Ideology and politics: The role of national identification

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Abstract:
The paper deals with the modifying role of in-group identification with respect to the ability of ideological orientations to explain political preferences. Drawing on the social identity theory, it is hypothesized that political expression of ideological orientations is dependent on relevant group identifications. The influence of ethnocentrism, post-materialism and religiosity on political party preferences is examined for those who express strong and weak national identification, separately. The outlined problems are examined using the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES) data. The results show that in-group identification affects the political expression of ideology.

Keywords: ideology – political attitude – ethnocentrism – religion – post-materialism – national identification

Introduction

Ideological orientations, values, attitudes, and related concepts often figure prominently in explanations of various political behaviors (Bardi and Schwartz, 2003; Inglehart, 1977, 1990; Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990; van Deth and Guerts, 1989). This paper focuses on conditions under which ideological orientations exert their political influence. The main idea, inspired by the social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), proposes that political expression of values is dependent on relevant group identifications.

Explanations of social behaviors often oscillate between models based on individual dispositions that exhibit their effects across different contexts, and those focused on social context and intergroup relations in particular. The intersection of these approaches is in-
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Increasingly receiving attention in literature (Reynolds and Turner, 2006; Reynolds et al., 2007). One way of exploring this problem is to look at how group identification modifies expression of political values. The specific case in question here refers to Dutch national politics, and therefore on values relevant for national politics and national identification.

The hypothesis examined states that the political role of value orientations, and the interaction between them, should depend on the level of identification with the national group. For instance, in-group-relevant attitudes, such as ethnocentrism, may be less predictive of political attitudes among the strong identifiers, because the identification already presumes a certain level of a particular orientation, while among the low identifiers, the role of values, which can be seen as a sort of individual-level dispositional constructs, may be stronger (cf. Reynolds et al., 2007).

A similar hypothesis about the role of in-group identification has recently been explored in applied setting by Lipponen et al. (2008). They concluded that “Personal values and level of identification with the group both serve as motivators of behaviour at work.” (p. 247). The implication from SIT that they derive is, however, different than the one proposed here. In their view, individual dispositions that are relevant for group identity are more influential under condition of strong identification. The present argument is more in line with Reynolds et al.’s (2007) ‘discontinuity hypothesis’, which states that “to the degree that personality is related to patterns of discrimination, it should become less so the more one’s social rather than personal identity becomes contextually meaningful.” (p. 521). Hence, in the context of national politics, national identification is relevant.

This paper examined modifying role of in-group identification on political effects of three general ideological orientations: post-materialism, religiosity and nationalist attitudes. The empirical basis for the analysis comes from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES) data series.

Theoretical framework and general hypotheses - The role of in-group identification

Ideological orientations in question include materialist-postmaterialist orientation, religiosity, and ethnocentrism. These attitudes represent some of the basic dimensions of ideology in the contemporary world (e.g., Middendorp, 1991). The criteria political variable is represented by political party preferences.

Hypotheses about the modifying role of in-group identification concerning the association between ideological orientations and political preferences come from the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and social categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987). These theories argue that there is a psychological discontinuity between individuals acting as individuals or as group members. The process of depersonalization, which takes place in intergroup framework, makes individual dispositions less relevant for explaining behavior. Thus, according to Reynolds et al. (2007), “personality tends to become irrelevant […] where social identity or group membership is salient” (p. 519).

Implications of this argument are straightforward as long as there is a consensus concerning the defining characteristics at the group level. With respect to the national-level identification, i.e., identification with national category, group-defining characteristics may be, and often are, contested. For some, identification with “the Dutch” may mean pride in its civic and secular traditions, while others may find Christian and cultural values as group-defining. Therefore, we could expect that the effects of identification are
more pronounced in case of value orientations that are contested and divisive, and in connection with political variables that are ideologically strongly profiled, in this case the preference for ideologically strongly profiled political parties. The following illustration may clarify the argument. Preference for the Dutch Green Left party is normally negatively associated with religious orientation. This association is likely to be stronger among those who strongly identify with the national category because this particular question reveals different sources of national identification — civic/secular versus religious/cultural. Thus, starting from the psychological discontinuity hypothesis, one can arrive at the opposite predictions concerning the interaction between attitudes if the contested nature of group-defining characteristics is taken into account (i.e., strong group identification may also enhance the effect of some dispositions). Similar implications could be derived for the relationship between political preferences and post-materialism. Again, sources of identification (or national pride) are likely to be different for those endorsing religious or secular values.

The situation, however, could be quite different with the ethnocentric orientation. Ethnocentrism could be seen both as an individual-level value or disposition, but also as a reflection of strong in-group identification (at least according to SIT). Hence, political effects of ethnocentrism should be weaker in the group of strong identifiers, since this group is expected to be more homogenous in their ethnocentric attitudes. Among the low identifiers, on the other side, ethnocentrism acts more as an individual disposition, and should therefore be more consequential for political preferences.

**Method**

The analyses are based on the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (DPES) data from 2002 and 2003. These studies are based on face to face interviews using nationwide probability samples of Dutch population. The 2002 study included pre-election and post-election interviews. The 2003 study consisted of post-election interviews only. Part of the 2003 sample were respondents already interviewed after the 2002 election (panel 2002-2003), while the rest was a fresh 2003 sample. In the initial sample in 2002 and the fresh sample from 2003, the sampling procedure included two main steps. The first step involved random selection of municipalities, while the second dealt with random selection of respondents within municipalities. For more details about the surveys see Irwin et al. (2005), Todosijević, Aarts and Kaap (2010), and http://dpes.nl/. The 2002-2003 DPES data-set is freely accessible through the (Data Archiving and Networked Services (http://www.dans.knaw.nl/; Source data file number: P1628). Basic characteristics of the samples are presented in Table 1.
Table 1: Basic characteristics of the samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002 Survey</th>
<th>2003 Survey (fresh sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of respondents</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>1271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey field-work period</td>
<td>April-June 2002</td>
<td>Jan-March, 290903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of respondent</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>54.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age - mean</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age - standard deviation</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest education (completed) of respondent</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Elementary</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (Lower) Vocational</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Secondary</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Middle level vocational, higher level secondary</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Higher level vocational, University</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures

Post-materialist value orientation

Post-materialist orientation is measured by the standard 4-item attitude scale. Respondents are asked to rank four political goals. Those who chose reducing inflation and maintaining order as their first two preferences are classified as materialists. Those selecting ‘More say in politics’, and ‘Freedom of speech’ as the most important goals are classified as post-materialists. Respondents with value priorities that mix the two categories are coded as ‘mixed’ type, and placed in-between the two former categories on the continuum from materialism to post-materialism.

Religious Orientation (ROS) Scale

Several indicators of religiosity available in DPES surveys are combined into a composite measure, labeled here as the Religious Orientation (ROS) Scale. The included questions include the frequency of religious service attendance (coded from 0 meaning ‘not religious’, to 5, meaning attending religious service at least once a week). The confessional attitude score combines several items that ask about the support for the existence of con-
fessional political parties, trade unions, schools, and broadcasting organizations, plus the belief that ‘Religion is a good guide in politics’.

In this way constructed measure captures both the behavioral aspect of one’s relationship to institutional religiosity (religious service attendance), and views on the political role of religion (the confessional attitude score). Individual scores on the ROS Scale are defined as the average of the religious service attendance item and the confessional attitude score.

Ethnocentric orientation

There are two indicators of nationalist/ethnocentric orientation available. One concerns the attitude towards asylum seekers (agreement with this item means ‘Send back as many asylum seekers as possible’), and the other concerns Ethnic minorities i.e., "foreigners and ethnic minorities", where high score means that they “Should completely adjust to Dutch culture.” For the respondents, this typically means immigrants from Suriname, Morocco, Turkey, and recently Eastern Europe. Throughout the rest of the paper I concentrate on the attitude towards ethnic minorities, interpreting it is as a measure of ethnocentric orientation.

Identification with national category

National in-group identification is operationalized by the statement “I am proud to be Dutch.” Respondents who answered “agree entirely and “agree” were categorized as “proud”, and the remaining respondents (those answering “agree nor disagree”, “disagree”, or “fully disagree”) are classified as “not proud”.

Sympathy for different political parties

This is a variable that represents respondent’s general evaluation of different political parties. Responses are given on a scale from 0, meaning “very unsympathetic, to 100, meaning “very sympathetic”. The variable is closely related to voting behaviour, since most respondents actually vote for parties they like the best.

Results

The modifying influence of in-group identification is analysed by running regression equations, containing the linear and interactive terms, separately among subsets of respondents who strongly identify with the in-group, and those who do not identify. In-group identification interacts with the expression of values in several cases. For instance, in-group identification modifies the influence of religiosity and ethnocentrism onto preference for the Labour Party (PvdA) and Green Left, as shown in Table 2. Religiosity predicts (dis)liking of PvdA and GL, but only among those strongly identifying. Conversely, the effect of ethnocentrism onto the dislike of PvdA is stronger among the non-identifiers. These effects are statistically significant in both election studies.
Table 2: Modifying impact of in-group identification onto political expression of values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-group identification</th>
<th>PM</th>
<th>ROS</th>
<th>Ethnoc</th>
<th>PM*ROS</th>
<th>PM*Ethnoc</th>
<th>ROS*Ethnoc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sympathy for PvdA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 Not proud</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.75</td>
<td>***-.05</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.43</td>
<td>***-.43</td>
<td>***-.12</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>* .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 Not proud</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.92</td>
<td>***-.03</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.41</td>
<td>***-.56</td>
<td>***-.04</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathy for GL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 Not proud</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
<td>***-.21</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>* -.26</td>
<td>**-.68</td>
<td>***-.22</td>
<td>* -.28</td>
<td>***-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 Not proud</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-1.20</td>
<td>***-.18</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>**-.30</td>
<td>**-.95</td>
<td>***-.01</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>* .11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Dependent variable: Sympathy for PvdA and GL. Entries are unstandardized multivariate regression coefficients. Independent variables are standardized (M=0, SD=1).

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

The interactions can be better understood using graphical presentation.
Figure 1). Among the weak identifiers, religiosity does not affect one’s sympathy for PvdA. Those proud to be Dutch tend to like PvdA only if they are not religious. Ethnocentrism, on the other side makes smaller difference among the proud respondents, while it is more consequential among the weak identifiers.
More challenging for interpretation is the influence of group identification onto the interaction between values, i.e., a kind of a three-way interaction. This interaction was found particularly clearly and consistently in connection with the sympathy for GL. In both cases, the interaction between ethnocentrism and postmaterialism is significant and negative among those strongly identifying with the in-group, but insignificant among the non-identifiers.
Figure 2 shows that among those not proud to be Dutch (low in-group identity), ethnocentrism and PM do not interact – ethnocentrism predicts dislike of GL regardless of one’s level of postmaterialism. Among the strong identifiers, postmaterialism modifies the political expression of ethnocentrism. The materialists dislike GL regardless of their level of ethnocentrism. Postmaterialists tend to like GL if they are low on ethnocentrism, but the postmaterialist ethnocentrics are among those most negative towards this party. By the same token, materialists dislike GL if they strongly identify, but if they are weakly identified with the Dutch nation, they dislike GL only if they are highly ethnocentric. Thus, it is clear that the level of identification makes the two value orientations interact.
The outlined findings show that in-group identification modifies the political effects of certain values. One’s relationship to the relevant group is important for the way one’s values shape her political attitudes. Different levels of group identification also represent different conditions for the observed interactive effects.

Discussion and conclusions

Value orientations, such as post-materialism, religiosity, and ethnocentrism, continue to be important for explaining various aspects of political attitudes and behaviour in the Netherlands. The results show that the role of group identification should be taken into account if our understanding of the political role of ideological orientations is to be complete.

The interaction between group identification and ethnocentrism in predicting political preferences could be approached from the perspective of social identity theory. In-group identification implies the emphasis on the group-specific values, and increased perception of in-group homogeneity concerning the salient group-defining characteristics. However, in-group definition may differ across various sub-groups. Those proud to be Dutch may have in mind traditions of civic liberties, but also the Christian values. Hence, the attitude towards a left-wing party, such as PvdA (almost identical effects are observed for the GL), may reflect one’s sub-group identities, such as the religious identity. Lack of the pride in being Dutch (and this is a relative minority of the Dutch public) may reflect more politi-
cal-ideological dispositions rather than sub-group level identities. Hence, in the case of
party preference, the disposition that was relevant for the attitude towards left-wing par-
ties in 2002 and 2003 was the view on ethnic minorities (the only significant coefficient
among the low identifiers). As the inter-group attitudes are supposed to reflect both group
membership and dispositions, the weak identification enhances the role of dispositions
(Reynolds et al., 2007). Hence the stronger effect of ethnocentrism among the low identi-
fiers. Furthermore, it seems that the lack of national pride among the Dutch is grounded in
two motivations: some respondents are dissatisfied because they feel that the country does
not live up to its standards concerning civil liberties and integration of ethnic minorities,
while the other may be dissatisfied because of the feeling of threat to the national com-
nunity due to culturally different immigrants. These two motivations would then find ex-
pression in different views of parties that have explicit views on these matters. As the re-
results showed, among the non-proud, one’s level of ethnocentrism is the sole determin-
ant of the sympathy for GL and PvdA.

The idea about different motives behind the (lack of) national pride leads to further
speculative interpretation of the findings. Since the reasons for national pride can differ –
might be civic and tolerant, or ethnic and intolerant – the constellation of specific values
is more consequential in the high identifying group. This would apply to the effects of re-
ligiosity and to a smaller extent PM. Furthermore, PM and ethnocentrism interact strongly
in this group. Specifically, in the identifying group, both materialism and ethnocentrism
independently make one firmly opposed to GL. But, if national pride is combined with
postmaterialist orientation, one’s attitude towards GL is strongly determined by her level
of ethnocentrism. In other words, reduction in ethnocentrism increases liking of GL inde-
dependently of other values only among the low identifiers. Among the high identifiers, the
association depends on the level of PM.

Approaching from another perspective, it may be that being non-proud in fact means
having psychological problems with national identity, which would imply sensitivity to
issues related to it (Verkuyten, 2009). Therefore even small differences in one’s ethnocen-
trism level have an impact on the political orientation. For the strong identifiers, ethno-
centrism may have become a secondary issue, moving into the background, and allowing
room for factors like religion to shape one’s actions and feelings.

These are, of course speculative interpretations of the empirical findings, and require
further theoretical elaboration and testing. The main message remains clear: the influence
of values onto attitudes concerning national politics depends on one’s relationship to the
national identity.

References

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