Inequality across social groups, families and economy: The Danish National Election Study 2015

A robust finding in the literature on political behavior is a strong parents-offspring correlation in political attitudes. The idea is that an intergenerational transmission of political values occurs from parent to child. We expand this classic notion of transmission by investigating how socio-economic characteristics of the family and household members both directly and indirectly, through their influence on voters' perceptions of social group belongings and risk aversion, affect vote choice in modern society.

As reflected in the recent upsurge in socialization studies within political science, the family is the central place of political socialization and has a dominant influence on political participation, and social position in society both in terms of objective relationship to a specific social group and perception of belonging to these groups. Similarly, the role of family and household networks in transmitting economic inequality has come in focus with increased economic inequalities in Denmark over the last 15 years as measured by, e.g., the Gini coefficient. What is still missing, however, is research integrating these strands of literature into a coherent study of socialization that investigates the impact of family and household on the mechanisms of inequality transmission on to voting behavior.

The effect of socio-economic background factors, not least social class, on the vote choice has been subject to intensive investigation. Research has persistently shown that the direct relationship between class and party choice has declined over the last five decades. This goes for Denmark and other industrialized democracies. Recently, however, much criticism has been levied at the decline of class voting-thesis for several reasons. First, we still see direct statistically significant influence of belonging to social groups on vote choice. This goes for gender, generation, education, income, and occupation even though class voting as measured by the simple Alford Index has decreased over time across developed democracies. Secondly, we see that new measures of wealth (patrimonial assets) play an important role in understanding voting behavior – in Denmark as well as abroad. Basically, these findings challenge the conventional wisdom of a declining influence of socio-economic factors on voting and raise demand for new approaches to study how belonging to specific social groups and social environments influence the vote choice today.

This project approaches these questions firstly by integrating traditional socio-economic background variables with new objective measures of patrimonial economic possessions. We tap into this by survey questions and by applying register data from Statistics Denmark linking families and households to the survey respondents. Exploring the mechanism further, we also include

measures of voters' perceptions of risk seeking behavior to understand how objective measures of socio-economic position relate to perceptions of economic risk and the effect hereof on vote choice. Secondly, we link voters' objective, register information – including information on families and households – to voters' identification with social groups.

The data will consist of a high quality post-election survey of Danish voters. As an innovative feature in the Danish National Election Study (DNES, www.valgprojektet.dk) we will, as implied above, link the survey with government records data from Statistics Denmark – this approach is unique and unprecedented in Denmark and international speaking when it comes to election studies. Firstly, this allows us to use reliable socio-economic variables at the individual level – variables that are not contaminated by self-reported biases. This is particularly relevant for variables such as education, income, and wealth. Secondly, and even more important, it allows us to link household, family and neighborhood characteristics to the individual voter. Some of these key variables can even be linked to the individual and his/her social environment over time as the data has annual observations dating back to 1980.

DNES is the longest running Danish longitudinal cross sectional dataset consisting of surveys conducted after every election since 1971. This means that DNES 2015 will be the 17th high quality cross sectional representative post-election survey tapping into the reasoning of Danish voters. Therefore it is an important, independent contribution of the project to continue the core of the *time series* of questions contained in the DNES. This will not only permit an analysis of the election in 2015, but will also provide a powerful tool for testing theoretical propositions regarding electoral behavior and public opinion across five decades. The usefulness hereof is reflected in the strong interest from researchers in using the data for analysis. The DNES datasets are by far the most frequently ordered data sets from the Danish Data Archive by both researchers around the world and social science students. It is also reflected in the popularity of the online versions of the data (available through CSSR, in both Danish and English versions, and on www.surveybank.dk) which have become an invaluable tool for high school students, journalists, etc.

Furthermore the project continues the integration of DNES into the international Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES, www.cses.org) and the established NORdic Election and Democracy research consortium (NORED, www.nored.dk). Moreover, special effort will be given to establishing collaborative work with the British Election Study on the social aspect of voting.

The first priority of the project will be a book in Danish about the election. The book will be a collaboration between the relevant research groups at Danish universities. The book will be peer-reviewed and published in an established series within political behavior with a recognized publisher. In addition we will publish seven international journal articles in top-journals.