ELECTION AND PARTY SYSTEM EFFECTS
ON POLICY REPRESENTATION:
BRINGING TIME INTO A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Forthcoming in Electoral Studies
SUMMARY

Public policy is the central focus of political science. It is supposed under democracy to be necessarily linked to public preferences through elections. Election outcomes however are shaped not only by the votes cast but also by the party-policy options on offer and the rules by which votes are aggregated into seats. An interesting question is whether rules exert their influence through the party system they help shape or whether public policy is directly affected by the type of electoral system in force. These questions are examined here over the whole of the post-war period with evidence on policy preferences at electoral and governmental levels in 21 countries. We discover that popular preferences are transmitted more clearly into government policy intentions under PR than under other rules. However, the introduction of an over time measure reveals that the difference is not as great as it appears with purely cross-sectional measures. Interesting variations in representational efficiency also emerge between majority, plurality, and run-off rules.
INTRODUCTION

The primary focus of political science has to be on the making of public policy (‘the authoritative allocation of values in society’ – Easton, 1965, 31). Democracy is uniquely characterised as a political system by forging a ‘necessary connection’ between popular preferences and public policy (May, 1978, 1; Saward, 1998, 51) through its defining institution, free elections (Dahl, 1956, 63-81). However we all know, at least since Duverger (1951), that the rules under which elections are held, particularly the rules for aggregating votes into legislative seats, affect outcomes. The major contrast has traditionally been drawn between PR rules aiming to match overall vote and seat shares, and single-member constituency (usually plurality) systems more concerned with producing a definite election outcome (Powell, 2000: Powell and Vanberg, 2000). More subtle differences within these broad groups have been neglected, owing partly to the absence of over-time measures in previous studies (see Tables 3 and 4 below). There is reason to believe that any variation in election rules has some political effect, and this deserves examination in regard to public policy – which we can better do by looking at several measures of policy correspondence concurrently, including some that are time based.

There is a difficulty however. Until recently little evidence on preferences or public policy has been available – whether on government actions or even government intentions. In particular, time-sensitive measures have been lacking. Rule effects have been debated mainly in terms of party electoral success. Parties are, of course, carriers of policy and can be seen as hewing to a reasonably consistent policy line over time at least in Left-Right terms (Castles, ed., 1982). Nevertheless they do vary their policies between election and election – and as far as individual elections are concerned, sometimes quite considerably (consider Clinton in 1992 and 1996 and Gore in 2000 – a variation in policy positions mapped
in Figure 1 (below). Such changes not only affect the choices offered to electors, and what they can be seen as voting for. It also alters the policies parties promote once in office.

Fortunately a direct source of evidence on party policy has emerged from the extensive codings of post-war election programmes now available (Budge et al, 2001). These enable us to take direct cognisance of what the parties themselves say about policy in their only fully authoritative pronouncement – the platform or manifesto - and to map it in terms of party Left-Right movement as in Figures 1 (US), 2 (UK) and 3 (France). Similar maps could be presented for all our countries and form the basis for Tables 3 and 4 below.

Being able to follow through party-policy shifts over time also enables us to estimate a particular government’s unique policy preferences (through weighting the preferences of parties making up the government – cf Kim & Fording, 2001, 169). These are not yet their declared preferences and far less the policy actually effected. However, they are closer than we have usually got to what individual governments want to do.

Having individual election positions for parties allows us to see what electors are voting for. Indeed, it also allows us to estimate what the median voter preference is (Kim & Fording, 1998, 2001). This gives an idea of popular preferences which we can compare with government preferences to measure correspondence between them under the different electoral rules – allowing some inferences about how far these also facilitate the correspondence.

In short, the availability of over-time policy estimates for individual parties and elections permits a more refined investigation of the effects of election rules over electoral preference formation and public policy in the countries under consideration. One central question is whether rules are more important than
cultural differences (Anglo-Saxon versus Continental, European versus American) or types of party system in shaping policy representation.

Below we examine the correspondence between popular and government preferences (Table 3). First, however, we describe the programmatic, voting and governmental data we use to make our estimates, and show how these can be combined to give locations on a Left-Right scale.

**COMPARATIVE EVIDENCE**

Our data cover some 265 elections giving rise to 482 governments in the 21 post-war democracies that we cover. As we are comparing popular and governmental, rather than parliamentary preferences, we can include the United States among the countries studied. To investigate the correspondence between median voter and government positions, the most obvious approach, justified immediately below, is to identify the positions of parties and electors along a left-right dimension. To do this we start with the left-right scoring from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) using the CMP-98 release (Budge, et al., 2001). We apply the operational strategies described below but first provide the overview in Table 1. The left portion of the Table reports the number of governments, sequence numbers, the caretaker and non-partisan governments and the number of government elections (as identified in Woldendorp, et al, 2000). The right portion reports the average left-right position of the median voter throughout the time periods and the weighted mean position of governments, where the weights correspond to the relative number of parliamentary seats held by parties in government.

[Table 1 about here]
SHARING POLICY SPACE

A policy space shared between electors and parties is, of course, crucial in making the alternatives parties define relevant to electors and in allowing the identification of a median and Government policy position that can be meaningfully compared. It is what permits us to identify and compare these without requiring a country’s political space to be unidimensional in some fundamental and absolute sense – though operationally we do use Left-Right as the most reasonable approximation. But, we must ask, by being so relaxed, are we not running into problems of cyclical voting and policy incoherence?

To evaluate fully the idea of a shared policy space, we need to start with its basic structure and move on to link it to shared communication in general and medians in particular. An important starting point is that the dimensionality of policy space depends less on the number of issues or policies involved than on the number of parties. While the policy space over \( k \) issues approaches to being \( k \)-dimensional, parties structure the \( k \)-dimensional space into a much smaller order of dimensionality by virtue of their limited numbers. That makes the conversation between voters and potential governors highly structured, where the structure comes principally from the parties on offer at election time. At the lower extreme of a two-party system, unidimensionality is true by definition. Three parties might require two dimensions, four parties three dimensions, and so on; so that the hypothetically conceivable upper bound of the dimensionality of the policy space of an election as structured by \( P \) parties is \( P - 1 \). At this upper extreme, with a space of \( P - 1 \), each party is an entity unto itself, offering a programme incommensurable with the programme of every other party. This might be a description of a system organized by exclusively single-issue parties. One party takes a position on abortion and nothing else, another party takes a position on agricultural subsidies
and nothing else, another takes up wetland preservation and nothing else, and so on. However, this is not a party system known to anyone. Rather, most parties take positions on a range of issues (Niemi, 1969) and most observers, experts and citizens in the mass public alike, can characterize such positions along something like a single left-right dimension.

Surveys of experts asked to rank their national parties along a left-right scale are, in fact, burgeoning. Most respondents find no difficulty in using a left-right characterization; nor do electors when asked to do the same in national voting studies (Castles and Mair, 1984), Huber and Inglehart, (1995), Inglehart and Klingemann, (1976)). Matthew Gabel and John D. Huber, (2000), undertake an extensive analysis of party programmes over fifteen post-war democracies and find a left-right dimension emerging as the principal and only shared dimension (see also, Budge et al., 2001 pp. 1-49). Analyses of electoral data stretching over a hundred years similarly identified a left-right dimension as the one on which to base analysis (Bartolini and Mair, 1990). By simply casting a vote for the nearest party on this dimension, communicated to them by parties and the media, a voter can register her or his preference for a policy programme on shared criteria. The overall distribution of percentages based on everyone voting for their party then designates the median voter position and the party closest to it.

These considerations help explain our relaxed tone on unidimensionality. In practice, the basic ordering of preferences is likely to be characterized reasonably well as spread along the well-known left-right continuum. Apart from expert and party use of it as a preferred frame of reference, telling evidence comes from the review of mass survey research on collective representation carried through by Philip Converse and Roy Pierce (1986) and more recently by Pierce, Warren Miller and their collaborators (1999). Their analyses show that voters do have a strong sense of where they themselves and the parties stand on the broad contours of
policy as indicated by the left-right dimension. Pierce summarizes the findings by saying:

The issue to which they [voters] are likely to give high priority … is the ideological super-issue …: the left-right dimension on the European continent or the liberal-conservative dimension in the United States. Voter-party congruence on more specific issues, even those that are traditionally linked to the ideological dimension, is much more limited (Pierce in Miller, et al., (1994, 30).

PARTY POLICY POSITIONS IN THREE NON-PR SYSTEMS

We can illustrate these points by looking at actual party policy movement between elections in three countries which display interesting differences – both in regard to PR systems and among themselves. These are the United States and Britain, with single-member district (SMD) majoritarian/plurality systems of voting, and France with its run-off system.

Figures 1, 2 & 3 map the Left-Right policy positions taken by their parties over the post-war period. The figures: show a general rightward drift by

[Figures 1, 2 & 3 about here]

British and American parties over time, and ideological stability or a small Leftwards shift in the case of France. The theoretically driven general Left-Right scale on which these representations are based (Budge et al, 2001, p.22) derives from a count of election programme sentences into Left, Right or irrelevant categories, subtracting the Left from the Right total and dividing by the total number of programme sentences. Left categories fall into three main groupings: Peaceful Internationalism, Economic Planning and Welfare. Right categories group as Military Alliances, Freedom and Traditional Order (Table 2).
The major interest of the Figures, given their over-time nature, is what they reveal about party policy moves and in particular whether they differ between countries in ways which might be attributed to their differing electoral systems. For example, we might expect the United States, the purest example of a two party system in the world, to confirm best to Downsian notions of policy convergence on the median (Downs, 1957, 112-119). The British case might be blurred through the existence of an electorally strong third party, the Liberal Democrats – even if they are consistently done down by the plurality system in single member constituencies. France might be even more ambiguous – the four mainstream parties falling most of the time into two competing blocks of Left and Right.

What we actually find however is a strong and consistent policy differentiation between the US Republicans and Democrats with little sign of convergence between them over time or at single elections (within a general Rightward draft which occurs in most countries). This corresponds to the behaviour of the major British parties except when they came closer at points in the 1950s. Even the Liberals have been quite distinctive in (centrist) policy terms over the last three decades. Similarly the Socialists and Gaullists in France have kept themselves apart, and seem to have carried their electoral partners with them.

These left-right party placements have been shown to be reliable and valid measures when evaluated against expert and mass perceptions of party left-right positions (McDonald & Mendes, 2001: Gabel & Huber, 2000: Klingemann, 1995). The special contribution of the manifesto data is that they do record changes in party positions from one election to the next. Expert and mass judgements of party positions have in contrast only been collected for a few time-points. Moreover, they
are so stable across time that they preclude any study of party movement – if they can legitimately be compared at all (McDonald and Mendes, 2001).

**GOVERNMENT POLICY POSITIONS**

Our concern here however is not with party left-right positions as such but the estimates we can derive from them of Government policy position and majority electoral preferences. By comparing the two we can then see how the transmission of electoral opinion into public policy is affected by the election system.

We calculate the left-right position of a government as the weighted mean position of the parties in government, where the weights are the parliamentary seat percentages among parties in government (Powell, 2000, 173-4: Huber & Powell, 2000). Using parliamentary seats as the weights is justified by repeated findings that government ministries are usually allocated to government parties in proportion to the seats they hold in parliament (Browne & Franklin, 1972). Using a weighted average to indicate a government’s left-right position is based on the assumption that parties in government influence policy in proportion to the cabinet posts they occupy. When there is just one party in government, that party’s left-right position is the government’s position; the party holds 100 per cent of the weight of the parties in government. When there are two parties in government, one with seventy-five seats and the other with twenty-five seats, then the position of the party with seventy-five seats has three times as much weight in the calculation of the government’s position as the party with twenty-five seats.

In order to provide a modest reliability and validity check, we have compared our government policy scores with others calculated in the same way but using expert scores. For thirty-two governments of the early 1980s and early 1990s for which we have parallel scores (Powell, 2000, 180-185) $r = 0.82$. 
For reasons which we specify immediately below, we use the preference of the median voter as our indicator of majority opinion. Her position is calculated as a variation on the measurement strategy devised by Kim & Fording (1998) using left-right party placements and the election voting percentages. Each party's voters are assumed to be distributed uniformly around its policy position out to the mid-points with the two adjacent parties. A simple formula, described in the Appendix to this article, can then be applied to the distribution to determine the position of the median voter.

We have made two modifications to the calculation. First, in the case of Iceland and Portugal we omitted the category 'effective authority' from the left-right calculation, as inspection indicated this was not an indicator of right-leaning attitudes in these two countries. Second, when the furthest left or furthest right party in a system is involved in the formula, we assume that the voters on its 'outer side' occupy an interval symmetrical with that on its 'inner side' rather than stretching out to +100 or -100, which would render them unrealistically extreme. These and other considerations affecting our calculation of the median voter position are discussed further in the Appendix.

**MEDIAN VOTER AND POPULAR MAJORITY**

Being able to estimate the median voter position is important because it is the best indicator we can have of what the popular majority wants (Powell, 2000; Powell & Vanberg, 2000; Huber & Powell, 1994; however, see qualifications in the Appendix about these authors' survey-based measures). This proposition has been proved mathematically (Black, 1958) and can also be seen intuitively – most readily in the case of a single-dimensional policy continuum like the left-right one.

[Figure 4 about here]
To see why, consider Figure 4, where voters prefer any policy closer to their own preference on a left-right continuum. This puts C, at the median, in the most powerful position. Voters both to left and right need C to form a majority. They can only attract C by putting their collective preference close to hers – otherwise the alternative grouping will be more attractive and become the majority. Compared to the policy-positions of voters on the other wing, C’s position will be preferred, whichever coalition she joins. Thus C’s position will constitute the point towards which majority-backed policy always tends in practice. That is why it is such a good indicator of what a majority would want if it formed. It also has a certain normative appeal, being the policy position which gives all voters the maximum satisfaction they can expect with equal suffrages under the existing distribution of preferences.

**REPRESENTING PUBLIC PREFERENCES**

With measures both of popular policy preferences and of government intentions we are now in a position to measure the correspondence between the two. This is a first step towards examining the effects of voting rules on representation, by seeing how the correspondence varies between countries with different types of election system.

There are three aspects of policy correspondence which we can examine. The first is the most obvious – the average absolute difference between median voter position and government position on the Left-Right scale after each election. However, we can also bring in time by seeing how this works out over the long run, since negative and positive deviations from the popular position at each election could over the long term average out close to the long term popular preference. Finally, we can see how well changes in the popular position from election to election get reflected in changes in government position – a simple regression equation is all that is needed to relate the two. The last two measures have not
been used before and build on the ability of the manifesto data to reflect changes over time, which have been lacking in most previous investigations of representative relationships (e.g. Powell, 2000). Yet they are essential to get a rounded view of how popular-representative relationships work out over a given period - surely essential to a full evaluation of the lasting impact of election systems.

**Table 3 about here**

Table 3 provides figures which enable us to make these three kinds of comparison, each casting light on some aspect of policy representation. The first (column 1 of Table 3) simply averages the absolute differences after each election between the Left-Right preference of the median voter and the (weighted) Left-Right preference of the subsequent government (we label this ‘distortion’). The second measure, of long term bias, averages these differences arithmetically, taking account of positive and negative values. It is designed to show how far individual election distortions might balance each other out in the long run. The third measure, responsiveness, shows how far a change in the position of the median voter produces a corresponding change in the government position after each election.

Applying these measures to the individual countries in the Table we can see, for example, that Australia commonly produces governments with quite a large incongruence between the median voter (majority) preference and the government policy position. This is reduced however when we average these distortions arithmetically over time because positive ones balance out negative ones. There is still quite a substantial discrepancy of 7.1 but it is much reduced from the 18.2 post-electoral incongruence. The figure for responsiveness (slope) at .64 does not differ significantly from 1.00, a one to one relationship, showing considerable sensitivity of government policy to shifts in popular opinion. In the case of the UK and US this might be considered over-sensitivity as small swings in public support produce
disproportionate changes in government positions – as in Germany, to cite a PR system which produces similar values.

In all countries, long term bias is less than short-term distortion – a reassuring finding for the representative democrat! The reduction is particularly marked for Denmark and the US, which approach almost perfect correspondence in the long run after showing a lot of short-term distortion. The much criticised electoral and party systems of Italy produce a good correspondence on all indicators, provoking the heretical reflection that possibly the median Italian voter got what she wanted out of the old political system (at least as far as policy intentions were concerned). Italy contrasts with France which performs badly on all representation measures.

**ELECTION SYSTEMS AND POLICY REPRESENTATION**

Our main interest is, of course, less in individual country differences than in those between election systems. The Table shows that SMD systems (largely as a result of electoral pluralities being transformed into parliamentary majorities) produce considerably more incongruence between popular and government preferences than PR systems – an average of 14.7 compared to 7.6. However, over time, these tend to cancel out, as a leftward incongruence is succeeded by a rightward incongruence – average bias is 5.3 (SMD) compared to 1.4 (PR). Thus long-term policy representation under SMD compares much more favourably than short term representation with that of PR systems, although the comparison still favours the latter.

Responsiveness is often considered the great strength of SMD compared to PR – shifts in electoral opinion being immediately transformed into changes of governments and their policies, while legislative bargaining over coalition formation impedes this. However we can see from the third column of Table 3 that
this sweeping generalisation is not upheld. In fact, most PR systems show a quite impressive level of responsiveness to changes in popular preferences while the lowest responsiveness appears in New Zealand and France.

The French case contrasts with that of Britain, which shows ultra-high responsiveness to shifts in electoral opinion. The US is even more responsive but also more erratic in registering a response. In terms of individual election distortions France and Britain both show high levels – resulting both from pluralities being represented as Parliamentary majorities and possibly also from having a limited number of party alternatives to choose from, given that effective choice in France is between Left and Right. In spite of having even more limited party alternatives, majoritarian voting in the US as associated with a better – indeed almost perfect – match between individual election preferences and government policy over the long run (-0.3).

When it comes to long-term bias we have seen that alternation between Left and Right substantially reduces the electoral-government gap in Britain, bringing it closer to the US in this regard. However, the French system still reveals itself the least sensitive system so far as reflecting popular preferences is concerned – not only in regard to Britain and the US but also to all the other countries in the Table. The majoritarian run-off system, and possibly the interventions of an autonomous Presidency in government negotiations, undermine policy representation by governments.

Over-responsive to change at one level, and insensitive to current popular preferences at the other, Britain hardly appears as a model of representation either. The majoritarian system of the US created by party competition for the Presidency appears somewhat more capable of reflecting and responding to popular demands although of course by considering only presidential intentions we are not taking into account the effect of the separation of powers and hostile Congressional
majorities. These probably impede the actual implementation of presidential policy intentions - a complication which is however beyond the scope of this study.

Examining differences among SMD systems themselves – interesting and neglected as they often are – should not be allowed to obscure the major differences in representational efficiency which emerge between the PR and non-PR systems in the table. The main lesson is that proportional representation does the job it was designed for in policy terms as well as in the reflection of vote shares in seats – and probably because it equates seat with the vote shares, giving Parliamentary influence to parties in proportion to the popular support they get (McDonald, et al, 2004). On all the indicators in Table 3, PR systems perform better or equally well as SMD systems on average – and indeed also compare well at the individual country level, with the intriguing exception of Canada.

This finding echoes the conclusions of previous studies such as Powell’s (2000: see also Powell & Vanberg, 2000). Perhaps an even more important finding once the extra dimension of time is introduced is that long term bias is reduced in SMD systems by alternation between governments with different policy positions. Individually these may be out of tune with their electorate. Abrupt alternations of policy direction seem in the end however to add up to an average position which is not too far removed from the average preference of electors. Alternation and confrontation may not be the best way to get a correspondence (Anderson and Guillory, 1997; Lijphart, 1999). But it is reassuring from the democratic point of view that the major alternative form of voting to PR does achieve it in the end.

PARTY SYSTEMS AND POLICY REPRESENTATION

One way in which electoral systems might exert an effect is through the kind of party system they promote. Since Duverger (1951) it has been recognized that PR tends to encourage more parties and SMD less. More parties might offer more
nuanced policy alternatives through which the median preference might more
sensitively be reflected by the government. (Though, of course, Downs (1957, 142-
150) has cautioned that coalition governments form without regard to popular votes,
which makes rational choice of party difficult.)

Table 3 however shows few differences that could be associated with party
numbers as such. Austria, with 2½ parties like Britain, scores better than the UK on
all measures. Italy and Denmark, both with highly fragmented party systems, turn
in different performances, as does France. There seems clear evidence therefore
that election systems generally exert direct effects on representation, not ones
mediated by the party system.

We can check this conclusion directly by tracing distortion and bias to their
roots in elections and parties. The party system distorts the representation of
median voter preferences by offering party policy packages that are all quite
distant from those preferences, even in terms of the closest alternative which
attracts her support. By measuring the distances in Left-Right terms between the
median voter and the closest party at each election and taking the absolute sum and
mean of these, we get an estimate of how much distortion each party system with its
range of offerings introduces into policy representation. By adding these distances
arithmetically and allowing for their positive and negative signs, we can estimate
the bias of the party system.

For its part the election system is supposed to make the party policy chosen
by the median voter the median one in Parliament. The measure of how far it
departs from this is the left-right distance between the policy position of the party
chosen by the median voter and that of the Parliamentary median. Distortion and
bias can both be estimated from this as previously.

As misrepresentation can last a longer or a shorter time these estimates are
weighted by the time between elections to get a truer picture of how far
representation is generally exact or off the mark. (However, unweighted estimates produce much the same results.) There are other sources of distortion and bias in the representative process – distance between the policy position of the Parliamentary median party and that of the Government for example. So the figures reported in Table 4 do not sum up in any sense to those in Table 3. What they do is provide a basis for judging whether party systems or election systems per se contribute more to representational distortion and bias.

**[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]**

The answers are mixed. In SMD systems the source of distortion varies very much between individual countries, from New Zealand where the party system contributes much more to distortion than the election system, to Britain where the reverse is very strongly time. Overall, election and party systems seem to contribute equally to distortion. In terms of long term bias however it is the election system which contributes more, except in Australia – three times the amount of party systems it seems. By alternating as the Parliamentary median, opposing parties arrive at a reasonable representation of long term average preferences.

Under proportional representation it is clear that what distortion of median voter preferences there is is due to the party system rather than electoral processes. These match up the median voter’s party with the Parliamentary median as they are supposed to do. It is the party alternatives which fail to match as closely to voter preferences as they are supposed to (still more closely than SMD systems however). There is little long term bias under PR at all, so one must judge both the electoral system and the party system as working together quite efficiently to match policy intentions and preferences in the long run.

We have not reported figures for the United States in Table 4, because by its nature direct election of an executive President is difficult to compare with Parliamentary selection of governments. However, the American party which
attracted the vote of the median elector always gains the Presidency in our period. So distortion and bias produced by the election system are zero. The substantial distortion and limited bias reported in Table 3 are due entirely to the operation of the party system with its not infrequent 'holes in the middle' where the median voter is generally found. Party alternation however reduces long term bias to vanishing point, as we have seen.

OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

Some distortion is produced both by election systems working on their own, and by the effects of the party system with which they are associated (and may have originally helped produce). However, in the long run both work to produce governments whose policy (or at least, policy intentions) are surprisingly close to those of the majority of voters, as estimated by the median. If one were choosing election systems so as to maximise democracy i.e. to creating the 'necessary correspondence' between popular preferences and public policy, our evidence would favour PR in terms of reducing bias and distortion, while remaining responsive to changing preferences. Taking a broader view however we are agreeably surprised at the extent to which non PR systems match up policy with preference over the long run – an aspect of the matter never investigated before, since long policy series have not previously been available for analysis.

Whatever their limitations as measures of preferences and intentions rather than actual policy outputs, the manifesto data do allow us to look directly at relationships across different levels of the political system. For the first time this enables us to consider representative processes comparatively and over time, and thus answer some of the classical questions raised in this regard by political and constitutional theory. Hopefully, the answers we supply here will be useful in

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1 Of course, had we information on policy stands of third party candidates this conclusion might be a little different.
designing electoral systems in the future as well as in developing a better understanding of existing ones.
APPENDIX

Our measurement of a median voter's position relies on the procedure developed by Hee Min Kim and Richard Fording (1998, 2000), with two adjustments discussed below. It differs from a survey-based measure in three respects. First, surveys asking respondents to locate themselves on a left-right scale often do not permit the identification of the party for whom a respondent had voted in an earlier national election. That requires the survey-based measure to refer to a median citizen rather than a median voter. Secondly, and more importantly, surveys that ask a left-right self-placement question are infrequently available so they are not up to the task of providing a good match to the party-position data. The party-position data are designed to have meaningful cross-national variation – i.e., if Norwegian parties locate themselves on average to the left of Australian parties of the same family (e.g. social democrats and conservatives), this can be taken as indicating that the Norwegian left-right space is left of the left-right space in Australia. This feature holds for the CMP data as well as for the 'expert' survey data (Mair and Castles, 1997). Mass survey data on respondents' left-right positions, on the contrary, appear to have no such cross-national variation.

In nearly all countries the median voter positions identified by mass surveys are quite similar (Powell, 2000, 162, 180-185). For example, the median citizen in Norway is recorded by surveys to be at the same left-right position as the median citizen in Australia or the United States. This is implausible when one thinks of the general difference between these countries' politics. One consequence is that, but for three countries that stand three to four standard deviations to the left of all the others (namely, France, Italy and Spain), the cross-national correlation between median citizen positions identified by surveys in the 1980s with those in the 1990s is almost non-existent and, worse, negative – i.e. $r = -0.14$. It appears, therefore, that voters in surveys report they are on the left, in the centre or on the right within the
context of their own country’s political space, rendering their self-placements suspect for any comparative analysis and, more damning for present purposes, for matching to the party-position data that do contain valid cross-national differences along the left-right dimension. The Kim-Fording measure uses leverage gained from the party system cross-national difference and has been validated in part by tests that pay attention to national political differences. And, we can note, the overtime $r = +0.44$ for the Kim-Fording measure applied to the same elections in the same fifteen nations for which Powell’s (2000) survey data correlation is -0.14.

The formula used by Kim and Fording is:

$$M = L + \left\{ \frac{(50 - C)}{F} \times W \right\}$$

Here:

$M$ = median voter position, left-right.

$L$ = lower end on the left-right dimension of the interval containing the median

$C$ = the cumulative vote percentage frequency up to but not including the interval containing the median.

$F$ = the vote percentage of the party in the interval containing the median

$W$ = the width of the interval containing the median.

In a three-party system, with parties at $P$, $Q$ and $R$ at left-right positions of -12, +2 and +8 and vote percentages of 46, 12 and 41, the median voter position is:

$$M = (-5) + \left\{ \frac{(50 - 47)}{12} \right\} \times 19;$$

$M = -2.5$

The one adjustment we made to their measurement strategy involved situations when the farthest left or farthest right party in a system is involved in the formulation of either $L$ or $W$. In those cases, Kim and Fording allow the extreme score of -100 or +100 to mark the endpoint where voters of that party are located. We find this implausible and its effect on the calculation undesirable. In particular, the -100 and
+100 endpoints can artificially stretch the distribution of voters around a party’s position. Rather than assume the party’s voters are so widely dispersed, we assume they are distributed in a symmetrical interval around the party’s position. For example, for a leftmost party at -15 and a 0 midpoint between it and an adjacent party on the right, we assume the left boundary of that party’s voters is -30. With this marginal modification, the measure produces cross-national characterizations of considerable plausibility (see the national median voter positions in Table 1 above) as well as passing several reliability checks such as the correlations between the country placements over time, all of which add to the extensive series of checks reported by Kim and Fording themselves.

The great strength of the median measure, as with the Manifesto data themselves, is its ability to catch cross-national differences and over-time movements. This enables us to inspect structural, long-term features such as representativeness and responsiveness (Table 3), crucial to the assessment of whether there is a policy correspondence between electors and governments. Static expert judgements and infrequent survey data on citizen self-placements have not allowed any of our predecessors to extend their investigations this far, thereby leading for example to harsh assessments of the extent to which majoritarian (SMD) systems co-ordinate popular preferences with public policy positions of parliaments and governments, which on our more extended investigation are not altogether justified.

The fact that both the median voter measure and government policy position are both calculated from party policy positions may raise some doubts about a potential tautology in evaluating our results. When we consider the details of the calculations in each case it can be seen however that they are quite capable of varying independently of each other – as Table 3 in fact demonstrates. We have already shown that substituting another measure would produce similar results in
the case of government policy \( r = 0.82 \) with Powell’s (2000, 173-4) expert estimates. Klingemann (1995) demonstrates that average party Left-Right scores from manifesto data match survey self-placements by their supporters. So these other measures would produce similar results, although they could be applied only to incongruence rather than to long term bias and responsiveness in Table 3, lacking the time dimension of the manifesto data. From a wider theoretical perspective, it can be said that any tautology is inbuilt to the structure of modern representative government, which forces voters to express their public preferences by voting for party alternatives, and then commissions the same parties with their declared programmes to make up government. We investigate the links between these, but representative government itself creates the situation in which they become substantively important.
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