

ECONOMIC EFFECTS ON THE VOTE IN NORWAY

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A body of accumulating evidence appears to support the finding that collectivist economic concerns and assessments of government economic performance directly influence voting behavior independent of other predispositions and cleavages. This seems reasonable and is well documented across both cultures and time periods. What remains more inconclusive is how to explain fluctuations in the electoral impact of personal economic worries. Our comparison of Norwegian and U.S. data has suggested that cognitive, social and political factors may all influence this association. The political information and cues for connecting the two spheres may be absent for most elections and for most people. Nevertheless, in some elections and under certain conditions individual economic worries can have a significant, independent impact on election outcomes. A major goal of future political-economy research, therefore, should be to specify more completely those factors that facilitate the linkage of personal and collectivist economic concerns.

The electoral consequences of economic conditions are the subject of an increasingly voluminous literature in the United States. By comparison, research on this topic in Scandinavian countries is quite rare. However, recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in the topic among both economists and political scientists.

Most of the Scandinavian work in this area relies on aggregate indicators to determine the relationship between economics and political behavior. Frey (1979), for example, employed rate of inflation, change in unemployment, and growth in real income to predict the popularity of the incumbent party in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden over a period of 67 years. The results are at best mixed. He found significant political effects for inflation in Denmark and unemployment in Sweden. For Sweden there is also an additional effect of real income growth but only in the bivariate model. These disappointing

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results are explained by structural changes in society and the short-lived tradition of placing economic security within the government's domain. "It may, for instance, be argued that voters have only held the government responsible for unsatisfactory economic conditions since the Keynesian revolution, i.e., since World War II" (Frey, 1979, p. 314). This interpretation is corroborated by an analysis showing that the popularity of the Swedish government during the period 1967-73 was significantly related to all three economic indicators.

In a similar study, Jonung and Wadensjö (1979) predicted the popularity of the Swedish Social Democratic party for the period 1967-78. Their model incorporated monthly data on unemployment, consumer prices, and real income. As the Social Democrats were in power from 1967 to 1976 but not during the 1977-78 period, a test of the incumbency factor was possible.

Although the estimates were sensitive to different model specifications, the main conclusions are fairly straightforward: unemployment, inflation, and to a lesser extent, decreasing real income have negative consequences for the Social Democrats when they govern. When they are out of power the sign of the coefficients reverses for inflation and unemployment, but not for real income growth. However, only the effect of unemployment is statistically significant at the .05 level in this model.

The Swedish case has also been analyzed by Sigelman (1983) in a study that covers the period 1967-74. This study has two advantages over the previously discussed works: it includes variables from a competing model of electoral behavior, and it uses an estimation method that is more appropriate with time series data (GLS as compared to OLS). The indicators of the political economy model include the demand for unskilled labor (as reported by Swedish firms) and the consumer price index. Two other indicators from a communication model are also included; the percentage of the editorials in newspapers with comments that are critical of the government, and the percentage of editorials expressing negative evaluations, regardless of their focus. The analysis results, when predicting the popularity of the government, show fairly strong effects in the predicted direction for the unemployment indicator, and more moderate effects of the consumer price index and media criticism.

By far the most advanced aggregate study has been done by Madsen (1980), who analyzed time series data for the Scandinavian countries for the period 1920-75. Among the strengths of the study is the explicit consideration of problems in the specification of a model for multiparty systems. Since coalition governments have been more the rule than the exception in the Scandinavian countries, especially in Denmark, the question is who gets the blame or the benefit from changing economic fortunes. In Norway and Sweden, Madsen used support for the incumbent parties as the dependent variable.

But for Denmark, Madsen assumed that the party supplying the prime minister will be seen as responsible for economic conditions, and he consequently used support for this party as the dependent variable in his model. An objection to this approach, however, is that the prime minister may come from one of the smaller parties in the coalition, thus the assumption may be less valid than when the prime minister represents the largest or dominant party in the coalition.

In addition to the conventional variables like percentage increase in real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, level of unemployment, net change in unemployment, and inflation, Madsen also attempted to include variables that capture changes in the social and political system. For example, he used a measure of increases in tax revenue to account for the growth of the public sector during the period investigated. He also took into account long-term changes in the electoral support for the parties by constructing a normal vote variable that is the average support across three previous elections.

The results of the estimation provide no support for the hypothesized economic effects in either Denmark (with the exception of inflation) or Norway. For Sweden, on the other hand, the economy is found to influence electoral outcomes as predicted: the incumbent party benefited from favorable economic conditions and was hurt by a deteriorating economy. The evidence produced by Madsen (1980) for the long-term period and the results of the analyses for the sixties and seventies thus makes the evidence in the Swedish case relatively strong. Denmark and Norway, by comparison, apparently do not fit the political economy model, at least as determined by the aggregate studies.

Madsen offered two explanations for the absence of economic effects in Norway and Denmark. He suggested that the economic conditions in these small countries are dominated by fluctuations in the international economy; thus country specific indicators fail to capture the appropriate variance (1980, p. 16). Second, he argued that the impact of class differences on the vote may be so strong as to eliminate other effects (1980, p. 26). The difficulty with these suggestions, and indeed with all the aggregate analyses, is that the additional explanatory variables are rarely included in the specified models.

Class is only one possible cleavage that may overshadow economic effects in Scandinavian countries. A weakness of the aggregate studies is that they do not take these relevant cleavages into account in the prediction of the vote. This is normally not an objection against individual-level studies based on survey data. These studies generally incorporate a number of factors from competing models of electoral behavior. In principle, such studies can include the economic items with a number of other variables; thus we can assess the relative net impact of economic perceptions.

The major study based on survey data comparing economic factors with

other important elements in a model of voting was done by Pettersen (1981). Through a set of regression equations predicting the vote for each of the Norwegian parties, he included independent variables from three models of electoral behavior: the identification model, the issue proximity model, and the investment model. In the investment model, he incorporated mediated retrospective items (assessments of the government's policies and performance on unemployment and inflation) and simple prospective items (expectations on personal finances and fear of unemployment). Pettersen's study is based on data from the Norwegian Electoral Studies and covers the elections of 1965, 1969, and 1977.

The major conclusions are that party identification is the most important determinant of the vote and that issues also have some importance, especially in the 1977 election. Only for the 1965 election is the investment model of some relevance. It is important to note, however, that the 1965 study did not include the personal finances items. The effects of the investment model in that election were, therefore, attributed to mediated items only. The simple economic items were included in the 1977 study, but Pettersen did not explicitly specify the relationship between the simple and the mediated items. It might be that the impact of personal concerns on the vote choice is dependent on the perception of how the alternative parties will handle inflation and unemployment.

A question that naturally arises is, Why have so few studies been published on the relationship between the economy and the vote in the Scandinavian countries when, at least for Norway, relevant items have been included in the surveys from 1965 on? The answer is at least twofold. First, the standard model for explaining electoral behavior in the Scandinavian countries, and probably most clearly in Norway, has been the cleavage model (Rokkan, 1967; Valen and Rokkan, 1974). This model sees the voters' position in the matrix of economic and cultural cleavages as the fundamental determinant of partisan affiliations. In more recent studies (Valen, 1981; Valen and Aardal, 1983), the ideology and issue positions of the voters have been linked to their cleavage locations to give a more complete model of how the vote is determined. This model does not easily facilitate the private economic concerns of the voter.

Second, to the extent that economic attitude items have been studied, they are assumed to reflect the partisan positions of the voters and consequently are treated as dependent variables (Valen and Aardal, 1983, chap. 10). The dominant view has been that there is little room for independent economic calculation on behalf of the Norwegian voter; they more or less automatically assess the parties and government alternatives from their structural positions and ideological inclinations, and once partisan attachment is determined, this strongly colors the perceived economic relevance of the parties and the government.

In summary, a review of the relevant literature provides little evidence supporting the hypothesis that economic conditions influence voting behavior in Scandinavia. The macrolevel studies show that economic effects are consistently found only for Sweden. However, the macrolevel studies cannot be viewed as conclusive, as they are often plagued by specification and measurement problems. Nevertheless, the infrequent individual-level analyses that have been conducted also failed to discover consistent economic effects. The major theoretical thrust of the microlevel studies has been to assume that economic judgments linking politics and economics are thoroughly confounded with the predisposing effects of partisanship.

If personal economic conditions are cognitively associated with evaluations of government or connected with the vote choice at all, it is only done as an extension of social cleavages or partisan loyalty, not as an independent, rational assessment of either personal self-interest or collective benefits. Given these conclusions from the literature, we would predict that any economic effects on individual-level political behavior in Norway, the Scandinavian country we focus on in this paper, would be at best weak, inconsistent across time, and most likely a spurious reflection of partisanship and other cleavages.

PERSONAL ECONOMIC VOTING IN THE WELFARE STATE

An alternative theory that derives from work on France suggests very different expectations. Lewis-Beck (1983) reported finding a significant correlation between personal economic conditions and the vote in the French parliamentary elections of 1973 and 1978. His results are in sharp contrast to those that have been repeatedly documented for the United States. Economic effects on the vote in the United States appear to arise mainly from a concern with collective economic conditions rather than personal economic experiences (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979). By comparison, the French data actually reveal a stronger impact of economic judgments about personal experiences rather than about collective conditions.

The difference in the findings for the two countries is so striking that Lewis-Beck invoked a "cultural" explanation for the dissimilarity. He argued that because of years of continuous growth in the centralization of economic authority in the French government, French voters are more likely than Americans to express their personal financial woes through the ballot box. Americans, in contrast, are assumed, on the basis of previous research (Feldman, 1982; Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979; Kinder and Mebane, 1983), to place blame on the individual more and to attribute their personal economic misfortunes to themselves or other proximal causes rather than to the government.

The Lewis-Beck "cultural" thesis appears to be a powerful explanation for what has plagued U.S. researchers for some time—namely, how to explain

the lack of a correlation between individual economic optimism/pessimism and the vote. Unfortunately, Lewis-Beck did not provide data to test his cultural hypothesis, he merely presented it as a speculative explanation for the differences in the French and American data.

The Norwegian case provides an excellent opportunity to extend the cultural hypothesis and investigate it with available empirical evidence.¹ Similar to France, the Norwegian government plays a much more pervasive role in directing the economic fortunes of the country than is true for the United States. Moreover, the welfare state is based on the principal of equality, and equalization of individual economic rewards and conditions is an explicit goal of the society. Individualism, therefore, should be much less prevalent and less highly regarded as a value in Norway relative to the United States.

Given these cultural differences we would expect, following Lewis-Beck's thesis, to find that: (1) Norwegians are more likely than Americans to hold the government responsible for economic problems; (2) personal economic fortunes should be more strongly correlated with both evaluations of government economic performance and the vote in Norway; and (3) evaluations of which party would do a better job in dealing with inflation and unemployment should be more strongly associated with the vote in Norway than in the United States. Each of these points is investigated in turn.

Is Government Responsible?

Over the years, the Norwegian election surveys have included a set of questions asking if government policies or other causes are most responsible for inflation and unemployment. The responses to these questions reveal a surprisingly high percentage of individuals who see causes other than government actions as responsible for the country's economic ills. In each year, approximately half or more of the Norwegian respondents saw other nongovernmental sources as the cause of high prices and unemployment (see Table 1). The only exception occurred in 1981 when 36 percent attributed inflation to nongovernmental causes. By comparison, between 16% and 32% pointed unequivocally to government as the most important cause of inflation and unemployment.

Contrary to the cultural hypothesis, the Norwegian data on attributions for economic ills appear very similar to comparable evidence from the United States. In 1976, for example, three out of every ten U.S. survey respondents blamed the government rather than labor unions or big business for the economic difficulties facing the country at that time (see Table 1). Similarly, Kinder and Mebane (1983) reported that 18% of the respondents in a 1979 consumer attitudes survey mentioned government as the cause of inflation.

Of course, it could be argued, on the basis of Table 1, that the percentage

TABLE 1. Perceived Cause of Economic Problems

| Perceived Cause of Problem | Data by Country and Years | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|---------|
| | 1969 | Norway 1977 | 1981 |
| <i>Unemployment</i> | | | |
| Government policy | 16% | 16% | 21% |
| Both | 25 | 29 | 33 |
| Other sources | 59 | 55 | 47 |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| (N) | (1,172) | (1,322) | (1,453) |
| <i>Inflation</i> | | | |
| Government policy | 20% | 21% | 32% |
| Both | 27 | 30 | 32 |
| Other sources | 53 | 49 | 36 |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| (N) | (1,168) | (1,459) | (1,416) |
| United States | | | |
| | 1976 | | |
| <i>Economic Problems</i> | | | |
| Congress | 19% | | |
| President | 12 | | |
| Labor unions | 33 | | |
| Big business | 36 | | |
| Total | 100% | | |
| (N) | (1984) | | |

of respondents mentioning government as the cause of economic ills was much higher in Norway than in the United States. This conclusion could be reached by combining those who said "both" with those who unambiguously blamed government. Because the "both" category is difficult to interpret, the evidence of Table 1 appears troublesome but inconclusive for the cultural thesis. Despite this lack of definitiveness the data suggest that, although government is seen as a prominent cause of economic problems, it is not the most predominant culprit in either society. While government may be faulted by many citizens for not solving economic problems, relatively few people see government as the cause of those difficulties.

Are Personal and Collective Economics Connected?

The cultural thesis also leads us to expect a relatively stronger correlation in Norway than in the United States between optimism/pessimism about one's personal economic situation and collective economic judgments. In a

TABLE 2. Correlations of Personal Economic Concerns With Assessed Economic Performance of Parties and the Vote^a

| | Inflation | Unemployment | Vote |
|---------------|-----------|--------------|-------|
| Norway | | | |
| 1969 | .04 | .01 | .08* |
| 1973 | b | b | -.02 |
| 1977 | -.08* | -.06 | -.07* |
| 1981 | .19** | .20** | .30** |
| United States | | | |
| 1976 | -.15** | -.08* | .09* |
| 1978 | .07 | .05 | .08 |
| 1980 | .07* | .06* | -.10* |
| 1982 | -.22** | -.18** | .10* |

^aPersonal economic concerns was coded: 1 = personal financial situation will be better in coming year; 3 = same; 5 = worse. Party performance for Norway was coded: 1 = better by Socialists; 3 = same; 5 = better by Bourgeois. For the U.S. it was: 1 = better by Democrats; 3 = same; 5 = better by Republicans. Vote in Norway and the U.S., respectively, was coded: 1 = Socialist parties, 2 = Bourgeois parties; 1 = Republican, 2 = Democrat.

* $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

welfare state, the government explicitly acts as the planning agent for economic stability, not just at the national level but at the individual level as well. We might, therefore, expect the average citizen to link these economic spheres cognitively. In the United States, however, there should be little or no relationship between personal and collective economic evaluations because government is "relatively fragmented and nondirective, at least with regard to people's economic life" (Lewis-Beck, 1983, p. 355).

Again we find little evidence to support the part of this cultural hypothesis that focuses on Norway. In 1969, 1973, and 1977, only weak correlations exist between judgments regarding personal economic conditions and either government economic performance or the vote (see Table 2). This pattern of relationships is similar to that found in the United States for 1976, 1978 and 1980. From those years one would conclude that assessments of personal economic conditions are not politicized in either country. The results would also clearly contradict the cultural hypothesis.

However, 1981 in Norway and 1982 in the United States provide a curious anomaly for both the cultural hypothesis and previous work on economic politics. In both countries for those years we find a stronger linkage between personal economics and political evaluations.² Clearly cultural differences do not explain this sharply stronger association between personal and collective economic judgments. We suggest that the issues and tenor of the political debate in those elections focused more clearly on economics and particularly

TABLE 3. Correlations of Vote With Assessed Economic Performance of Parties

| | Inflation | Unemployment |
|---------------|------------------|--------------|
| Norway | | |
| 1969 | .39 ^a | .40 |
| 1977 | .45 | .46 |
| 1981 | .49 | .48 |
| United States | | |
| 1976 | .61 | .52 |
| 1978 | .50 | .41 |
| 1980 | .62 | .57 |
| 1982 | .48 | .44 |

^aAll correlations are positive, indicating that people were more likely to vote for the party they thought would do a better job in dealing with the economic problem. All correlations are significant well beyond the .001 level.

on the implications of government economic policies for individual prosperity. In Norway, for example, inflation had reached 14% in 1981, and Kaare Willoch, then floor leader of the Conservatives and later prime minister, directed considerable criticism during the campaign toward the economic record of the ruling Labour party. Similarly, the 1982 U.S. congressional elections were held amid considerable discussion of Reagonomics, cuts in social welfare programs, growing unemployment, remaining fears of inflation, and a world wide recession.

In short, we speculatively suggest that an interaction between the economic nature of the times and the discussion of economic problems by the candidates and the media produced the increased politicization of the personal financial assessments. This outcome suggests two additional conclusions. First, the link between individual and collective judgments may have more to do with specific political campaigns and the transmission of political information than with cultural differences. Second, generalizations regarding the independence between personal and collective economic beliefs need to be specified more clearly.

Are Assessments of Government Economic Performance Reflected in the Vote?

One last prediction of the cultural hypothesis is that evaluations of government economic performance should be more strongly reflected in the vote of a welfare state than is true for the United States. Again the data fail to support this prediction. In fact, as the correlations in Table 3 demonstrate, the vote and performance judgments are often more strongly associated in the U.S. data. The impact of economic performance on the vote choice in Norway has, however, increased over the years.

Partly the increased correlations reflect a shift by the public away from the perception of the bourgeois parties as less capable than Labour in dealing with economic problems. In 1969 the socialist parties were perceived as more likely to deal effectively with the economy by roughly two to one over the bourgeois parties. By 1981 this had changed considerably. In that year the socialist and bourgeois parties were mentioned by nearly equal percentages as the party best able to handle unemployment and the bourgeois had surpassed Labour in the public's estimation as the party most capable of controlling inflation.

The strong correlations between the vote and these mediated economic evaluations of which party would better handle economic problems raise several other theoretically relevant questions. First, in those years when we find a significant zero-order correlation between personal economic conditions and the vote, is this relationship reduced to insignificance by controlling on the party evaluations? Second, in a more fully specified model incorporating class ideological and partisan cleavages, do either the personal or collective economic judgments continue to have any independent effect on voting behavior?

In contrast to the Lewis-Beck (1983) finding, both Fiorina (1981) and Kinder and Mebane (1983) have proposed models that argue for no independent, direct effects of the individual's personal economic situation on the vote. According to these models, personal economic distress is connected with the vote only through politicized intervening variables such as government economic performance or perceptions of how the broader economy is functioning. The Norwegian data for both 1969 and 1981 offer examples that are contrary to the U.S. models. After controlling for the inflation and unemployment party performance measures, personal finances were still significantly, albeit weakly, correlated with the vote in 1969 and rather strongly correlated in 1981 (Beta = .18).

Specifying the model more fully does reduce personal finances to an insignificant level for the 1969 data, but not in 1981 (see Table 4). In general, the Norwegian data suggest that as the more traditional cleavages associated with class and party loyalties have decayed, economic performance has come to the fore as a major determinant of the vote. Contrary to what was suggested by the earlier macrolevel studies, economic factors appear to have influenced the vote choice rather strongly in recent elections. Indeed, the fairly recent rise in the importance of the economic factor may explain the absence of economic effects in the earlier macrolevel studies of Norway, as well as the disregard for these factors in the microlevel analyses.

Of course, one might argue that part of the relationship between the vote and the economic indicators is a reflection of reciprocal causation originating in other prior predispositions or the vote choice itself. Clearly we have

TABLE 4. Regression Coefficients for a More Fully Specified Model Predicting the Vote^a

| Predictors | Norway | | |
|-------------------------|--------|-------|------|
| | 1969 | 1977 | 1981 |
| Personal finances | .01* | -.02* | .13 |
| Party best-inflation | .14 | .19 | .22 |
| Party best-unemployment | .16 | .23 | .20 |
| Left/Right ideology | | .28 | .27 |
| Party identification | .44 | .21 | .24 |
| Class | .22 | .19 | .11 |
| <i>R</i> | .69 | .70 | .72 |

| Predictors | United States | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|------|------|------|
| | 1976 | 1978 | 1980 | 1982 |
| Personal finances | .01* | .02* | -.08 | .02* |
| Party best-Inflation | .26 | .22 | .31 | .12 |
| Party best-unemployment | .20 | .09 | .15 | .10 |
| Liberal/conservative | .13 | .05* | .04* | .02* |
| Party identification | .33 | .42 | .41 | .47 |
| Class | .03* | .01* | .05* | .01* |
| <i>R</i> | .73 | .64 | .76 | .63 |

^aVote in Norway was coded: 1 = Socialist, 2 = Bourgeois. In the U.S., it was coded: 1 = Republican, 2 = Democrats.

*Denotes coefficients that are *not* significant at the .05 level. All other entries are significant at the .01 level or better.

not tested for all these reciprocal relationships. Our task has been a more modest one of attempting to determine if there is any independent effect of economic considerations after controlling for all those other assumed prior predispositions. Having incorporated the major alternative explanations for the vote, we feel rather safe in concluding that in Norway there is definitely an impact of the economy which is independent of partisan ideological and social cleavages. For 1981, this economic effect appears quite similar to Lewis-Beck's French findings and contrary to the U.S. models. Nevertheless, there is little evidence to suggest that this result can be explained by a "cultural" difference.

SPECIFYING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ECONOMICS AND POLITICS

Having dismissed the "cultural" explanation for the 1981 results, it behooves us to provide some other individual-level explanation. Following the lead of Kinder and Mebane (1983), we can search for those factors that might increase the availability of information that would facilitate the cognitive link

between economics and politics. We might expect, for example, that since there was a significant rise in the proportion of the Norwegian population blaming the government for inflation in 1981 (recall Table 1), that this fostered a closer tie between personal economic worries and political behavior in that year. Similarly, we might predict that people who are better informed and intensely interested in politics may have either more fully developed political schemas or stronger partisan attachments which facilitate the connection between economic concerns and political choices.

Before turning to these psychological or cognitive factors which can influence the linkage between private economic concerns and the vote, we will also consider one social factor. Kramer (1983) has argued that observable changes in individual welfare may be caused by two unobservable components, one which is government induced, and hence politically relevant, and one which is caused by life cycle and other politically irrelevant factors. His argument suggests that issues of personal finances may be of greater relevance for individuals who are more closely linked to the government sector and be of less relevance for persons making their fortunes outside the direct reach of government economic decisions. While this latter group may be considered very small in a society like Norway, the degree to which the government is an important cause in determining personal welfare certainly varies across individuals.

We propose that persons employed in the public sector of the economy, for example, will be more influenced by the economic decisions of the government than persons employed in the private sector. Consequently, the linkage between economic concerns and voting should be stronger for the former than for the latter group. If this were true, it would also help explain the increased importance of economic factors in voting behavior during recent years, as the public sector grew rapidly between 1969 and 1981.³

We do, in fact, find the predicted pattern for 1969 and 1977. Among persons employed in the private sector of the economy, there was virtually no relationship between personal finances and the vote, while the correlation is moderately strong for those employed in the public sector (see Table 5). However, in 1981 the pattern reverses: the correlations for both sectors are significant, but personal economic concerns and the vote are most strongly associated among respondents employed in the private sector. The 1981 results, therefore raise serious doubts about employment in the public sector as a sufficient condition for specifying the connection between personal finances and the vote.

Of course, it may be that people employed in the private sector in 1981 were even more likely than those in the public sector to hold government responsible for their economic fortunes. Kinder and Mebane (1983) argued that how individuals explain their economic situation strongly conditions

TABLE 5. Correlation Between Personal Financial Concerns and the Vote Controlling for Specifying Variables—Norway

| Specifying Variables ^a | Correlations | | |
|---|--------------|--------|-------|
| | 1969 | 1977 | 1981 |
| <i>Employment by sector:</i> | | | |
| Private | -.01 | .01 | .40** |
| Public | .16* | -.12** | .24** |
| <i>Blame government for unemployment:</i> | | | |
| No | .02 | -.02 | .33** |
| Partly | .20** | -.03 | .25** |
| Yes | .08* | -.09* | .17** |
| <i>Blame government for inflation:</i> | | | |
| No | .02 | -.02 | .27** |
| Partly | .13** | -.13** | .26** |
| Yes | .04 | -.07 | .19** |
| <i>Strength of party identification:</i> | | | |
| Independent | .02 | -.01 | .14** |
| Weak | .08* | -.07* | .26** |
| Strong | .09* | -.11** | .42** |

^aVote was coded: 1 = Socialists, 2 = Bourgeois. Economic concerns were coded: 1 = personal financial situation will be better in coming year; 3 = same; 5 = worse.

* $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

the relationship between personal economic worries and presidential voting. They predict that the relationship among those who have "collectivist" economic views and hold government responsible for the state of the economy should be weaker than for those who are "privatistic" and attribute the cause for economic problems to nongovernmental sources.

This theory would predict a stronger linkage between personal financial prospects and the vote for persons who blame the government for unemployment or inflation than for those who say the causes lie elsewhere. The empirical evidence from Norway, however, is less than fully supportive of the hypothesis for 1969 and 1977 because the correlations are slightly stronger for those who blame the government than for those who don't (see Table 5). But the difference between the correlations is so small as to be insignificant. Moreover, the 1981 data clearly contradict the hypothesized pattern.

Although controlling for the perceived cause of economic problems fails to confirm the Kinder/Mebane thesis, it may suggest an alternative theory. Upon closer examination, the pattern of correlations obtained after controlling for the perceived cause of inflation and unemployment appears somewhat curvilinear. That is, the correlations tend to be stronger for people saying that the government is partly to blame for economic ills than for those who hold government entirely responsible. This difference might reflect a

greater degree of political sophistication among the former than among the latter group. Certainly a reasonable view is that the government alone can only partially control unemployment and inflation. Blindly "blaming" the government, therefore, may actually reflect somewhat less political-economic sophistication, which in turn increases the difficulty of translating personal economic experiences into voting behavior.

This suggests the possibility that the connection between personal economic conditions and political behavior may have more to do with cognitive structuring than with attributing the cause of economic woes to particular sources. The connection may simply be more dependent on how well-informed and capable the person is to abstractly conceptualize politics. The richer the person's cognitions of politics, the more likely they should be expected to connect economic conditions and political preferences.

Whereas it is difficult to provide definitive proof for this argument, we have found some rather convincing evidence. First of all, we find stronger correlations between personal finances and the vote among people who are more interested in politics. Moreover, since strength of party identification indirectly indicates both the richness of political cognitions and the ability of a person to structure political experiences, we would expect it to be the mediating variable *par excellence*. Previous research shows that strong identifiers are much more likely to relate their views to political parties and to politicize their experiences. We would expect, therefore, that the link between economic concerns and the vote will depend on the strength of party identification. Strong identifiers should be more likely than independents to make the connection.

Unlike the results obtained with the previous controls, those for varying levels of party strength are both supportive of the hypothesis and consistent across all the years (see Table 5). Strong identifiers, particularly in 1981, were indeed more likely than Independents to link the vote and personal economic concerns. A similar analysis performed with the U.S. data reveals the same pattern of results especially for the years 1976 and 1982.

How are we to interpret the pattern of correlations obtained with the various specifying variables? In general, all three indicators (sector of employment, blaming government, and strength of party identification) appear to reflect factors that influence a person's ability to translate personal economic concerns into political behavior. Yet the three variables give rise to somewhat different interpretations. Both employment in the public sector and strength of partisan attachment lend themselves to a more benign interpretation than the one derived from the attribution of responsibility items.

In the latter case, we assume that citizens are consciously aware of the impact that government actions have on their own economic conditions and they punish the incumbents for detrimental outcomes. In the former case,

TABLE 6. Correlation Between Personal Financial Concerns and the Vote Controlling for Strength of Partisanship and Focus of Responsibility—United States^a

| Strength of Party Identification | 1976 | 1978 | 1980 | 1982 |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------|------|-------|
| Independent | .03 | .02 | -.07 | .04 |
| Weak | .11* | .07 | -.08 | .09 |
| Strong | .14* | .09 | -.11 | .19** |
| | Blame Government (1976 only) | | | |
| | | Yes | No | |
| Total | | .16** | .07 | |
| Independent | | .12 | .01 | |
| Weak | | .16 | .09 | |
| Strong | | .19** | .12* | |

^aVote was coded: 1 = Republican, 2 = Democrat. Economic concerns were coded: 1 = personal financial situation will be better in coming year; 3 = same; 5 = worse.

* $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

certain individuals, because of their occupational location, connection with partisan organizations, or self-interest, have available or seek out and are better prepared to utilize political-economic information. The connection between economics and partisan choices are, therefore, more readily made and used by these people in making electoral decisions. In short, their understanding of economics is more politicized regardless of whether or not they blame the government for their own *personal* economic conditions.

The Norwegian data separating these two potential connections are quite conclusive. There is no correlation between strength of partisan identification and blaming the government for inflation or unemployment. In addition, the correlation between personal finances and the vote fails to vary systematically with respect to blaming the government after having first controlled for strength of party identification. In brief, the link between personal economic assessments and the vote is enhanced by strength of partisanship and not by attributions of economic responsibility.

Data from the United States, on the other hand, suggest that both blaming the government and strength of party attachment help mediate the connection between personal economics and the vote choice (see Table 6). For Independents or those who do not hold the government responsible for economic problems, there is no linkage between personal finances and the vote, whereas quite a significant correlation is found for strong identifiers (particularly in 1976 and 1982) or for those who blame the government. Unfortunately, 1976 is the only year we can test for the effects of blaming the

government as this measure was not included in other National Election Studies (NES) surveys. Nonetheless, the 1976 data demonstrate that both factors independently help facilitate the connection of everyday economics with politics. The weakest correlation occurs among Independents who do not blame the government and the largest for strong identifiers who hold the government responsible.

The difference between the U.S. and Norwegian results when controlling for both strength of party identification and blaming the government may arise from a difference in the functions of political parties in the two countries. In Norway, the party organizations are a major source of political information for the voter. But in the United States, very little political information originates directly from the political parties. Strength of party identification in the United States, therefore, is more an indicator of self-motivation, whereas in Norway it also reflects integration into a network of political communications and organizational activities. In addition, the findings reported here fit nicely with Fiorina's (1981) suggestion that partisan attachment is heavily influenced by retrospective assessments of how well the parties have performed in office. Given this argument then, we would have expected to find, as we do, a closer linkage between economic performance attitudes and the vote among stronger identifiers.

CONCLUSIONS

Contrary to the earlier macrolevel studies, we have found a strong and systematic impact of economic concerns on political behavior in Norway. As the social cleavages that traditionally dominated Norwegian politics dissipated, economic factors came to have an increasingly powerful influence on election outcomes. The absence of economic effects in the macrolevel studies may, therefore, have been an accurate representation of an earlier period in Norwegian political history, rather than the result of statistical limitations. One major problem with macrolevel studies, however, is that they are not sensitive to shifts in social and political forces as they are occurring.

The microlevel data, on the other hand, provide less than conclusive evidence as a counter to the "small nations" argument, which has been raised by the macrostudies. Economic conditions in smaller countries with open markets are subject to political decisions and economic fluctuations in other countries. Politicians in these smaller nations frequently point to fluctuations in the world economy as the culprit for economic problems at home. Voters in Norway and other small countries, therefore, might be less likely to translate economic grievances into votes against the incumbent because they might perceive the incumbent as exercising little control over economic conditions (Lewis-Beck, 1982).

The 1969 and 1977 Norwegian data showing insignificant relationships between personal economic conditions and the vote actually fit the smaller nations explanation. Likewise, the appearance of a strong relationship in 1981 may be interpreted as reflecting the influence of the worldwide recession occurring at that time rather than a public reaction to the economic policies of the Norwegian government. However, one piece of evidence that contradicts the external forces thesis is the 1969-to-1981 rise in the percentage of Norwegians blaming the government for inflation and unemployment. Another is the increasing impact on the vote found for perceptions of which party would better handle economic difficulties.

These trends seem to suggest that Norwegian politics are becoming less a reflection of the vagaries of external market conditions and more sensitive to questions of economic self-determination. This change may have been enhanced by a number of factors including the 1972 debate over membership in the European Economic Community, the discussions surrounding the development of off-shore oil, as well as the criticisms which Conservative politicians have leveled against the economic policies of the previously dominant Labour government. Now that the Conservatives have been in office since 1981, it remains to be seen how important internal economic conditions are for their reelection in 1985. But a definitive determination of whether the election outcome reflects internal or external economic forces cannot be obtained without directly exploring the assumptions of the smaller nations thesis. Future studies in Norway, therefore, should attempt to ascertain if voters are less likely to hold their government responsible for economic conditions because they attribute the cause to uncontrollable external factors.

A variation on the "cultural" hypothesis may also merit further attention. Whereas we found little support for this thesis as articulated by Lewis-Beck, the Norwegian data do suggest that differences in the political structures of various countries might influence the link between personal economics and political behavior. Namely, cross-cultural differences in the type of party structure and the party functions may help explain variation in the extent to which personal economic factors are important determinants of the vote.

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NOTES

1. The Norwegian Election Surveys are based on personal interviews with a cross section of Norwegian adults. The sampling procedure has two stages. In the first stage a number of

geographical areas are randomly chosen. These areas are stratified by region, socioeconomic characteristics of the "kommuner," and size of population. Within each area (sampling unit) a random sample of persons are selected. In the election studies 1957-73 the lists of all voters ("manttaller") were used to select the individuals. In the two most recent studies the person register of the Bureau of Statistics has been employed. The U.S. data in each case derive from the American National Election Studies conducted by the University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research.

2. A close inspection of the sign of the correlations for the 1981 Norwegian data reveals what might initially also be regarded as an anomaly. In that year, those who expected to be worse off in the future voted more heavily for the Labour party, the ruling party at that time. Normally we would expect economic pessimists to vote against the ruling party, but in 1981 the widespread anticipation that the bourgeois parties would win the election may have increased economic optimism among their supporters. Those who thought they would be worse off logically voted for Labour, as it was under a bourgeois government that they expected to be worse off. The pattern of correlations thus fits with what we would normally expect, that is, people vote for the party that they think will promote the most beneficial economic conditions. The important difference in 1981, therefore, is not the sign but the strength of the correlation.
3. The differentiation of private and public employment is based on the self-report of the respondents. This categorization of private and public sector occupations, therefore, may be less precise than the work of others (see, for example, Kolberg, 1983) but shows the same trend. The Norwegian Election Survey data reveals 30% of the 1969 sample employed in the public sector as compared with 44% in 1981.

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