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# Split-ticket voting in German Federal elections, 1953–90: an example of sophisticated balloting?

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## Abstract

Though the German electoral system has provided the opportunity of split-ticket voting since 1953, until now there has only been mere speculation concerning the rationality of ticket-splitting. In this paper we examine the rationality thesis empirically, using data provided by the official representative electoral statistics of the Federal Republic. Modifying the Downsian notion of rational voting, rational ticket-splitting is defined in terms of coalition building and of voters' expectations of the electoral success of candidates and parties. Applying this conceptual framework, it will be shown that the combinations of first and second votes actually chosen by a majority of the German electorate can rather be conceived of as a product of accident than of tactical considerations. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Ticket-splitting; German elections; Sophisticated voting

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## 1. Introduction

Since 1953, German voters have had two votes in Federal elections; thus the opportunity to split tickets has been a feature of German Federal elections for more than 40 years. The distribution of seats between parties, however, is almost exclusively determined by the so-called second vote (*Zweitstimme*) which is given to a party, while the first vote (*Erststimme*), cast for a candidate, affects — with two minor exceptions (the so-called surplus mandates and the *Grundmandatsklausel*) — only the personal composition of parliament. This is accomplished by a mechanism of seat allocation which

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works in the following way: first, in each of the 328 local constituencies, a so-called direct mandate is awarded to the candidate who attracts a relative majority of first votes. In a second step, a total of 656 seats is allocated to the parties according to their share of the national second votes.<sup>1</sup> Then, in a decisive third step, in each state (Land) the number of direct mandates a party has received in the first round is subtracted from its total seat share; only the remaining seats are filled by candidates from the party lists. Although some observers describe the German electoral system in terms of a mixed system, it is an almost pure system of proportional representation.

There is sufficient evidence to show that voters do indeed make use of the opportunity to split tickets. In 1953, 10 per cent of voters gave their first vote to the candidate of one party, but cast their second vote for a different party. This type of voting behavior decreased throughout the 1950s to reach a minimum of 4.4 per cent in 1961, but then almost continuously increased. In 1972, 8.8 per cent of the combinations were split, and in 1980 even one in ten voters cast a split vote. During the subsequent decade the portion rose at an even higher rate resulting in a split ticket rate of 16.2 per cent at the reunification election in 1990 (cf. Schoen, 1996, pp. 37–40). Thus, in Germany, ticket-splitters still form a minority, but they are a growing one.<sup>2</sup> Compared to other countries, however, this ratio is not very impressive; in New Zealand, for example, under an electoral system very similar to the German model (cf. Vowles, 1995) in 1996 about 37% of the tickets were split (cf. Banducci et al., 1998, 1999, p. 2).

Despite the long tradition of ticket-splitting in Germany and its growing quantitative importance, this topic has been neglected by political scientists for quite a long time. There are but a few contributions addressing the simple descriptive question of the extent of ticket-splitting (see Nohlen and Schultze, 1969; Harscheidt, 1973; Jesse, 1975, 1987). With regard to the motives for ticket-splitting, the literature proves to be sparser still. Only Jesse (1988) raises the point that tickets might be split for quite irrational reasons, but does not test this suspicion systematically. Most other observers simply take it for granted that tickets are split in a rational, sophisticated way. In particular, it is very popular to consider ticket-splitting as an instrument of supporting prospective governmental coalitions in a sophisticated way (cf. e.g. Beyme, 1996, p. 88; Rudzio, 1996, p. 186). Schultze (1995, p. 346) seems to have the same in mind when he states: “The majority of ticket-splitters cast their votes based on tactical considerations and rational decision-making” (author’s translation). Similarly, Eith (1989, p. 106) claims that any vote combinations that cannot be justified by that kind of reasoning should be seen rather as an indication of protest than of ignorance, which implies that the author is still regarding at least implicitly such decisions as a result of a politically motivated calculation.<sup>3</sup> In sum, the fundamental assumption of rationality has widely been treated so far as a kind of self-evident axiom, not as a hypothesis which should be tested empirically in a systematic way. It is the aim of this contribution

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<sup>1</sup> This procedure applies only to those parties which manage to gain at least 5 per cent of the national second votes or are able to win at least three direct mandates (Grundmandatsklausel).

<sup>2</sup> Based on exit polls, in 1998 already 20 per cent of voters have been found to cast split tickets.

<sup>3</sup> Such an argument, however, runs the risk of making “rationality” a mere tautology and thereby becoming unsuitable as a criterion for an assessment of empirical behavior, see Converse (1975, p. 119).

to concentrate on the latter. The paper is divided into three sections: first, we will discuss what tactical ticket-splitting means in the context of German Federal elections. Second, we will attempt to operationalize our conceptual framework and deduct some empirically testable hypotheses. The remaining part of our paper is then dedicated to an empirical analysis of tactical ticket-splitting in Germany.

## 2. Tactical ticket-splitting in Germany: spelling out a thesis in theoretical terms

In Germany, a widespread view regards ticket-splitting as an instrument of supporting prospective governmental coalitions in a sophisticated way (cf. Beyme, 1996, p. 88; Rudzio, 1996, p. 186). The proponents of this thesis rely simply on common sense and a few empirical observations; however, there has been no attempt to analyze ticket-splitting based on theoretical reasoning. Because of this omission, it seems reasonable to try to couch this contention in a theoretically more satisfying way.

Fundamentally, it is assumed that voters' decision-making is instrumental and short-term in perspective (Downs, 1957).<sup>4</sup> It is distinct from purely expressive voting behavior because casting a vote for a specific party does not provide a utility in itself. Based on this fundamental premise, the notion of rational ticket-splitting — widespread in Germany — comprises two components. First, it draws on a tradition in political science represented by Maurice Duverger. He stated that voters anticipate the mechanical effects of electoral systems and accordingly adjust their behavior; as a result, a psychological effect of electoral systems is postulated (Duverger, 1954). In particular, it is assumed that voters do not wish to waste their votes (see, e.g., Fisher, 1973; Cox, 1997, p. 80). The second component states that, furthermore, voters seek to influence the selection of the future government. Where coalition governments are expected, tickets have to be split in regard to the partisan compatibility of the two votes. This thesis which is discussed as "portfolio maximizing" (Cox, 1997, pp. 194–198), however, is much less popular than the former one.

As noted above, German electoral law can be described as a proportional representation system supplemented by components of a plurality system. Under these very special circumstances, a rational voter trying to assess the candidates' and parties' electoral prospects has to use different sets of criteria. It is possible that a party's prospects on the two dimensions relevant for decision-making are quite disparate. If, for example, a given party is promising in one respect while its attempt in the other seems despairing, a rational voter will cast his votes for two different parties

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<sup>4</sup> Thus, long-term strategic behavior is not analyzed. An example of the latter approach is a voter's attempt to make two parties presently not willing to form a coalition inclined to do so in the future. This omission can be justified by the argument that the longer the range of time, the less likely it is that a sufficiently large number of voters will actually poll with calculation in mind. Moreover, the theoretically interesting question whether a Downsian rational voter will go to elections at all, is not addressed. Voter turnout is simply taken for granted based on the working of the feeling of citizen duty internalized by the voters. For an underpinning of this argument, see Ordeshook and Zeng (1997, p. 178), for the empirical importance of citizen duty in Germany, cf. Rattinger and Krämer (1995).

in order to affect the electoral results with both votes. Since a rational elector, however, is not only interested in electoral fortunes but also has political inclinations, he will choose among the viable parties the alternative which ranges highest in his order of preferences. Since political affiliations, normally, do not differ too dramatically between the first and the second vote, there should, furthermore, be only a minor ideological distance between the two parties chosen.<sup>5</sup>

One has to take into consideration that on the national level, Germany has been governed almost exclusively by coalition governments (Schüttemeyer, 1990, pp. 470–472).<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the assumptions concerning empirical splitting behavior have to be rephrased in terms of a restriction of the voter's calculus. This implies a complication of voters' decision-making insofar as they have to take into account the parties' coalition preferences *and* the electoral prospects of potential governments. Theoretically, this results in a large amount of information by voters due to the large number of potential coalitions. In reality, this number is lowered by the fact that German parties generally reveal their preferences concerning coalition building well *before* election day (see Eckstein, 1995, p. 122; Völk, 1989, p. 143). In addition, German parties tend to keep their promises in regard to coalition building. Thus, German voters generally do not need to deliberate about possible coalitions, but can direct their attention at the latter's arithmetical chances. Therefore, the opportunity to reduce electoral decision-making in German Federal elections to a competition between different possible coalitions restricts the number of combinations of first and second votes eligible for a rational voter. Voters who decide to split their votes because of their assessment of electoral prospects and who want, in addition, to influence the selection of government, *must* vote for two parties which are willing to form a coalition with each other after the election. Otherwise, by casting their vote for two parties not (mutually) willing to form a coalition, they would be voting for two mutually exclusive governmental alliances.

Whatever the sequence of decision-making criteria,<sup>7</sup> in German Federal elections a rational ticket-splitter of the Downsian type faces two restrictions, one concerning the incentives induced by the electoral system, the other in terms of coalition politics. In respect of the first vote, he can only choose a party whose candidate might win a majority in his constituency, while for the second vote he can take only those parties into consideration which seem to be able to enter parliament. Additionally, the two votes should not be incompatible in terms of party politics, i.e. a split ticket is rational only

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<sup>5</sup> This consideration suggests regarding the empirical patterns of ticket-splitting as an indicator of the ideological distance between the parties as perceived by the voters. The meaningfulness of this measure, however, depends heavily upon the question of whether the ticket-splitters constitute a representative sample of the electorate, and are not too different from the rest of the electorate in terms of political preferences.

<sup>6</sup> Here, for example, the phase after the German Party left the coalition with CDU/CSU in 1960 is disregarded. Similarly, mere caretaker governments are not taken into consideration.

<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, an elector can start by forming political preferences for a particular coalition government and deduct his splitting decision from the attempt to maximize this coalition's number of seats. This reasoning gains further attractiveness due to the possibility that so-called surplus mandates could be generated by widespread ticket-splitting.

insofar as it is cast for two parties which are willing to form a coalition after election day. Applying both rationality criteria simultaneously, four theoretically possible categories of ticket-splitting emerge (Fig. 1). If a voter takes both restrictions into account, we will call his behavior “rational ticket-splitting”. Observing only the electoral prospects, he acts in terms of maximizing the impact of his votes on the composition of parliament. A voter exclusively concerned with coalitions is called an “ideologue”. Finally, we assign the label “ignorant” to those voters who disregard both restrictions.

Clearly, this conceptualization of tactical ticket-splitting is not the only one possible and it is based upon quite a narrow notion of ticket-splitters’ rationality. This is a result of the thesis to be tested which has additional consequences worth mentioning. First, our analysis is focused on the occurrence of certain patterns of ticket-splitting; therefore, it differs somewhat from the conventional literature on rational or tactical voting. Furthermore, the decisions regarding the two votes are considered not to be made in isolation, rather they are supposed to be interrelated. On the one hand, as far as electoral incentives are concerned, a split ticket is called rational only if both votes meet the respective criteria. Hence, if a person casts his or her second vote for a splinter party, he or she is considered irrational in terms of the institutional arrangement, irrespective of their use of the first vote. On the other hand, the coalition argument ties both votes together in a way similar to the thesis well-known from the existing US literature on ticket-splitting; there, ticket-splitting is supposed to be a means to create moderate policies (cf. Fiorina, 1988, 1996) or to enable the functioning of a system of checks and balances (cf. Ladd, 1990). Additionally, this argument takes only government formation into account, while combinations plausible for other reasons, e.g. pure ideological proximity, are not called rational.

### 3. Measuring tactical ticket-splitting

#### 3.1. Data and operationalization

The data on which our analysis is based are generated by an instrument unique to the German political system. Between 1953 and 1990, at each Federal election in roughly 3 per cent of the electoral districts, ballots were marked according to age

Voter acts in terms of:

(b) coalition building

		rationality	irrationally
(a) electoral prospects	rationality	+/+	+/-
	irrationally	-/+	-/-

Fig. 1. Types of ticket-splitting.

and sex; at each election, a random sample of almost two million voters was taken.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the German Federal Statistical Bureau was able to provide data on the absolute frequencies of all possible split ticket patterns in federal elections between 1953 and 1990, as well as data on the gender and age of party voters and abstainers. Using this information, some problems of alternative data bases can be avoided. First, the sheer size of the sample eliminates, to all practical purposes, any sampling errors. Second, in contrast to survey data, actual voting behavior is registered, not only voters' reports; thus problems of validity and reliability do not exist. Third, the data available gives the real amount of ticket-splitting, whereas traditional aggregate data only shows the net ratio (see, for example, Dutter, 1986; Bawn, 1993; Burnham, 1965). Since actual ticket-splitting is registered at the individual level, this kind of data is well suited for an analysis of split-ticket voting (cf. Rattinger, 1992, p. 224; Falter and Schumann, 1989, pp. 12–13).

Unfortunately, representative electoral statistics present certain new problems. First, this invaluable data collection was suspended for the 1994 and 1998 elections, based on doubts concerning the secrecy of the vote. A second limitation for longitudinal analysis is caused by boundary changes to the territory covered by the representative electoral statistics. In 1953 Bavaria, Rhineland-Palatinate and the Saar were not included, and the latter was even omitted in 1957. This affects, of course, the longitudinal comparability of the data, since the label "Federal Republic" thus embraces different territories. If the missing areas were significantly different in terms of theoretically relevant dimensions, this could lead to somewhat biased results. With the reunification election of 1990, such difficulties do not arise because the data for the "old" Federal Republic can easily be calculated. Another drawback can be seen in the fact that the data are only published at the state and national levels, but not at the constituency level. This precludes the analysis of the classical Duvergerian psychological effects at the level at which they are supposed to work (Duverger, 1954; for a discussion see Riker, 1982).<sup>9</sup>

One way of measuring the rationality of ticket-splitting is to define rationality in terms of the degree of congruence between the voter's analysis of the premises for his decision-making and the actual vote. Applying this strategy, one would need data on voters' perceptions of the prospects of the parties and on parties' preferences in regard to coalition formation. Furthermore, information about voters' intentions pursued by their vote and their actual decision is needed. Unfortunately, representative electoral statistics inform us only about the objective results, not about the subjective components of that calculus. Therefore, rationality has to be measured indirectly. For each election, we will first determine which parties seemed promising to surmount one of the two electoral hurdles, and second which coalitions a voter could realistically expect at that time. Furthermore, we will introduce a uniformity assump-

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<sup>8</sup> The lowest number of voters included is about 300 000 in 1953 (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt, 1991, p. 6). This means that our analysis presented below is in any case based on more than 10 000 ticket-splitters; taking into account only the time since 1970, the number of cases even exceeds 50 000 in any election.

<sup>9</sup> In this regard, the data collected in New Zealand are superior (see Banducci et al., 1999, pp. 7–10).

tion by suggesting that all ticket-splitters had arrived at exactly the very same perceptions. This allows us to attribute any deviation from the ideal-typical rational pattern of split-ticket voting to wrong conclusions based on correctly recognized facts. Only then are we in a position to classify any theoretically possible party combination according to the scheme presented in Fig. 1.

### 3.2. *A coalition history of the Federal Republic*

Before analyzing the amount of tactical ticket-splitting, we have to decide which combinations could be regarded as rational with respect to the two relevant aspects delineated above. Let us first turn to the electoral prospects. Between 1953 and 1990, only the CDU/CSU and the SPD were able to secure a majority of candidate votes (*Erststimmen*) in local constituencies (see Jesse, 1985, p. 295). Though in the 1950s other parties like the FDP, the national-conservative Deutsche Partei (DP), and the Catholic Zentrum won some constituency seats as well, they are not regarded as promising because their successes were both temporally confined and territorially restricted to only very few areas.<sup>10</sup> For the same reason, we disregard the FDP and the PDS, the heir of the GDR state party, in 1990.<sup>11</sup>

In respect of the 5 per cent hurdle, the established *Bundestag* parties, i.e. the CDU/CSU, the SPD, and the FDP, are classified as “promising” in every election. In contrast, extremist left- and right-wing parties are not categorized as “promising”.<sup>12</sup> The exception to the rule was the PDS in 1990. The successor party of the SED could hope to obtain more than 5 per cent of the total vote in the territory of the former GDR. This would have been sufficient to enter parliament because of the unique amendment to the electoral law for the first Federal election in the reunified Germany (see Jesse, 1994, pp. 30–32). The latter holds true as well for the Alliance 90/The Greens party, a successor of the citizens’ rights movement in the GDR, and its Western cousin, the Green Party, which had turned out to be electorally successful already in the two preceding elections.<sup>13</sup>

For 1953, we assume that the 1949 coalition of CDU/CSU, FDP and DP was to be continued and the refugees’ movement GB/BHE tried to join this coalition.<sup>14</sup> By 1957,

<sup>10</sup> In 1953 the FDP gained a majority of first votes in 14, the DP in 10 and the Zentrum in one constituency; in 1957 the FDP was awarded one direct mandate, while the DP won six. Hence, in 1953, about 10 per cent and in 1957 about 3 per cent of the constituencies are not in line with the pattern indicated in Fig. 2.

<sup>11</sup> The FDP obtained a constituency seat in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt, while the PDS succeeded in one constituency in the Eastern part of Berlin and came second in a couple of constituencies.

<sup>12</sup> This assumption is even made for the NPD in 1969, since its temporary success induced by the economic downturn in 1966 and 1967 started to decline in 1968; cf. *Die Wähleranteile der Parteien*, supplement to Noelle-Neumann and Piel (1983). For a different opinion see Völk (1989, p. 87).

<sup>13</sup> For the somewhat controversial assessment of the electoral prospects in 1983, see Noelle-Neumann and Piel (1983, p. 297).

<sup>14</sup> Though the GB/BHE was supposed to be willing to join any coalition promising a chance of carrying through the refugee party’s proposals and provide its members with offices, the BHE’s leaders’ inclination towards bourgeois political views is taken as an indication of a tendency to join the so-called “Bürgerblock” coalition; cf. Stöss (1986, pp. 1434–1435).

the government coalition was reduced to a CDU/CSU and DP alliance.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, the SPD found a potential ally in the Federalist Union, which is indicated by several constituency agreements between the two parties.<sup>16</sup> While in 1961 and 1965 the voters could expect a coalition of CDU/CSU and the FDP, in 1969 the lines of coalition politics were far from being clear-cut. In spite of some confusion provoked by parties' tactics, however, a rational voter should have been able to recognize before election day that a social-liberal coalition was emerging. The FDP's support of the SPD-candidate for the Federal presidency could be regarded as a harbinger of the new coalition. The same partisan pattern holds for the following three elections in 1972, 1976 and 1980. Subsequently, the breakdown of the social-liberal alliance in 1982 led to a change back to a liberal-conservative coalition seeking a majority of votes from 1983 onwards. In the other political camp, however, a major change took place. In 1983, a coalition between the Social Democrats and the Greens seemed far from being realistic, whereas in 1987 and 1990 a red-green partnership became increasingly plausible.<sup>17</sup>

These considerations form the basis of the following classification of theoretically possible first/second-vote patterns in the elections from 1953 to 1990 (see Fig. 2).

### 3.3. *Problems with this approach*

This approach may be challenged in several respects. In regard to the assumption that all ticket-splitters are fully informed, an a priori criticism seems to be inappropriate. However since the thesis of split-ticket voters as rational actors is to be tested, such voters, by definition, should be fully informed. The other assumptions concerning the objective pursued by the vote on the one hand and the parties' perceived coalition preferences on the other are relevant in as far as only if these assumptions are met can deviations from the ideal-typical rational split-ticket pattern be attributed to voter irrationality. There are only very few cases in which it could not be decided objectively how a voter should judge the electoral situation realistically. Finally, the ticket-splitter as the personification of a politically sophisticated citizen should be aware of the ultimate goal of an election. Thus, the assumption that citizens attempt to influence by their vote the selection of government seems legitimate also.<sup>18</sup>

The indirect procedure of measurement practised in this analysis implies an infer-

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Stöss (1986, p. 1437) and Kitzinger (1960, pp. 121–130), respectively. In the latter respect, it should be noted that the FDP was not included in any constituency agreement with CDU/CSU and DP; cf. Schindler (1983, p. 109). The question of whether the FDP's attempts to delimit itself against other parties were only of a tactical nature cannot be answered here definitively.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Schindler (1983, p. 109). In the same direction points the fact that in Bavaria between 1954 and 1957, a coalition existed which consisted of SPD, Bavarian Party, FDP, and BHE.

<sup>17</sup> The thesis referring to the red-green cooperation is supported both by the Greens' willingness to tolerate a SPD minority government and by the fact that the SPD's official aim, an absolute majority, was highly controversial within that party. Furthermore, in Hesse a red-green coalition was in power from 1985 up to 1987. See Völk (1989, p. 88) and Schultze (1987, p. 10).

<sup>18</sup> Additionally, survey data indicate that some voters do actually take into consideration the parties' chances of passing the 5 per cent hurdle when deciding which party to vote for; cf. Noelle-Neumann and Piel (1983, p. 358).

1953

Second vote

First vote	Union	SPD	FDP	GB/BHE	KPD	Others
CDU/CSU		+/-	+/+	+/+	-/-	-/-
SPD	+/-		+/-	+/-	-/-	-/-
FDP	-/+	-/-		-/+	-/-	-/-
GB/BHE	-/+	-/-	-/+		-/-	-/-
KPD	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-
Others	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	

1957

Second vote

First vote	Union	SPD	FDP	GB/BHE	DP	FU	Others
CDU/CSU		+/-	+/-	-/-	+/+	-/-	-/-
SPD	+/-		+/-	-/-	+/-	-/+	-/-
FDP	-/-	-/-		-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-
GB/BHE	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-	-/-	-/-
DP	-/+	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-	-/-
FU	-/-	-/+	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-
Others	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	

1961

Second vote

First vote	Union	SPD	FDP	GDP	DRP	DFU	Others
CDU/CSU		+/-	+/+	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-
SPD	+/-		+/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-
FDP	-/+	-/-		-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-
GDP	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-	-/-	-/-
DRP	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-	-/-
DFU	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-
Others	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	

Fig. 2. Classification of theoretically possible patterns of ticket-splitting in Federal elections 1953–90 according to their degree of tactical rationality. (The notation is taken from Fig. 1. The asterisks in 1990 indicate theoretically impossible combinations.)

ence of voter motives and perceptions from observable behavior. This suggests that between both levels, there exists a clear-cut relationship in as far as any deviation from the expected pattern could be explained in terms of inadequate conclusions based on correctly perceived information. Unfortunately, this assumption is not very realistic. Any behavioral pattern can be caused by many different motives. In the

1965

## Second Vote

First vote	Union	SPD	FDP	NPD	DFU	Others
CDU/CSU		+/-	+/+	-/-	-/-	-/-
SPD	+/-		+/-	-/-	-/-	-/-
FDP	-/+	-/-		-/-	-/-	-/-
NPD	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-	-/-
DFU	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-
Others	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	

1969

## Second vote

First vote	Union	SPD	FDP	NPD	ADF	Others
CDU/CSU		+/-	+/-	-/-	-/-	-/-
SPD	+/-		+/+	-/-	-/-	-/-
FDP	-/-	-/+		-/-	-/-	-/-
NPD	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-	-/-
ADF	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-
Others	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	

1972

## Second vote

First vote	Union	SPD	FDP	NPD	DKP	Others
CDU/CSU		+/-	+/-	-/-	-/-	-/-
SPD	+/-		+/+	-/-	-/-	-/-
FDP	-/-	-/+		-/-	-/-	-/-
NPD	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-	-/-
DKP	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-
Others	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	

(Fig. 2. Continued.)

context of our analysis, this implies that “irrational” split-ticket patterns are not necessarily an indication of a voter’s political “insanity”. The vote could be motivated by other goals than influencing the selection of government, or by perceptions of the political situation different from the operationalization presented above (see Behnke, 1994, pp. 400–406). Therefore, the causes of “irregular” split-ticket voting cannot be discerned exactly. A wide variety of potential explanations of deviations from the “correct” pattern could be offered. Since, however, our data do not contain

1976

Second vote

First vote	Union	SPD	FDP	NPD	DKP	Others
CDU/CSU		+/-	+/-	-/-	-/-	-/-
SPD	+/-		+/+	-/-	-/-	-/-
FDP	-/-	-/+		-/-	-/-	-/-
NPD	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-	-/-
DKP	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-
Others	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	

1980

Second vote

First vote	Union	SPD	FDP	Greens	DKP	Others
CDU/CSU		+/-	+/-	-/-	-/-	-/-
SPD	+/-		+/+	-/-	-/-	-/-
FDP	-/-	-/+		-/-	-/-	-/-
Greens	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-	-/-
DKP	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-
Others	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	

1983

Second vote

First vote	Union	SPD	FDP	Greens	DKP	Others
CDU/CSU		+/-	+/+	+/-	-/-	-/-
SPD	+/-		+/-	+/-	-/-	-/-
FDP	-/+	-/-		-/-	-/-	-/-
Greens	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-	-/-
DKP	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-
Others	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	

(Fig. 2. Continued.)

any information on the irrationality of voting intentions, in the following sections we will rely primarily on an analysis of the factual premises (for this concept cf. Simon, 1976, pp. 45–46), i.e. the information concerning parties' viability and coalitional preferences on which voters' decision-making is based.

1987

## Second vote

First vote	Union	SPD	FDP	Greens	NPD	Others
CDU/CSU		+/-	+/+	+/-	-/-	-/-
SPD	+/-		+/-	+/+	-/-	-/-
FDP	-/+	-/-		-/-	-/-	-/-
Greens	-/-	-/+	-/-		-/-	-/-
NPD	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-
Others	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	

1990

## Second vote

First vote	Union	SPD	FDP	Greens	B 90/Gr	PDS	REP	Others
CDU/CSU		+/-	+/+	+/-	+/-	+/-	-/-	-/-
SPD	+/-		+/-	+/+	+/+	+/-	-/-	-/-
FDP	-/+	-/-		-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-
Greens	-/-	-/+	-/-		*	-/-	-/-	-/-
B 90/Gr	-/-	-/+	-/-	*		-/-	-/-	-/-
PDS	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-	-/-
REP	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-		-/-
Others	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-	

(Fig. 2. Continued.)

#### 4. Tactical ticket-splitting from 1953 to 1990: hypotheses and empirical findings

##### 4.1. Hypotheses

The above discussion suggests that ticket-splitting need not be constantly rational over time; the level of rationality should vary according to the information available concerning the factual premises of decision-making. In the course of the cognitive mobilization of the electorate beginning in the 1960s (Dalton, 1996, p. 21) which led to an improved level of awareness on the demand side of the political market, *ticket-splitting should have become more rational.*

Separating both dimensions of decision-making, more detailed hypotheses can be derived. Concerning the electoral system, it can be assumed that *the longer an electoral law is in effect, the larger the share of the electorate acquainted with it, since*

each election provides the voters with another opportunity to acquire the electoral rules. Because of the widely stable distribution of vote shares in the constituencies and only marginal shifts on the federal level, it can be presumed that *the ability to assess the parties' electoral prospects has increased over time*, too. Thus, with regard to the implications of the electoral system, *rationality of split-ticket voting should have increased from election to election*.

Furthermore, party strategies to increase the awareness of “correct” ticket-splitting should be taken into account. Therefore, *campaigns aimed at encouraging voters to split tickets in a certain way should be accompanied by a high rate of vote combinations which are correct in terms of the incentives generated by the electoral laws*.

Concerning the coalitional preferences of parties as perceived by the electorate, a similar training effect can be expected. The longer a party alliance lasts, the larger the number of voters who are aware of it. Besides their duration, the unambiguity of the coalitional preferences of the parties appears relevant. Parties which are undecided or which quarrel internally about their coalitional preferences do not provide voters with reliable information for their decision-making. Furthermore, it seems plausible that the number of parties wanting to form a coalition is important because any uncommitted party constitutes a further element of uncertainty for the voter's calculus. Thus, *an increase in the share of parties committed to forming a coalition should be associated with a growth in the level of rationality of ticket-splitting*.

Finally, a durable electoral system and a highly stable distribution of the vote coincide with sharply changing preferences with regard to coalition politics. This suggests that voters should have internalized the former much better than the latter. *The share of split tickets rational in coalitional terms should be systematically exceeded by the proportion of vote combinations which are correct in terms of the electoral system*. Information on the frequencies of the four theoretically possible types of ticket-splitting can be gathered by applying both criteria simultaneously. As a result, when the requirements for the application of both kinds of considerations are met, one can expect an especially large percentage of fully rational split ticket patterns.

#### 4.2. Empirical test

An initial look at our data shows that on average between 1953 and 1990 about 30% of the tickets are split in an entirely rational way. Almost 15% are rational in terms of coalition politics only, whereas about 30% are rational in regard to the electoral system as the only criterion of decision-making. Finally, about a quarter of the combinations of first and second votes seem to be totally unaffected by any considerations concerning the electoral system or the composition of a prospective government (Table 1). Separating both dimensions shows that on average about 65% of the ticket-splitters apply electoral laws correctly, whereas almost 50% pay attention to potential coalitions (Table 2).

Behind these average results, quite dramatic fluctuations can be observed over time (Table 2). Let us first turn to combinations which are correct in terms of the electoral system. Starting with an absolute minimum of 23% in 1953, the percentage

Table 1  
Empirical frequencies of the types of ticket-splitting, 1953–90 (per cent of split tickets)

Election	Type of ticket-splitting			
	Tactically rational	Rational in terms of the electoral system	Rational in terms of coalition building	Irrational
1953	14.3	8.9	30.3	46.5
1957	10.5	37.9	17.0	34.7
1961	24.1	32.3	11.5	32.1
1965	30.0	39.6	10.3	20.2
1969	17.9	42.9	7.9	31.4
1972	51.8	23.5	14.7	10.1
1976	37.6	29.2	17.9	15.3
1980	37.1	28.0	15.1	19.8
1983	35.8	43.6	1.5	19.1
1987	45.4	22.5	14.2	17.9
1990	27.5	25.1	16.4	31.1
West Germany	30.2	26.1	17.0	26.7
East Germany and Berlin	19.8	22.3	14.9	43.0
1953–90 (West)	30.4	30.4	14.3	24.9

Table 2  
Frequencies of rational ticket-splitting in terms of electoral system and coalition building (per cent of split tickets)

Election	Rational in terms of the electoral system	Rational in terms of coalition building
1953	23.2	44.6
1957	48.4	27.4
1961	56.4	35.7
1965	69.5	40.2
1969	60.7	25.7
1972	75.3	66.4
1976	66.8	55.6
1980	65.1	52.2
1983	79.4	37.3
1987	68.0	59.6
1990	52.5	43.9
West Germany	56.3	47.2
East Germany and Berlin	42.1	34.7

of rational combinations continuously increased to 70% in 1965. This development can be interpreted as evidence of the hypothesis that in the course of elections, voters actually learned to handle the electoral system in a more sophisticated way. After a decline in 1969, the amount of rational combinations reached 75% in 1972 before decreasing again in 1976 and 1980. In 1983, rational combinations made up almost 80% of split tickets, the elections of 1987 and 1990 fell clearly behind these results, the latter being at the same level as the elections of the 1960s. If only the mere knowledge of electoral mechanisms accounted for this development over time, such a decline would seem implausible. We should therefore look for additional mechanisms.

The negative deviations in 1969 and 1990 suggest that misperceptions of electoral prospects might explain the development. What may sound plausible for the 1969 election where the right-wing NPD was about to enter the Bundestag does not apply at all to the 1990 election. There was no third party which could have acquired 5 per cent of the second votes. Hence, misperceptions do not suffice in explaining empirical findings adequately.

Turning to 1972 and 1983 as exceptions most wanting of an explanation, there are some common features of both elections in regard to the political constellation. In both cases, one of the coalition parties faced the danger of being voted out of Parliament, and, in consequence, a government in office was confronted with possible dismissal. In order to prevent this, the ruling coalitions campaigned heavily for ticket-splitting by propagating their versions of “correct” combinations of first and second votes. In light of this mechanism, the low level of ticket-splitting in 1990 can be explained by the fact that no party in this election explicitly called for ticket-splitting, and that for many voters, the outcome of the election seemed not to be a very close one, which in turn led them to regard careful ticket-splitting as unnecessary.

To sum up, until the 1960s the variation of ticket-splitting labeled as “correct” in terms of the electoral system can be explained by improved knowledge of the German electoral system. After this initial phase, characterized by the introduction of the two-vote system and gradual consolidation of the German party system, this mechanism lost ground<sup>19</sup> and, in its place, political factors gained in importance. The impression that the existence of a government could depend upon “correct” ticket-splitting seems in particular to increase the inclination of voters to take the mechanisms of the electoral system into account.

Turning to coalition preferences, on a lower level a much more irregular pattern of development emerges. In 1953, about 45 per cent of ticket-splitters chose reasonable combinations. Up to the beginning of the 1960s, this proportion fell at times clearly below this level, whereas since 1972 the 45 per cent level has been passed regularly.

The duration of a coalition option does not affect the likelihood that it is actually taken into account. From 1972 to 1980 and from 1987 to 1990, the constellation of

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<sup>19</sup> This finding supports the argument that only in the elections immediately following the introduction of a new electoral system can learning effects account for differences. Similarly, expectations concerning the electoral prospects of political parties seem to be an adequate explanation only if the party system has not yet settled, but not if the electoral prospects are stable over time.

party alignments remained the same. Despite this fact, which suggests an increase in rationality, in both periods “correct” ticket-splitting declined. In addition, the share of parties committed to potential coalitions cannot account for the variations observed over time. Both in 1969 and in 1972, two out of six parties could be regarded as potential allies. In the former case, however, an absolute minimum was reached, while in the latter an absolute maximum was achieved.

The extraordinarily low levels in 1957 and in 1969 throw light on the mechanisms actually affecting the degree of coalition-based rationality of ticket-splitting. In 1957, voters were highly uncertain about the coalition preferences of the FDP due to its attempts to foster its image as an independent third force. Similarly, in 1969 the FDP left many voters in doubt by revealing its preferences for the Social Democrats only at a very late stage of the electoral campaign. Additionally, that 1969 election was held under a grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD, a fact which might have encouraged voters to cast split tickets *for these two parties*, though both parties clearly did not want to continue their cooperation. Thus, campaigns in which parliamentary parties refrain from clear-cut statements about post-electoral alliances seem to produce low levels of politically rational ticket-splitting.

This view is corroborated by the 1972 figures. Before that election, coalition preferences were evident and the governing parties strongly emphasized coalition politics in their campaigns in order to lead their partisans to split tickets. In 1976 and 1980, the situation was quite different and this difference can explain the decline in rationality in these elections. Though in these years the electorate had to decide whether the social-liberal coalition should be continued, the two partners were already too estranged for the one to have stood aside for the other’s benefit; consequently, both strove not for ticket-splitting but for both votes.

In contrast, the low level of ticket-splitting rational in terms of coalition politics in 1983 seems implausible at first glance because in that campaign the Liberals called upon the supporters of their partner, the CDU/CSU, to cast their second votes for the FDP (see Roberts, 1988, pp. 326–327). This can be explained by taking into account the entry into the political arena of the Green Party, an ideological offspring of the extra-parliamentary opposition and the left wing of the Social Democrats which rejected at that time cooperation with any “established” party. Some voters, evidently less interested in actually viable coalitions than in ideological purity, cast one vote for the Greens notwithstanding their unwillingness to form a coalition. Thus the amount of rationally split tickets in terms of party politics decreased in spite of the Liberals’ call for clever ticket-splitting.<sup>20</sup>

The 1987 level clearly falls behind the 1972 peak though in 1987 red-green ticket-splitting can be regarded as rational. This may be attributed to the fact that in 1987, neither camp openly campaigned for ticket-splitting; additionally, within the SPD the choice of an appropriate coalition partner for government was quite controversial. In 1990, the percentage of combinations meaningful in terms of coalition building

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<sup>20</sup> Regarding a red-green coalition as a realistic option even in 1983, the proportion of ticket-splitting correct in terms of coalition building rises to 63.9 per cent — a level quite similar to that of 1972.

once again declined in spite of the evidence of the parties' coalition preferences. It must be kept in mind that parties tended to campaign for both votes, not for split tickets, and that many citizens took the continuation of the Kohl coalition for granted.

These considerations can be generalized as follows: the level of rationality of ticket-splitting in regard to coalition building is furthered when each parliamentary party can be assigned to a potential government coalition in an unambiguous way. As the 1983 election shows, however, information as such is not the crucial precondition. In addition, voters must be willing to use it.

Comparing the shares of both kinds of rational ticket-splitting, the hypothesis stated above is corroborated. The restriction referring to governmental alliances is indeed much more demanding than that induced by electoral laws. We may thus draw the conclusion that information on the electoral system and the parties' electoral fortunes are better available and, due to its stability, easier to process than that on potential coalitions.

Only in 1953 can the inverse relationship be observed. This can be accounted for by the fact that this was the very first election held under the two-vote system, while the demarcation line between the different potential governments remained largely unchanged in comparison to 1949. In part, however, this finding can be regarded as a methodological artifact. We assumed that only two parties, the CDU/CSU and the SPD, were in a position to win direct seats in the 1950s. In fact, in 1953 some 26 candidates of other parties managed to obtain a majority of first votes (Jesse, 1985, p. 295). This implies that actually rational split tickets including a first vote for one of those 26 candidates is declared irrational, which results in a systematic underestimation of the percentage of ticket-splitting regarded as rational in terms of the electoral system.

Applying both criteria simultaneously reveals information relative to the frequencies of the four theoretically possible patterns of ticket-splitting presented in Table 1. If we disregard the exception of 1953, the share of completely rational combinations continuously increased in a first phase ranging from 1953 to 1965.<sup>21</sup> This indicates that the citizenry learned to judge the electoral perspectives and coalition preferences over time. This steady rise is followed by the most restless period. In 1969, the share dramatically decreased before reaching an absolute maximum of more than 50 per cent in 1972. The low level in 1969 can be attributed to the joint effects of uncertainty about potential coalitions and the parliamentary entry of the NPD. In contrast, in 1972 factors favoring tactical ticket-splitting, more specifically a clear-cut demarcation line between potential government alliances and a vigorous campaign for ticket-splitting, produced a new peak.

In subsequent elections, this level was never reached again. The proportion of tactical splitting fluctuates within a 30 and 40 per cent interval. Only in 1987 was

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<sup>21</sup> Moreover, it has to be acknowledged that in 1953, Bavaria, Rhineland-Palatinate, and the Saar were not covered by the representative electoral statistics. This could have induced an arithmetical exaggeration of the rationality of ticket-splitting, as throughout the period since 1965, Bavarian voters have handled ticket-splitting quite irrationally, and the electorate in the two other states has differed from the federal average at least partly in a negative way; cf. Schoen (1996, pp. 104–112).

the upper limit slightly exceeded with 45 per cent. Since this local maximum is accompanied by an election in which all parliamentary parties had a chance to become coalition partners and did not advise their followers to abstain from ticket-splitting, the situation was in many ways similar to that of 1972. Thus, the hypothesis that tactical split-ticket voting should be especially widespread in elections when the preconditions for the application of both criteria are met, can be seen as corroborated. Conversely, the 1969 election demonstrates that uncertainty in regard to both dimensions of ticket-splitting reduces the share of tactically split tickets.

This analysis of the determinants of rational ticket-splitting is underscored by a cross-sectional comparison of West and East Germany in 1990. That East German voters on all three dimensions of rationality fell behind their West German counterparts is no surprise. For the first time, East Germans were able to choose their representatives by a two-vote system. In addition, they were not accustomed to realistic coalition options. Under these preconditions, a deficit in knowledge and, as a result, a wide gap in splitting rationality was to be expected.

The first Federal election in the unified Germany constitutes the temporary end point of a negative trend of tactical ticket-splitting starting in the 1970s. On the one hand, the 1987 local maximum clearly falls behind the 1972 peak. On the other hand, the share of rational ticket-splitting subsequently declined from almost 40 to 30 per cent. This development raises doubts as to the explanatory power of the so-called cognitive mobilization hypothesis, which implies a likely increase for that period. This finding can be seen as evidence that both phenomena may not be connected at all. Alternatively, if such a connection is taken for granted, it would follow that the educational boom was rather a formal than a substantial one. Moreover, it is more plausible to argue that it was the public discussion in 1972 of ticket-splitting which made the citizenry more sensitive to tactical ticket-splitting. This resulted in a higher level of splitting rationality than before 1970, even in elections in which there was no incentive to do so. However over the course of time, the influence of this discussion vanished. As a consequence, rational ticket-splitting declined in 1990 to its 1960s level. This interpretation provides an answer to the question whether the high level of the 1970s and 1980s should be regarded as a rule or as an exception. It suggests that in these two decades, factors favoring rational ticket-splitting were at work, the presence of which cannot always be taken for granted. For this reason, the level of the 70s and 80s should be regarded rather as an exception than as the rule.

In analyzing the development of the rationality of ticket-splitting over time and its determinants, we have tested several hypotheses. The more mechanical ones, e.g. the number of parties committed to coalitions, have been rejected. In contrast, those implying political factors have performed quite well. Since the empirical development is explained quite conveniently in terms of theoretically derived hypotheses, our measurement of rationality of ticket-splitting may be regarded as valid. Based on this conclusion, we can in the following section turn to an assessment of the empirical level of the rationality of ticket-splitting.

## 5. Ticket-splitting — an indicator of political maturity or mere accident?

Expectations concerning the empirical level of rationality of ticket-splitting heavily depend on normative perspectives. When we look at ticket-splitting as an indication of political maturity and sophistication, as it is widespread, almost any ticket-splitter will a priori be classified as “rational”. In contrast, one could argue that ticket-splitting is purely idiosyncratic, i.e. not at all motivated by political reasoning. Applying this latter assumption, it could be expected that the empirical distribution of combinations would not differ from a random distribution with electoral prospects and coalition intentions not being considered at all. On the one hand, such an expectation can be operationalized by a simple random distribution (Table 3). On the other hand, an empirically supported version can be constructed which results from a multiplication of the parties’ shares of first and second votes under the assumption that both votes are completely independent from each other (Table 4).

A comparison of the empirical findings with the two purely theoretical reference models reveals mixed results. Though far from being completely rational voters, ticket-splitters seem to perform quite well. Taking the third model into consideration, however, the one which is supported empirically, this conciliatory judgement seems to require revision. The share of fully rational combinations actually chosen by the ticket-splitters does indeed exceed the predicted frequency. This statement, however, holds as well for the absolutely ignorant combinations. The picture is further darkened when both dimensions of decision-making are examined separately. Now, with

Table 3  
Frequencies of types of ticket-splitting according to a random distribution model (per cent of split tickets)

Election	Splitting pattern			
	Tactically rational	Rational only in terms of the electoral system	Rational only in terms of coalition building	Irrational
1953	6.7	13.3	13.3	66.7
1957	2.4	11.9	7.1	78.6
1961	2.4	7.1	2.4	88.1
1965	3.3	10.0	3.3	83.3
1969	3.3	10.0	3.3	83.3
1972	3.3	10.0	3.3	83.3
1976	3.3	10.0	3.3	83.3
1980	3.3	10.0	3.3	83.8
1983	3.3	16.7	3.3	76.7
1987	6.7	13.3	6.7	73.3
1990	5.5	13.0	5.5	75.9
West Germany	5.5	13.0	5.5	75.9
East Germany and Berlin	5.5	13.0	5.5	75.9

Cell entries are relative frequencies of the different types of ticket-splitting in Fig. 2, e.g. in 1953, two out of 30 cells are + / + -cells which results in a ratio of 6.7 per cent.

Table 4

Frequencies of types of ticket-splitting according to an empirically supported random model (per cent of split tickets)

Election year	Splitting pattern			
	Tactically rational	Rational only in terms of the electoral system	Rational only in terms of coalition building	Irrational
1953	10.0	43.6	13.5	32.9
1957	2.7	60.7	4.0	32.6
1961	9.2	58.6	8.6	23.6
1965	7.6	70.3	6.1	16.1
1969	4.2	72.0	3.5	20.3
1972	7.5	81.2	4.1	7.2
1976	5.9	80.9	4.7	8.6
1980	8.0	75.0	5.3	11.7
1983	5.8	82.1	1.8	10.3
1987	11.4	68.8	7.1	12.8
1990	9.8	58.1	7.8	24.2
West Germany	10.0	61.7	7.4	20.8
East Germany and Berlin	9.5	47.8	8.7	33.9

respect to coalition building, the actual combinations are more rational than predicted by the model. With regard to the electoral system, however, the results would appear more sophisticated if the voters did not apply the implied calculus but cast their two votes simply by chance.

Finally, we want to supplement the above analysis, which so far is exclusively based on the comparison of single percentages, by applying the Loosemore–Hanby Index. Using this tool, it emerges that with only two exceptions in all elections, the third model best fits the empirical distribution. In only one case, the 1972 election, does the optimal model correspond best to reality; but even the pure random model is able to do so in one case, namely in 1953. This suggests that we look at ticket-splitting not as a result of tactical considerations but as “a nice touch of sophistication based on ignorance” (Smith, 1987, p. 134) (Table 5).

## 6. Conclusion

Our empirical analysis shows that it cannot be taken for granted that a majority of voters in German Federal elections rationally consider the electoral system and potential coalitions when deciding which combination of parties to vote for with their first and second votes. Between 1953 and 1990, not more than half of the tickets were split in a completely rational manner. This finding leads us to refute the widespread thesis cited above and to abandon the over-optimistic picture of ticket-splitters held by some observers and replace it with a more realistic one. In

Table 5

Deviation of the empirical frequencies of types of ticket-splitting from three theoretical models (Loosemore–Hanby Index<sup>a</sup>, Loosemore and Hanby, 1971)

Election	Deviation from ...		
	Optimal model	Random distribution	Random distribution backed up empirically
1953	0.86	0.25	0.35
1957	0.90	0.45	0.23
1961	0.76	0.56	0.26
1965	0.70	0.63	0.31
1969	0.82	0.52	0.29
1972	0.48	0.73	0.58
1976	0.62	0.68	0.52
1980	0.63	0.64	0.47
1983	0.64	0.59	0.39
1987	0.55	0.55	0.46
1990	0.73	0.45	0.33
West Germany	0.70	0.49	0.36
East Germany and Berlin	0.80	0.33	0.25
1953–90 (West)	0.70	0.55	0.38

<sup>a</sup>This index is defined as  $1/2\sum|f_i - p_i|$ , where  $f_i$  is the empirical portion,  $p_i$  is the share predicted by the respective model, and  $i = 1, 2, 3, 4$  is the type of ticket-splitting as given in Table 1. Thus, for example, the last number in the first row is calculated as follows:  $((0.143 - 0.1) + (0.436 - 0.089) + (0.303 - 0.135) + (0.465 - 0.329))/2 = 0.35$ .

this more realistic scenario, both the politically sophisticated ticket-splitters and their politically confused counterparts should be considered.

The validity of the operationalization presented in this paper is corroborated by the fact that the variation of the proportion of rational split tickets may be explained by the change in the factual premises of decision-making perceived by the voters. Thus, the conceptual framework of this analysis, though not the only possible interpretation of “rational ticket-splitting”, appears to be promising. Additionally, it seems suitable to apply it to other political systems in order to understand the rationality of ticket-splitting in different settings. Since the problems innate to the indirect measurement used in this analysis should not be neglected, studies based on survey data are also highly recommended. Moreover, such data would permit the investigation of the effects of further variables, especially those of attitudinal character; additionally, they would allow research in line with the traditional literature on sophisticated voting.

Our quite simple analyses have shown that in Germany, the rationality of ticket-splitting is problematic in terms of both coalition politics and electoral incentives. Regarding the former aspect, where we found rationality to be more severely lacking, an appropriate remedy is not easy to offer. The ambiguity in the signalling of future coalitions by political elites is the main cause, and there is no way to force party leaders to make clear-cut commitments.

Turning to electoral incentives, deficits are both less dramatic and more easily curable by institutional engineering. By far not all German voters are able to handle the electoral system, which implies that a large portion of the electorate is unable to communicate its political preferences to the political system in a straightforward way. In order to remedy this shortcoming, which is especially problematic in respect of normative theoretical considerations on democracy, two measures seem appropriate. At first sight, one is tempted to call for an intensification of civic education in order to enable more voters to handle the existing electoral system. However, in Western societies, which emphasize the protection of individual freedom, no eligible voter can be forced to expose himself to such instructions. Hence, such attempts do not appear very promising. Therefore, a second solution may be considered, namely that of adjusting the electoral system in a way in which more voters are able to understand it. This may be accomplished in two ways. First, one can think of changing the nomenclature of the two votes. The more important party vote should be called “first vote”, the less important vote for a candidate “second vote”. Second, a substantial electoral reform may be taken into consideration. A straightforward solution would be to abolish the two-vote-system and to return to the one-vote-system that was in use at the first German Federal election in 1949. Each citizen voter would then have only one vote with which to influence the selection of both a candidate and a party, and this would preclude any confusion concerning the relative impact of different votes.

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