Meaningful Choices.
Substantive Theme and Intellectual Context of Module 3 of the CSES.

Hermann Schmitt & Bernhard Wessels
Observation:

— We know a lot about how and why voters vote

— We do know little about how and why voters vote depending on how they can vote

Resulting Question

— How do choice sets/choice options effect voting and the rational of voting?
Meaningful Choices - Theory, Concept, Relevance

Elections:
only electoral democracy
or meaningful elections?

Prerequisites of polyarchy/democracy
(Robert Dahl):
- effective participation
- control of the agenda
Consensus among the varying concepts/theories of democracy:
- Democracy implies choices
- Choices should have effects

Thus, democracy needs

**Meaningful choices. Definition**

distinctiveness of choice options
effectiveness of the electoral linkage
Meaningful choices
—Match between demand and supply

Precondition
—Supply: Choice set is differentiated
—Demand: Voter‘s choice is structured
Choice set

—What: agenda
—How: policies
—Who: actors (candidates; parties)

Evaluative criteria
(retrospective/prospective):
- ideology/positions of actors
- Performance of actors
Institutions condition choices and their effectiveness

— Openness of the electoral system
  i.e. majoritarian/proportional; hurdles; proportionality; type of vote

— Openness of the party system
  i.e. rules for the establishment of parties

— Type of government
  i.e. single party, coalition, presidential
Hypotheses on Choices and Behavior I

likely determinants of distinctiveness and effectiveness
- cleavage structure
- format of the party system
- ideological polarization of party competition (declining due to dealignment and the demise of communism)
- divided government and more generally multi-level governance
Hypotheses on Choices and Behavior II

reasons of a possible decline/absence of meaning in the choice set
- dealignment and the growing homogenization of societies
- change of parties and how voters relate to them
- modern campaigning
Hypotheses on Choices and Behavior III

likely voters reactions if choices cease to be meaningful

- turnout decline
- rise of anti-system parties
- decline of system support
Indicators of a Meaningful Choice Set (Micro)

Policy and ideological differences between the different choice options:
- perceptions and evaluations of differences in issue positions and/or issue emphasis of parties and/or candidates
- perceptions and evaluations of ideological distances between parties and/or candidates
Performance and competence differences between the different choice options:

- measures of competence of parties and/or candidates in order to discount policies or ideologies

Perceived actor constellations:

- identifiability of alternative governments (or government coalitions)
### competence and performance of actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>most important problem (MIP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>party/candidate competency MIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second most important problem (SMIP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>party/candidate competency SMIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third most important problem (TMIP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>party/candidate competency TMIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government performance in general</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### distinctiveness of choice options and inclusiveness of choice set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>difference between parties in campaign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hypothetical choice if voting compulsory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alternative choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative choice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2: $R^2$, Regression of Perception of Parties' L-R Positions on 14 Factor Scales

Source: Regression model as in table 3, R square from country-wise regressions.
Logit (pVote Choice) = a 
+ b1*LR Distance 
+ b2*Party Rating 
+ b3*Party Representation 
+ b4*Clarity of Policy Positions 
+ b5*Eff. Parties 
+ b6*LR Range 
+ b7*LR Differentiation 
+ b8*(LR Distance*Clarity of Policy Positions)
Figure 3: Marginal Effect of Proximity conditioned by the Strength of Re-Conceptualization of Policy Positions in Election Platforms on the Left-Right Scale
Figure 7: Marginal Effect of Proximity conditioned by the Left-Right Differentiation of Political Supply
Survey questions

Q1a. >>> MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE - EGOCENTRIC – TEXT: What has been the most important issue to you personally in this election?
Q1b. >>> MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE - EGOCENTRIC – TEXT: What has been the second most important issue to you personally in this election?
Q3a. >>> PARTY/CANDIDATE COMPETENCE - FIRST SOCIOTROPIC PROBLEM TEXT: Thinking of the most important political problem facing [COUNTRY] which [party/presidential candidate] do you think is best in dealing with it?
Q4. >>> WHO IS IN POWER CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE
Q5. >>> WHO PEOPLE VOTE FOR MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE
Q6. >>> GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE: GENERAL
Q7. >>> IS THERE A PARTY THAT REPRESENTS RESPONDENT'S VIEWS
Q7a. >>> PARTY THAT REPRESENTS RESPONDENT'S VIEWS BEST
Q8. >>> IS THERE A LEADER THAT REPRESENTS RESPONDENT'S VIEWS
Q8a. >>> LEADER THAT REPRESENTS RESPONDENT'S VIEWS BEST
Q9a. >>> LIKE-DISLIKE – PARTY
Q10a. >>> LIKE-DISLIKE – LEADER
Q11a >>> LEFT-RIGHT - PARTY A
Q12a >>> LEFT-RIGHT - LEADER A
Q13. >>> LEFT-RIGHT – SELF
Q17. >>> DIFFERENCES OF CHOICE OPTIONS

During the election campaign, would you say that there were major differences between the [parties/candidates], minor differences, or no differences at all?

Q18. >>> CAMPAIGN INVOLVEMENT
Q19. >>> SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRATIC PROCESS
Q20. >>> ARE YOU CLOSE TO ANY POLITICAL PARTY