sic]." We again turned to that volume and found no other French panel studies reviewed. Even taking a broader definition of longitudinal, we could not locate this "large range," although that may indicate a faulty search strategy on our part.

Since we do not have the Converse-Pierce panel data, we can only evaluate their quality conclusion indirectly, principally by examination of the 30-some pages of text in appendix A (Converse and Pierce 1986). Here are numbers from table A-7 in that appendix (Converse and Pierce 1986, 814). For the 1968 wave, the "crude reinterview rate" was 56.0% (on a 1967 sample of 1,032). For the 1969 wave, the "crude reinterview rate" was 61.5% (on this 1967 sample of 1,032). For the full panel, 1967-1968-1969, the number interviewed in all three years is $N = 492$. They go on to note, "Of course, for any estimates involving individual change in the 1967-1969 period, we are restricted to our panel sample." In this estimation, missing data would easily cut these sample sizes by around half (e.g., consider the simple univariate effects, such as those not identifying with party). In the full panel, the working N relating ideology and party would almost certainly fall below 200. (Unfortunately, the tables in the appendix often report weighted N , so it is difficult to ascertain precise estimates.) We remain troubled by such sample attrition.

However, let us assume that the samples are still probability samples, as in theory they could be. The problem here is that the population inferred to is atypical. Converse and Pierce (1986) describe part of the field methodology for the 1968 and 1969 waves:

The 1967 mass and elite surveys had not been planned as the first wave of a panel study. . . . The timing was extremely awkward . . . it seemed important to complete as much of the mass interviewing as possible while the events of May [1968] and the ensuing elections were fresh in the public mind. (799–800)

Our 1969 fieldwork, involving the third wave of mass interviews, was motivated by the intrusion of the spring referendum which led to the retirement of de Gaulle and subsequent presidential elections.

These quotations state that the panel was not originally planned, and that it was carried out in response to two unique and dramatic events: the social upheaval from May 1968 and the resignation of de Gaulle. While both events are of immense interest, and the authors deserve considerable credit for being at-the-ready, the larger question of generalizability remains. In terms of assessing what “anchors” the French electorate, data from the volatile years of 1968 and 1969 would seem less than ideal.

However, as time has passed for the Fifth Republic, the greatest issue has become data age, not data availability or data atypicality. Now 25 years later, a focus on these data alone, fine as they may be, yields little more than a useful history lesson. Partly for this reason, we introduced Euro-Barometer data on level of ideological identification, for the legislative election years 1973, 1978, 1981, 1986. On average, 87% surveyed did place themselves on a left-to-right scale.

But Converse and Pierce (1993) seem to dismiss these Euro-Barometer results as coming from “cut-rate commercial polls investing in few or no quality-control procedures.” They go on to say that “F & L-B [sic] apparently lack the background to understand these differences, for they treat scientific studies and commercial polls as co-equal sources of information. If anything, they seem to favor commercial poll results.”

We are sorry to say that this charge appears to rest on a fundamental misunderstanding of the Euro-Barometer organization. Euro-Barometers are paid for by the European community and are now conducted twice a year in member nations. Until recently, it was overseen by Jacques-René Rabier, a respected European survey researcher and social scientist. (A leading volume on comparative electoral behavior studies, by Dalton et al. [1984], is dedicated to M. Rabier “for his invaluable contributions to comparative social research.”) Euro-Barometer data sets are routinely archived at ICPSR and are the third-most widely requested data set in the holdings. The interviews in the different countries are carried out by local surveyors hired by Euro-Barometer staff for the purpose. Here, as with all survey research, quality control is essential. Because of a National Science Foundation grant, the senior author (Lewis-Beck) had the opportunity to participate in questionnaire design and supervision of Euro-Barometers Nos. 20 and 21. (These served as the basis for Lewis-Beck [1988].) At that time, H el ene Riffault, director of *Faits et Opinion* in Paris, a woman of great integrity and much professional experience, directed field operations. My impression was that she sought work of scientific quality and got it.

Beyond the Euro-Barometers, other valuable French election surveys exist. Most recently, there is the impressive 1988 election study, directed by a group of electoral researchers at *Centre d'étude de la vie politique française* (CEVIPOF), part of the *Fondation nationale des sciences politiques*. A representative national sample of 4,032 voters were interviewed face-to-face for about an hour. The interviewing was done by SOFRES, the same polling organization used by Converse and Pierce (1986, 789). Their responses have been extensively analyzed (see Boy and Mayer 1990). We will make use of this data set later.

Besides this 1988 elections study, SOFRES regularly polls and, since 1964, has posed a left-right self-placement scale to national samples at least 11 times. During that period, the percentage willing to place themselves ideologically has always been very high, varying from 90% to 94% (Michelat 1990, 73). In France, like the United States, there are good polls and bad polls. SOFRES and IFOP are the most established French polling firms. An interesting datum is that the long series from the IFOP election surveys has given an average prediction error for election outcomes of around 2% (Lewis-Beck 1981, 531). The IFOP data are routinely used in popularity function work, and as the SOFRES series lengthens it has received this use (see, respectively, Lewis-Beck 1980; Lafay 1991). BVA, a more recent arrival to polling, has acquired a high reputation among French political scientists and economists known to the senior author.

Measuring Ideological Identification

Utilizing the Converse and Pierce (1986) left-right self-placement scale, our estimate of ideological identifiers is 77%. They comment, "We agree tolerably on these numbers, but not at all on what they mean." We are pleased the numbers are acceptable. Perhaps the dispute over meaning can also be resolved. In France, survey researchers have been administering left-right self-placement scales since at least 1946 (see *Sondages* 8[14], 16 July 1946, 166). Over the last 20 years an intensive amount of methodological work, led by Michelat (1966, 1986, 1990), has demonstrated that left-right self-placement mirrors different issue positions, and that these issue positions have a distinctive structure. Further work, led by Percheron (1977), has shown that left-right ideological commitment is much more likely to be transmitted from parent to child than is partisanship. (See also Percheron and Jennings 1981.) This body of scholarship suggests that a French voter's left-to-right position summarizes his or her issue stances, and that this "issue summary" has some stability.

If Converse and Pierce agree that those on the "Left" and "Right" ends of the scale have a coherent issue-orientation, that leaves only the "Center" up for discussion. They note that Deutsch, Lindon (pardon our typo), and Weill (1966) "used a special metaphor for the center category—*le marais*, or 'swamp.'" While this may be an apt metaphor, it is perhaps misleading to call it "special." The term dates at least from the National Convention of 1792–1793, when it was applied to

the deputies of the political center, as distinct from the Jacobins on the left and the Girondins on the right (Patrick 1972). As it turns out, the position of deputies in that revolutionary body—left, center, right—strongly predicted their issue stances (Lewis-Beck et al. 1991).

In posing the question for the more contemporary analysis, probably few in the center would describe themselves as holding their middle-of-the-road position with revolutionary ardor. And, there is no quarrel with the notion, first seriously demonstrated sometime ago by Deutsch et al. (1966), that those in the center tend to register less of an interest in politics. However, there are also those on the left or right who are not interested in politics. In the 1988 CEVIPOF election survey mentioned earlier, voters were asked whether they were interested in politics “*beaucoup*” (very much), “*assez*” (somewhat), “*peu*” (not much), or “*pas du tout*” (not at all). Voters of all ideological stripes appeared in the low interest categories. In particular, here is the percentage distribution on ideological self-placement among those who declared they were “not at all” interested in politics: left = 28%; center = 39%; right = 32% (Ranger 1990, 138). Most who are “not at all” interested are on the left or right. The center is only slightly more likely to declare itself “not at all” interested than the left and right categories (as seen most clearly by comparison to the overall percentage distribution of left-center-right in the sample, immediately reported on below).

Further, while political interest may be somewhat less among those in the center, it is still a separate variable from ideology. Whether each variable (ideology and interest) should enter into an equation additively, interactively—or at all—depends on the theory under estimation. Finally, if a simple “lack of political interest” correction is to be made on the univariate statistical estimate, say, by a subtraction (Converse and Pierce radically propose subtracting the *entire* center category), then it would be more appropriate to make that correction for left and right categories as well. And, for comparability, it would be then necessary to correct the party identification measure for level of interest, since it cannot be assumed that all identifiers are equally interested (or even interested at all).

Let us now look more directly at left-right ideological identification in these 1988 CEVIPOF data. SOFRES asked the following question of these 4,032 voters (Michelat 1990, 71),

On classe habituellement les Français sur une échelle de ce genre qui va de la gauche à la droite. Vous, personnellement, où vous classeriez-vous sur cette échelle?

Gauche _____ *Droite*

[One usually classifies the French on a scale that runs from left to right. You, personally, where would you place yourself on this scale?

Left _____ Right]

Only 3% refused to answer, yielding an ideological identifier score of 97%. The “center” was selected by 28% which, even if completely subtracted from the total, still leaves 69% who explicitly chose a left or a right position.

Measuring Party Identification

For purposes of comparison, we had measured party identification following the method of Converse and Pierce (1993), and they do not object to our application. However, we actually have certain reservations which, at this juncture, are perhaps appropriately shared. In the French case, there is no consensus on how to measure party identification. Researchers employ varieties of open- and closed-ended items, with wildly varying results (see the review in Lewis-Beck 1984, 428–31). Converse and Pierce use an open-ended item of the form:

“What is the party you habitually feel closest to?”

While the item appears simple, it makes for an impressive coding problem. Consulting the 1967 FNES codebook (V181), there are about 90 codes for this variable, and within each code there may be several different labels. While we applaud the painstaking effort, we worry that the myriad of choices—for respondent, interviewer, and researcher (i.e., how to sort these 90 responses into real party attachments for 7 or so parties?)—is likely very error-prone. Such error could account for their reported instability of party identification over time, namely, 1958 (September) = 38.5%; 1958 (December) = 47.6%; 1967 = 59.5%; 1968 = 48.7%; 1969 = 45.0% (Converse and Pierce 1986, 75).

Even assuming no such error, these changing figures certainly suggest that for the years on either side of 1967, party identification is 20 to 10 percentage points lower. In other words, the (still large) gap between ideological identifiers and party identifiers in 1967 may be atypically small. Another possibility is that the higher 1967 party identification percentage was induced by item-order effects, e.g., the proximity of the party and vote items in the survey instrument. Converse and Pierce (1993) say that our discussion of item-order effects is “pure conjecture.” We think this dismissal is a bit hasty, since we base our discussion on an empirical item-distance count in their questionnaire. Obviously, no “control” survey, e.g., one with a theoretically nonreactive item-distance order, is available to yield more definite results.

An alternative to an open-ended item is a closed-ended one, following along the lines of the American elections survey items which name the parties (Campbell et al. 1960, 68). However, Converse and Pierce object to this format, saying “we specifically did not want to include as true party identifiers persons who would pick a party from a list and claim that it was near and dear to them in order to fulfill questionnaire expectations.”

A compromise between the two possibilities—a wide-open question and completely-sealed question—might be the following, which was asked in the 1988 CEVIPOF election study:

Diriez-vous que vous êtes habituellement très proche, assez proche, peu proche, ou pas proche du tout d'un parti politique en particulier.

[Would you say that you are usually very close, fairly close, not very close, or not at all close to a particular political party?]

The question has the virtue of not “cueing” respondents to select a party from a fixed list of parties. Rather, it gives the respondent responsibility for coming up with the party label. Further, it has the coding (and potentially error-reducing) advantage of the fixed format, asking the respondent to evaluate his or her “habitual closeness” to the party. Taking as identifiers those who respond “very” and “fairly” close, Haegel (1990, 154) finds 42% of the French electorate are party identifiers (a number quite close to the 1978 estimate as well.)

Also, many of these party identifiers, when asked about their political interest, say “not much” or “not at all”; for example, 28% of those who say they are “not much” interested in politics also claim to be “very close” or “fairly close” to a particular party (see Ranger 1990, 133). Obviously, the act of party identification in France does not automatically carry with it a commitment to serious political involvement.

Party Versus Ideology: Which Horse Wins?

It is tempting to avoid an answer to the question of which variable—party or ideology—has more scope in the French electorate. Politics is a seamless web, perhaps more so in France than other advanced democracies. But, we believe science moves forward when serious researchers take carefully developed—but clear—positions on important scholarly issues. In large part, that is the utility of this exchange. We agree with our colleagues that it is preferable “to work closer to transparent data structures, where less is going on under the table that defies intuitive monitoring.” As a leading French chef, Escoffier, proclaimed, “*Faites simple.*” To “make things simple” in this case, we restrict ourselves to comparison of the reported percentages of ideological identifiers versus party identifiers in the 1988 CEVIPOF election study. In addition to their contemporary relevance, these survey items have the added advantage of not being “asymmetric” in terms of open versus closed-ended format.

In that survey, 97% identified with an ideology, as opposed to 42% for a party. That yields a 55 percentage point difference in favor of ideology. If, by main force, one excludes the entire 28% who are centrists, then the difference in favor of ideology falls to $69 - 42 = 27$ percentage points. With either comparison, “ideology beats party all hollow,” as it did in our analysis of the 1967 data.

This conclusion should not surprise us. The widely used idea of interpreting politics along a left-right dimension was born in the French Revolution (see the recent commentary in Mayer and Perrineau (1992, 72). As distinguished observer Rémond (1962, 13) stated, “A basic fact of our political life, the traditional division in the public mind into two main contrasting tendencies remains the key to understanding our recent history.” Surveys of the French electorate should always ask careful questions on ideology, as well as party, questions for which the results

can be meaningfully compared. Ideally, the design should be panel as well as cross-sectional to further sort out some of the perplexing issues this valuable exchange has raised.

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