Should I Stay or Should I Go? Testing the Influence of Ambivalence on Vote Switching in a Multi-Party Context

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Abstract

Post-World War II advanced democratic systems were characterized by political stability, such as strong party systems, stable governments, and low electoral volatility. Arguably this has changed over the past two decades since vote switching has been on the rise. An under-researched dimension of this phenomenon is the impact of ambivalent political attitudes. Whilst the effects of ambivalence on vote switching have been investigated in the American political system, its application to multi-party systems has not been explored. To address this gap, I investigate the effects of ambivalence on vote switching in Germany, a multi-party system, which has seen some instability. Using the *German Longitudinal Election Study*, I tease out the mechanics of voter ambivalence. My results suggest that political ambivalence increases voters' probability to switch parties at two consecutive elections. Therefore, ambivalence has important implications for vote switching and our understanding of the underlying determinants of electoral volatility in 21st century politics.

Keywords: Vote switching, ambivalence, political attitudes, multi-party system, partisanship

1 Introduction

In the decades after World War II, advanced democratic systems have been traditionally characterized by a low electoral volatility. Arguably this is changing over the last two decades since volatility and vote switching are increasing (e.g., Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2017; Dassonneville, 2018; Spoon & Klüver, 2019). A hereto under-researched dimension of vote switching in the socio-psychological branch is the impact of ambivalent political attitudes – mainly named ambivalence from now on. Ambivalence displays an attitude conflict that is characterized by competing positive and negative considerations regarding one or multiple

objects of interest (Lavine, 2001: 915; Basinger & Lavine, 2005). Whilst some literature has explored the influence of ambivalence on vote choice (e.g., Lavine, 2001, Haddock, 2003; Basinge & Lavine, 2005), few scholars have explored its impact concerning vote switching (exceptions Thornton, 2009, 2014; Hillygus & Shields, 2008; Lavine et al., 2012; Smidt, 2017). However, the current research on ambivalence and its impact of vote switching has been stymied by its focus on the United States.

In this paper, I plow a fresh field in respect of context. I extend the focus of political ambivalence to multi-party contexts. I argue that looking at multi-party systems different to the two-party system in the US is important and beneficial (Thornton, 2009: 126; Steenbergen, 2020). It is beneficial because ambivalence is more likely to be present in multi-party systems due to factors, such as, the number of parties, coalition formation processes, strategic voting, the entrance of new parties, and the interplay of parties and their leaders. For instance, ambivalence could be more prevalent in multi-party systems as the party menu in those systems offers more viable alternatives to voters at times of elections (Johnson, 2014: 509; Steenbergen, 2020: 155). If the number of parties increases, parties are likely to be ideologically closer to each other as they place themselves on the ideological scale that then offers less space for each party. If then parties are closer on the ideological scale, policy proposals and opinions are more likely to overlap. This in turn increases the probability of developing similar positive attitudes towards multiple parties. This may lead to an increased probability of becoming ambivalent. The research question of this paper is whether ambivalent political attitudes influence vote switching in multi-party systems?

But why care about electoral volatility and ambivalence? I argue that it is important to study ambivalence due to two aspects. First, we observe simultaneously to an increasing electoral volatility that parties converge ideologically (Spoon & Klüver, 2019). This party convergence is used to profit from a broader appeal strategy at times of elections (Somer-Topcu, 2015). Bearing in mind that some scholars did not find evidence of a strong trend of

convergence over time (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2015), I still argue that voters find themselves in more ambivalent decision situations as parties become more similar leading to an increased difficulty to distinguish them from one another. This in turn leads to more ambivalent voters and ambivalence to an increased likelihood of vote switching. Second, we observe an increasing electoral volatility together with an increasing electoral de-alignment. De-alignment describes the trend that voters are less likely to identify with parties. Research shows that the number of people identifying with parties is decreasing (Berglund et al., 2005; Dassonneville, Hooghe & Vanhoutte, 2012; Dalton, 2013; Dalton, 2014; Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2018; Garzia, Ferreira da Silva & De Angelis, 2018). Previous research suggests that electoral de-alignment and volatility are related (Carmines, McIver & Stimson, 1987; Dalton, McAllister & Wattenberg, 2000; Dassonneville, 2018) and shows that ambivalence leads partisans to be more likely to switch parties if their preferences are not congruent with their partisanship (Lavine et al., 2012). Thus, ambivalence has important implications for the literature on electoral de-alignment and may lead to an increased probability of vote switching.

To get to the bottom of my research question, my analysis focuses on Germany based on three reasons. First, the ambivalence measure that I intend to compare to the American studies is rarely included in any other election study besides the *German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES)*. Second, Germany is a well-established multi-party system that offers the party menu that I am interested in for investigating the impact of ambivalence. Third, Germany, similarly to other European countries, is experiencing a relatively high electoral volatility. Therefore, I use two datasets of the *GLES:* The Short-term Campaign Panel 2013 (Rattinger, Roßteutscher, Schmitt-Beck, Weßels, Wolf, Plischke & Wiegand, 2016) and 2017 (Roßteutscher, Schmitt-Beck, Schoen, Weßels, Wolf, Gärtner, Preißinger, Kratz & Wuttke, 2019). They enable me to investigate the impact of *party* and *leader* ambivalence on vote switching for the German federal elections 2013 and 2017. In contrast to previous studies, this paper does not focus exclusively on partisans but also looks at nonpartisans. Therefore, the

paper allows to compare its findings to the ones from the US literature but it also accomplishes another contribution when including nonpartisans in the analysis. Whilst I rely on a more novel measurement of ambivalence, I replicate the well-established one as a robustness check to ensure the comparability to the previous work from the US. Additional, I run some analyses on data of the *American National Election Study (ANES)* to validly compare my findings of two recent elections of the German multi-party system to some recent elections of the American two-party system.

For the German federal elections 2013 and 2017, my results demonstrate that higher levels of party and leader ambivalence lead to an increased probability of vote switching in two consecutive elections. The paper also shows that the effects of ambivalence on vote switching differ between partisans and nonpartisans. The robustness checks provide additional support for the effects of ambivalence on vote switching regarding the measurement and in case of the two-party system of the US. The key finding is, however, that political ambivalence shows strong effects on vote switching in the multi-party system of Germany and that ambivalence is useful to explain electoral volatility in Germany and the US.

2 State of the Art: Electoral Volatility, Vote Switching and Ambivalence

2.1 Electoral Volatility

The current literature on vote switching focuses on a variety of factors to explain electoral volatility and can be divided into aggregated and individual level analyses. Whilst work on the aggregate level focuses on comparative study of official election results, individual level studies rely primarily on data gathered in survey data of respondents (Schoen, 2014: 491, 494). There are three main branches trying to explain volatility: the sociological paradigm, socio-psychological approaches, and rational choice explanations. Looking at the influence of political attitudes on individual voter behavior falls into the socio-psychological approach. In this branch, other studies have identified other motivations besides ambivalence to investigate

vote switching. Those studies have shown that voters vary in their party support because they are either unaware of or indifferent between party alternatives (Converse, 1962; Kelley, 1983; Zaller, 2004; Hillygus & Shields, 2008; Mayer, 2008). Scholars have found that volatility is related to voters being independent, less informed, and less sophisticated (Schoen, 2004; Zaller, 2004). Blumenstiel and Plischke (2015) show that voters' motivations can change over time, and that inter- and intra-individual heterogeneity affects processes of decision-making. At some election, a voter might be candidate-oriented and at another one issue-oriented.

As mentioned above, despite much ink being spilled over the dynamics underlying vote switching, a hereto under-researched dimension of this phenomenon is the impact of ambivalence. I argue that investigating ambivalence will yield important implications for the literature on vote switching and de-alignment. If one follows the de-alignment thesis, party identification becomes weaker, rarer and has less of an impact on voting behavior (Beck, 1984; Holmberg, 1994; Clarke & Stewart, 1998; Berglund et al., 2005). The traditional view of partisanship (Campbell et al., 1960) argues that party identification is one of the most stable political predispositions. The principal assumption is that vote choice is best understood as the "cumulative consequences of temporally ordered sets of factors" (Miller & Shanks, 1996: 192). Where party identification is a long-term psychological attachment to a party that is believed to be resistant to change over the entire lifetime. The revisionist view on the other side challenges this traditional view by arguing that partisanship is rather unstable and influenced by party performance and policy agreement. Lavine et al. (2012) take a third highly inventive position in this debate by arguing that ambivalence drives the variation in partisanship. They show that when party and issue positions are in conflict and those issues are salient, *univalent* partisans *change their policy preferences* to become consistent with their party identification and to prevent becoming ambivalent. Whilst *ambivalent* partisans in contrast *switch parties* to achieve their policy consistency. Based on this finding of Lavine et al. (2012), I argue that

ambivalence leads to an increased probability of vote switching by reducing partisans' reliance on their party cues. This may also be an important finding for the literature on de-alignment.

2.2 Ambivalent Political Attitudes and Their Impact on People's Behavior

The early work on ambivalence mainly referred to the term "cross-pressures" (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Berelson et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1960). Since Mutz's (2002) study, the term cross-pressures was partly replaced by the common sociological-psychology term "ambivalence". Ambivalence is an attitude conflict that is characterized by competing considerations regarding one or multiple objects of interest (Lavine, 2001: 915). It describes the state of having simultaneously positive and negative feelings or contradictory ideas about an object or a person (Kaplan, 1972; Zaller & Feldman, 1992; Thompson et al., 1995).

So far, the work on ambivalence has mostly focused on policy issues, candidates or parties (Lavine, 2001; McGraw et al., 2003; Basinger & Lavine, 2005). Where a person can be ambivalent towards *one* or *multiple* objects. Common objects are candidates, parties or policies. A person is ambivalent towards *one* object, for example, if he has similar negative and positive feelings or considerations towards a party (Lavine, 2001). Ambivalence towards *multiple* objects can then be found if a voter has negative and positive feelings towards two parties (Lavine, 2001). This paper focuses on ambivalence towards parties and leaders.

But does ambivalence substantially affect electoral behavior? Research shows that it does. Ambivalence impacts people's political opinions and evaluations. It influences individuals' evaluations of candidates (Guge, 1999; Lavine, 2001, 2004; Meffert et al., 2004; Schoen, 2010; Blumenstiel & Gavras, 2015) and how strongly individuals approve or disapprove with the president (Meffert et al., 2004). Ambivalence also affects people's decisions in different facets of their voting behavior. Ambivalent individuals are more likely to vote based on competence and valence issues (Thornton, 2009). Basinger and Lavine (2005) show that ambivalent partisans lacking political knowledge are more likely to engage in

economic voting. Whilst ambivalent partisans that show a high political knowledge are more likely to engage in ideological voting. Lavine et al. (2012: 161) demonstrate that while partisanship is the dominant influence on vote choice for univalent partisans, their ambivalent counterparts are more affected by political issues and less by partisanship (see also Blumenstiel, 2014: 32). They show that ambivalence changes partisans' focus when performing decision-making tasks and impacts partisanship. Blumenstiel (2014: 32) presents additional evidence that ambivalent voters rely much less on their partisanship. Ambivalence also leads voters to make up their minds later (Mutz, 2002; Lavine, 2001, 2004: 100; Nir, 2005; Plischke, 2014: 213; Schmitt-Beck & Partheymüller, 2014; He, 2016), destabilize the relation between vote intention and vote choice (Lavine, 2004: 106) making the vote intention less predictable (Lavine, 2001; Blumenstiel, 2014).

The objective of this dissertation is to investigate how ambivalence influences vote switching at elections. Whilst some literature has explored the influence of ambivalence on vote switching, Thornton (2009, 2014), Hillygus and Shields (2008), Lavine et al. (2012) and Smidt (2017) are the only scholars dealing with this topic so far. Support for the impact of ambivalence comes from Smidt (2017: 375) demonstrating that for the time-period between 1957 to 2004 ambivalence leads to a higher probability of switching. Lavine et al. (2012) find that ambivalent partisanship facilitates three types of electoral volatility: defection, ticket-splitting and third-party voting. Hillygus and Shields (2008) find that defection strongly increases among ambivalent or cross-pressured partisans if they are exposed to campaign information on relevant issues to them. Conversely, Thornton's (2014: 193) results rarely show significant effects for ambivalence on switching. Thornton's (2009: 103) previous work also yields some counter-evidence where he does not find effects of ambivalence on switching at all. Evaluating where the mixed results come from is harder than it seems. All scholars use data from the *ANES*. They equally measure vote switching. Apart from Lavine et al. (2012), they apply the same operationalization of ambivalence. The main difference seems to be the time of investigation.

Whilst those studies which find significant effects of ambivalence mostly look at larger time periods between 1980 and 2004. Thornton's studies (2009, 2014) focus on three elections: 1980, 1992 and 2004. For those elections in 1980 and 2004, he does not find effects of ambivalence on switching. In 1980, this might be explained by the fact that Ronald Reagan (Republican Party) clearly dominated Jimmy Carter (Democratic Party) in the election and voters rarely have been ambivalent between both candidates. Apart from those mixed results, we see only work done in the two-party context of the United States. Its application to the multi-party context is the aim of this paper.

3 Ambivalence in a Multi-Party Setting

3.1 Sources of Ambivalent Attitudes

First of all, it is important and necessary to investigate the question why people become political ambivalent. I argue that this is relevant because voters are more likely to hold ambivalent attitudes in multi-party systems. More generally speaking, people can become ambivalent based on a variety of cognitive processes provoked by internal and external sources. Internal sources are characteristics of individuals influencing the development of ambivalent attitudes. They therefore vary across all individuals. One internal source is the information affinity, people who enjoy systematically processing information are more likely to be ambivalent (Rudolph & Popp, 2007). External sources are factors beyond the individual, such as electoral contexts or networks. The focus of this paper is the party system: Comparing two-party systems with multi-party systems.

3.2 External Source: Party System

The impact of ambivalence is mostly investigated in the American two-party system (Lavine, 2001; Mutz, 2002; Lavine, 2004; Basinger & Lavine, 2005; Nir, 2005). Nevertheless, there are studies where ambivalence is investigated in different contexts (Schoen, 2010; Schmitt-Beck & Partheymüller, 2014; Blumenstiel, 2014; Plischke, 2014; Blumenstiel & Gavras, 2015;

Steenbergen, 2020). Where ambivalence is investigated in the German multi-party context, scholars acknowledge that the ambivalence measure developed in the American context is not easily transferable to multi-party systems (Blumenstiel, 2014: 30; Schoen, 2010) but they do not theoretically discuss or try to get to the bottom of ambivalence or its measure in this context (Blumenstiel, 2014; Schmitt-Beck & Partheymüller, 2014; He, 2016). They apply the same operationalization or partly adjust it. Steenbergen (2020) also recognizes this problem and develops a first more detailed conceptualization and operationalization of ambivalence in multi-party systems. My paper follows a similar aim but it does not rely exclusively on the work of Steenbergen (2020) who mainly focuses on partisan ambivalence.

The influence of ambivalence on vote switching is likewise mainly investigated in the US context (Thornton, 2009, 2014; Hillygus & Shields, 2008; Lavine et al., 2012; Smidt, 2017). However, according to Thornton (2009: 125; 2014: 196), presidential elections in the US might be the least likely scenario in which one could expect ambivalence to influence voting behavior due to polarization. Thornton (2009: 126) suggests pushing the frontiers and to explore ambivalence voting in more contexts (see also Pappi, 1996: 256; Keele & Wolak, 2008; Johnson, 2014). Keele and Wolak (2008) show that electoral context matters in determining ambivalence. Johnson (2014) demonstrates that effects of partisan ambivalence on turnout differ among two-party and multi-party systems. Based on this, I want to investigate the impact of ambivalence on vote switching in multi-party systems.

I argue that with an increasing number of alternatives, chances of holding ambivalent attitudes increases and the more cognitively complex the decision-making process becomes (Plischke, 2014; Lau, 2003: 45). An increasing number of alternatives, whether parties or leaders, leads to an increasing size of individuals' consideration sets (Wilson, 2008; Johnson, 2014: 509; Oscarsson & Rosema, 2019). Consideration sets are built when voters apply heuristics to reduce their choice sets (Wilson, 2008: 162; Lavine et al., 2012; Oscarsson & Rosema, 2019). Choice sets consist of all viable alternatives. Whilst the choice set in two-party

systems is a maximum of two, the choice set size of individuals in multi-party systems is larger by default (Oscarsson & Rosema, 2019: 257). The increasing number of parties in multi-party systems leading to larger choice sets affects individuals' consideration sets in two ways: The ideological distance may decrease and trade-offs between assessment dimensions become increasingly complicated. Both lead to larger consideration sets in multi-party systems and hence, an increased decision difficulty.

Starting with the first aspect: Ideological distance. The ideological distance between parties is affected by the number of parties and the polarization of the party system. It is likely that the more parties compete, the ideologically closer they become and the greater becomes their overlaps in content (Plischke, 2014: 125). However, a high number of parties does not necessarily mean that distances between parties are small. Dalton (2008) focusing on party system polarization shows that party systems with relatively similar numbers of parties may vary widely in the parties' ideological positioning resulting in a variety of possible party distances. For example, all parties in a political system could position around the ideological right – leading to a very small difference between those parties – but they could also distribute among the complete left-right continuum resulting in larger differences between them. Differences between parties hence vary across countries. We thus need to consider the number of parties together with its party system's polarization. If, however, ideological distances become smaller in multi-party systems, the overlaps in content also mean that parties with similar programs can cooperate if they pursue common goals. They may even be forced to form coalitions to achieve government majorities (Schoen, 2010). In coalition governments, parties cannot implement their pure programs, but must make compromises that further reduce the discriminatory power of the two coalition partners' perceptions (Plischke, 2014: 125). This makes certain parties appear more similar or even give the impression of parties belonging to the same political camp (Plischke, 2014: 125). The comparison of the positions of the parties

would therefore not reveal too many differences, from whose evaluation a decision could be derived.

Complicated trade-offs between assessment dimensions display the second manner of why consideration sets could be expected to be larger in multi-party systems. I focus on two types of assessment dimensions: (1) between favorite party and potential coalition partners and (2) between a party and its leader. Starting with the first one, a voter may become conflicted if he shows a clear party favorite but strongly disagrees with a potential coalition partner. The voter may then consider voting for the second most liked party. If the voter's dislike is strong enough, it may lead to vote for this party. This can only be observed in multi-party systems. The second trade-off type deals with party-leader ambivalence. For instance, the leader of party A may be preferred to the leader of party B, while party B is assigned a higher competence or more liked than party A. This voter is likely to find himself in an ambivalent decision situation. The conflict between those two assessment dimensions is highly relevant for multi-party systems in which leaders play an important role because leaders and parties are often not seen as unit but evaluated differently. Leaders mostly reflect and strongly overlap with their party's agendas but they are likely to develop and occupy different emphases within those agendas leading to circumstances where leaders and parties are evaluated differently.

If individuals in multi-party systems then have larger consideration sets, they face a more difficult decision task than individuals in two-party systems. A higher decision difficulty comes along with voters being more likely to hold ambivalent attitudes. I thus expect voters in multi-party systems to be more likely to hold ambivalent attitudes than voters in two-party systems.

3.3 Ambivalence and Vote Switching

After having looked at the party system influencing ambivalence, I examine how ambivalence affects vote switching. This is what I expect. If voters are ambivalent between the party that they voted for in the last election and another party, their voting intentions are less stable

(Thornton, 2009). Depending on how voters gather or encounter information, their vote choice is likely to be delayed (Plischke, 2014; Blumenstiel & Plischke, 2014). If voters are not able to solve their ambivalent decision situation until the election, the likelihood to switch parties increases (Thornton, 2009: 76). In contrast, non-ambivalent voters are expected to show an early vote choice and stable vote intentions. Hence, they should be less likely to switch parties. However, an individual must not necessarily be ambivalent to switch parties. A voter that was highly disappointed of the performance of the party he voted for in the last election, might decide to vote for another one even though that he does not show ambivalent attitudes. Ambivalence therefore increases the likelihood of vote switching but is not a necessary determinant of vote switching.

Besides the fact that voters are more likely to be ambivalent in multi-party systems and that those previously discussed points also ease party switching, the psychological threshold of switching is lower in multi-party systems. Voters must do smaller steps as switching to another party that is relatively (ideologically) close to the other similarly liked party might include only making 'half steps' (Schoen, 2004: 11). Whereas parties in two-party systems are more polarized and distinct implying that voters must make 'larger steps' (Schoen, 2004: 11). This increases the likelihood that the impact of ambivalence kicks in in multi-party systems. I derive hypothesis *H1* to test this impact of ambivalence on vote switching as it was done in the American context.

H1: The more ambivalent a voter is the more likely that he switches parties at two consecutive elections.

In a second step, I contribute to the literature by differentiating between partisans and nonpartisans. Whilst the previous literature mainly focuses on partisans, I argue that voters without a stable party identification should be especially likely to be affected by ambivalence. I expect the effects of ambivalence on switching to be stronger for nonpartisans than for partisans. Whilst partisans have a tight relation and strong emotional attachment, they should,

hence, be less likely to be affected by ambivalence and more likely to stay with the party that they have a connection to. Whereas nonpartisans do not have such heuristics like party cues that can help them to solve their ambivalent decision dilemma. Nonpartisans are then also more likely to engage in deliberative information strategies because party cues cannot guide their information search or ease their information interpretation and evaluation. Furthermore, partisans and nonpartisans are likely to differ in their choice sets (Tillmann, 2008). Whilst both should have the same number of viable alternatives, partisans are expected to show a strongly reduced choice set compared to nonpartisans. *H2* tests whether the impact of ambivalence on vote switching is stronger among nonpartisans than partisans.

H2: The effects of ambivalence on vote switching are stronger for nonpartisans than for partisans.

4 Research Design

For this research agenda, I unpack the above-described issues by using data from the *GLES*. The two datasets of interest are the Short-term Campaign Panel 2013 (Rattinger et al., 2016) and 2017 (Roßteutscher et al., 2019). I use this data based on three reasons. First, the ambivalence measure that I intend to compare to the American studies is rarely included in any other election study besides the *GLES*. Second, Germany is a well-established multi-party system that offers the party menu that I am interested in for investigating the impact of ambivalence. Third, Germany, similarly to other European counties, is experiencing a relatively high electoral volatility.

As the name of the panel already indicates, the Short-term Campaign Panel is a campaign panel allowing for an analysis of individuals' behavior over the course of the campaign. In the campaign panel 2013, respondents are interviewed up to seven times during the campaign within short intervals - six times before and once afterwards the election. In the campaign panel 2017, respondents are interviewed up to nine times - seven times before and

two afterwards the election. The target population were all German citizens who were eligible to vote in the German federal election. Sampling quotas were based on sex, age and education. As this panel is an online study, it was not possible to draw a random sample. Therefore, the campaign panel mostly represents young and internet-oriented people as those are present in online panels. As this group differs from the total population, generalizability is limited.

The dependent variable *vote switching* is a dummy variable indicating whether a respondent voted in the German federal election in 2009 and 2013, or 2013 and 2017 for the same party, coded as 0, or whether he voted for two different parties, coded as 1. This variable is based on the second vote where voters vote for party lists rather than candidates from their local constituencies. Due to the binary dependent variable, I use logistic regressions.

Turning to the independent variable *ambivalence*. The focus of this paper is to capture ambivalence between *multiple* parties. To measure *ambivalence*, I use feeling thermometer ratings of a respondent's two highest rated parties or leaders (Johnson, 2014). On the feeling thermometer, respondents scale parties and leaders on an 11-point scale from strongly dislike to strongly like. Based on the rating of the two most liked parties (leaders), an index[1] is calculated demonstrating respondents' degree of ambivalence. Consequently, I do not follow the better-established ambivalence measurement of previous studies. Those previous studies used respondents' answers of like and dislike open-ended questions about parties or leaders (Lavine, 2001; Basinger & Lavine, 2005; Thornton, 2009, 2014; Blumenstiel & Plischke, 2014; Smidt, 2017). In those questions, respondents can indicate up to five positive and negative considerations about the same object. Based on their answers, an index[2] is calculated accordingly to which respondents are classified in being ambivalent or not (Thompson et al., 1995).

[1] Ambivalence = $(\text{Party}_A + \text{Party}_B) / 2 - (|\text{Party}_A - \text{Party}_B|)$

[2] Ambivalence = $((P_R + N_D)/2 + (P_D + N_R)/2)/2 - |(P_R + N_D)/2 - (P_D + N_R)/2|$

However, the use of the feeling thermometer is motivated by two key aspects. First, the feeling thermometer allows to conclude about a respondent's overall evaluation of a party or leader. The valence of positive and negative considerations should automatically be incorporated in the thermometer ratings. In contrast, the pure number of positive and negative reactions used in previous work reveals nothing about the salience of those answers and may lead to wrong estimation of ambivalence (Lavine, 2001: 917-18; Steenbergen, 2020: 160). Second, feeling thermometer ratings are included in a lot of surveys across the globe. In contrast, questions asking for positive and negative evaluations are rarely included in any election study besides the *ANES* hindering scholars to investigate the impact of ambivalence in other electoral contexts. Based on both aspects, I argue that we should use the ratings of the feeling thermometer. Measuring ambivalence with ratings of the feeling thermometer is not new and already done by Johnson (2014). Whilst the Griffin formula (Thompson et al., 1995) is mainly calculated using the number of positive and negative reactions, the formula provides an appropriate comparative measure of ambivalence for the feeling thermometer as well (Johnson, 2014: 509).

Finally, I include several control variables such as socio-demographic measures like *age, gender, education* and *income* (Johnson, 2014). *Age* is a continuous variable. The dummy *gender* is coded as 1, if the respondent is a female, and coded as 0, if male. *Education* is an ordinal variable that is coded from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) education. *Income* is coded from 1 to 13 where 1 is the lowest and 13 the highest income category. Furthermore, I add *strength partisanship* that measures the strength of voters' partisan attachments as stronger partisans should be less likely to switch even if they are ambivalent (Thornton, 2014). It is coded from 0 (non) to 5 (very strong). *Bad economy* is measured by the individuals' perceptions of the general economic situation. This is an important control variable because dissatisfied voters who voted for the incumbent government in the last election should be less likely to vote for the incumbent government in the current election (Fiorina, 1981). *Bad economy* is a dummy variable coded as

1, if a respondent voted for the incumbent government in the last election and evaluates the economy as neither good nor bad, bad, or very bad. It is coded as 0, if a respondent did not vote for the incumbent government in the last election or if he voted for it but evaluates the economy as good or very good. Political sophistication is measured by respondents' *political interest* and *political knowledge* (Johnson, 2014; Thornton, 2014). These two variables capture how likely it is that voters receive political information, how interested they are in learning about politics and how able they are to assimilate and organize those information (Luskin, 1990). *Political interest* is another ordinal variable that is coded from 1 (highest) to 4 (lowest) political interest. *Political knowledge* is a dummy coded as 1, if a respondent knows the difference between the German first and second vote and 0, if not. Political dissatisfaction is another control variable that is measured by the two variables *satisfaction with democracy* scale and *political efficacy* indicators. *Satisfaction with democracy* is coded from 1 (very satisfied) to 5 (not satisfied). *Political efficacy* is a continuous variable with higher values indicating a lower efficacy[3]. Finally, I add a dummy *election loser* that captures whether the respondent was belonging to the losing side at the previous election. This might influence whether he thinks about switching to another party because he wants to be one the winning side and it might also make him more ambivalent.

As hypothesis *H2* tests an interaction effect, I need to include one additional dummy variable. *Partisanship* differentiates between strong partisans and non-partisans. Because the number of non-partisans is very low and this would result in a very small group if we would

[3] The variable consists of the following five items: *Politicians care about what ordinary people think*, *politicians try to get in close contact with the population*, *I have the confidence to take active part in a political discussion*, *I am perfectly able to understand and assess important political questions,* and *in a democracy it is the duty of all citizens to vote regularly*. The five answer categories are strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree. For each item, the scale was reversed. Then the items were summed up and divided by five. This results in an index that is used in this paper.

compare all partisan groups against non-partisans, it is coded as 1, if the partisanship is fairly strong or very strong and coded as 0, if nonexistent [4].

To assess the robustness of my findings, I follow three steps. First, I do not only look at the 2013 German federal election but at the 2017 elections as well to back up that the results are no artificial finding of one election. Second, I compare the feeling thermometer measurement of Johnson (2014) to the established like-dislike open-ended measure of Basinger and Lavine (2005). For doing so, I replicate the first model with an item from the *GLES* Short-term Campaign Panel 2013 that is highly comparable to the item used for the ambivalence measure of Basinger and Lavine (2005)[5]. The item asks for respondents' positive and negative feelings for the five largest parties in 2013 (Union, SPD, FDP, Greens and Left), and enables me to replicate and evaluate the results of the novel measurement compared to the established one. Using this item, I calculate the continuous and binary ambivalence measure based on Basinger and Lavine's (2005) approach. This means that I calculate their ambivalence index[6] (continuous measure) and their classification into ambivalent and non-ambivalent (binary measure). In their binary classification, respondents with positive index values (from the continuous measure) are classified as ambivalent and respondents with negative values are classified as non-ambivalent. I replicate the binary measure as it is used in most previous studies although the binary classification into ambivalent and non-ambivalent based on the index is problematic. Probing the index with a variety of combinations of positive and negative answers shows that the index mostly results in positive values and hence, automatically in a predominant classification of ambivalent respondents. This disenables a good comparison. I assume that this one-sided distribution of the variable will likely lead to nonsignificant results in the analysis.

[4] For 2013, including all types of partisans would end in 85.65 percent of partisans against 14.35 percent of non-partisans. For 2017, the gap would even be larger resulting in 89.73 percent of partisans and 10.27 percent of non-partisans.

[5] The measure is however slightly different because it asks respondents about the *strength* of their negative and positive feelings, and not to list positive and negative considerations.

[6] Ambivalence = $((P_R + N_D)/2 + (P_D + N_R)/2)/2 - |(P_R + N_D)/2 - (P_D + N_R)/2|$

Therefore, I argue that relying on the continuous measurement is more appropriate. Third, I run additional analyses on data of the *ANES* to validly compare my findings of the German multi-party system to the American two-party system. For doing so, I use the Time Series Cumulative Data File of the *ANES* including survey data of about 60,000 respondents on all elections between 1948 to 2016. The first analysis investigates the effects of party ambivalence on vote switching based on the measurement of the feeling thermometer (*H1*). Leader ambivalence cannot be tested as leader evaluations were not asked. In the second analysis, I investigate whether the effects of ambivalence on switching differ among partisans and nonpartisans (*H2*). As the feeling thermometer was not included before 1996, both analyses focus on elections between 1996 and 2016[7]. The third and fourth analyses on the *ANES* replicate the established continuous and dummy ambivalence measures as used in previous American studies. As the open-ended like-dislike questions are only included until 2004, the third and fourth analyses investigate elections between 1980 and 2004[8]. Regarding the control variables, I included as many control variables compared to the German analyses as possible. Unfortunately, *satisfaction with democracy, political knowledge, political efficacy* and *election loser* could not be included.

5 Analysis

I start by looking at the descriptive statistics of the Short-term Campaign Panels 2013 and 2017 (Table 1). The sample consists of 6,346 observations. It includes only voters who show no missing data on the dependent variable, at least data on one ambivalence measure and each control variable. The first three rows of Table 1 illustrate that the sample consists of about 40 percent of *vote switchers* and 60 percent of loyal voters in 2013 and 35 percent of *vote switchers*

[7] The 2012 US presidential election is not included in the analysis because data on respondents' previous vote choice in 2008 is not available.
[8] Elections before 1980 could not be included in the analysis because of missing data on the control variables.

and 65 percent of loyal voters in 2017. This fits relatively well with the actual portion of, for example, about 33 percent vote switchers at the German federal election in 2013 (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung). The two ambivalence measures *party ambivalence* and *leader ambivalence* range from -5 to 10. Both show an average of about 5 indicating that most voters show a relatively high value of ambivalence. The standard deviation of both is about 3

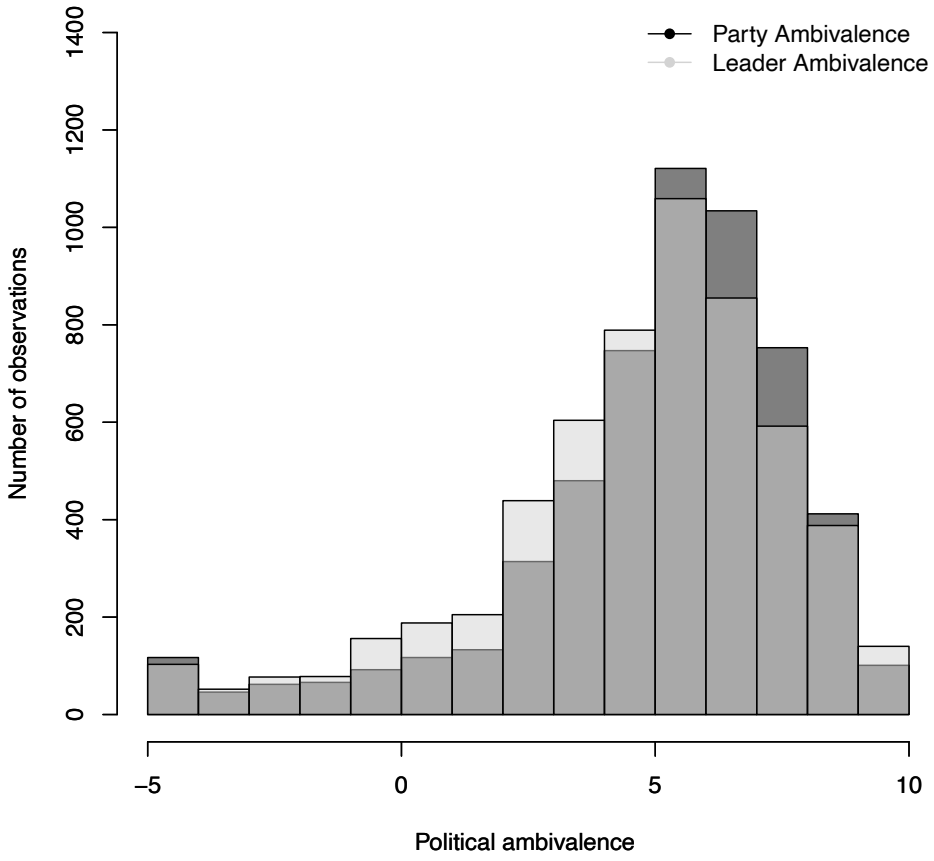
Table 1: Descriptive statistics of all relevant variables of the Short-term Campaign Panels 2013 and 2017

Statistic	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Vote Switch 2009/2013	1,904	0.4	0.5	0	1
Yes	756 (39.71%)				
No	1,148 (60.29%)				
Vote Switch 2013/2017	4,442	0.4	0.5	0	1
Yes	1,564 (35.21%)				
No	2,878 (64.79%)				
Party ambivalence	5,595	5.2	2.9	-5.0	10.0
Leader ambivalence	5,725	4.9	2.9	-5.0	10.0
Basinger & Lavine's (2005) continuous ambivalence measure	1,374	2.0	0.8	-1.0	4.5
Basinger & Lavine's (2005) dummy ambivalence measure	1,374	1.0	0.1	0.0	1.0
Ambivalent	1,343 (97.74%)				
Non-ambivalent	31 (2.26%)				
Gender	6,346	0.4	0.5	0	1
Age	6,346	52.2	13.4	19	89
Education	6,346	3.5	1.2	1	5
Income	6,346	7.1	2.4	1	13
Economic situation	6,346	0.1	0.3	0	1
Strength partisanship	6,344	3.4	1.4	0.0	5.0
Partisanship	3,718	0.8	0.4	0.0	1.0
Partisan	2,989 (80.39%)				
Non-partisan	729 (19.61%)				
Satisfaction democracy	6,346	2.6	0.9	1	5
Political interest	6,346	3.8	0.9	1	5
Political knowledge	6,346	0.6	0.5	0	1
Political efficacy	6,346	2.8	0.6	1.0	5.0
Election loser	6,346	0.5	0.5	0	1

Note: The total number of observations is 6,346. 1,904 observations from the 2013 panel and 4,442 from the 2017 panel. The dataset includes only observations that show no missing data on the dependent variable, at least one ambivalence measure or any control variable. The two ambivalence measures that are based on Basinger and Lavine (2005) show a relatively low number of observations (1,374) because the respective survey questions were only included in the 2013 panel.

demonstrating that there is quite some variation in the variables' distributions. In Figure 1, we find additional support for this. Most voters show a value higher than zero. This supports the argument that a binary classification of ambivalence into ambivalent and non-ambivalent is not reasonable and implies a huge loss of information. If we keep the information, we may show that variation explains differences in the likelihood of switching. It also reveals that many German voters seem to be ambivalent. It thus also demonstrates that investigating the impact of ambivalence is a highly relevant issue as it affects many voters. When looking at *Basinger & Lavine's (2005) dummy ambivalence measure*, we see that about 98 percent of the German voters are classified as being ambivalent and only about 2 percent as non-ambivalent. This has important implications for the later analysis where I expect this dummy to be insignificant based on the one-sided distribution of the variable. The dummy *partisanship* consists of about 80

Figure 1: Frequency of Leader and Party Ambivalence Based on the Feeling Thermometer (2013 and 2017)



percent of respondents being classified as (strong) partisans and 20 percent being classified as non-partisans. Most of the control variables show very well-balanced distributions.

Table 2 displays the logistic regression results of models 1 to 3. Models 1 and 2 reveal the impact of *party and leader ambivalence* on vote switching. Both continuous measures show positive highly significant effects. This indicates for both models that with increasing levels of ambivalence, voters are more likely to vote for a different party compared to the previous election, holding everything else constant. The significant effects of ambivalence in models 1 and 2 thus support the first hypothesis stating that the more leader or party ambivalent a voter is, the more likely that he switches parties. Regarding the control variables, the negative and significant effect of *age* indicates that with an increasing age the probability to switch parties decreases. *Strength partisanship* shows very strong effects. In both models, the variable is negative significant indicating that stronger partisans are less likely to switch parties, holding everything else constant. *Bad economy* is significant in both models. With the impression of a

bad economic performance, voters are more likely to switch parties, holding everything else constant. The two political dissatisfaction variables, *satisfaction with democracy* and *political efficacy*, are also significant in both models. With a decreasing satisfaction with democracy and a decreasing political efficacy, voters are more likely to switch parties, holding everything else constant. The two political sophistication indicators, *political interest* and *knowledge* are positive significant indicating that with a decreasing interest or a better knowledge voters are more likely to switch parties.

Because coefficients of logistic models are difficult to interpret, the simulation approach is very handy to get meaningful quantities of interest. Figure 2 and 3 include two such quantities of interest. Both show the predicted probabilities of vote switching given different levels of either party or leader ambivalence. Both graphs build on scenarios based on the observed value

Table 2: Regression table analyzing ambivalence in the German 2013 and 2017 federal elections

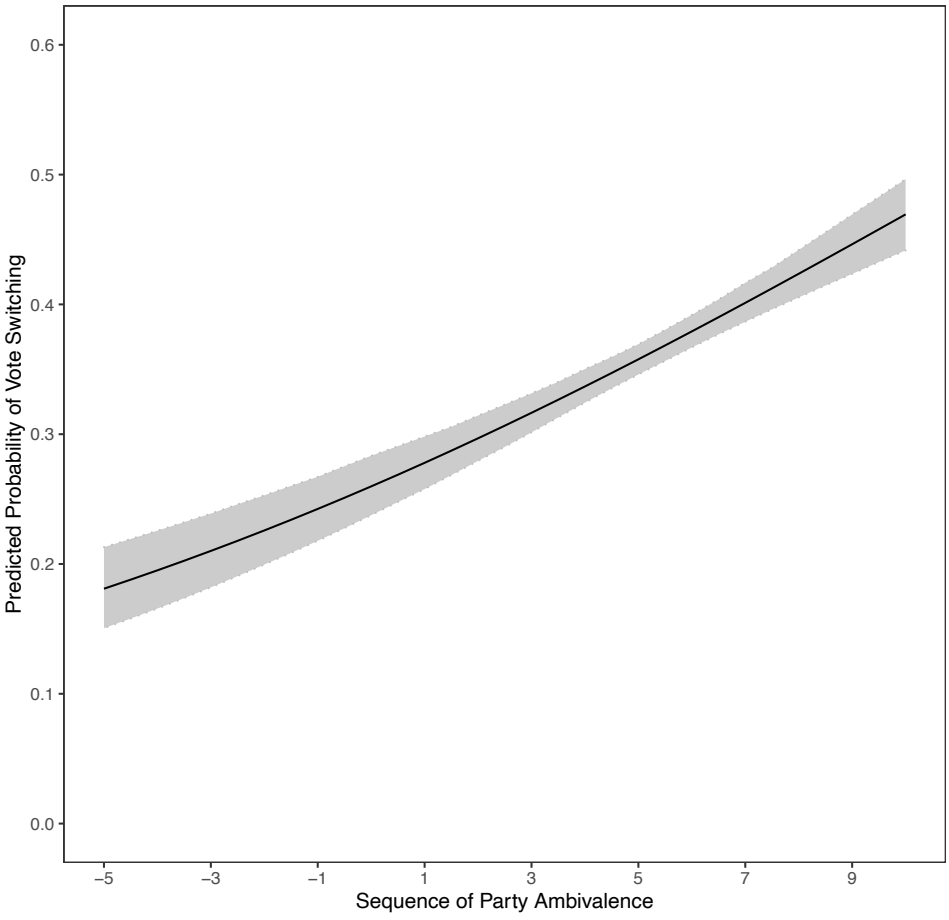
	(1) Vote Switch	(2) Vote Switch	(3) Vote Switch
Party ambivalence	**0.101*****		0.053
	(0.012)		(0.031)
Leader ambivalence		**0.064*****	
		(0.011)	
Partisanship			**-1.559*****
			(0.188)
Party ambivalence* Partisanship			**0.075***
			(0.034)
Gender	0.01	0.032	0.013
	(0.061)	(0.060)	(0.082)
Age	**-0.009*****	**-0.007****	**-0.014*****
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Education	-0.046	-0.026	-0.063
	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.037)
Income	-0.016	-0.012	**-0.034***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.017)
Bad economy	**0.233***	**0.239***	0.141
	(0.098)	(0.095)	(0.137)
Strength partisanship	**-0.349*****	**-0.353*****	
	(0.022)	(0.022)	
Satisfaction with democracy	**0.262*****	**0.174*****	**0.243*****

	(0.038)	(0.037)	(0.048)
Political interest	**0.207*****	**0.185*****	**0.138****
	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.052)
Political knowledge	**0.181****	**0.145***	**0.178***
	(0.061)	(0.060)	(0.082)
Political efficacy	**0.273*****	**0.263*****	**0.276*****
	(0.063)	(0.062)	(0.083)
Election loser	-0.087	0.009	**-0.466*****
	(0.068)	(0.067)	(0.093)
Constant	**-1.524*****	**-1.162*****	-0.546
	(0.344)	(0.330)	(0.460)
N	5594	5724	3221
AIC	6871.7	7070.8	3908.5
BIC	6957.9	7157.2	3993.5

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

approach. Whilst we see very similar effects for party and leader ambivalence, the impact of party ambivalence on vote switching is slightly stronger. Voters with the highest value on *party* ambivalence compared to voters with the lowest value are nearly about 25 percent more likely

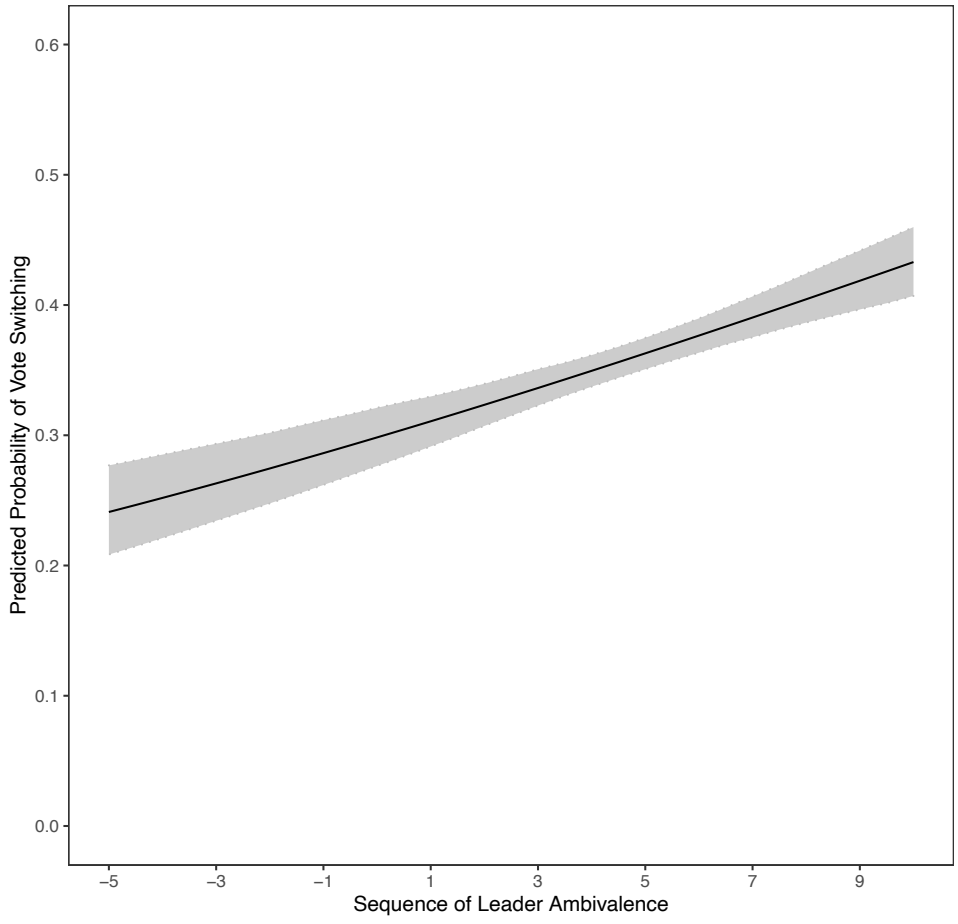
Figure 2: Predicted Probabilities of Vote Switching for Party Ambivalence



to switch parties. Voters with the highest value on *leader* ambivalence compared to voters with the lowest value are more than 20 percent more likely to switch parties. These findings are not completely surprising. They are rather reasonable, however, uncovered in the non-US context so far.

Model 3 displays the joint impact of *party ambivalence* and *partisanship* on vote switching. *Partisanship* and the interaction itself show significant effects supporting the second hypothesis. The effect of *party ambivalence* itself vanishes. The negative effect of *partisanship* shows that voters holding a party identity are less likely to switch compared to voters without partisanship. The positive interaction term indicates that the effects of ambivalence differ among nonpartisans and partisans. Figure 4 shows that nonpartisans are on average 25 percent more likely to switch than partisans. Contrary to what I expected, we see a steeper effect of

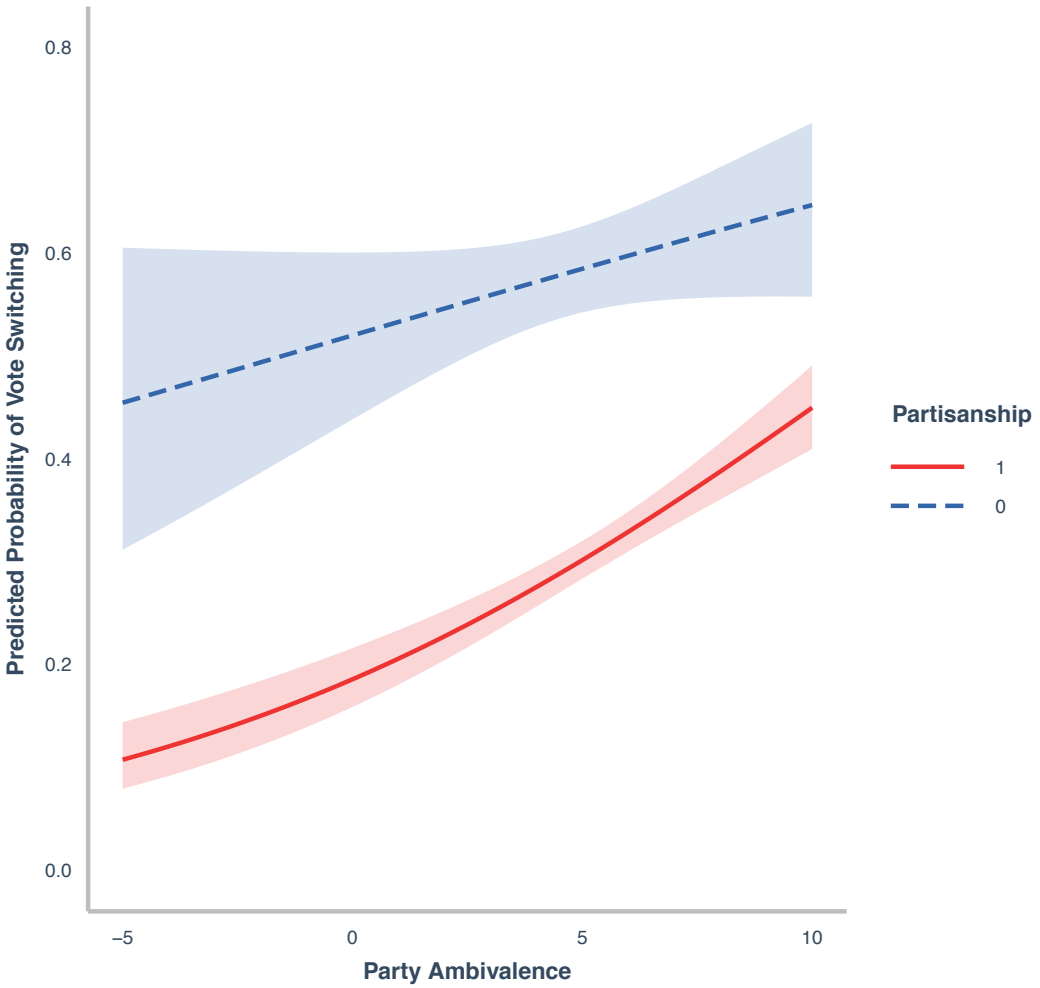
Figure 3: Predicted Probabilities of Vote Switching for Party and Leader Ambivalence



high levels of ambivalence on switching for partisans than for nonpartisans. The second hypothesis is therefore only partly supported. More in general, the findings support previous research by demonstrating that ambivalent partisan's vote choice might not be dominated by their partisanship anymore but by other factors like political issues (Lavine et al., 2012: 161; Blumenstiel, 2014: 32). Ambivalent partisans might, therefore, rely much less on partisanship and become more likely to switch (Blumenstiel, 2014: 32). For the significant control variables *age* and the political sophistication and dissatisfaction indicators, we find similar effects like in the previous two models. Voters with an increasing income or who did not vote for the government in the last election show a reduced probability of vote switching.

To sum up, the results of the two baseline models 1 and 2 successfully show that party and leader ambivalence have a substantial impact on vote switching in the German federal

Figure 4: Effects of Party Ambivalence and Partisanship on the Predicted Probability of Vote Switching



elections 2013 and 2017 and hence, a different context than the US. The paper also demonstrates that the effects differ among partisans and nonpartisans. However, more research is needed to adequately explain the differences of those effects.

Table 3 displays the logistic regression results of the first robustness check. Model 4 demonstrates that we find similar strong and highly significant effects of ambivalence on vote switching if we use the well-established ambivalence measure of Basinger and Lavine (2005). This indicates that with an increasing ambivalence voters are more likely to vote for a different party in 2013 compared to the previous election in 2009. However, these findings build on a continuous measurement of ambivalence. If we use a dummy variable as mainly applied in previous literature (Model 5), we do not find those effects. Again, we must keep in mind that only about two percent are classified as non-ambivalent and about 98 percent as ambivalent.

The results are thus not surprising. I conclude that Model 4 yields robustness for my previous findings. The significant control variables of models 4 and 5 show very similar effects to those of models 1 and 2 (Table 2).

Table 3: Robustness checks

	(4) Vote Switch 2009/2013	(5) Vote Switch 2009/2013
Basinger & Lavine's (2005) continuous ambivalence measure	**0.302***** (0.074)	
Basinger & Lavine's (2005) dummy ambivalence measure		0.276 (0.411)
Gender	-0.017 (0.125)	-0.001 (0.124)
Age	**-0.01**** (0.005)	**-0.01**** (0.005)
Education	-0.052 (0.055)	-0.047 (0.055)
Income	-0.027 (0.026)	-0.022 (0.026)
Bad economy	**0.557**** (0.269)	**0.613**** (0.268)
Strength partisanship	**-0.415***** (0.044)	**-0.429***** (0.044)
Satisfaction with democracy	**0.228***** (0.077)	**0.197***** (0.076)
Political interest	0.111 (0.076)	**0.126*** (0.076)
Political knowledge	-0.213 (0.138)	-0.218 (0.138)
Political efficacy	0.001 (0.128)	0.003 (0.127)
Election loser 2009	-0.241 (0.187)	-0.211 (0.186)
Constant	0.460 (0.694)	0.804 (0.784)
N	1373	1373
AIC	1692.6	1709.5
BIC	1760.5	1777.4

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 4 presents the logistic regression results of the second robustness check using data from the *ANES*. Model 6 provides support for the first hypothesis in the two-party context of

the US demonstrating that with increasing *party ambivalence* vote switching becomes more likely. Unfortunately, model 7 does not provide additional support for the second hypothesis as we do not find an interaction effect between *ambivalence* and *partisanship*. Models 8 and 9 show that we find significant effects of ambivalence on vote switching if we use the original

Table 4: Regression table analyzing ambivalence in the ANES

	(6) Vote Switch	(7) Vote Switch	(8) Vote Switch	(9) Vote Switch
Party ambivalence	**0.177*****	**0.179*****		
	(0.019)	(0.032)		
Partisanship		**-0.792*****		
		(0.149)		
Party ambivalence* Partisanship		0.028 (0.039)		
Basinger & Lavine's (2005) continuous ambivalence measure			**0.128*** (0.054)	
Basinger & Lavine's (2005) dummy ambivalence measure				**0.260*** (0.112)
Gender	0.104	0.086	**0.220***	0.214
	(0.115)	(0.114)	(0.111)	(0.110)
Age	0.002	0.001	**-0.013*****	**-0.013*****
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Education	**-0.098***	-0.08	**-0.150*****	**-0.151*****
	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Income	-0.049	-0.048	**-0.109***	**-0.111***
	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.055)	(0.055)
Political interest	-0.114	-0.168	-0.093	-0.096
	(0.087)	(0.086)	(0.083)	(0.083)
Bad economy	**0.964*****	**0.994*****	**1.424*****	**1.427*****
	(0.137)	(0.136)	(0.112)	(0.112)
Strength partisanship	**-0.524*****		**-0.601*****	**-0.604*****
	(0.059)		(0.059)	(0.059)
Constant	**-0.810***	**-1.247****	0.616	0.525
	(0.391)	(0.385)	(0.376)	(0.378)
N	3836	3836	3483	3483
AIC	2248.0	2289.3	2350.0	2350.2
BIC	2304.3	2351.8	2405.4	2405.6

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

continuous and dummy ambivalence measure of Basinger and Lavine (2005) that is based on the open-ended like-dislike questions. I conclude that models 6, 8 and 9 yield additional robustness for my previous findings and especially, the first hypothesis.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, I have investigated the impact of political ambivalence on vote switching. Using data from the *GLES*, I tested two hypotheses. The results offer strong support for the first hypothesis and partly support for the second hypothesis. In nearly all models, political ambivalence displayed positive significant effects. Regarding *H1*, I have shown for 2013 and 2017 that voters who are ambivalent between two parties or two leaders are more likely to vote for a different party in the current than in the previous election. Regarding *H2*, I showed that the effects of ambivalence on switching differ among (strong) partisans and nonpartisans highlighting that the explicit differentiation between both groups is beneficial for future research. However, whilst I have expected that nonpartisans show a stronger effect on switching for high levels of ambivalence than partisans, the opposite was the case. Using data from the *ANES*, I was unfortunately not able to replicate the significant effects of the interaction term for the American two-party system. The key finding is, however, that political ambivalence shows strong effects on vote switching in the multi-party system of Germany. This supports my major argument that investigating ambivalence in multi-party systems is highly relevant and should gain more attention in future research.

The analysis offered important and new insights into the impact of political ambivalence. Nevertheless, I should also acknowledge some limitations of this paper. First, this is the first study in which the relation between political ambivalence and vote switching was investigated in a multi-party system but the investigation of more multi-party contexts is needed to validly generalize those findings. Furthermore, the Short-term Campaign Panels may not build on the most representative samples due to their focus on internet users. Generalizability

is therefore limited. However, to replicate the findings from the US context, items of this study were needed acknowledging this limitation. Second, Germany might be a difficult case for investigating vote switching compared to other multi-party systems. Its electoral rule allowing voters to split their vote when they feel attracted by two parties simultaneously makes it harder to operationalize vote switching. This could lead to an underestimation of switching. Third, I did not look closer at the difference or the interplay between leader and party ambivalence. As described above, I argue that the interplay between both might be highly interesting and therefore, I recommend looking at this relation more in detail in future research.

In the end, the question remains what the results mean substantially. I argue that these findings have important implications for the practical world of politics. We see that an increasing ambivalence has important consequences for electoral stability. This means that trends, like party convergence, may further increase electoral volatility. On one hand, this is intended as parties try to catch voters of other parties. On the other hand, this also means that they lose their own voters, or perhaps even more important their partisans. Highly ambivalent partisans seem to become as volatile as nonpartisans. This indicates that increasing ambivalence may speed up the process of de-alignment that in turn relates to electoral volatility.

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