The Electoral System, the Party System, and Electoral Accountability

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Introduction

Scholars have had a difficult time defining and measuring democratic accountability (Schmitter 2004), and as result, they have found it difficult to make confident statements as to whether certain electoral rules are better able to than others to deliver democratic accountability. This paper is an effort to address this situation.

Following on Przeworski's (1991, 10) dictum that "democracy is a system in which parties lose elections," we argue for a minimalist conception of democratic accountability that emphasizes the electorate's capacity to remove incumbent governments. This is a necessary condition for democratic accountability, and - importantly - one that can be quantified. To that end, we estimate the marginal effect of changes in incumbent governments' vote shares on their governing status at 432 parliamentary elections in 28 countries. We argue that democratic accountability requires that this relationship be reliably and strictly positive. This condition implies that voters have a reasonable assurance that incumbent governments that lose votes will see their governing power diminish. We refer to this property as (strict positive) *monotonicity*.

In any parliamentary system, monotonicity is function of two constituent relationships: 1) the mapping from votes to legislative seats; and 2) the mapping from legislative seats to governing power. We begin from the premise that the electoral system directly governs only the first of these relationships, whereas it is the party system that is primarly responsible for the mapping from seats to power. With respect to the electoral system, we argue that it is the electoral formula and ballot structure structure the mapping of vote shifts onto seat shift. With regard to the party system, we are inspired by Sartori's (1976) theories of polarized pluralism. Sartori stressed that it was the "triangular" nature of polarized pluralism that insulated centrally-located governing coalitions from electoral sanction and encouraged irresponsible and ideologically extreme opposition. In contast, the bipolar nature of two-party and moderate multi-party systems provided

for the alteration in power of alternative coalitions. To test Sartori's argument, we follow Maoz and Somer-Topcu's (2010) methodological approach and conceive of party systems as networks. This approach provides us with sophisticated measures of each party's "centrality" to the network and the party system's propensity to bipolarity.

We partial out the relative impact of the electoral system and the party system on monotonicity in order to adjudicate between a Madisonian vision that sees institutions-electoral institutions in this instance-as sufficient to generate and preserve electoral accountability, and a Sartorian vision that sees the force of institutions mediated-and potentially undermined-by the character of the party system. We find that monotonicity declines in the proportionality of the electoral system and increases as the party system becomes increasingly bipolar in structure, but the latter effect is by far the larger.

Related Literature

There is a close relationship between our concept of monotonicity and Powell's (2000) notion of *responsiveness*. Powell(2000, 122) defines responsiveness as the strength of the connection between citizens' votes and the selection of policy makers. We prefer monotonicity to responsiveness, however, because the latter term is employed in a number of different ways in political science. King (1990), for example, defines responsiveness as the rate at which a party's votes translate into seats across electoral districts, a usage that is common in the U.S. literature on redistricting (see, e.g., Cox & Katz, 2002). Responsiveness is also used to denote the rate at which public policies change to reflect changes in public opinion (e.g., Soroka and Wlezien 2010). Note also that Powell's notion of responsiveness is directed at the *selection* of governing parties. In contrast, we see the normative value of monotonicity flowing from the capacity it gives voters to remove unpopular incumbents.

There are strong empirical and methodological similarities between our work and that of Colomer (1996), who examines the devations between parties' vote shares and their legislative bargaining power in five parliamentary systems. Colomer partitions these power deviations into a votes-to-seats component and a seats-to-bargaining power component, and concludes that centre parties enjoy a significant seats to seats-to-bargaining power. The empirical scope of our effort is much larger than Colomer's, and we offer a more sophisticated treatment of the party system.

We also draw on Abou-Chadi and Orlowski's (2016) idea that the bargaining positions of some parties in the legislature are relatively insulated from electoral pressures. Abou-Chadi and Orlowski's link variation in the "insulation" that parties enjoy to the level of party identification that the party enjoys in the electorate, and posit that parties that are less insulated from electoral pressures are more likely to moderate their policy positions. Our effort is not geared toward understanding party strategies, but rather to identifying what aspects of the electoral and party system facilitate or undercut monotonicity. In this respect, our normative and analtyical focus more closely resembles that

of Lijphart (1984; 1999), Powell (2000) and Carey & Hix (2011). Again, we feel that we offer a more sophisticated treatment of the party system than do Abou-Chadi and Orlowski's (2016).

Theoretical Argument

The normative importance of monotonicity

Why should we value on the electorate's capacity to remove incumbent office-holders? We see three main reasons. Firstly, the electorate's capacity to displace the incumbent is integral to democracy. Secondly, voters have more information about the incumbent than any challenger, and for that reason they have a greater capacity to to act collectively to remove the incumbent than to elect a challenger (Manin, 1997, 177). This accords with Riker's (1982) social choice argument that elections can at most serve as a popular veto on unpopular incumbents. Thirdly, even were voters intent on using their votes primarily to select a challenger than to defeat the incumbent, they would still have to remove the incumbent to make way for a challenger - and outside a pure two-party system, votes cast for a challenger do not simultaneously act againt the incumbent.

The impact of the electoral system and the party system

The crux of our argument can be seen in the following identity:

$$\frac{\Delta P}{\Delta V} = \frac{\Delta S}{\Delta V} \times \frac{\Delta P}{\Delta S}, \tag{1}$$

where P indicates the incumbent government's power[1], V indicates its vote share, S indicates its seat share, and Δ indicates the difference in value between elections at t and $t-1$. Our normative argument is that electoral accountability fails should $\frac{\Delta P}{\Delta V} \leqslant 0$. This could occur either because the mapping of changes in votes to seats is not strictly positive (i.e., $\frac{\Delta S}{\Delta V} \leqslant 0$), the the mapping from changes in seat shares to power is not strictly positive (i.e.,$\frac{\Delta P}{\Delta S} \leqslant 0$), or both.

Note the implicit assumptions on which Eq. 1 rests. Firstly, one must be able to identify the incumbent government. This can only happen if the mapping from party labels to the incumbent government is relatively stable $t-1$ to t. If governing coalitions continually splinter and reform, for example, it becomes difficult and perhaps impossible

[1]We are agnostic at this stage as to whether P refers to the incumbent's legislative bargaining power or governing status.

to identify a particular party or set of parties as the incumbents. This accords with Powell's notion of clarity of responsibility. Secondly (and this is less obvious), there must exist an opposition in the sense that the party system must contain at least one party at t that was not in government at $t-1$. This condition ensures that the voter has at least some alternative to the incumbent government; in the absence of such an alternative, the voter's capacity to sanction incumbent parties would be diminished. Perhaps more importantly, democracy requires contestation and contestation demands an opposition (Dahl 1971).

We see aspects of the electoral system as primarily responsible for the failure of monotonicity in the translation of votes to seats. Two apsects of the electoral system are particularly relevant:

1. **Proportionality of the electoral formula**: Our theoretical model identifies the proportionality of the electoral formula as a crucial aspect of the electoral system. This is because under a purely proportional electoral system $\frac{\Delta S}{\Delta V} = 1$. This insight has two important implications. Firstly, any violation of votes-power monotonicity in a pure-PR systems can only be due to the party system. Secondly, violations of votes-power monotonicity that occur at the votes-to-seats stage can only occur under a non-proportional electoral formula. Of course, the (average or median) district magnitude has some bearing on the issue because it constrains how proportional the system is in practice.

2. **Ballot Structure**: One of the obvious ways in which an incumbent government can avoid electoral sanction under a plurality electoral system is when opposition parties and voters fail to coordinate their efforts against the incumbent (Powell 2004; Powell 2000; Carey & Hix 2011). Thus, "too many" opposition parties contest the election, voters subsequently fail to concentrate their votes on one viable opposition party or coalition, and the incumbent retains power despite losing votes. Preferential ballots, joint lists, and run-offs offset the risk of this sort of coordination failure, and should therefore shore up monotonicity.

Critical Features of the Party System

We ground our understanding and measurement of the party system in Sartori's (1976) theory of polarized pluralism. Party fragmentation and ideological polarization were certainly notable aspects of polarized pluralism, but is was not these features that separated polarized pluralism from more functional patterns of bipartism or moderate pluralism. (Sartori repeatedly describes the ideological distance between poles as simply a control variable.) The pathological aspect of polarized pluralism was instead its "ideological patterning" (137). In polarized pluralism, a centrally located governing party was bracketed by ideologically extreme opponents, who were themselves antagonistic toward one another. In consequence, political interactions were not "bipolar" in nature (e.g., government-vs-opposition or left-vs-right) but "triangular" (134). This was a

pathological situation in that it simultaneously encouraged an irresponsible opposition and insulated the government from electoral sanction; centrally-located governments were exposed to merely peripheral turnovers in their membership (139) precisely because no viable alternative coalition could be constructed that excluded these parties. This was the pattern of Italian post-war politics: the DC, surrounded on one side by proto-fascists and on the other by communists, could not be displaced from government because the opposition parties could not form an alternative governing coalition that excluded the DC. In contrast, the bipolar competition that characterized bipartism and moderate pluralism provided the voter with a clear choice between alternative coalitions (179-180) and the prospect of a wholesale turnover in government membership.

Sartori's description of polarized pluralism produces two testable propositions:

1. **Party System Bipolarity**: Votes-to-power monotonicity declines as the party system becomes less bipolar.
2. **Centrality**: The less bipolar the party system, the more the legislative power and governing status of centrally-located parties are insulated from vote shifts

Data and Methods

We test our four propostions against data from 432 parliamentary elections in 28 countries. Our first election is observed in 1945, and our last in 2012. The set of elections and countries is defined the coverage of the Comparative Manifesto Project and listed in the appendix.

We obtain parties vote shares and seat shares from the ParlGov database (Döring & Manow 2012). We computed (non-normalized) Banzhaf scores for all parties on the basis of their seat shares. We obtain data on parties' cabinet membership and cabinet type from the ParlGov database, and data on the number and percentage of cabinet portfolios held by each party from Seki and William's Party Government Data Set (Seki & Williams 2014). In cases of conflict (e.g., ParlGov indicates that a party was in cabinet but the Party Government Data Set shows the party holding no portfolios), we referred to the relevant issues of the *European Journal of Political Research*.

Estimation strategy

We can estimate the influence of the party and electoral systems on the possibility of electoral accountability for party i in country j for election year t by re-arranging the

identity set out in Eq. 1. We begin by expressing the seats-votes and power-seats relationships as linear functions. To do this, we estimate two equations:

$$\Delta S_{ijt} = \delta_1 \Delta V_{ijt} + E'_{jt}\delta_2 + E'_{jt}V_{ijt}\delta_3 + X'_{jt}\delta_4 + u_{ijt} \tag{2}$$

$$\Delta P_{ijt} = \eta_1 \Delta S_{ijt} + C'_{ijt}\eta_2 + C'_{ijt}S_{ijt}\eta_3 + X'_{jt}\eta_4 + e_{ijt} \tag{3}$$

In Eq. 2, ΔS_{ijt} represents the difference in party i's seat share as a result of the election at t, E'_{jt} is a matrix of variables that characterize the electoral system in country j at election t, and X'_{jt} is a matrix of controls. In Eq. 3, ΔP_{ijt} represents the difference in party i's legislative power as a result of the election at t, C'_{jt} is a matrix of variables that characterize the party system in country j at t. We measure party i's legislative power in terms of its non-normalized Banzhaf index. Our control variables in X include the average district magnitude and the maximum euclidean distance between any two parties in the party system.

Our claim is that the marginal influence of votes on legislative power captures the strength of voters' accountability over an incumbent party. That is, it constitutes a measure of accountable government within country j in election year t. To understand this, we differentiate Equations 2 and 3 as follows:

$$\frac{\Delta S_{ijt}}{\Delta V_{ijt}} = \delta_1 + E'_{jt}\delta_3 \tag{4}$$

$$\frac{\Delta P_{ijt}}{\Delta S_{ijt}} = \eta_1 + C'_{jt}\eta_3 \tag{5}$$

From Eq. 1, we can have:

$$\frac{\Delta P}{\Delta V} = \frac{\Delta S}{\Delta V} \times \frac{\Delta P}{\Delta S}$$

Then, substituting equations 4 and 5 into this identity, our quantity of interest can be expressed as:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\Delta P}{\Delta V} &= (\delta_1 + E'_{jt}\delta_3) \times (\eta_1 + C'_{jt}\eta_3) \\ &= \beta_1 + E'_{jt}\beta_2 + C'_{jt}\beta_3 + E'C_{jt}\beta_4, \end{aligned} \tag{6}$$

where$\beta_1 = \delta_1\eta_1$, $\beta_2 = \delta_3\eta_1$, $\beta_3 = \eta_3\delta_1$, and $\beta_4 = \eta_3\delta_3$.

Equation 6 allows us to adjudicate between two views of the influence of the party and electoral systems on accountability. A Madisonian argument privileges the electoral system over that of parties, and would anticipate that $\beta_2 > 0$ and $\beta_3 = \beta_4 = 0$. In contrast, a Sartorian claim is that the relationship between the party and electoral systems have a significant impact on accountability, or that $\beta_4 \neq 0$.

Electoral system characteristics

On the basis of the information in Bormann & Golder (2013) we contruct a 2×2 typology of electoral systems. The first dimension of this typology identifies the electoral formula as proprtional or not. We count list PR systems (open or closed), mixed dependent systems (e.g., German-style MMP), and STV as proprtional systems, and all others as non-proprtional (i.e., SMP, AV, Majority run-off, SNTV, and mixed independent systems). Note that we cannot classify electoral systems on the basis of an index of disproprtionality because one of our dependent variables, $\frac{\Delta S}{\Delta V}$, is itself a metric of disproportionality. The second dimension of our typology identifies the electoral formula as *coordinating* or not. We count preferential (AV, STV) or two-round run-off systems as coordinating electoral systems; all others are defined as non-coordinating. Thus, STV is the only system that is considered both proprtional and coordinating. We also control for the average district magnitude in the lowest tier of seats.

Party systems as Networks

To test our propositions about the impact of the party sysyem on votes-to-power monotonicity requires that we situate parties and party systems in a multi-dimensional policy space (else we rule out "triangular" interactions a priori). We also require measures of the party system's bipolarity and each party's centrality in the party system. To do so, we emulate the methodology set out in Maoz and Somer-Topcu (2010). This involves representing each party system as a network, and then computing its *network polarization index* (NPI). We also calculate each party's *between-ness centrality*, our measure of each party's centrality.

The key step in this process is the construction for each election of a binary $n \times n$ party affiliation matrix, A, that indicates whether or any two parties i, $j, ...n$ are connected to one another. We begin by locating parties in a two-dimensional policy space on the basis of the ideal points developed by Franzmann and Kaiser (2006) from the Comparative Manifesto Project.[2] We then compute parties' policy horizons on the basis of the method set out in Warwick (2000), and define i and j as connected if their

[2]Any other party position data could be employed, with the proviso that those data locate parties in a multi-dimensional policy space.

policy horizons overlap ($a_{ij} = 1$) and unconnected if their policy horizons are disjoint ($a_{ij} = 0$). We then group parties into cliques (i.e. proto-coalitions) based on an iterative algorithm. Parties i, j, and k constitute a cliques if i) the intersection of their policy horizons, H_i, H_j and H_k is non-empty, i.e., $H_i \cap H_j \cap H_k \neq \emptyset$; $H_i \cap H_j \neq \emptyset$; $H_i \cap H_k \neq \emptyset$ and $H_j \cap H_k \neq \emptyset$, and ii) i, j, and k are not themselves a strict subset of another cliques (Zeev & Zeynep Somer-Topcu 2010, 812).[3] Observe that neither condition bars party i from being a member of more than one clique or from being a clique unto itself.[4]

Given information on parties ideal points, their seat shares, and their clique affiliations, we can compute the Maoz and Somer-Topcu's NPI. The NPI varies between 0 and 1. The NPI is 1 when there exists i) exactly two ii) highly cohesive cliques of iii) equal size that have iv) no common members. A clique's cohesion varies inversely with the variance in the ideal points among the parties that comprise it. The NPI collapses to zero if there exists just one clique, the grand coalition.

In addition to the NPI, we compute each parties' *betweenness centrality*. Formally, the betweenness centrality of a node i is defined as

$$g(i) = \sum_{i \neq j \neq k} \frac{\sigma_{jk}(i)}{\sigma_{jk}}, \tag{7}$$

where σ_{jk} is the total number of paths between nodes j and k, and $\sigma_{jk}(i)$ is the number of those nodes that pass through i. Equation 2 can be normalized based on the total number of possible paths in the system. A high betweenness centrality marks a node that is an important gatekeeper, broker, or information conduit in the network (Freeman 1980). Given the nature of our data, we interpret parties' betweenness scores as indicating their (in-)dispensibility to coalition formation; a party with a high betweenness score is indispensible to building a majority coalition, and by virtue of that fact is

[3] Our algorithm operates via brute-force. It first computes all m possible cliques from a set of n parties using *Stata's* `tuples` command. It then examines if the policy horizons of all $i = 1, 2, ..n$ members of cliques m overlap. If they do not, m is discarded. The algorithm then cycles through the $1, 2, ...k \leq m$ remaining cliques and assesses if k is a strict subset of cliques $1, 2, ...k-1$. If so, k is discarded.

[4] We feel that our method of defining A on the basis of the intersection of parties' policy horizons is more theoretically defensible than defining connections on the basis of an arbitrary threshold (e.g., all parties with ideal points closer than the average are connected, all others are unconnected), but it is not problem-free. Especially in crowded multi-party systems (e.g., the Netherlands, Italy, Israel, Spain), some parties' policy horizons can be estimated to be so large that they encompass the whole policy space. When this happens, the only properly defined clique is the grand coalition and the NPI collapses to zero (as it is designed to do). As theoretically appropriate as it may be to set the NPI for these cases to zero, that action does not account for the possibility of measurement error in the estimation of party's policy horizons. Hence we take two further actions in these cases:

1. We "shrink" parties' policy horizons by a scale factor (e.g., .9,.75, .67, etc.) until at least 2 cliques emerge, and then calculate the NPI and employ the scale factor as a control variable.
2. We compute the NPI as if each party were its own clique. This provides a limiting case for all elections. The NPI in these cases is a close analogue to the effective number of parties.

We also noticed that the denominator of Equation 1 (p. 812) of Maoz and Somer-Topcu's NPI is undefined for two-party systems; we set the NPI for these systems to 1.

insulated from declines in its vote share and *also in its seat share*. The latter property follows because parties' seat shares do not figure in Eq. 2, and the affiliation matrix, A, from which Eq. 2 is computed, is derived solely from parties' ideal points and policy horizons.

Table 1: OLS Estimation of Equations 3 and 4

	Eq. 3			Eq. 4		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
ΔV_{ijt}	1.76***	1.76***	1.76***			
	(.30)	(.21)	(.21)			
PR	-1.82***	-1.66***	-1.66***		-6.82*	
	(.51)	(.49)	(.47)		(3.61)	
$Coordinate$	-.43					
	(.52)					
$\Delta V_{ijt} \times PR$	-.66**	-.66***	-.66***			
	(.29)	(.21)	(.21)			
$\Delta V_{ijt} \times Coordinate$	.004					
	(.25)					
ΔS_{ijt}				1.25***	1.11***	1.28***
				(.29)	(.29)	(.28)
NPI			.10	8.77**	5.98*	8.48**
			(.622)	(3.29)	(3.32)	(3.30)
Between			.002	.05		
			(.006)	(.27)		
$\Delta S_{ijt} \times NPI$				2.18***	2.15***	2.07***
				(.62)	(.53)	(.59)
$\Delta S_{ijt} \times Between$				.04		
				(.07)		
$\Delta S_{ijt} \times NPI \times Between$				-.12		
				(.14)		
$\Delta S_{ijt} \times PR$					.19	
					(.34)	
Avg. M	-.003	-.003*	-.003			
	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)			
Max Distance			-.03	-.60	-.61	-.66
			(.11)	(.53)	(.46)	(.54)
Constant	2.32***	2.32***	2.27***	4.21	10.86**	4.76
	(.46)	(.42)	(.73)	(3.44)	(5.09)	(3.39)
R^2	.77	.77	.77	.48	.49	.48
N	736	736	736	738	738	738

Results

In this early draft of the paper, we simply present OLS results of Equations 3 and 4 (see Table 1). The sample is restricted to incumbent parties, with incumbency defined as membership in the longest serving cabinet if there were multiple cabinets in a term.

We make three observations about the specifications related to Equation 3 (the mapping of changes in votes onto changes in seats). Firstly, the use of a PR formula reduces the rate at which vote shifts are translated into seat shifts from 1.76 to 1.10. This is close to what one would expect, although the marginal effect under PR is statistically greater than 1. This reflects the fact that, even under PR, larger parties (which are mainly incumbents), enjoy a slight advantage in the translation from votes to seats. Secondly, coordinating ballot structures have no effect on the the rate at which vote shifts are translated into seat shifts. Thirdly, none of the party system measures-NPI, Betweenness, or the maximum inter-party ideological distance-have any impact on the translation of votes into seats. Thus, our intuition that the effects of these variables are confined to the translation of seats into power seems on the mark.

We make a further three observations about the specifications related to Equation 4 (the mapping of changes in seats onto changes in legislative power). Firstly, the bipolarity of the party system as measured by the NPI more than doubles the marginal effect of changes in seat on changes in power. An incumbent's betweenness, in contrast, has no impact on the seats-power relationship. Secondly, the the interaction between the shift in seats and the PR dummy is statistically insignificant. Thus, the impact of electoral institutions appears confined to electoral stage. (The coefficient on PR in Specification 5 tells us only that the average shift in legislative power is smaller under PR than under non-proportional systems; that could be for many reasons.) Thirdly, the standard measure of polarization, maximum inter-party ideological distance, has no effect on the translation of seats to power.

On the basis of these results we can compute β_2, β_3 and β_4 from Eq. 6 to obtain the total (marginal) effects of the electoral system and party system on votes-to-power monotonicity. It is useful in calculating these figures to identify the marginal effect of the electoral system off of PR systems (i.e., setting the coefficient on ΔV_{ijt} to 1.10 and the coefficient on $\Delta V_{ijt} \times \sim PR = .66$). This avoids multiplying through by a negative coefficient, which would give the misleading impression that parties' see the power increase when their votes decline; the results in Table 1 show us that this does not happen, at least on average. We obtain:

$$\hat{\beta}_2 = \delta_3 \eta_1 = .66 \times 1.28 = .84$$

$$\hat{\beta}_3 = \eta_3 \delta_1 = 2.07 \times 1.76 = 3.64$$

$$\hat{\beta}_4 = \eta_3 \delta_3 = 2.07 \times .66 = 1.37.$$

Whilst we have not yet calculated the standard errors for these estimates, it strikes us that these figures largely affirm Sartori's perspective. The bipolarity of the party system has a substantial impact on vote-to-power monotonicity.

Discussion

We have sought to make three contributions. Firstly, we have argued that electoral accountability requires that incumbents who see their vote shares decline must see their power decline also; if incumbents' legislative power is unaffected by declines in their vote shares, electoral accountability cannot be said to exist in any meaningful sense. Secondly, we have argued that votes-power monotonicity is not solely a function of the electoral system but also of the party. In particular, we have tried to test Sartori's arguments about the importance of the bipolar nature of the party system in ensuring that governing coalitions are exposed rather than insulated from electoral forces. Finally, we have shown that the data are more in keeping with a Sartorian vision in which the force of institutions is mediated by the character of the party system than a Madisonian that sees institutions as sufficient to generate and preserve electoral accountability.

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