

## LINKING CITIZENS AND PARTIES

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# Linking Citizens and Parties

*How Electoral Systems Matter  
for Political Representation*

LAWRENCE EZROW  
University of Essex

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## Preface

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This book presents three basic arguments. First, electoral systems do not matter in ways that are commonly accepted (Chapters 2 and 3). Second, electoral systems, however, do influence levels of niche party competition (Chapter 4). Third, citizen-party linkages, that is, channels of political representation, are fundamentally different for niche parties than for mainstream parties (Chapters 5 and 6). Thus, electoral systems matter because they influence the level of niche party competition.



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---

Shortly after I arrived at the University of Essex in 2007, Ian Budge remarked to me “your papers are very nice.” Then, he demanded “But Lawrence, how do they all fit together?” This project constitutes my response. I thank Ian for pushing me to approach my research with wider scope and for his extensive feedback on the manuscript.

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## List of Abbreviations

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CMP	Comparative Manifesto Project
CSES	Comparative Survey of Electoral Systems
ENEP	Effective number of elective parties
ENPP	Effective number of parliamentary parties
OLS	Ordinary least squares
PR	Proportional representation
SMD	Single member districts
UPE	Unweighted measure of the average party policy extremism
WPE	Weighted measure of average party policy extremism



# Part I

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## Introduction



---

## Citizen–Party Linkages, Political Institutions, and Type of Party

### 1.1 TRANSLATING CITIZENS' PREFERENCES: INSTITUTIONS AND PARTIES

Popular democratic beliefs dictate that somehow policy preferences of citizens will translate into the selection of representatives who, in turn, produce policies. These policies then govern the interactions of citizens. How do citizen preferences influence policy? The most straightforward way is through voting in elections. In this sense, democratic ideals imply citizen participation and voting in elections drive the policies that govern citizens.

The *translation* of citizen interests into government policy may be far from smooth or simple, however, and this transmission is also dependent on institutions and parties. For example, the rules that govern the translation of votes into legislative seats directly affect pathways of representation. Writing in Great Britain in the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill noted that distorted representation was a direct consequence of plurality voting rules, that is, laws that dictate that a candidate with the most votes wins. Although plurality voting systems are likely to produce winning candidates that will represent their supporters' interests, Mill complained that many citizens, who had voted for the loser, would largely be left unrepresented. The discussion over the effects of electoral systems on political representation has continued (Hoag and Hallet 1926; Hermens 1941; Duverger 1954; Rae 1967; Riker 1982; Cox 1990, 1997; however, for dissenting opinions on the overstated impact of electoral systems, see Grumm 1958; Lipset and Rokkan 1967).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In addition to electoral systems, institutions that determine how the executive branch is selected and organized also affect the nature of democratic governance. Although the systematic study of constitutions and executive power sharing arrangements is relatively new (Lijphart 1984, 1999; Powell 2000), these authors have underlined a major distinction, between systems where executive power is shared by more than one party, and systems where authority is bestowed upon *only* one party through elections. These power-sharing rules affect the way in which citizens underlying preferences are translated into representative outcomes. For example, citizens are more likely to vote sincerely where power-sharing is the norm and, strategically, where only one party dominates government decision-making. While the mediating effects of power-sharing are only partially explored in this

Underlying the importance of electoral institutions is the important role of *parties*, which are critical in mobilizing citizen participation, especially during election periods. More importantly, parties are responsible for expressing the ideological preferences of citizens and converting them into public policy. The role of parties has been articulated under the “party government model,” which assumes parties compete on the basis of distinct policy platforms, which respond to the ideological interests of their supporters (Dalton 2002).

In this sense then scholars of political representation pay attention to linkages between citizens and parties – and how these linkages may (or may not) be mediated by electoral institutions. In the following chapters, these linkages are analyzed. First, I identify how citizen preferences are translated into election outcomes (Chapter 2), and the policies that parties announce (Chapter 3). This task requires a macro-level approach that employs cross-national analyses of party ideologies, public opinion, election outcomes, and institutions.

The layout and argument of this study is relatively straightforward. Scholars of comparative democracy often identify electoral systems as the prime factor in explaining cross-country variation in patterns of representation. I find that while electoral systems matter for political representation, they do not matter in ways we might expect. For example, there is a fairly common expectation that parties cluster toward the Center of the ideological space under plurality-like systems, and that one of the main reasons for doing so is that the electoral incentives for centrist positions are greater in these systems. Yet, the evidence presented in Chapters 2 and 3 suggests that electoral systems do not systematically motivate parties to take divergent or convergent positions. I wish to implore scholars to alter the discourse on citizen–party policy linkages by lowering the level of analysis from the country-level to the party-level. When parties are classified along the lines of two recent studies by James Adams and his colleagues (2006) and Bonnie Meguid (2008; see also Meguid 2005) into “niche” and “mainstream” parties, a powerful narrative emerges that these groupings of party families represent citizens’ viewpoints in starkly different ways (in Chapters 5 and 6). Niche parties refer to those parties that occupy the extreme Left, the extreme Right, or a distinctly noncentrist niche; specifically, these parties belong to the Communist, Right-wing Nationalist, and Green party families. Mainstream parties are defined as parties belonging to the Social Democratic, Liberal, Christian Democratic, and Conservative party families.

It is the type of party that is important for policy representation rather than differences between election systems. In several respects democracies operate

study because it is not the main focus, it should be noted that concentrated power-sharing arrangements tend to be associated with plurality electoral rules, and dispersed power-sharing arrangements with proportional systems. To the extent the two are observed hand in hand, the mediating effects of electoral systems will also apply to power-sharing arrangements.

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similarly, regardless of particular electoral institutions, and in many ways patterns of representation vary quite drastically by type of party – each type offering different channels of political representation to citizens. If the type of party is so vital in mediating linkages between citizens and parties (as I argue), then the question naturally arises: Under which settings do different types of parties thrive? Unsurprisingly, electoral systems influence levels of niche party success. *My central argument is that electoral systems matter for political representation through their influence on the balance between niche and mainstream party influence.*

The rest of the chapter addresses several issues. Related to this argument, it identifies the core questions behind my analysis, and the limitations to it. Additionally, the chapter identifies several conceptual building blocks that underpin the discussion: these are electoral institutions, two models of electoral outcomes, two models of party responsiveness, and type of party (niche and mainstream groupings). The following sections discuss these concepts, assess the significance of the study, and set the plan for the book.

## 1.2 CENTRAL QUESTIONS AND THEMES

My central goal is to determine when and how electoral institutions mediate citizen–party linkages on a “Left–Right” dimension that is defined as the level of support for government intervention in the economy (Downs 1957). En route, I aim to produce theoretical and empirical contributions to understanding why parties take the Left–Right ideological positions that they do, and also to explore the subsequent electoral effects of these positions. We will examine the correspondence between citizens’ policy preferences and parties’ ideological programs – and how this pattern varies across eighteen industrialized and stable democracies from 1973 to 2002. I will address four questions in regard to representational congruence between voters and parties:

1. Do political system variables (i.e., voting rules) affect whether it is electorally advantageous for parties to advocate centrist policy positions, relative to the distribution of voters’ policy preferences?
2. Do institutions (in particular, electoral rules) affect the average distinctiveness of policy alternatives that parties offer citizens?
3. Do institutions affect the configuration of niche and mainstream party families that exist or compete within a political system?
4. How do niche and mainstream party families matter for patterns of political representation, with respect to responsiveness and election outcomes?

1.2.1 Which aspects of democratic representation are covered by this study?

Figure 1.1 partially reproduces figure 1.2 from Powell (2000), depicting connections in the democratic process. It is particularly useful for illustrating components of representation that are dealt with directly (and those that are dealt with less directly) in the analyses here. This figure identifies citizen preferences and public policies as the necessary starting and finishing points for democratic theory. The correspondence between A and E is obviously important. However, it is the *process* by which the “connection” is made, which is also critical for democracy. For example, a system would not be considered a democracy where a benevolent dictator implements policies that match the ideological preferences of the citizens, because there is no element of citizen control over policy making. Democracies are identified as such by whether or not institutions, or connections, are in place that establishes a mechanism for citizen preferences to be translated into public policies.<sup>2</sup>

Returning to Figure 1.1, there are several steps of the representative process that I do *not* systematically explore, such as the *formation of citizen preferences* in the sense of any examination of the socialization processes that shape individual political attitudes (Jennings and Niemi 1981). Scholars have persuasively argued that citizens take cues from political leadership when forming their policy preferences (Przeworski and Sprague 1986; Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989). Some final aspects of the representative process that will not be addressed are policy making and policy implementation during the postelection bargaining process (for the effects of institutions on policy outputs, see Soroka and Wlezien forthcoming; Lijphart 1999; McDonald and Budge 2005).

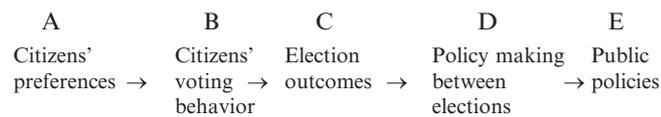


FIGURE 1.1 Democratic connections

Source: G. Bingham Powell (2000: 15: fig. 1.2).

<sup>2</sup> This scenario is similar to that raised by Hannah Pitkin (1967: 234) who comments, “An absolute monarch or dictator who chooses, for a reason of his own, to take public opinion polls and do whatever the people seem to want is not yet a representative government. We require functioning institutions that are designed to and really do, secure a government responsive to public interest and opinion (quoted in Powell 2000: 280).”

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### 1.3 DEFINING INSTITUTIONS

It is worth clarifying what is actually meant by the term “institutions.” In a comparative analysis of economic performance, Douglas North (1990) presents a concise and reasonable definition:

Institutions include any form of constraint that human beings devise to shape human interaction. Are institutions formal or informal? They can be either, and I am interested both in formal constraints – such as rules that human beings devise – and in informal constraints –such as conventions and codes of behavior. Institutions may be created, as was the United States Constitution; or they may simply evolve over time, as does the common law. (p. 4)

In what follows, I analyze the effects of *formal institutions* by concentrating on voting rules. One benefit of this decision is that formal institutions are easier to identify, measure, and classify than informal institutions.<sup>3</sup> However, the price paid for this simplification involves losing some information about the cultural context of each country.

### 1.4 DEFINING ELECTORAL SYSTEMS: PLURALITY VOTING VERSUS PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

By electoral system, I denote the rules that specify how votes are translated into seats for representatives in the main legislation making body. What I particularly want to focus on here is the *outcomes* of these rules. Thus, I focus on the *discrepancies between parties’ national vote shares and their parliamentary seat shares*. If the vote and seat shares for a party roughly correspond as in the 1998 Dutch elections where the Labour party (PvdA) won 29% of the popular vote and subsequently received 30% (45/150) of the seats in the lower house (the Tweede Kamer), then this system is considered “proportional.” However, systems where votes and seats do not correspond – for example, in the 2002 French elections the National Front received above 11% of the national vote and were subsequently allotted zero seats in the National Assembly – are labeled “disproportional.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> While there is no systematic analysis presented here of informal institutions, which include cultural factors such as customs, traditions, and codes of conduct, it is worth noting that these factors are relevant because they are crucial in the understanding of how a given political system came to adopt a particular set of formal institutions.

<sup>4</sup> I owe this simplification to an *Electoral Studies* article by Gallagher (1991), where he develops a continuous index of disproportionality (discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 3).

While the literature classifying electoral systems is extensive, and there are many combinations of electoral rules that will yield proportional and disproportional outcomes,<sup>5</sup> in the subsequent discussion the major fault line that is drawn is between systems allocating seats by *plurality voting* and those that determine seat shares via *proportional representation* (PR) electoral formulae. Under single-member district plurality voting, the winning candidate is the one who receives the most votes. For this reason “first past the post” and “winner-take-all” voting are perhaps more common labels for the plurality voting formula. Examples of countries that use plurality voting rules include Britain, Canada, and the United States, and New Zealand prior to 1993. Plurality voting rules generate disproportionate vote-to-seat allocations. More specifically, these voting rules hurt smaller parties and reward larger parties.<sup>6</sup>

As this discussion suggests, the plurality voting formula often manufactures a majority of seats for one party in the legislature, because a party that wins a nationwide plurality will tend to be overrepresented and hold a majority of seats in the legislature. One of the potential benefits of this system of voting is that *accountability* should be clear to voters by the legislation passed. However, the major drawback is uneven, or unfair, representation of citizens’ policy preferences, which in turn bars entry for third parties, and it induces voters not to “waste” their votes on third or losing parties. Instead, voters cast their ballots strategically for one of the two contenders as opposed to voting *sincerely* for the parties that best represent their policy preferences.

On the other hand, electoral systems featuring PR are associated with more “proportional” vote-to-seat conversions than in plurality systems. The difference in outcome can be attributed to four differences from plurality systems based on: formula, district magnitude, candidate versus party voting, and effective thresholds. The latter three characteristics are a by-product of the differing voting rules that determine how votes are translated into seats. That is, plurality systems will almost automatically be associated with single-member districts, individual candidates, and high effective electoral thresholds. In contrast, PR systems are associated with multimember districts, party lists, and relatively low effective thresholds.

PR systems are more prevalent in developed democracies than are plurality systems, perhaps because they are more appealing insofar in terms of their “representativeness” than plurality systems. More parties and smaller or minority

<sup>5</sup> A comprehensive discussion of electoral systems would also include attention to the effects of district magnitude (i.e., the number of seats awarded per district to the legislature), electoral thresholds (or the minimum percentage of the vote necessary for a party to gain representation in the legislature), and assembly size (Lijphart 1994). Notice too that there are several methods of allocating seats within PR systems that will affect the proportionality of the system; some systems include the Hare, Droop, d’Hondt, Saint Lague, and the Imperiali methods of allocating seats.

<sup>6</sup> In systems employing plurality voting, smaller parties will receive smaller shares of seats than their national vote shares indicate (recall the example of the National Front), while larger parties benefit by receiving larger proportions of the seats than their shares of the votes.

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interests can gain representation in the legislature in a way that is commensurate with their level of popular support. However, critics argue that PR allows too many parties to gain power, which affects the efficiency, stability, and accountability of policy making. A more serious objection that is often raised against PR systems is that they present the opportunity for extremist factions to gain too much influence, a claim that is refuted in Chapter 3. Parties that compete in PR and plurality systems are on average equally extreme (or centrist). I return to these normative arguments in the conclusion, arguing that – in addition to the conventional justification for PR that it increases the raw numbers of parties and thereby the number of outlets for representation of citizen interests – PR also enhances niche party competition, which in turn provides fundamentally different channels through which political representation can take place.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.5 EFFECTS OF INSTITUTIONS

The central goal of this study is to determine how electoral institutions mediate citizen–party linkages. I briefly outline here how institutions, with specific regard to electoral systems (and power-sharing arrangements), play a role in structuring the *number of competitive parties* in the political system; and the role institutions play in *policy making* and the quality of representation (Lijphart 1984, 1999; Powell 2000). Then, I discuss the role institutions play in elections and in influencing *party support*. Additionally, I consider their effects on *positioning incentives* – under which sets of circumstances are centripetal or centrifugal incentives more prevalent for competing parties in a political system (Cox 1997; Dow 2001; Merrill and Adams 2002)?

## 1.6 INSTITUTIONS, THE NUMBER OF PARTIES, AND POLICY OUTPUTS

In 1954, Maurice Duverger asserted that electoral institutions affect the number of parties that are able to compete in a political system. Specifically, Duverger’s Law states that plurality rules are associated with two-party systems. Conversely,

<sup>7</sup> The dichotomy between PR and plurality voting, and the subsequent trade-offs that academics acknowledge between the two systems, are disputed by Carey and Hix (2008). In a paper titled “The Electoral Sweetspot,” they argue that low district magnitude (approximately 6) PR systems maximize on the conventional strengths of both types of systems (choice, accountability, and stability).

Duverger developed hypotheses claiming that PR is associated with multiparty systems. Two ballot majority systems, which in a certain sense lie between PR and plurality, are associated with “multipartism tempered by alliances.”

Duverger identifies *mechanical* and *psychological* effects of “first past the post” electoral rules to support his “Law,” that plurality tends toward bipartism. The mechanical effect comes from the fact that smaller parties, that is, third parties, fourth parties, and so on are unable to become significant competitors because of the disproportional vote-to-seat translations that have already been discussed. Plurality systems award seat shares to large parties that exceed their national vote shares, while smaller parties receive seat shares that are significantly less than their national vote shares.<sup>8</sup> For smaller parties, this unfair allocation of seats is a threat to their future viability.

The mechanical effect induces voters to cast their ballots strategically in order to avoid “wasting” their votes on parties that will not gain at least a proportionate influence in the legislature. This effect on voters is referred to as the *psychological effect*. Additionally, William Riker (1986: 40) supposes politicians and party donors are “rational purchasers” of political careers and “influence and access.” If this is the case, the psychological effect influences the behavior of more than just voters, as it will indeed also cause leaders and donors to desert marginalized parties.

Plurality rules therefore induce broad interests in society to coalesce *before elections* in order to have any chance of gaining the most votes. Much later research has reinforced Duverger’s point that voting institutions are crucial because they influence party systems (Rae 1967; Riker 1982; Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Cox 1997).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The British election of 1983 is perhaps the best example of Duverger’s mechanical effect. The Liberals and the Social Democrats allied, and gained just over 25% of the votes, and yet they only received 23 of 650 seats (approximately 3.5%) in the House of Commons. Ironically, the competitiveness of what would become the Liberal–Democrats in these elections with plurality voting can also be construed as evidence against Duverger’s Law.

Further supporting the presence of the mechanical effect, Sprague (1980) found that in order for parties to gain fair representation in PR systems (that their shares of votes translate into at least the same shares of the seats), they must receive around 0.12% share of the popular vote. Contrast this with plurality systems where he estimates that parties need to receive approximately a third of the popular vote in order to receive at least a third of the seats in their legislative assembly.

<sup>9</sup> As with many influential theories in the social sciences Duverger’s Law has its share of critics. Debates either circulate over its status as a “sociological law” and/or by focusing on endogeneity issues relating to the relationship between voting rules and the party system. Grumm (1958) documents the latter objection by asserting that it is the party systems that affect the adoption of voting rules and not the other way around, that is multiparty systems adopt proportional representation electoral rules.

Alternatively, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) explain party systems in terms of the number of and depth of *cleavages* (e.g., center–periphery, church–state, land–industry, and owners–workers) in society. Hence the structure of these cleavages at the time of mass enfranchisement was established influenced greatly the structure of party competition.

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G. Bingham Powell Jr. (2000) and Arend Lijphart (1999) have done important work that analyzes the relationship between institutions and policy making. Powell concludes that the Left–Right positions of the governing parties are significantly closer to the median citizen’s position in proportional systems, as opposed to majoritarian systems (see also McDonald et al. 2004).<sup>10</sup> Lijphart (1999) provides additional evidence that consensual systems, which are often associated with PR electoral systems, perform better than majoritarian systems on several dimensions by arguing that “consensus democracies do clearly outperform the majoritarian democracies with regard to the quality of democracy and democratic representation as well as with regard to what I have called the kindness and gentleness of their public policy orientations” (p. 301).<sup>11</sup>

### 1.7 TYPE OF PARTY: MAINSTREAM AND NICHE

The above arguments support the idea that electoral institutions matter. The central argument of this book is that their main effect is exerted by influencing the ability of the smaller niche parties to exist and compete effectively. This is an extension of the Duvergerian logic sketched out above. PR encourages small party survival, and many of these small parties are niche parties.<sup>12</sup> To my knowledge scholars have not yet made this precise point. While they tend to focus on the electoral success of one type of niche party, like extreme Right-wing parties or Green parties, a survey of the literature actually turns up few studies that analyze niche parties as a bundle.

How are niche and mainstream parties classified? Concretely, “niche” parties refer to those parties that occupy the extreme Left, the extreme Right, or a distinctly noncentrist niche; specifically, these parties belong to the Communist,

An additional study of the relationship is in *Patterns of Democracy* by Arend Lijphart (1999) where he finds the correlation coefficient that estimates the relationship between proportionality and the number of parties is .55 and reaches statistical significance for the thirty-six postwar democracies.

<sup>10</sup> Powell accurately identifies inherent trade-offs that are built into each “vision” of democracy. While majoritarian systems are portrayed in a negative light because there is a weak correspondence between policy makers and the median citizen, the strength of these systems is that citizens should be able to hold their leaders more accountable because the responsibility for policies is clear.

<sup>11</sup> However, McDonald and Budge (2005, chapter 6) present evidence that the median legislative parties across *all democratic systems* dictate policy.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to the communist, extreme Right-wing Nationalist, and Green party families, smaller party families that could emerge under permissive (i.e., PR) electoral rules are the agrarian, regional, ethnic, and liberal party families.

Right-wing Nationalist, and Green party families. Mainstream parties are defined as parties belonging to the Social Democratic, Liberal, Christian Democratic, and Conservative party families.

There are several characteristics particular to niche parties that lead to the distinction made above – one of which is that these parties promote distinctly noncentrist ideologies along the conventional Left–Right dimension. Bonnie Meguid (2005, 2008) has pioneered the study of niche party competition. Meguid attributes three crucial characteristics to niche parties. First, they can be identified as those parties that attempt to introduce new issues to party competition. Second, these issues are noneconomic or do not comfortably fit on the traditional Left–Right dimension. And third, niche parties limit the number of issue appeals to one. Using these criteria, Meguid explores the electoral fortunes of Green, Nationalist, and ethno-territorial parties. For example, the historical goal of Green parties has been to emphasize environmental issues, and accordingly this issue has remained at the center of its programmatic appeals. Similarly, ethno-territorial parties emphasize regional autonomy, and far-Right Nationalist parties make programmatic statements about restricting immigration.

There is a difference between the definition used in this book and that employed by Meguid, which is that Meguid defines niche parties based on their emphasis of additional issue dimensions that run orthogonally to the traditional Left–Right. As noted above, Green parties highlight environmental concerns, and extreme Right-wing Nationalist parties stress immigration and traditional values (Marks et al. 2006). While Meguid emphasizes the additional issue dimensions on which niche parties compete (see also Rovny and Edwards 2009), I make a central departure from her study and others by pointing out that while niche parties do attempt to compete on additional dimensions, this does not preclude them from also competing in traditional Left–Right terms. The strongest example of this is that Communist parties remain within the typology of niche parties, because they clearly do compete on traditional Left–Right issues. However, in Meguid’s study, Communist parties are not considered niche parties, because they do not focus on issue appeals on additional dimensions.

Indeed parties that belong to the Nationalist party family are also called “Right-wing” or “extreme Right” parties. The labels themselves connote competition on the far “Right” of the “Left–Right.” Environmental parties tend to fall distinctly to the Left. To the extent political trade-offs have existed historically between environmental interests and commercial industry, one would expect environmental parties to lean distinctly to the Left. However, there are smaller parties characterized as neither mainstream nor niche parties. These are the regional, ethnic, and agrarian parties. Several studies have defined these parties as niche parties. Here I do not because I contend that these parties really do not compete on the Left–Right. So, while Meguid emphasizes additional issue dimensions, I emphasize the distinctly noncentrist space on the traditional Left–Right in which these parties compete. I note that practical differences are actually quite

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slight.<sup>13</sup> The major difference is the analysis of these parties' relevance on the Left–Right dimension.

1.8 TWO MODELS ON THE ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES  
OF PARTY PROXIMITY TO THE MEAN VOTER POSITION:  
THE PARTY PROXIMITY MODEL AND THE PARTY  
DISTINCTIVENESS MODEL

The logic of the party proximity model suggests that parties increase popular support when their policies are closer to the Center of the distribution of voters' policy preferences, while the party distinctiveness model posits that the opposite holds, namely, that parties are rewarded when they advocate noncentrist or radical policy positions. Traditional spatial theory predicts that parties contesting two-party elections gain votes by converging toward the Center (Downs 1957). Theoretical predictions in multiparty settings are mixed: theoretical models that assume deterministic policy voting predict that noncentrist positioning may be optimal (Cox 1990; Adams 2001), while models that assume probabilistic voting predict that parties will increase their expected votes by moderating their positions (De Palma et al. 1990; Lin et al. 1999).

In future chapters (2 and 5), I conduct such analyses in an effort to clarify expectations about the relevance of the convergence prediction in multiparty systems. *Macro-level* analyses are conducted in these chapters, which examine the effects of party positioning on election outcomes across Western Europe from 1976 to 1998. The dependent variable is the party vote share in real-world elections, and the crucial independent variables are based on *policy distance* between the parties and the mean voter positions in the countries included in the study. For this purpose, Eurobarometer surveys have been gathered from the country election years, which have made it possible to construct a measure of the mean citizen policy preference, as well as measures of the policy distances between the parties' policy positions, and the mean citizen preference.

The findings in the second chapter support the conclusions developed in many of the existing studies of multiparty competition: *proximity to the mean voter position matters*. More specifically, I conclude that parties receive a statistically significant electoral benefit from locating near the mean voter position. This benefit, however, is relatively modest in size, so that parties that advocate noncentrist positions may nonetheless be electorally competitive. Chapter 5 shows

<sup>13</sup> The difference is the substitution of ethno-territorial parties with communist parties in the niche party classification. In practice when ethno-territorial parties are included in the niche party classification, it has changed few of the substantive conclusions about niche parties. For example, the conclusions reported in Chapter 6 are robust to a definition of niche parties that includes these parties.

that this finding remains robust in even in statistical analyses that control for the type of party. This finding is labeled the *general policy centrism result*. However, the major contribution of Chapter 5 is to show that the opposite dynamic holds for niche parties. That is, radical niche parties tend to receive more votes than their moderate niche counterparts. This finding is labeled the *party distinctiveness result*. It provides one of the foundations for the argument of the book that the *type of party* matters for analyzing political representation.

### 1.9 TWO MODELS OF PARTY RESPONSIVENESS: THE GENERAL ELECTORATE MODEL AND THE PARTISAN CONSTITUENCY MODEL

Do political parties respond to the mean voter position, or to the ideological shifts of their supporters? Several theoretical and empirical studies stress that the mean or the median voter position is the starting point for political representation, and the implication of these studies is that parties would be highly sensitive to shifts in the *mean voter* position (Downs 1957; Huber and Powell 1994; Stimson et al. 1995; Powell 2000; Erikson et al. 2002; Adams et al. 2004, 2006; McDonald and Budge 2005). However, an alternative and equally plausible model of party responsiveness exists. This model emphasizes the policy preference of the mean *party supporter* in explaining party–citizen linkages (Weissberg 1978; Dalton 1985; Wessels 1999). I refer to the first model of party responsiveness as the general electorate model, and to the second model as the partisan constituency model. The general electorate model is defined by the political parties responding to shifts in the mean voter position, and the partisan constituency model posits instead that parties respond to their supporters. Chapter 6 takes up these models empirically, and again finds that the type of party drastically mediates the relationship between citizens' and parties' ideological preferences. Specifically, the general electorate model characterizes shifts of mainstream parties, while the partisan constituency model characterizes shifts of niche parties.

### 1.10 COMBINING CONCEPTS: INSTITUTIONS, TYPE OF PARTY, MODELS OF PARTY RESPONSIVENESS, AND ELECTION OUTCOMES

Figure 1.2 combines the concepts raised in Sections 1.6–1.9 to present an overview. Generally, electoral rules matter because they affect party system size, which

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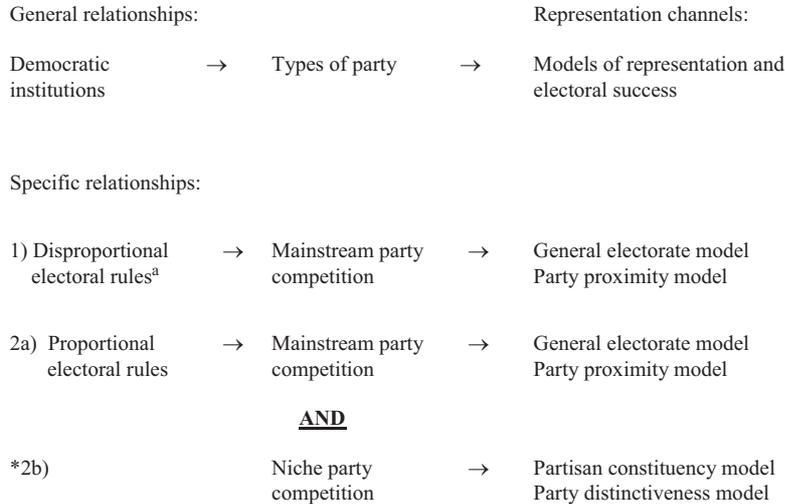


FIGURE 1.2 An overview of relationships: electoral rules, types of party, and political representation  
 Notes: <sup>†</sup>The dual ballot majority system employed in France is a special case. Although this system is comparatively “disproportional,” it does have significant levels of niche party competition (discussed in Chapter 4).

has implications for the types of parties (mainstream and niche) that compete in a political system. The type of party mediates relationships between the citizens and the parties in important ways: specifically, disproportional electoral systems (row 1) are associated with mainstream party competition, where the general electorate and party proximity models apply. Proportional systems similarly display the dynamics of mainstream party competition (row 2a), but they also offer niche party competition (in row 2b) where the partisan constituency and party distinctiveness models characterize party responsiveness and electoral competition.

### 1.11 SIGNIFICANCE

There are several reasons why students of voting and elections should find this study interesting. First, Chapter 2 tests out the plausibility of spatial models of convergent and divergent party behavior in Western Europe. Second, the inquiry introduces a macro-level empirical approach to the study of parties and voters in a cross-national setting that provides the analyses with greater observational leverage. Third, the study clarifies expectations about how party support is generated, incentives for party positioning, and how these factors interact with system-level

features. Finally, there are implications for our notions of democratic governance and representation.

The findings have direct implications for Downsian models of electoral competition insofar as one of the primary goals is to examine the relationship between citizens' ideological preferences and the Left–Right placements of competing parties or candidates.<sup>14</sup> Cross-sectional and temporal analyses have shown a connection between centrist policy positioning and electoral support for parties. Implicit in this outcome is the importance of policy positions – for voters and parties – in determining election outcomes. Had a different conclusion been reached, this would have suggested that party positioning along this abstract continuum is unrelated to electoral outcomes.

The study additionally takes advantage from its macro-level empirical approach as suggested by Erikson et al. (2002). Most studies tend to emphasize individual-level data on voting because it is easy to multiply the number of observations by increasing the number of survey respondents. Here data has been gathered from Eurobarometer surveys from 1976 to 2002, which permits the empirical analyses to be conducted cross-nationally. The scope of the data collection further enhances our ability to study how the *dynamics* of representation vary under different institutional contexts. Data have been scarce at aggregate levels of voting especially outside of the United States and, thus, there have been few studies focusing on proximity in several subnational or national elections over time.<sup>15</sup>

An additional reason why this study should be of interest is that it clarifies expectations about convergence in multiparty systems and shows how these expectations vary under different institutional arrangements. Using a Downsian framework in the United States creates clear predictions of convergence. However, in Europe, parties are capable of following several strategies, thus muddling predictions about their behavior. Parties that move toward the median voter to gain votes leave their traditional bases of support. Here, there are solid testable hypotheses – one says parties should gain votes by moving closer to more voters. The alternative hypothesis says these same parties will lose votes by deserting their core supporters. Additionally, the expectation is that proximity effects will be stronger in majoritarian systems than in proportional systems.

Finally, the study is of relevance to those with a general comparative interest in democratic representation. In what follows, the relationship between the voter–party correspondence and the election outcomes is examined with particular

<sup>14</sup> Citizen Left–Right ideological placements are measured in the Eurobarometer 31A (1989).

<sup>15</sup> The primary set of analyses in Chapters 2–4 places candidates and parties on an ideological scale using the *perceptions of citizens*. Other scholars believe there are more accurate placements of candidates. These studies have used measures of candidates and/or parties based on: expert-placements (Powell 2000), roll-call voting behavior (Ansolabehere et al. 2001; Burden 2001), or the close scrutiny of party manifestos (Budge 1994). In each chapter, alternative analyses are conducted relying on these other measures of party placements so that the confidence in the findings is increased.

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reference to how the dynamics of this relationship change under varying institutional settings. Thus, the work bears directly on “congruence” between policy makers and citizens (Huber and Powell 1994) and on the widely known comparative works that study the effects of constitutional design (Lijphart 1984, 1994, 1999; Powell 2000). The findings also relate to our normative ideals about how representation should work. Elections should function as a “link” between citizen policy preferences and elected representatives. From this standpoint, the analyses presented in the following chapters shed light on widely held conceptions of popular democratic governance.

### 1.12 PLAN OF THE BOOK

The book makes three basic arguments. First, electoral systems do not matter in the ways that are commonly accepted (Chapters 2 and 3). Electoral systems however do influence niche party competitiveness (Chapter 4). The role of niche parties in turn has dramatic implications for the way in which representation works (Chapters 5 and 6). Thus, electoral systems matter because they influence the level of niche party competition.

In particular, this study examines how system-level variables interact with election outcomes and party positioning incentives. The analyses address two questions that are of significant interest for students of voting and elections. The first area of inquiry asks: *do electoral systems affect whether it is electorally advantageous for parties to take centrist positions in elections?* Second, *do electoral systems affect the diversity of policy alternatives that parties offer citizens?* The following chapters will argue that important system-level factors, such as electoral institutions and the number of parties, do not systematically affect party policy positioning; nor do they systematically mediate the effects of party proximity (to the mean voter) on election outcomes.

Thus, Chapters 2 and 3 in Part II apply a macro-level cross-national approach and present evidence that *democracies are similar* in important ways that scholars have commonly overlooked. Across systems with different electoral rules there are similar patterns for election outcomes and party positioning. Chapter 2 presents theoretical arguments and empirical analyses that support the hypothesis that moderate parties tend to gain greater vote shares than their distinctly noncentrist counterparts, and that this relationship holds across *all* multiparty systems, regardless of electoral laws. The second half extends the argument by providing dynamic, over time, analyses that support the finding that parties gain votes when public opinion shifts in their direction between electoral contests.

In Chapter 3, I present evidence that party policy distinctiveness is roughly the same across proportional and plurality-based party systems, a finding that runs

counter to the conventional wisdom that PR-based systems encourage radical party positioning. There is extensive theoretical research that explores the linkages between parties' policy positions, on the one hand, and the characteristics of the political system (i.e., voting rules and the number of parties) on the other, but empirical research on this topic is less developed. This chapter reports empirical analyses exploring the relationship between party policy extremism in eighteen party systems, and the proportionality of the electoral laws used to select representatives to the national legislature. Contrary to expectations, I find no evidence that average party policy extremism increases under PR. In addition, Chapter 3 explores several crucial measurement issues. Average party policy extremism, the dependent variable, requires three pieces of information per country: these are the ideological placements of parties, the ideological placements of voters, and the parties' vote shares. Scholars sharply disagree about how to aggregate these party position measures into a valid country-level estimate of party policy extremism. I explore the arguments relating to each approach. Then several constructions of the key variables are employed in the analyses of average party extremism in an effort to triangulate the central findings of this chapter.

While Chapters 2 and 3 highlight similarities across countries featuring different electoral rules, Chapters 4–6 emphasize how electoral rules can produce very important and meaningful differences in policy representation. The central effect of electoral rules is that they affect the influence of niche parties in the representative process (Chapter 4). This in turn has dramatic implications for party positioning (Chapter 5) and election outcomes (Chapter 6). Chapter 4 explores the relationship between voting rules – PR versus plurality voting – and the size and number of relevant niche parties. This chapter presents evidence for a strong association between PR voting rules and the existence of niche parties.

Chapters 5 and 6 argue that lowering the level of analysis, from the institutional level to the party-level, is crucial for understanding how democratic representation occurs. Chapter 5 revisits the two models of election outcomes (i.e., the party proximity model and the party distinctiveness model) and develops expectations about how these models fare in terms of explaining the election outcomes for niche and mainstream parties. Specifically, I argue that mainstream parties' vote shares will conform to expectations based on the party proximity model, while niche parties' vote shares are best explained by the party distinctiveness model. Next, I empirically evaluate these expectations.

Like Chapter 2, Chapter 5 analyzes how parties' policy positioning affects their vote shares. The additional step is to evaluate how the type of party mediates the relationship between party proximity to the Center of the voter distribution, and election outcomes. The cross-sectional empirical results suggest that ideologically oriented niche parties presenting moderate policies fare poorly in elections. By contrast, the results suggest that if niche parties present distinctly noncentrist policy platforms, they fare well. In other words, while most parties benefit when

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they advocate moderate policies (relative to the Center of the voter distribution), the opposite is true of niche parties.

Chapter 6 examines whether political parties respond to the ideological shifts of their supporters or to those of the mean voter. Previous theoretical and empirical research stresses the primacy of the mean or median voter’s policy preference as the starting point for democratic representation (Downs 1957; Powell 2000; Adams et al. 2004, 2006; McDonald and Budge 2005). An alternative and equally compelling vision of policy representation emphasizes the policy preference of the *mean party supporter* in explaining party–citizen linkages (Dalton 1985; Wessels 1999; see also Downs 1957: 120). My analyses show that these two theories in fact describe different styles of party behavior which complement each other. The *type of party* (i.e., “mainstream” versus “niche” parties) mediates linkages between parties’ and citizens’ policy preferences. Thus, I return to the two models of party responsiveness (i.e., the general electorate model and the partisan constituency model) and develop expectations about how these models would fare in terms of explaining the programmatic shifts of niche and mainstream parties. Specifically, I argue that mainstream parties’ policy shifts are explained by the general electorate model, while niche parties’ policy shifts are explained by the partisan constituency model. The empirical analyses examine political parties in fifteen Western European democracies from 1973 to 2003.

The results of my analyses support the following conclusions. First, mainstream parties tend to respond to shifts in the mean voter position as opposed to the policy shifts of their supporters. Second, the opposite pattern is true for niche parties. Specifically, niche parties are highly sensitive to shifts in the position of their mean supporter, and they do not respond systematically to the median voter in the general electorate. Thus, each model of representation is accurate at capturing parties’ policy shifts, depending on the type of party being examined.

The findings are summarized in Chapter 7, and I identify paths for future study. In addition, striking normative implications of the study are highlighted. One implication is that systems that adopt PR should increase the number of *pathways* by which public preferences are translated into party programs. The evidence in the latter half of the study suggests that niche and mainstream parties offer radically different channels of political representation. Citizens in PR-based systems have access to niche party channels of political representation, and citizens in plurality-based systems do not. This suggests that citizens in PR systems are advantaged, because they have access to two pathways of representation rather than one.

On the other hand, in disproportional systems featuring some form of plurality voting, there is greater party responsiveness to the mean or median position, an important characteristic for democracy highlighted by Budge and McDonald (2005). However, it is less clear that partisans receive adequate representation in these systems (see Dalton 1985; Wessels 1999).

In spite of some of the trade-offs raised above, the book concludes with a positive evaluation of democratic representation for the countries under review. Though pathways of representation vary considerably across party families (and thereby party systems), the empirical survey of eighteen democracies nonetheless identifies concrete patterns, or policy linkages, between citizens and parties.

## Part II

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# Observing Citizen–Party Linkages and Election Outcomes Under Different Institutions



## 2

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# Are Moderate Parties Rewarded in Multiparty Systems?

Our simplification concentrates on the central notion that the policy preferences of voters and the policy promises of parties both matter for elections. Despite the importance of this proposition, it has not been subject to serious macro-level testing.

(Erikson et al. 2002: 256)

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Casual observers<sup>1</sup> of politics often cite examples of major parties benefiting from policy moderation. In particular, there are many “third way” examples – or instances in which Leftist parties adopt centrist strategies in order to appeal to greater portions of the electorate – to which scholars often point when they argue that there are electoral benefits for policy centrism. The US Democratic Party accomplished a successful move to the Center in 1992, co-opting several initiatives not so distant from the platform of the Republican Party on welfare reform and taxation. These moves were associated with the election of Bill Clinton and a relabeling of the party as “New” Democrats. Following the New Democrats in the early 1990s were the victories of Tony Blair (and New Labour) in Britain, Gerhard Schroeder in Germany, Costas Simitis in Greece, and the Olive Tree coalition in Italy – each election success attributed to a centrist move by parties that had previously identified more with the Left.

The Labour Party of Britain successfully reemerged as the New Labour Party in 1997, emphasizing a broad-based movement that attracted the support of the median voter. Meanwhile, the Italian Olive Tree Coalition formed in 1995, led by Romano Prodi, assumed power in 1996 by taking a pragmatic and centrist approach. Similarly, Gerhard Schroeder revitalized the German Social Democratic Party with a move to the middle, taking over as Chancellor in 1998. In Greece, the Panhellenic Socialist Party (PASOK) moved more to the Center under Costas Simitis. Touted as the “modernization period,” PASOK made gains in the elections taking power in 1996.

<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter are drawn from Ezrow (2005).

The Dutch Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid, PvdA) also moved significantly toward Center in the 1990s to counter the centrist Christian Democrats. The PvdA under Wim Kok formed the Purple Coalition in 1994 coalescing with the Democrats '66 (D'66) and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie, VVD), the latter closely linked to market liberalization principles. By contrast, Sweden's Social Democrats only received 38% of the votes in the 1991 Riksdag elections, when they failed to grasp that the median voter in Sweden had moved slightly to the Right.

The examples above speak to the validity of the party proximity model and the party distinctiveness model, that is, whether it is advantageous for parties to adopt centrist or distinctive policy positions. Recall from Chapter 1 that the party proximity model suggests that parties are rewarded for adopting positions closer to the Center of the voter distribution (party proximity), and the party distinctiveness model is upheld when parties are rewarded for adopting radical or extreme positions. The instances of Leftist Centrism and electoral success cited above clearly speak to the party proximity model. Nevertheless, anecdotes and examples are not statistical regularities. The goal of this chapter is to determine whether these examples accurately describe the wider political phenomena of policy centrism and electoral success.<sup>2</sup>

Can parties in Western Europe gain votes by converging toward the mean (or median) voter's position? Traditional spatial theory clearly predicts that, *ceteris paribus*, parties contesting two-party elections gain votes by converging toward the Center (Downs 1957). However, prior studies of models of multiparty elections report conflicting conclusions. Theoretical models that assume deterministic policy voting suggest that noncentrist positioning may be optimal<sup>3</sup> (Cox 1990; see also Adams 2001), while models with probabilistic voting suggest that parties increase their expected votes by shifting in the direction of the mean voter position (De Palma et al. 1990; Lin et al. 1999). However, recent work by Norman Schofield (2003; Schofield and Sened 2005) and by Adams and Merrill (1999, 2000; see also Adams 2001; Merrill and Adams 2002) has challenged this conclusion, suggesting that when measured nonpolicy-related voting influences are introduced into the probabilistic voting model, then parties may enhance their vote by shifting *away* from the Center of the voter distribution.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 1 emphasized that niche parties benefit from policy radicalism while mainstream parties benefit from policy centrism. Here, in Chapters 2 and 3, I concentrate on (the lack of) variation across electoral systems, and in Chapter 5, I explore variation across types of party.

<sup>3</sup> Additional models with deterministic voting make similar noncentrist predictions by assuming that parties are motivated by policy preferences, or by including *valence* characteristics in their models (Wittman 1973, 1983; Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000; Groseclose 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Schofield and his coauthors emphasize the importance of "valence" dimensions of evaluation (such as voters' judgments about the competing party leaders' degrees of competence, integrity, and charisma), arguing that parties that are disadvantaged on valence grounds have electoral incentives to differentiate their policies from the policies of valence-advantaged parties, and that