

Party Competition in Western Europe

Electoral Systems and Party Competition

Mirko Wegemann

Universität Münster
Institut für Politikwissenschaft

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What we did two weeks ago...

- you submitted essays on the benefits and costs of accommodating the far-right
- we discussed two different perspectives, as put forward by yourself + Krause, Cohen, and Abou-Chadi (2023) and Hjorth and Larsen (2022)

Brief reflection: how did you feel about the roundtable (as a presenter/as a discussant)?

Plan for today

There will be again two parts of the session

- in the first part, we will introduce the relevance of institutions to understand party competition, focusing on electoral systems
- in the second part, I will introduce you to different data sources you can use when working on institutions

Institutions

What do we mean when we talk about institutions?

Institutions

“Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” (North 1990, p. 1).

They differ in various aspects...

- formal vs. informal (written vs. customs)
- created vs. evolving (Constitution vs. common law)

Institutions are not organizations (groups of individuals pursuing similar goals) but they shape how organizations function.

Institutions

Institutions of interest for scholars of political parties

- electoral systems
- legislatures
- intra-party organization (e.g., candidate selection methods)
- campaigning rules (e.g., election posters)

Electoral systems as institutions

Why electoral systems matter? Remember your own work on electoral systems in the beginning of the seminar

Country	Electoral System	Parties	Volatility/ Fragmentation
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> open-list (proportional) threshold: 4% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> previously: catch-all parties in centre powerful far-right challenger 	average but increasing
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mixed electoral system threshold: 3% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> electoral blocs (left and right) multiparty 	quite high
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> proportional threshold: only de-facto nation-wide constituency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> multiparty (a lot) larger coalitions 	high fragmentation, increasing volatility
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> majoritarian single member districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two-party system high disproportionality in parliament 	mid levels of volatility but increasing

Electoral systems as institutions

Lots of research has focused on the idea of *strategic voting*:

- strategic voting implies that voters take institutional design of electoral system into account when casting their ballot
- in this context, studies often scrutinize the validity of

Duverger's Law

Who is Duverger and since when are there any laws in the social sciences?

Electoral systems as institutions

Duverger's Law (Duverger 1964):

- electoral systems with single-member districts and plurality voting lead to two-party systems
- mechanisms
 - supply side: less parties compete because of lower chances of winning
 - demand side: voters behave strategically, they rather vote for those parties which have chance of winning

Electoral systems as institutions

Table 1. Treatment effects on electoral outcomes.

Specification/ bandwidth	Single-ballot mean	Linear 50,000	Linear 25,000	Linear 75,000	Quad. 50,000	Quad. 75,000
Dependent variable		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Vote share — 3rd and lower placed candidates	0.155	0.088 (0.040)	0.093 (0.056)	0.069 (0.033)	0.104 (0.058)	0.113 (0.046)
Vote Share — 4th and lower placed candidates	0.041	0.043 (0.024)	0.046 (0.030)	0.036 (0.021)	0.057 (0.031)	0.055 (0.028)
Vote Share — 5th and lower placed candidates	0.012	0.015 (0.010)	0.017 (0.012)	0.015 (0.009)	0.022 (0.012)	0.021 (0.011)
Registration rate	0.638	0.011 (0.019)	0.016 (0.030)	0.021 (0.016)	0.031 (0.029)	0.014 (0.024)
Turnout rate	0.851	0.003 (0.007)	-0.004 (0.011)	0.002 (0.007)	-0.003 (0.01)	-0.002 (0.009)
Observations	—	175	81	282	175	282

Robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level in parenthesis. Each figure in the table is from a separate local linear/quadratic regression with the specified bandwidth. The level of observation is a municipal election. The estimated treatment effect is of a change from SB to DB. All estimates include year effects. Details on the dependent variables are presented in the text.

Figure: Effects of a dual-ballot design on third candidates' success in Brazil (Fujiwara 2011)

Dual ballot designs increase chances of third candidates →
evidence for Duverger's Law

Electoral systems as institutions

TABLE 4—IMPACT OF RUNOFF ON POLICY VOLATILITY, RDD ESTIMATES

	Spline third	Spline fourth	Spline second	LLR (h)	LLR (h/2)	LLR (2h)
<i>Panel A. Estimations without covariates</i>						
Time variance of business property tax	−0.455 (0.182)	−0.647 (0.240)	−0.238 (0.140)	−0.651 (0.255)	−0.697 (0.389)	−0.378 (0.160)
Observations	575	575	575	118	59	236
Cross-sectional variance of business property tax	−0.659 (0.258)	−0.937 (0.294)	−0.313 (0.201)	−0.694 (0.256)	−0.364 (0.590)	−0.443 (0.203)
Observations	92	92	92	19	9	37
<i>Panel B. Estimations with covariates</i>						
Time variance of business property tax	−0.450 (0.170)	−0.614 (0.224)	−0.237 (0.132)	−0.563 (0.211)	−0.167 (0.167)	−0.377 (0.140)
Observations	575	575	575	118	59	236
Cross-sectional variance of business property tax	−0.627 (0.276)	−0.856 (0.306)	−0.352 (0.199)	−0.736 (0.274)	−0.832 (0.278)	−0.371 (0.184)
Observations	92	92	92	19	9	37

Figure: Effects of a dual-ballot design on policy volatility (tax rate) in Italy (Bordignon, Nannicini, and Tabellini 2016)

Dual ballot designs increase presence of more than two candidates but increase policy stability (less volatility) → mixed evidence regarding Duverger's Law

Electoral Reform and Strategic Coordination

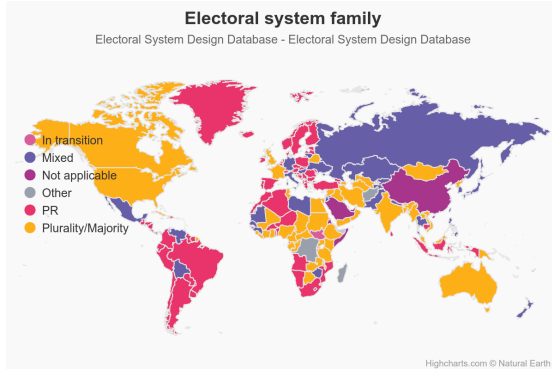


Figure: Electoral systems as of today, Source: [Electoral System Design Database](#)

Electoral Reform and Strategic Coordination

Which consequence of an electoral system change do Fiva and Hix (2021) investigate?

Electoral Reform and Strategic Coordination

In line with the literature on strategic voting, Fiva and Hix (2021) are concerned with the effect of the electoral system on voting behavior

- following research on Duverger's Law
- how does adoption of proportional electoral system affect voting behavior of people (mechanism 2)?

Question by Sophie: Why might voters feel more comfortable voting for their favorite party under proportional representation?

Argument

- general idea: proportional representation gives voters more choice
- before introduction of PR, voters may 'waste' their vote for their preferred party if it has less chance of winning
- as a corollary, they vote for their second best option: an allied party (e.g. as a Liberal, you vote for a Conservative party)

Argument

When the system changes...

- voters are no longer constrained in their vote choice: it's more likely that their preferred vote translates into actual representation, even in districts in which they constitute minority
- if coordination was at work, voters should vote less for "allied" party in districts in which ally was stronger; and more for allied party when it was weaker

Data and Methods

Fiva and Hix (2021) exploit the effect of an electoral system reform in 1919 in Norway

- change from single-member districts to proportional electoral systems
- data on vote results in Norwegian electoral districts from 1909 to 1927
- they compare only those districts in which all parties were present before and after the electoral system change

Findings

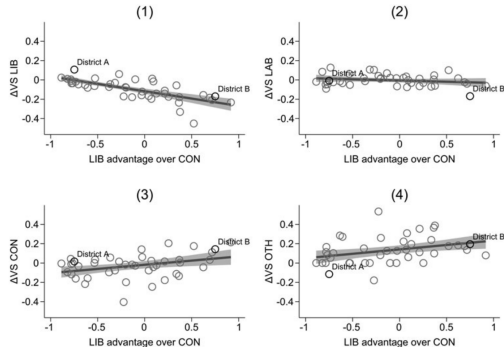


Figure: Changing vote patterns in districts with liberal advantage over conservatives (Fiva and Hix 2021)

How did the electoral system change shape voting behavior?

Findings

- Liberal advantage over Conservatives is partly driven by strategic voting
- after reform: drop in vote share for Liberals, increase in Conservative vote share
- introduction of proportional systems also increase likelihood of newly emerging parties, such as *Farmers Party*

Question by Sarah: Which impact on switching votes after the reform did different campaigning of the party have (parties advertising that you can finally vote for them and it will produce an outcome etc.)?

Findings

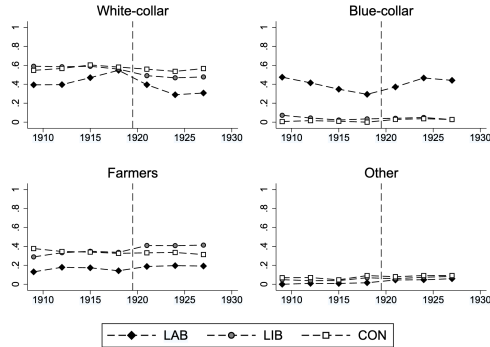
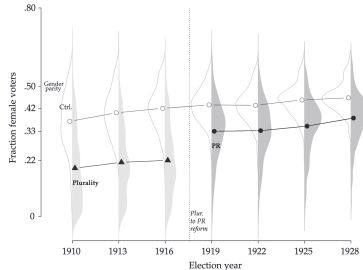


Figure: Change in candidate nominations pre- and post-reform (Fiva and Hix 2021, Appendix A.6)

Other effects of the reform

FIGURE 1 Means and Densities of Women's Percentage of the Votes Cast by Treatment Group and Election Year



Note: Filled points and densities denote the municipalities forced to switch to PR in 1919 (treatment group); outlined ones denote the municipalities with PR throughout the period (control group)

Figure: The change to PR also caused higher turnout of female voters, particularly in uncompetitive districts (Skorre 2023)

Mechanism?

Further questions?

- **Question by Valentine:** In Norway, proportional representation allowed new parties to make themselves heard without making government formation too complicated. In Germany, the proportional system has also allowed new parties to emerge, but this sometimes seems to make coalitions more difficult. Why can proportional representation have different effects on political stability depending on the country?
- **Question by Timo:** The paper is about Norway between 1918 and 1921. During the last centuries, party systems stayed more or less the same. Do you think that the effect of party systems on strategic coordination can still be studied?

To conclude...

- **Research Question:** How does an electoral system change from SMD to PR affect strategic voting?
- **Main Argument:** Voters coordinate in plurality voting systems to avoid wasting their votes.
- **Data and Method:** Election results in Norway between 1909 and 1927
- **Results:** Citizens vote strategically.
- **Implications:** Voting behavior is constrained by the institutional context, shaping parties' fortunes

Data on institutions

Compared to parties and voters, data on institutions differs in some aspects...

- rules are often publicly available (e.g. constitution, legal data bases, party statutes, etc.)
- yet, many specifics need to be collected by the researcher themself
- data on institutions alone often not sufficient to respond to research question → combine different data sources

Data on institutions

Different types of data

- for data on electoral systems:
 - [Electoral System Design Database](#)
- for data on party organization
 - [V-Party](#): for all kind of data on party types and candidate nomination
 - [Political Party Database](#): data on party's selection methods, financing and internal events (e.g. congresses)
 - [Integrated Party Organization Database \(IPOD\)](#): combines several datasets on parties' organizational features
- for data on parliaments:
 - [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#): data on parliamentary procedures + electoral system information
- interesting outcome data

Data on institutions

- [Comparative Political Dataset](#) for data on government composition
- [Parlgov](#): Election results and government composition from 1900-2023 in EU and OECD countries

Data on institutions

Let's switch to R.

To prepare for next week...

- Next week, there will be our final substantive session
- We'll talk about parliaments and how its institutions shape legislative debates
- **Mandatory readings**
 1. **Proksch SO and Slapin JB (2012)** Institutional Foundations of Legislative Speech. *American Journal of Political Science* **56** (3), 520–537. ISSN: 0092-5853, 1540-5907. DOI: [10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00565.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00565.x)

To prepare for next week...

2. **Sieberer U and Höhmann D (2022)** Do Party System Parameters Explain Differences in Legislative Organization? Fragmentation, Polarization, and the Density of Regulation in European Parliaments, 1945–2009. *Party Politics* **28** (4), 597–610. ISSN: 1354-0688, 1460-3683. DOI: [10.1177/13540688211002490](https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688211002490)

- **Complementary reading**

1. **Zubek R (2021)** Committee Strength in Parliamentary Democracies: A New Index. *European Journal of Political Research* **60** (4), 1018–1031. ISSN: 1475-6765. DOI: [10.1111/1475-6765.12426](https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12426)

Thank you for your attention!
Any further questions?

Literature



Bordignon M, Nannicini T, and Tabellini G (2016)

Moderating Political Extremism: Single Round versus Runoff Elections under Plurality Rule. *American Economic Review* **106** (8), 2349–2370.



Duverger M (1964) *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. Methuen, 1964.



Fiva JH and Hix S (2021) Electoral Reform and Strategic Coordination. *British Journal of Political Science* **51** (4), 1782–1791.



Fujiwara T (2011) A Regression Discontinuity Test of Strategic Voting and Duverger's Law. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* **6** (3-4), 197–233.

Literature



Hjorth F and Larsen MV (2022) When Does Accommodation Work? Electoral Effects of Mainstream Left Position Taking on Immigration. *British Journal of Political Science* **52** (2), 949–957.



Krause W, Cohen D, and Abou-Chadi T (2023) Does Accommodation Work? Mainstream Party Strategies and the Success of Radical Right Parties. *Political Science Research and Methods* **11** (1), 172–179.



North DC (1990) *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.



Proksch SO and Slapin JB (2012) Institutional Foundations of Legislative Speech. *American Journal of Political Science* **56** (3), 520–537.

Literature



Sieberer U and Höhmann D (2022) Do Party System Parameters Explain Differences in Legislative Organization? Fragmentation, Polarization, and the Density of Regulation in European Parliaments, 1945–2009. *Party Politics* **28** (4), 597–610.



Skorge ØS (2023) Mobilizing the Underrepresented: Electoral Systems and Gender Inequality in Political Participation. *American Journal of Political Science* **67** (3), 538–552.



Zubek R (2021) Committee Strength in Parliamentary Democracies: A New Index. *European Journal of Political Research* **60** (4), 1018–1031.