What's Right about the Left–Right Dimension? 
The Causes and the Consequences of Ideological Inconsistency on Economic Issues in Germany

Simon Otjes

To cite this article: Simon Otjes (2016) What's Right about the Left–Right Dimension? The Causes and the Consequences of Ideological Inconsistency on Economic Issues in Germany, German Politics, 25:4, 581-603, DOI: 10.1080/09644008.2016.1223841

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2016.1223841

© 2016 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 20 Oct 2016.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 617

View Crossmark data
What’s Right about the Left–Right Dimension? The Causes and the Consequences of Ideological Inconsistency on Economic Issues in Germany

SIMON OTJES

There is growing evidence that policy preferences of citizens on economic issues do not follow an ideological left–right pattern; that is, from the perspective of political science theory, citizens’ economic policy preferences are ideologically inconsistent. This article examines this phenomenon for the German case. It shows that a large share of German citizens have ideologically inconsistent views on economic issues. The article further investigates the causes of this ideological inconsistency and its consequences for democratic representation: citizens with inconsistent views tend to be more dissatisfied with their own societal position and tend to have less political knowledge. The article further shows that citizens with ideologically inconsistent views are less satisfied with democracy and less likely to vote in elections, because they cannot find adequate representation among the established parties.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is growing evidence that the views of voters and politicians on economic issues are different. It is not just that voters are more left-wing on economic issues, while politicians are more right-wing, but rather that voters and politicians think fundamentally differently about these issues. Where politicians and parties have a unidimensional understanding of economic issues, voters have a multidimensional understanding of economic issues. There are a range of studies that show, for instance, that citizens who favour principles such as egalitarianism do not necessarily endorse the welfare state that is meant to achieve it; that voters who are economic egalitarians are not necessarily economic interventionists; that voters who support policies meant to achieve equal outcomes do not necessarily support policies that are meant to achieve equal opportunity; or simply that questionnaire items which are expected to form a single economic left–right scale do not do so. From the perspective of political science theory, citizens have ideologically inconsistent views about economic issues that do not fit in an ideological left–right pattern. As will be discussed in greater detail below, these views may be consistent with the citizens’ own perception of their own economic situation. Therefore the use of the term ‘ideologically inconsistent’ is not a moral judgement of citizens’ views but rather an assessment from the perspective of political science theories that currently fail to incorporate the existing

German Politics, Vol.25, No.4, 2016, pp.581–603
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2016.1223841 © 2016 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.
diversity of voters’ views on economic issues. Despite the fact that many classical authors like Converse and Zaller have already observed, theorised and explained ideological inconsistency quite extensively, most authors currently treat this phenomenon as a methodological issue, and neglect the substantive implications that this has for democratic representation and political behaviour.

This article seeks to analyse the causes and consequences of this ideological inconsistency. It seeks to identify which kinds of voters have ideologically inconsistent views about economic issues. Three causes are identified for this: first, citizens who feel they have not been given a fair share of society’s resources may have less consistent views. Earlier studies indicate that voters who feel they are overtaxed believe that they would benefit from lower taxes as well as from better public services. Second, citizens who lack basic political knowledge or are not politically interested may have less consistent views about economic matters. And political socialisation may play a role: this may lead to differences between generations and regions with different historical experiences and party systems. Thus, this ideological inconsistency is more than some form of measurement error that can be disregarded. It actually represents substantial differences in economic views between citizens.

Third, this article seeks to show that this ideological inconsistency has implications for the quality of democratic representation and citizens’ political behaviour: as established parties offer either left-wing or right-wing packages of policies, citizens with ideologically inconsistent views cannot find a party that offers a policy package that matches their policy preferences. Therefore they may become dissatisfied with a democratic system that cannot represent them and therefore they are less likely to turn out to vote. Voters with ideologically inconsistent preferences are like vegetarians in a fish restaurant. They can get potatoes and cod or salad and salmon, but they cannot order potatoes and salad. Such restaurant guests are likely to be dissatisfied with the menu and are unlikely to eat at the restaurant again.

This article analyses the case of Germany. Germany is an important case for the study of voter opinions about economic issues. In the first place, because existing research indicates that of all European countries German voters tend to have the most consistent views about economic issues: this means that Germany is a ‘least likely’ case. If one finds evidence for ideological inconsistency here, this provides more proof for the notion that, in general, the views of voters are ideologically inconsistent, compared to evidence from other countries. Second, Germany had been divided between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. This division still affects the party system in these two regions. As Neundorf has shown, this difference between the political histories and party systems affects the ideological consistency of the view of citizens from these regions. Therefore this single case may be relevant to understanding patterns of voter opinion about economic issues in western, central and eastern Europe.

2. THE ECONOMIC LEFT–RIGHT DIMENSION

This article focuses on the economic left–right dimension. This is understood as a value dimension: a consistent difference in opinion between citizens. Parties also differ structurally in their views about policies. The structure of the party space, however, does not necessarily need to mirror the voter space: as will be discussed
in greater detail below, political socialisation plays an important role in ensuring that
the mass public understands political issues in terms of the ideological categories that
the elite employs. Many authors agree that views of citizens on economic issues can be
integrated into a single economic left–right dimension. \(^{15}\) This is thought of as a centre-
piece of a left–right super-issue that also orders the views of citizens on cultural,
environmental and ethical issues.\(^ {16}\)

The common denominator that most studies share is that the economic left–right
dimension concerns at least two questions: economic interventionism and economic egal-
itarism. The first concerns the classical Downsian question: ‘\textit{h}ow much govern-
ment intervention in the economy should there be?’\(^ {17}\) Right-wing voters tend to
support laissez-faire economic principles and small government, while left-wing
voters support an active government. Lipset et al. have proposed that egalitarianism is
the core of the left–right divide: ‘\textit{b}y left we shall mean advocating social change in
the direction of greater equality – political, economic or social; by right we shall
mean \ldots opposing change towards greater equality’.\(^ {18}\) In Bobbio’s influential concep-
tual model, the division between equality and inequality forms the core of the division
between left and right.\(^ {19}\) The left favours a more equal redistribution of resources,
while the right believes that inequalities are incentives that reward good performance.

A number of studies have found that citizens do not have consistent views on econ-
omic matters: on the one side there are studies that examine the support for welfare
state measures and egalitarianism. Qualitative and quantitative studies have found
notable ideological inconsistencies: research shows that supporting the principle of
egalitarianism is not the same as supporting the institutions necessary to realise it.\(^ {20}\)
These studies focus on economic egalitarianism and support for the welfare state.
They do not concern other aspects of the economic realm such as taxation and govern-
ment intervention. A second line in the literature has found that the views of citizens on
economic matters are not consistent but they have treated this as either a country-
specific problem or as a methodological issue.\(^ {21}\) It is not seen as a theoretical
problem or an empirical phenomenon worth understanding. Fossati, Häusermann
and Otjes show in separate studies that this is not only a methodological issue, but a
theoretical problem: Fossati and Häusermann’s study of the Swiss case shows that
support for measures oriented at equal outcomes do not necessarily equate to measures
oriented at equal opportunities.\(^ {22}\) Otjes’ study of voter preferences all over the Euro-
pæan Union focuses on the difference between interventionism and egalitarianism,
which do not necessarily align.\(^ {23}\) He has, however, found that voter opinions about
economic issues are most consistent in Germany and that many other countries
score much lower in terms of ideological consistency.

3. **CAUSES OF IDEOLOGICAL INCONSISTENCY**

This article identifies three possible causes of the ideological inconsistency among
voters: micro-justice, political knowledge and political socialisation.

3.1 **Micro-justice**

In the literature on citizens’ attitudes towards the welfare state, objective economic
conditions are expected to shape citizens’ attitudes towards economic matters.\(^ {24}\)
This article proposes that the extent to which citizens consider their own economic positions may shape the ideological consistency of their views.

In a study of income equality and tax policy in the United States, Bartels shows that support for tax cuts is based on people’s attitudes towards their own tax burdens rather than their attitudes towards income distribution in general. Citizens are myopic: instead of assessing whether a tax cut would lead to a desired state of affairs in society, citizens favour or oppose economic measures on the basis of their subjective sense of their own tax burden. This self-interest can be ‘unenlightened’, even when a tax cut greatly benefits the rich rather than the middle class, citizens’ own assessment of their tax burden determines their support for particular tax cuts. In this way, how citizens perceive their own economic positions is an important informer of economic policy views, even when controlling for sociological and ideological factors.

This study proposes that this pattern does not just concern tax policy but might be extended to how citizens feel about economic issues in general: it may be that citizens who feel that they have been disadvantaged have less consistent views on economic issues than citizens who feel otherwise. Such citizens are likely to favour policies oriented at ensuring a guaranteed minimum income for the worst off (believing that they will benefit from this) while at the same time favouring lower taxes (believing that they will also benefit from that).

*H1. Micro-justice hypothesis:* citizens who feel that they get less than their ‘fair share’ have more consistent views about economic issues that citizens who do not feel that.

### 3.2 Political Knowledge and Interest

A large share of voters are ‘inattentive’ and even ‘ignorant’ about economic issues. Political knowledge and political interests are important factors in explaining the extent to which voters have consistent views about policy issues.

Citizens that lack political knowledge also tend to have ideologically inconsistent views about policy issues. Their additional knowledge may help to contextualise policy questions: without sufficient knowledge about politics, citizens may not see the links between issues; for instance, in order to ensure a minimum income for all citizens, the state would need to increase taxation. The literature on the relationship between political knowledge and ideological consistency indicates that the relationship between knowledge and ideological consistency is not linear. There is a marked difference between those who have very little knowledge and those who have basic knowledge and beyond, while the marginal effect of additional knowledge declines.

*H2. Knowledge hypothesis:* voters with basic political knowledge have more coherent views about economic matters than voters without basic political knowledge.

Lack of knowledge about political issues is one element that may explain ideological inconsistency, a lack of political interest may be another: citizens are more likely to understand political issues in the left–right terms of the political elite if they pay attention to what the elite are saying. Citizens who are uninterested in politics are less likely to be influenced by the political elite simply because they do not give enough attention.
to politicians in order to be influenced by them. A link between political interest and the extent to which the views of the voters fit into the left–right dimension has been established before.\(^\text{30}\)

**H3. Political interest hypothesis:** citizens who are more interested in politics are more likely to have more consistent economic views than uninterested citizens.

### 3.3 Political Context

The nature of elite competition may determine the coherence of the economic views of citizens: for instance, the political debates that are dominant during the period in which voters became politically aware shape their political priorities.\(^\text{31}\) Differences in political context between voters from different regions and contexts may explain differences in the opinion structures of citizens.

First, when it comes to region, the German case is particularly important, as it provides the opportunity to compare two regions with different historical experiences and party systems, the territories that used to be in the GDR and former West Germany. This leads to two competing expectations about the relationship between region and the political system. First, one could argue that history matters: while in western Europe democratic politics have been established for decades, in central and eastern Europe new democracies were formed after decades of communist rule. Mondak and Gearing show that the experiences of dictatorships in former communist Europe have caused citizens to turn away from politics:\(^\text{32}\) citizens who were socialised during a dictatorship have been shown to be less interested in politics, to engage less in political debates and to understand economic interests less often in political terms than their counterparts from Western democracies. In line with these findings, Neundorf has shown that the correlation between issue positions and left–right self-placement is stronger in western Germany than in eastern Germany; this is the case for economic items but also new cultural and environmental items.\(^\text{33}\) The underlying mechanism is that during communism East Germans were less often exposed to ideological labels than West Germans.

The two regions in Germany also offer different party systems: in former East Germany, Die Linke (The Left) is the main party to the left of the social democratic SPD. This party emphasises economic issues. It is much weaker in former West Germany, where Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Alliance ‘90/The Greens) is the main party to the left of the SPD. This party emphasises new political issues such as the environment. According to Neundorf, this difference in political supply leads to different patterns in public opinion. She shows that in the territory that used to be the GDR citizens identifying as left-wing tend to have more consistent views on economic matters than left-wing West German citizens.\(^\text{34}\) She attributes this to differences in the party system: in eastern Germany left-wing citizens receive more cues from Die Linke, a party that prompts citizens to think in ideological left–right terms about economic issues. In former West Germany left-wing citizens receive fewer cues on economic matters because of the absence of Die Linke: therefore they have less consistent views about economic issues.

This leads to two opposite hypotheses about the relationship between ideological consistency and region: from the first, historical, perspective those who lived in the
former German Democratic Republic tend to have less consistent views about economic matters than those who have always lived in the Federal Republic of Germany. From the second perspective that focuses on the party system, those who live in a party system with a strong old-left party tend to have more consistent views about economic matters than those who live in a party system with a strong new-left party.

**H4a. Historical hypothesis:** citizens who lived in the GDR have less coherent views about economic issues than citizens from former West Germany.

**H4b. Party system hypothesis:** citizens who lived in the GDR have more coherent views about economic issues than citizens from former West Germany.

These political systems are not necessarily stable over time: in western Europe, new issues, such as the environment and immigration, have been crowding out economic issues that used to dominate the political agenda. As voters from older generations developed their political views in the period in which the welfare state was created and the main political issues were its size and scope, economic issues matter more for their voting decisions than for voters from younger generations who grew up when issues like civil liberties and the environment were more important. While this effect has been established for the saliency of issues, it is proposed here that this pattern may also extend to the ideological consistency of views. If citizens are socialised in a period in which the economic left and right manifested themselves clearly, their views will be more consistent than in a period in which other issues dominated the debate.

**H5. Cohort hypothesis:** citizens who were socialised earlier have more consistent economic views than citizens who were socialised more recently.

The effect of the cohort of a respondent and the region from which they come may interact. The historical hypothesis is only applicable to citizens who were socialised under a dictatorship: only citizens who were socialised in the period in which eastern Germany was a communist state are likely to have lower levels of ideological consistency. Citizens from eastern Germany, who were socialised in the democratic period are likely to have similar levels of ideological consistency as their western German counterparts, from the perspective of the historical hypothesis.

4. EFFECTS OF IDEOLOGICAL INCONSISTENCY

If citizens do not have a single dimensional understanding of economic issues, but politicians do understand economic issues in terms of a single dimension, this may affect the quality of democracy. Previous studies established a link between policy dissatisfaction and political trust: citizens who are dissatisfied with the policies pursued by the government have less political trust and are more alienated from the political sphere. This article adds another level by arguing that those who cannot find policy representation in government parties or opposition parties will also show less political trust and turn away from politics.

Parties offer bundles of policies: if there are only parties that offer lower taxes and no guaranteed minimum income or higher taxes and a guaranteed minimum
income, voters who prefer lower taxes and a guaranteed minimum income cannot find representation; voters who have ideologically inconsistent views cannot be represented by the traditional parties of the left and the right. In terms of democratic quality this is worrying.38 Those citizens who are unable to find representation are likely to turn away from politics. They will be less satisfied with democracy, because the current democratic system does not cater for their needs. This decrease in satisfaction with democracy may lead them to abstain from voting. Political dissatisfaction may be the mediating variable that connects ideologically inconsistent views and electoral abstention.

**H6. Mediation hypothesis:** citizens with ideologically inconsistent views about economic matters are more likely to abstain from voting because they are more likely to be dissatisfied with politics.

One should note, however, that discrepancy on economic issues is not the only kind of discrepancy between voters and political parties. In terms of the general left–right dimension, which encompasses both economic issues and new cultural issues such as immigration, the structure of public opinion and the packages offered by parties also differ: as van der Brug and van Spanje show,39 voters and parties think differently about these matters. The voter space is two-dimensional: new cultural issues and economic issues form separate dimensions. The party space is one-dimensional: new cultural and economic issues form one dimension. This may also affect political dissatisfaction and voting behaviour in a similar way to that proposed by the mediation hypothesis. One would need to control for this pattern when analysing the relationship between consistency on economic issues, political dissatisfaction and electoral abstention.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study will use Mokken scaling, a scaling method from the Item Response Theory family. The dependent variable is constructed using this scaling method: the number of ‘Guttman errors’ respondents make. Patterns in this variable will be studied using poisson regression. It will be used as an explanatory variable in a mediation analysis. The data is drawn from a mass survey (the 2009 German Longitudinal Election Study).

5.1 Scale Construction

There are different scaling methods and each comes with its own limits and assumptions. The choice for a particular method should be informed by the data and the research question. It is, however, in the end, a choice for the researcher.40 This means that a latent dimension is always a construction: there is no true underlying structure in the opinions of respondents waiting to be discovered.41 All one can do is test the extent to which responses of voters fit the criteria for unidimensionality linked to a particular method. Scaling, however, is an indispensable element of the study of political behaviour: in studies that use a single item to measure policy preferences, voter positions are often found to be unstable and have little impact on vote choice.42 Studies by Achen and Ansolabehere et al. have shown that this is due to measurement error that can be overcome by means of multi-item scales.43
This article employs Mokken scaling to measure the extent to which voters have consistent views on economic matters. The reason Mokken scaling is selected is that it offers an individual measure of respondent fit. For each individual one can calculate the number of Guttman errors that expresses the extent to which the respondent’s views are ideologically consistent or inconsistent with the scale that is tested. Previous research on dimensionality such as that by Otjes, and for instance Jacoby or Walczak et al., also uses Mokken scaling.

Mokken scaling was developed to assess the quality of educational tests: it tests the assumption that a set of items can be ordered on a continuum from simplest to most difficult (a Guttman pattern): that is, items for which most respondents answer correctly to those to which least respondents answer correctly. One can express the quality of the entire scale in terms of deviations from a Guttman pattern, Guttman errors: the number of respondents that answer the ‘difficult’ items correctly (or the most right-wing items affirmatively), but answer the easy items incorrectly (or the least right-wing items negatively). The H-value is a measure of scale quality that is independent of the number of items and answer options included. The H-value can be expressed as the number of Guttman errors and compared to a pattern where the items are independent of each other: if there are no errors, H equals one; if the error pattern is the same as the pattern for two statistically independent variables, H equals zero. There is a simple rule of thumb to assess scale quality: a scale that has an H below 0.3 should not be used as a scale, because items do not measure the same underlying phenomenon. H-values can also be calculated for specific items (the H_i-values) and the relationship between pairs of items (the H_ij-values). At the same time, the Guttman errors can also be used as a person-fit measure, in which case it is the number of deviations respondents make from the Guttman pattern.

As this article uses Likert items concerning economic statements, the goal is to assess the extent to which the items can be ordered from those on which most respondents give the left-wing answer to those to which most respondents give the right-wing answer. Therefore, Polytomous Mokken scaling is used, instead of standard dichotomous Mokken scaling. This also affects the Guttman errors, as strong deviations from the Guttman pattern (i.e. responding to all items in an extreme-left way and to one in an extreme-right way) count more than weak deviations from the Guttman pattern (i.e. responding to all items in an extreme-left way and to one in a centrist way). In order to perform Mokken scaling, respondents with missing values on any of the economic items have to be removed from the analysis. The Mokken scaling analyses were performed by means of the ‘Mokken’ R-package. In order to show that the results of the scaling analysis are not some artefact of a particular method, the Cronbach’s α from Classical Test Theory will also be employed where appropriate. The threshold value for Cronbach’s α is 0.7 and the ‘psy’ R-package is used.

5.2 Methods of Data Analysis

Below, two inferential analyses are presented. The first explains the number of Guttman errors respondents make. In this case, the Guttman errors are used as a dependent variable. As this is count data, it is not normally distributed. As the standard deviation is smaller than the mean (see Table 2), the data is not over-dispersed, therefore
one can employ poisson regression. The poisson regression function from the Zelig R-package was used: this allows one to visualise interaction relationships.

The second inferential analysis uses Guttman errors as an explanatory variable. The hypothesis is that citizens who make more Guttman errors will vote less often and will be less politically satisfied. Political satisfaction is identified as the mediating variable that links making errors to abstaining from voting. In order to model this structure, mediation analysis is employed, which has been specifically developed to assess this kind of model where one variable stands in between two others. This study uses Hayes’ SPSS macro to test the relationship. In order to assess the strength and significance of the mediation relationship, one has to look at the mediation term (the effect of the relationship of, in this case, errors on political satisfaction multiplied by the effect of political satisfaction on voting). This term indicates whether the mediation effect is significant. Mediation analysis is applied in the context of an ordinary least squares regression (to explain political dissatisfaction) and a logistic regression (to explain turnout).

5.3 Survey Data

This article uses the 2009 German Longitudinal Election Survey. It allows one to compare the positions of citizens on four economic issues, which are generally assumed to form a left–right dimension. These items are listed in Table 1. This includes items tapping into economic egalitarianism, but also items tapping into economic interventionism. The selected items are: an item on introducing a minimum income, one on introducing a maximum income, one on socialism and one on the balance between taxes and spending. Out of the items that ask respondents to agree or disagree with a particular statement, only those were selected that have the same ‘direction’, as Costello et al. suggested that acquiescence bias was the cause of the ideological inconsistency they observe: that is, ideological inconsistency is caused by citizens answering every question with ‘yes’ independent of whether the question was posed in a left-wing or right-wing way (e.g. ‘taxes should be higher’ and ‘taxes should be lower’). If one includes items that have both a left-wing and right-wing direction, acquiescence bias lowers the quality of scales (because citizens that always say ‘yes’ are ideologically inconsistent). If one includes items that are only in a left-wing or right-wing direction, acquiescence bias increases the quality of scales (because citizens that say ‘yes’ to every question are consistent). In order to exclude the possibility that the ideological inconsistency found in this article is the result of acquiescence bias instead of meaningful patterns, the selection of items is limited to those that have the same direction. Moreover, by only including such items this study provides a stronger test of the hypotheses than including a mix of items, as acquiescence bias would reduce the ideological inconsistency. This adds to the least likely case selection design of this study.

Table 1 and 2 also list a number of descriptives about the variables included in the different regression analyses. The micro-justice hypothesis is operationalised through an item that measures whether citizens feel that compared to other citizens they have received ‘a fair share’. This question has advantages and disadvantages compared to the measure Bartels used, which taps into whether citizens feel their tax burden is fair. On the one side, it does not just concern the taxes citizens pay, but also other
factors that affect the share of resources citizens receive, such as benefits and public services. On the other side, it does not tap into the role of the government, which the Bartels tax item did; therefore the conceptual link with economic policies is less clear than an item on taxation.

For the historical and party system hypotheses a dichotomy is used measuring whether citizens live in the new Bundesländer (the territory that used to be in the GDR) or old Bundesländer (the former Federal Republic of Germany). This is an imperfect measure, as it measures current residence, and for the historical hypothesis residence at a young age would be a better measure, but this is not available. For the cohort hypothesis the age of the respondent is used. In order to make the beta values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tax vs. spending            | Please tell me on basis of the scale from one to 11, what is your own position?  
1: lower taxes and levies, also when it means lower social services  
11: more social services, also when that means more taxes and levies | Position on 11-point scale                   |
| Immigration                 | Please tell me on basis of the scale from one to eleven, what is your own position?  
1: laws on immigration should be relaxed  
11: laws on immigration should be tougher | Position on 11-point scale                   |
| Socialism                   | Socialism is a good idea, which has been poorly executed                  | Agreement on 5-point scale                   |
| Minimum income              | The state shall guarantee a minimum income for all                         | Agreement on 5-point scale                   |
| Maximum income              | The state shall set an upper limit for incomes                              | Agreement on 5-point scale                   |
| General political interest  | How interested are you in politics?                                        | Position on 5-point scale                   |
| Interest in elections       | How interested are you in the election campaign for the coming Bundestag election? | Position on 5-point scale                   |
| Political knowledge         | From what percentage of the vote can a party send delegates to the Bundestag? | 5% coded as 1, other answers as 0           |
| Satisfaction with democracy (1) | How satisfied or dissatisfied are you in general with democracy, as it exists in Germany | Position on 5-point scale                   |
| Satisfaction with democracy (2) | Are you satisfied with the way in which democracy functions in the German Federal Republic? | Position on 4 point scale                   |
| Satisfaction with parties   | And are you satisfied with the range of political ideals and proposals that parties have offered during the campaign | Position on 4-point scale                   |
| Cynicism about parties      | Parties just want the votes of their voters, they do not care about their views | Agreement on 5-point scale                   |
| Voting is duty              | In a democracy, it is the duty of every citizen to regularly participate in elections | Agreement on 5-point scale                   |
| Micro-justice               | Compared to others who live in Germany, do you believe that you have obtained a fair share or do you not believe that? | Position on 5-point scale                   |
| Politics is difficult       | Political questions are often too complicated for me to understand         | Agreement on 5-point scale                   |
| Voting matters              | Some people say: it does not matter how you vote, it does not matter what happens in politics; others say that it matters greatly how people vote | Position on 5-point scale                   |
comparable to the dichotomies used in this article the highest value (the most recent date of birth) equals one and the lowest value (the least recent date of birth) is zero. To allow for a curvilinear relationship, a squared variable age was also included. In order to delve into the proposed relationship between region and age, an interaction between region and age was included.

There is only one item in the survey that measures political knowledge: whether citizens know that Germany has a 5 per cent electoral threshold; 69 per cent of respondents knew this. This may seem like a poor measure of political knowledge, as it differentiates only between those who have basic knowledge about how the German political system functions and those who lack such knowledge. As the hypothesis concerned with this difference, this question is actually well fitted to this end. To measure political interest, a scale of two items is used. It consists of two items that measure citizens’ general political interest and their interest in the 2009 elections specifically. These two items form a good scale ($H = 0.50$).

Education and class are included as control variables, as according to van der Waal et al. these variables are correlates of ideological consistency. The two highest diplomas (university and polytechnic) are identified as higher education and are given the value one. Citizens with other or no diplomas have the value zero. For the class variable, self-identification of socio-economic status is used. A split is made between working class (including lower middle class) (value is one) and non-working class voters (value is zero).

The next step in the analysis is examining the effects of the ideological inconsistency on political satisfaction and voting behaviour. For political satisfaction a scale is constructed out of four items that concern satisfaction with democracy, satisfaction with the established parties and cynicism about the established parties. These items form a good scale ($H = 0.52$). It is important to note that these items do scale; this

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Mokken errors</td>
<td>9.57</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.51</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>3540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General left/right Mokken errors</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West German</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro-justice</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting is a duty</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics is difficult</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting matters</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In order to ensure comparability this variable has been standardised in the mediation analysis.*
shows that citizens do have consistent beliefs about some aspects of their political system.

Voting is measured by asking citizens whether they voted in the 2009 German Federal election; 82 per cent of respondents say they voted. This is 10 per cent higher than the actual 71 per cent turnout, which implies that non-voters are underrepresented in the survey.

In order to control for other factors that may explain non-voting, 11 control variables are included, based on Smets and van Ham: this includes political knowledge, political interest, region, age, age-squared, class and education variables that were already presented above, as well as gender. Moreover, a number of specific psychological correlates of turnout are included: these are agreement with the ideas that voting is a duty, that voting matters (‘external efficacy’) and that politics is difficult (‘internal efficacy’). Finally, in order to control for the effect of ideological inconsistency on the general left–right dimension (encompassing economic and new cultural issues), the Guttman errors for a scale consisting of one economic and one cultural issue ($H = 0.14$) was included as a control variable. The taxation versus spending and immigration item from the survey are used.

Tables 1 and 2 show different $N$s ranging from 4288 and 1650. The reason for these differences in the numbers of respondents is that some items come from the pre-election and some from the post-election survey, and not all respondents were included in both waves; moreover, some respondents may not have answered all questions. This means that results may be biased because respondents with high political interest may be overrepresented. This decreases the likelihood of finding a lack of ideological inconsistency and therefore further adds to the least likely case selection design of this study.

6. SCALING ANALYSIS: DO CITIZENS HAVE CONSISTENT VIEWS ON ECONOMIC ISSUES?

The first question is whether the four economic items form a consistent scale. The result of the scaling analysis is presented in Table 3. It shows that on the whole the scale falls short of the 0.3 threshold: the $H$-value is 0.24. Two pairs of items have sufficient scalability: citizens who favour a minimum income tend to favour a maximum income and citizens who favour a minimum income tend to favour more spending.

In order to show that the lack of scalability is not the result of some methodological artefact, the Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was also calculated. This score ($\alpha = 0.54$) also falls well below the acceptable standard (0.7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Tax vs. spending</th>
<th>Socialism</th>
<th>Minimum income</th>
<th>$H_i$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socialism</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum income</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum income</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\alpha = 0.54$
In this survey of the German electorate during the 2009 German parliamentary elections, German citizens do not have sufficiently consistent views about economic matters to justify using a single left–right dimension. The question arises whether this pattern is the result of specific circumstances of the 2009 elections. On the one hand, this result is not surprising given the general pattern found by Otjes: views of citizens on economic issues all over Europe cannot be scaled into a single dimensional structure. On the other side one cannot dismiss the possibility that the specific circumstances of the 2009 elections led to this relatively low level of scalability: the elections were held after the global financial crisis. All major German parties of the left and right endorsed increased government spending in order to prevent an economic depression. The cues of the left-wing and the right-wing parties may have been less consistent than in previous years.

The following two sections address two questions that logically follow from this observation: what explains this phenomenon? And does it matter?

7. POISSON REGRESSION ANALYSIS: WHICH VOTERS HAVE CONSISTENT VIEWS ON ECONOMIC ISSUES?

Table 4 presents a number of poisson regression analyses; they differ in how the effect of age and region were modelled. Model 1 simply looks at a linear effect of age and does not include an interaction with region. Model 2 looks at age in terms of a non-linear relationship. Model 3 includes an interaction between the linear effect of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.80***</td>
<td>2.92***</td>
<td>2.90***</td>
<td>3.08***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West German</td>
<td>0.08***</td>
<td>0.09***</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.07*</td>
<td>-0.77***</td>
<td>-0.29***</td>
<td>-1.29***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age-squared</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.76***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.07***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro-justice</td>
<td>-0.44***</td>
<td>-0.46***</td>
<td>-0.44***</td>
<td>-0.46***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>-0.25***</td>
<td>-0.25***</td>
<td>-0.25***</td>
<td>-0.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>-0.33***</td>
<td>-0.33***</td>
<td>-0.33***</td>
<td>0.33***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>-0.11***</td>
<td>-0.11***</td>
<td>-0.11***</td>
<td>-0.11***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.14***</td>
<td>0.15***</td>
<td>0.14***</td>
<td>0.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West German * Age</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.31***</td>
<td>0.73**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West German * Age-squared</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>17045</td>
<td>17022</td>
<td>17030</td>
<td>17008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 1538$
region and age. Model 4 includes an interaction between region and the non-linear effect of age.

In each analysis, micro-justice has a highly significant effect on the number of errors citizens make: citizens who feel that they are treated more fairly (the higher values of micro-justice) make fewer errors. Those who feel that they have obtained much less than their fair share make 60 per cent more Guttman errors than those who feel that they have obtained much more than that. This corroborates the micro-justice hypothesis. The citizens who feel unfairly treated by the system make more Guttman errors: they may feel that their material situation might be improved by cutting taxes and by introducing a minimum income, despite the fact that the first is a ‘right-wing’ measure and the second a ‘left-wing’ measure.

Next, the effect of political knowledge and political interest are examined. In each model this variable has a similar and highly significant effect: citizens with no political knowledge make 30 per cent more Guttman errors than those with basic political knowledge. This corroborates the knowledge hypothesis: citizens who have a minimum of political knowledge make fewer Guttman errors than those who lack such basic information. The political interest hypothesis proposes that those who pay more attention to politics are more likely to receive elite cues and therefore are more likely to think in the economic left–right terms of the elite. This is the case in every analysis: those who express a very low interest in politics make 40 per cent more Guttman errors than those who express a very high interest in politics.

When it comes to differences between region and generation, the results support the party system hypothesis rather than the historical hypothesis. In Model 1 (no interaction relations, only a linear effect of age) western German citizens make more Mokken errors than their eastern German counterparts, as the party system hypothesis predicted. There is a weakly significant and negative effect of the respondents’ age. In Model 2 (no interaction, age-squared), one can see that the relationship between age and making errors is complex: citizens who are younger make fewer errors (the linear effect) but at the extremes the youngest voters make more errors (the curvilinear effect). In this model former East German citizens still make fewer Guttman errors than those from former West Germany. In Model 3 an interaction effect between age and region is included. It shows that there is a negative relationship between making errors and age (with younger voters making fewer errors) among those from former East Germany and there is no significant effect of age among those from former West Germany. Model 4 includes the squared age term and an interaction between both age variables and region. This has been visualised in Figure 1. It shows that in former East Germany (the black line) the relationship is curvilinear, for those born before 1950 age has a moderate effect on errors: younger citizens have more consistent views about economic issues. For those born after 1950 the relationship is reversed: the younger citizens are, the more Guttman errors they make. In former West Germany the effect of age is much weaker and closer to a linear relationship: younger citizens make slightly fewer errors than older citizens. These results contradict both the region and cohort hypothesis. The first held that citizens from former East Germany would have less consistent views about economic issues than citizens from former West Germany. Rather, older voters from former East Germany have the most consistent views about economic matters.
The effect of age also is not in the hypothesised direction. The hypothesis held that older citizens would have more consistent views than younger citizens. This is only true in eastern Germany. In western Germany, the effect of age is very small and has the opposite effect.59

These results support the party system hypothesis: citizens from the former East German Länder where Die Linke plays a major role tend to have more consistent views about economic matters than citizens in the former West German Länder where this party is less relevant. Following Neundorf’s argumentation one could attribute this effect to differences in elite cuing, with those in former East Germany receiving more cues on economic matters (due to the role of the old-left Die Linke) than those in former West Germany.60 This study found no evidence for the possibility that the experiences with authoritarianism decreased the ideological consistency of those living in the former German Democratic Republic.

Two control variables were included: class and education. Both have a consistent and significant effect in each of the models: working class and less educated citizens make fewer Guttman errors compared to middle class and more highly educated citizens. This shows that ideological inconsistency is not necessarily a characteristic of less educated or working class citizens.
8. MEDIATION ANALYSIS: SO WHAT?

So far, this article has shown that a large share of German citizens lack consistent views about economic issues and that this ideological inconsistency is concentrated among West German citizens who are least informed about and interested in political issues and who feel that they are not getting their fair share. One may wonder: so what? Is this only an arcane measurement issue or does it affect political attitudes and voting behaviour? This section will show that ideologically inconsistent thinking about political issues contributes to political dissatisfaction and that in turn leads to lower turnout. The key argument is that because established parties have consistent views about economic issues, citizens who lack consistent views cannot find representation. They are alienated from politics and abstain from voting.

There is a weak but significant relationship between whether or not citizens vote and the number of Guttman’s errors they make on economic issues. The key question is how one can explain this correlation: the hypothesis tested here is that political dissatisfaction makes people with less consistent views on economic issues not turn out to vote.

In order to determine whether this mechanism is present a mediation analysis was performed. The structure of the analysis is shown in Figure 2, while Table 5 shows the full model including controls. Indeed, citizens who make more Guttman errors are significantly more likely to be politically dissatisfied. Moreover, citizens who are less politically satisfied are less likely to vote. As the indirect effect \((A \times B)\) is also significant, the mediation hypothesis is corroborated: because citizens who make more Guttman errors are more politically dissatisfied, they are less likely to vote. The fact that the relationship between errors and voting is no longer significant in Table 5 indicates that there is complete mediation: there is no significant effect of making Guttman errors on not voting independent of the effect through political dissatisfaction. A large number of control variables have been included both as covariates of political satisfaction and as covariates of the decision to vote or not: many of these control variables were linked to making Guttman errors above (such as class, education, political interest, political knowledge, age, age-squared and region). A number of other controls (gender, whether voting is seen as a duty, internal and external efficacy, errors on the

\[\text{FIGURE 2} \]

**VISUALIZATION OF THE MEDIATION BETWEEN MOKKEN ERRORS AND VOTING THROUGH POLITICAL DISSATISFACTION**

*Note:* Mediation effect with controls included. Based on Table 5.
## TABLE 5
MEDIATION ANALYSIS EFFECT OF ERRORS AND POLITICAL SATISFACTION ON TURNOUT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.45*** (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Errors on the economic left–right scale</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>0.11*** (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.03 (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.04*** (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West German</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.06*** (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of birth</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.11 (0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of birth-squared</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.14 (0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.04*** (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.01 (0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.01 (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duty</td>
<td>Political Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.10*** (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal efficacy</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.20*** (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External efficacy</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05*** (0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Errors on the general left–right scale</td>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.17*** (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>-4.60*** (0.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political satisfaction</td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-1.19 (0.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td>-7.46*** (1.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.43*** (0.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West German</td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.53** (0.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of birth</td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.25 (1.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of birth-squared</td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.91 (1.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.18 (0.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.14 (0.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.51*** (0.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duty</td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.97*** (0.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal efficacy</td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.22*** (0.80)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Continued*
general left–right dimension) are also included. All variables, except for political interest, the age variables, education and gender have separate and significant effects on political satisfaction. All variables except for the age variables, class, education and errors on the general left–right dimension have separate and significant effects on turning out to vote. Despite these controls, the specific mediation structure that was hypothesised is corroborated: citizens who have preferences on economic policy issues that do not fit the established left–right patterns are more likely to be dissatisfied with democracy and established parties. Their dissatisfaction can be understood, given that no party caters to their views. This dissatisfaction is the mediating variable between ideological inconsistency and electoral abstention.

A number of concerns may be raised about these results. First, this pattern may be the result of voters’ preferences not fitting in the general left–right dimension instead of the socio-economic dimension. The same pattern that was found for deviations from the economic dimension was visible for Guttman errors on the general left–right dimension: a significant effect on political satisfaction but no such effect on voting. This may indicate that a similar mediation structure may be present for the general left–right dimension. Still, our results hold if this control is included. Second, the direction of causality cannot be determined as all items are taken from the same survey. If this is indeed the case, the current analysis cannot determine without doubt whether dissatisfaction with politics leads to ideological inconsistency or whether ideological inconsistency leads to dissatisfaction. The theory discussed above provides a mechanism for the second interpretation, but the causality may be reversed or the effects of ideological inconsistency and dissatisfaction may reinforce each other. 62

9. CONCLUSION

This article concerned the ideological consistency in the views of voters in Germany in the 2009 elections. The five key findings were that: first, a large share of German citizens expressed ideologically inconsistent views about economic matters. For instance, citizens who favour lower taxation do not necessarily oppose a maximum income. Even though earlier research suggested that German citizens have the most consistent
views about economic matters of all European citizens, this study showed that at least in the 2009 election, using this survey, German citizens did not understand economic issues in terms of the left–right dimension that structures party competition. Given that Germany is a least likely case, this makes it likely that this lack of ideological consistency can be found in most European countries.

Second, citizens who feel that they have not been given their fair share are less likely to have consistent views about economic matters. These citizens may prefer to pay lower taxes themselves while at the same time favouring a minimum income. These citizens may be right about their own situation: they may be better off from lower taxes and from a guaranteed minimum income. These views are, however, ideologically inconsistent from the perspective of political science theory because these citizens do not think about economic issues in terms of the left–right dimension.

Third, citizens who lack basic political knowledge are more likely to have ideologically inconsistent views about economic matters compared to those who have basic political knowledge. This indicates that basic political knowledge can help to contextualise the issues voters were questioned about. Moreover, there is a significant effect of political interest on the ideological consistency of the view of voters. This indicates that citizens who pay more attention to politics are more likely to receive cues from the political elite.

Fourth, the difference between political contexts also contributes to differences in ideological consistency: the views of those living in former East Germany were more consistent than those living in former West Germany. Following Neundorf, this difference was explained by differences in the party system in these regions: in former East Germany, the old-left Die Linke, which focused on economic issues, plays a major role. In former West Germany the role of this party is much smaller. Therefore the cues voters receive to think about economic issues in left/right terms may be weaker.

Finally, this article also answered the ‘so what?’ question. It showed that the lack of ideological consistency is not just an arcane methodological issue. Citizens who have less consistent views about economic matters are also less likely to be satisfied with democracy and the established parties. The established parties offer left-wing and right-wing policy packages and therefore do not cater to citizens that have more complex economic views. Through its effect on political dissatisfaction, ideological inconsistency also affects turnout. The citizens who cannot find parties that cater to their policy preferences turn away from politics and are less likely to vote. This shows that the ideological inconsistency in economic policy preferences has a real effect on political attitudes and political behaviour.

Further research may want to pursue the questions examined in this article beyond the limitations of this research. Five avenues of further research are open: first, researchers may want to discover whether the ideological inconsistency uncovered in this paper for the German electorate in the 2009 elections was present before this year and persists after this year. As discussed above, the specific circumstances of the financial crisis and political reactions to the crisis may have affected the ideological consistency of economic views of voters. It seems worthwhile to trace this phenomenon, its causes and its consequences over time.

Second, future research may want to compare the ideological consistency of those living in former East and former West Germany to those living in central and eastern
European countries to determine more precisely what role experiences with communist dictatorships, democracy and party systems with parties with and without a strong economic focus play in determining the ideological consistency of voters.

Third, a number of indicators in this research yield promising results but a fuller picture could emerge if better indicators are used. One indicator that yielded strong and significant results despite having clear drawbacks was the indicator on micro-justice. This indicator measured whether citizens felt that they were given ‘a fair share’ but did not specify whether respondents felt that the government has advantaged or disadvantaged them. A more precise indicator that asks citizens whether, considering all taxes that they pay to the government and all government subsidies and services they receive, they have received a fair share of the resources would allow one to better trace whether it is a sense of micro-justice that fuels the Guttman errors citizens make. Moreover, this study relied on a single knowledge question to differentiate between those with no knowledge and basic knowledge of German politics. A multi-item scale with easy and difficult questions and in particular a squared knowledge term could be used in further research to understand the non-linear effect more precisely.

Fourth, future research may want to exploit the longitudinal nature of the German Longitudinal Election Survey to examine more precisely the causal claims made in this survey. By using items from the different waves of this multi-year survey, one may more precisely determine the direction of causality: for instance, it may be that political dissatisfaction and not having policy views that fit in the left/right policy packages that the established parties offer form a reinforcing cycle, as citizens who turn away from politics are less likely to pick up on elite cues. A similar pattern might occur for micro-justice, where preferences about government policy that cannot be met by established parties may strengthen a sense of not receiving a fair share of resources, which in turn may reinforce such policy preferences. A longitudinal study may also shed greater light on the level of ideological consistency between different cohorts in former East and West Germany, allowing one to disentangle party system and historical effects.

Finally, this study established a relationship between having ideologically inconsistent views on economic issues, political dissatisfaction and non-voting. As a control variable, ideological consistency on the general left–right dimension was included in the mediation analysis. This analysis indicated that there might also be a mediation relationship between the ideological consistency of voters’ views on a general left–right dimension, encompassing both economic and new cultural issues and political dissatisfaction and electoral abstention. Future research may want to analyse this relationship in greater detail, to establish whether the patterns found here for the economic left–right dimension also hold for the general left–right dimension.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Simon Otjes is a researcher at the Documentation Centre Dutch Political Parties at Groningen University. His research on political parties and spatial modelling has
previously been published in the American Journal of Political Science, Party Politics and Electoral Studies.

NOTES


26. Ibid., p.176.

27. Ibid., pp.177–78.


52. H. Rattinger, R. Schmitt-Beck, S. Roßteutscher, and B. Weßels, ‘German Longitudinal Election Survey’ (Mannheim: University of Mannheim, 2011), ZA503_en_v6.0.0. This specifically employs the Rolling Cross-Section Campaign Survey with Post-election Wave. Respondents were drawn using a multistage random sampling to create a representative sample of the entire population of German-speaking residents of the Federal Republic of Germany who were eligible to vote and living in a private household with a landline. The fieldwork was done between the 29 July 2009 and 26 September 2009 for the pre-election wave and between 28 September and the 26 October 2009 for the post-election wave. The response rate was 20 per cent. For more information on the survey approach see https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/desc2.asp?no=5303&db=e&doi=10.4232/1.11604. No weights were used in this analysis. Mokken scaling can only be applied to unweighted data.


54. The results of the analysis do not substantially change if a fifth item that has been asked in the opposite direction is included in this analysis.

55. Bartels, Unequal Democracy.

56. Van der Waal et al., ‘“Some Are More Equal than Others”’.


59. An alternative set-up was also tested, where instead of a continuous age variable, a dichotomy was used that divides voters born before or after 1961 (i.e. the group that was 18 when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989). This sustains the same interpretation: older citizens from former East Germany make the least errors: they make 7.0 errors (95 per cent confidence interval between 6.7 and 7.3). This is lower than young respondents from former East Germany, who make 7.9 errors (between 7.5 and 8.3), but also lower than young respondents from former West Germany, who make 8.1 mistakes (between 7.8 and 8.4) and older respondents from former West Germany with 8.0 (between 7.7 and 8.3).

60. Neundorf, ‘Growing up on Different Sides of the Wall’.

61. Point-biserial correlation is 0.07, significant at the 0.00 level.

62. In order to exclude the possibility that outliers on the economic left–right error variable affected the analysis, the analyses were also re-run excluding cases that scored two standard deviations above the average on the economic left–right error-variable and with logged count variables that have much less extreme distribution. Both these analyses show a significant mediation term.

63. Neundorf, ‘Growing up on Different Sides of the Wall’.