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What Shapes Electoral Choice Options? Institutional Determinants of the Distinctiveness of Choice Options

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--- First Draft ---

1. Introduction

“The issue of choice is now at the centre of the political debate”, stated Steve Schifferes in the BBC News and he asked, “Is increased choice always good?”¹ He referred to policy choices, not to elections. However, the question certainly applies to elections, too. What a meaningful choice is, and what makes elections meaningful, is not so easy to answer.

One of the problems is that the two questions are confounded. Only if elections are meaningful can choice be meaningful. In our use of the language, the first addresses the outcome and consequences of elections, the latter the evaluation of the choice act. One might even go further and say that the evaluation of the choice act depends not on what the real outcome and consequences of elections are but on the expected outcome and consequences.

This identifies at least two perspectives for the evaluation of the choice act, the retrospective, and the prospective view. Furthermore, individual evaluations may be based on a more socio-tropic or a more egocentric position. This of course sounds very similar to established models of vote choice. However, actual vote choice and the evaluation of choice sets are two different things. For vote choice the question is which choice option is closest to ones own preferences. With regard to the meaningfulness of choices more

1 BBC News, 02.05.2005, 10:42.

generally the question relates to the supply side as a whole (i.e. the choice set), and to the question, whether choices can make a difference in the outcome.

The first question refers to the level of the party system, the supply side as a whole. The second question refers to the effectiveness of elections, thus to the question of translation of votes into seats, seats into governments, governments into effective policies. The whole political process is at stake, the quality of democratic processes with regard to the hand-over of action products, i.e. demands into party pledges, party pledges into voice in parliament, the position of government, and laws or policies.

Thus, our subject matter ‘meaningful choices’ entails a macro and a micro perspective. In the following steps, some arguments are discussed with regard to the measurement of the meaningfulness of electoral choices at both levels, and some hypotheses put forward about the relationship of macro settings and micro evaluations and actions. It might be helpful to start the discussion from the consequences can be expected at the micro level if choices are meaningful.

2. Theoretical Considerations on Meaningful Choice and Meaningful Elections

2.1 Consequences of Meaningful Elections at the Micro Level – or: What is Meaningful Choice?

Several claims can be made about how the meaningfulness of elections should manifest itself at the micro level. Most simply, the argument can start from the end of the election process on the side of the voters, namely whether they participate or not.

Voter Participation: a weak, though consequential indicator, whether voters perceive elections as meaningful is turnout. If elections are not meaningful, turnout should be low. The second-order election model (Reif, Schmitt 1980) has delivered most prominently the empirical evidence for this simple claim. If voters regard the body to elect not a relevant actor, at least in comparative terms, they do turn out in smaller numbers. This has been shown comparing national and European Parliament elections as well as national and sub-national elections. A similar effect originates in the perception that a race is already settled. If the winner is clear, there is little reason to turn out. However, if a race is close people anticipate a higher weight of their individual vote and

turnout increases. This has been shown empirically by Feld and Kirchgässner (Feld, Kirchgässner 1998).

Party Differentials and Representation: It is Anthony Downs' insight that voting decisions are made in terms of expected utility from one's decision (Downs 1957). The perceived possibility of maximizing expected utility can depend on several things, among them the observation, that there is no real opportunity to maximize because there are a) no real differences between alternatives; or b) that there are real differences but alternatives are far away from voter's preferences. Whereas a) should lead to indifference, b) may be expected to produce alienation (Brody, Page 1973; Hinich, Munger 1997)². Only if there is a reasonable offer, meaningful choices are available. This requires from the different choice options a) a reasonable proximity between two (or more) of them and b) a sufficient differentiation between them.

Party Performance Differentials: Differentials do not only exist with regard to the programmatic supply, but also with regard to the trust and confidence that the elected actors realize their pledges. This aspect has two dimensions: a) that the actor is trustworthy; b) that the actor is competent. If voters regard an offer not as serious and of no integrity, this offer would not present a serious choice option. If voters regard an offer as serious but cast doubt that the actor has the competence and capability to realize it, they may discount their proximity to the offer by the perceived lack of competence (Grofman 1985; Fiorina 1977: 604ff.; Merrill III, Grofman 1999). Thus, for choices to be meaningful, the representing actors must be trustworthy and competent.

Perception of Electoral Effectiveness: Elections are meaningful to the voters, if they regard them as consequential. Voting must make a difference in order to make choices meaningful. Although this is only one aspect of democracy, Schumpeter rightly argued that democracy means "that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them" (Schumpeter 1942: 269). In other words, voters in principle must have a chance to 'throw the rascals out' if they want to. This is the central sanction

2 "Indifference: If voters perceive little (no) difference between alternatives, they are less likely to vote. This prediction has both cross-sectional and time series implications: Voters who perceive little distance between alternatives are less likely to vote than voters who perceive large net candidate differentials. Similarly, any given voter is more likely to vote in an election where the perceived difference is large, compared with other elections where the same voter perceives the difference as small... Alienation: If both (all) alternatives in the election are far from the voter's ideal point, that voter is less likely to vote. Again, the prediction is made both across voters and over time: The greater the difference between the voter's ideal point and the nearest alternative, the less likely is that voter to turn out, compared either with other voters or other elections where perceptions of the difference are smaller." Hinich, Melvin J.; Munger, Michael C. 1997. *Analytical Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.: 151.

aspect of accountability. Party competition forces political elites and voters alike to consider alterations to the existing political agenda; examine alternative ideological, cultural, or policy ideas; and reevaluate which societal groups should be represented by the government and how (Scheiner 2005).

Perception of Institutional Effectiveness: Perceptions of the poly relevance of the election outcome also decide about the meaningfulness of choices. The perception that who is in government matters, for example, can be regarded as an indication that the institutional setting is structured in such a way that the hand-over of election results to the composition of parliament and from there to the formation of a government majority functions properly, and that different election results are reflected in policy differences.

Whether choices are meaningful or not does not only depends on the structure of the political supply, but also on the question, how demand is processed in a political system. Thus, policy content, the party system, the electoral context, the electoral system, and the system of government may all matter in one way or the other for the evaluation of voters whether choices are meaningful.

2.2 *What makes Elections Meaningful?*

Preconditions for Meaningful Choices at the Macro Level.

Dealing with the macro-level now, our question about meaningful choices translates into a question of meaningful elections. Which are the institutional provisions of a party system, an electoral and a governmental system, that affect the perception of choices to be meaningful or not? There is little doubt that institutional characteristics have micro-consequences. Many studies have shown that different features of the political system affect a variety of individual characteristics, evaluations, and behavior.

We turn to a topic that we have not touched yet. It relates to the question whether and to what degree institutional structures and incentives steer the capacity of ordinary citizens to deal with politics. This capacity, which is sometimes also referred to as political competence or cognitive mobilization, can be regarded as a general filter or precondition that largely influences the perception of elections and electoral choices to be meaningful. Some macro-micro research has been done on this topic and evidence shows that differences in institutional settings produce differences with regard to the involvement and attraction of people. We will not deal with this topic here directly, mainly, because the

institutional factors responsible for different degrees of involvement and cognitive mobilization are often the same as those that make choices and elections meaningful. We rather restrain ourselves to a brief report of the results of earlier research. One finding is that political sophistication is higher in political systems with a richer choice set. Findings of Gordon and Segura (1997) for example show a robust correlation between the size of the choice set and the competitiveness of the electoral system measured by district size. They find an even stronger relationship between political sophistication and the number of effective parties. The mechanism behind it is simple: stronger competitiveness and more parties imply more mobilization efforts and higher attentiveness of the electorate. Based on CSES I data, another analysis has shown that the ability of voters to make judgments about the positions of political parties depends strongly on the structure of political supply (Weßels 2002). The two crucial characteristics here are the left-right differentiation of the party system, and the effective number of parties. The more differentiated political supply is both in content and in numbers, the more are voters able to determine their own political position and the position of the competing political parties. Moreover, there is a direct relation to the quality of choice in spatial terms: the more differentiated political supply is, the higher the individual proximity of voters to the party they have chosen to support. This suggests that the quality of electoral representation directly depends on the quality of the individual choice, and the quality of the individual choice on the available choice options. This research also suggests a strong implication for the problem of social inequality in political participation. The more differentiated political supply is, the smaller is the impact of traditional social characteristics related to political inequality (e.g. education and income) on the ability to orient oneself and to turn out and vote (Weßels 2002).

Here we stop the discussion. As mentioned above, institutional factors that are responsible for different degrees of involvement and cognitive mobilization are quite often the same than those that make choices and elections meaningful. This means, in other words, the more competitive an election is the more meaningful it is. We now turn directly to the relationship between macro-characteristics and the meaningfulness of an election.

With regard to the macro perspective on meaningful elections, several aspects mirroring the micro perspective have to be considered: 1. general characteristics of an election and its context; 2. the supply-side of an election; and, 3. the institutional dimension.

General characteristics: One important prerequisite of meaningful choices is the stability of the supply side. Only when political supply is sufficiently continuous is it possible for voters to evaluate choice options on basis of experience. Experience in our context refers

to the performance of political parties. Moreover, only parties that are continually present in the political arena can be held accountable for their performance during the previous term or terms (Weßels, Klingemann 2006). However, the stability of political supply correlates strongly with the stability of demand. Only if demand is sufficiently stable can parties react to it and make what they have to offer more attractive, more focused and more distinguishable from the offers of their various competitors. Stability of supply and demand is mutually re-enforcing. The pre-requisite of stable supply does not include super-stability because this would make elections meaningless. It is hard to say where the equilibrium on the continuum of political supply and meaningful elections is. From a theoretical perspective, too much volatility in supply implies a loss in the possibility of retrospective evaluation. Too much stability, on the other hand, suggests a loss of choice.

A second general aspect refers to the question whether individuals can possibly regard their choice as decisive. If chances of alternative political parties or party coalitions to gain a government majority are very asymmetric it is not worth to vote, neither for the supporters of the losers nor for those of the winners. Ideally, the electoral race for a government majority should be as close as possible in order to make elections meaningful. Several authors have shown that the strength of competitiveness indeed matters (Powell 1986; Jackman, Miller 1995; Feld, Kirchgässner 1998).

The supply-side: If elections are about organizing representation, political parties or candidates have to offer what they stand for. Otherwise, an appropriate evaluation of the different choice options by the voters is impossible. Moreover, in a proper representative democracy meaningful elections request *political* alternatives, not only technocratic alternatives. Thus, parties and candidates must not only present what they stand for, but in particular, their alternative policy plans and pledges. Elections can only be meaningful if there is choice in a substantial (i.e. policy) sense.

Institutional factors: Two institutional characteristics are important for the meaningfulness of elections. First, electoral institutions must be effective in translating votes into seats, seats into governments, and government majorities into policies. Secondly, electoral institutions must offer the opportunity to hold governments accountable. Clearly, the two are not independent of one other. If electoral institutions are not effective, accountability cannot come about. However, the same does not apply the other way round. Electoral institutions may be effective in the mentioned sense, but still accountability may not fully be realized due to the existence of coalition governments, and the way coalitions are formed and government majorities manufactured.

3. Propositions and Variables

Two aspects of electoral meaningfulness are under investigation: the meaningfulness of choices, and the meaningfulness of elections. With this distinction, we refer to the characterization of political supply on the one hand, and to the characterization of elections as institutions on the other hand. These aspects are interrelated. Only if elections are meaningful can meaningful choices be made. On the other hand, if elections are meaningful from an institutional point of view but choices are not perceived as such, the meaningfulness of elections is questioned. The demarcation line of choices and elections is not between the macro- and the micro-level of observation, but between supply and institutional characteristics.

Meaningful choices depend on political supply. This applies to the offer of the party system (or candidates) to voters and on how the offer is perceived. Important here is the notion of party system. Not the single offer, but the offers in relation to each other define the possibility of a meaningful choice. This implies the necessity of distinct policy offers, and that there is one among them that is sufficiently close to the preferences of the voters. The first aspect stipulates the existence of choice; the second refers to the proximity of choice options. Still in other terms, the first one refers to the differentiation of the choice set, and the second to issue congruence. There is a third aspect, which does not refer to content, but to the character of the supplier. Suppliers (parties and/or candidates) must be regarded as sincere and competent. If they are not sincere, they are likely to be discarded because the choice option is not serious. If the supplier is regarded as serious, the second question is whether she is also competent enough to realize the promised goals. If suppliers in general are regarded as incompetent, choices are not meaningful. If, however, it is a matter of degree, voters start calculating and discounting as several studies have shown (Grofman 1985; Merrill III, Grofman 1999; Weßels 2004).

Beyond policy content and competence, also the closeness of the race matters. The question is what is realistically at stake. If there is a variety of choice options, but only one has a real chance for winning, elections are not salient because they do not offer the opportunity for change. The same applies in elections for more or less powerless institutions. Thus, perceptions that an election result is already fixed (or irrelevant) may make elections not fully meaningless but not fully meaningful either.

Thus, proposition 1 reads like follows:

P1: The more differentiated political supply is – formally, policy wise, and with regard to actors – and the greater the chance of change in power is, the more meaningful are the choices.

Proposition 2 is:

P2: The higher the proximity in terms of policy positions or objectives is – subjective and objective - the more meaningful are the choices.

Table 1 gives a summary of these propositions, and shows the possible measurement concepts.

Table 1: Meaningful Choices – Basic Characteristics at the Micro and the Macro Level

Supply Characteristics	Micro Indicators	Macro Indicators
<i>Differentiation</i>		
- Formal	?	Number of Supplies
- Content	Party Differentials	Party Program Polarization
- Character of Suppliers	Trustworthiness	?
- Ability of Suppliers	Competence (Differentials)	Government effectiveness
- Symmetry/Asymmetry	Perception as important/ perception of closeness	“Closeness of the race”
<i>Representation</i>		
	Proximity (perceived and own position)	Proximity (party stands and voters’ positions)

Whereas meaningful choices refer to the “menu” from which voters can choose, meaningful elections refer to the impact elections may have on representation in the broader sense. Several aspects are important.

First, there is the problem of electoral effectiveness, which covers two aspects. Does the single vote count or not for the composition of parliament? The problem of so-called ‘wasted votes’ is at stake here. The less proportional a system is the more voters who are not close to any of the major parties may regard their vote as wasted and thus the election less meaningful. The second aspect concerns the effectiveness of an institutional system with regard to the possibility to ‘throw the rascals out’, or more generally, to hold elected

representatives accountable. Accountability can be distorted by a variety of factors. One factor certainly is coalition governments. They may make it difficult for voters to identify who is responsible for given policy decisions. They may be unpopular: bargaining may lead to coalitions, which are not induced by the election result. Finally and related to this is the problem of manufactured majorities.

The last element of meaningful elections is the effectiveness of an institutional system to guarantee that governments get their policies thru. Together with electoral effectiveness, this implies the necessary hand-over of the peoples will from votes to seats, from seats to government, and from government to policies.

Two propositions follow from these considerations:

P3: The more effective electoral institutions are with regard to the translation of votes, and the impact of votes in terms of accountability, the more meaningful are elections.

P4: The more effective the institutional system is in allowing the government to pursue and implement its policy goals, the more meaningful are elections.

Table 2 provides a summary of these propositions, and shows the possible measurement concepts.

Table 2: Meaningful Elections – Basic Characteristics at the Micro and the Macro Level

Institutional/ Election Characteristics	Micro Indicators	Macro Indicators
<i>Electoral Effectiveness</i>		
- Translation	Voting matters	Proportionality
- Accountability	(Efficacy)	Government Turnover
		Responsiveness
		Government Coalitions
		Manufactured Majorities
<i>Institutional Effectiveness</i>	Government matters	Government Effectiveness

4. Characterizing CSES II Electoral Systems: Does the “Great Trade-Off” Exist?

There is a great debate about the trade-offs in democracies, and to which degree different normative objectives are maximized over others. Shepsle coined the “great trade-off” between governance and representation (Shepsle 1988). Debates about the basic structure of electoral systems also regard the two prototypes, majoritarian and proportional, as serving different goals contradicting each other (Nohlen 1978). Applying the trade-off hypothesis to the elements of meaningful choices and elections leads to the conclusion that if some elements are maximized, others are automatically minimized.

Thus, before analyzing effects of meaningful choices and elections it seems to be necessary to discuss and evaluate possible trade-offs.

From the trade-off hypothesis follows that the two aspects of electoral effectiveness stand in tension. The effective translation of votes into seats maximizes representation, but distorts accountability. Furthermore, the assumption is that effectiveness of government declines due to the restraint for compromise. Thus, in general terms, maximizing the representation of the many and not only the majority produces a trade-off to effective governance and accountability.

This has also implications for choices. If effective governance and accountability are maximized, the number of choices may be limited. From here follows that representation also may be limited.

Thus, the trade-off hypotheses with regard to meaningful elections and choices read like follows:

- H1: Where the meaningfulness of elections with regard to representation is maximized, the meaningfulness of elections with regard to accountability is minimized.
- H2: Where the meaningfulness of elections with regard to representation is maximized, the meaningfulness of elections with regard to government effectiveness is minimized.
- H3: Where the meaningfulness of elections with regard to accountability is maximized, the meaningfulness of elections with regard to choices is minimized.

We now turn to an empirical elaboration of H1. Whether an electoral system favors representation or accountability, can be best seen from the proportionality it produces with regard to the distribution of votes and seats. Accountability is harder to measure. Among the indicators are government turnover (voting the rascals out), the number of parties in government (with everything above 1 indicating a problem), and the degree to which government majorities are manufactured.

We use the following variables to test the hypotheses:

Disproportionality:	Gallagher
Government Turnover	Mean number of governments in a four year, measured over the whole period of democratic elections since 1945
Number of Parties in Government	a) Mean number of parties in government b) Number of parties in elected government
Manufactured Majorities	%-difference between votes and seats of government when votes are less than 50 percent, otherwise 0.
Responsiveness/Accountability	WBI Accountability Score 2004.
Government Effectiveness	WBI Government Effectiveness Score 2004.
Effective Number of Parties	Mean of effective number of parliamentary parties over the whole period of democratic elections since 1945 (Taagepera)

Evaluating the correlations does not reveal a clear picture of trade-off. Neither are the relationships strong, nor are they always consistent with expectation. Government turnover seems to be slightly higher when disproportionality is high. There is no relation to the size of government in terms of coalition partners on average, but for the recent election. Manufactured majorities are more prominent when proportionality is low, accountability as measured by the World Bank higher when proportionality is high. In sum, we would totally overstate the empirical observations would we talk of a trade-off between accountability and representation (table 3). The trade-off between representation and government effectiveness seems to be a chimera, too. The correlation is quite high. It is statistically

significant, however, it is pointing into the wrong direction. This is not so with regard to the trade-off between governance and choice. If governance is maximized, i.e. disproportionality high, the effective number of parties is low.

Table 3: Trade-Off between Representation and Accountability?

	Disproportionality (Gallagher)		N
	Corr	Sig.	
Turnover, Government	0,23	0,31	22
Mean Number of Government Parties	0,01	0,97	22
Number of Parties, elected Government	-0,29	0,20	21
Manufactured Majorities.	0,30	0,18	22
Accountability/Representation	-0,37	0,08	24
Government Effectiveness	-0,45	0,03	24
Effective Number of Parl. Parties	-0,56	0,04	24

Our trade-off hypotheses obviously yield all but strong support. We find only mixed evidence for a trade-off between representation and accountability (H1). The trade-off between representation and government effectiveness (H2) is not at all supported, rather the contrary. Reasonably supported is only the well-established trade-off between governance and the size of the choice set (H3).

5. The Test: Do System Characteristics Decide on the Meaningfulness of Choices?

5.1 Consequences of Supply and Institutional Characteristics on Turnout

If as stated above, turnout is a general indicator for the meaningfulness of choices and elections then one should expect that choice characteristics, i.e. the supply, and the institutional characteristics in particular with regard to the quality in handing-over the preferences, should matter. Several indicators have been mentioned already and arguments for them have been introduced.

Regressing official turnout figures on characteristics of supply and institutions reveals that not all factors have a significant impact. However, surprisingly many have. Proportionality, regarded here as an indicator for the degree as to which representation is favored by an electoral system drops out. This is partly a result of other measures of disproportionality, namely the relation of votes and seats with regard to government

majorities. The WB Government's effectiveness score also shows insignificance, which is a result of the strong relationship to WB accountability. The other variables behave well and as expected.

Left are three characteristics of supply and four variables of institutional features. The supply characteristics include:

- The effective number of parties (seats),
- The differentiation of supply as measured by the weighted left-right polarization (seats) between election manifestoes,
- The closeness of the race in the recent election inversely measured by the share of seats above 50 percent of the elected government.

Institutional characteristics measure generally the quality of handing-over the people's will:

- Government turnover in average number of governments in a legislative period (4 years assumed; this measure characterizes whether a government holds for the whole period after an election);
- Disproportionality of votes and seats for government majority;
- The degree as to which government majority is manufactured, measured for governments with less than 50 percent of the votes as the percentage of seats over 50 percent;
- The WB accountability score.

With regard to the supply factors, one would expect that all have a positive impact since they all characterize meaningful choice. With regard to the institutional factors, one would expect government turnover as measured here to relate negatively to turnout since values higher than one would indicate that not so much elections decide about, who governs but coalition bargaining. Disproportionality of governments' seat share can be seen as an indicator as to which an electoral system provides stable majorities and thus should positive relate to turnout. However, there is a limit to favor the strongest parties in an election. The more a government majority is manufactured, the less meaningful is an election is. Thus, the degree as to which majorities are manufactured, should relate negative to turnout. Finally, if accountability and representation (i.e. the WB accountability score) are high, institutions have proved to be effective. This should favor turnout.

Interestingly enough, this is indeed the case. Even though the number of cases is limited, all factors show a significant impact to the expected direction. Multicollinearity does not seem to be a problem, given the high F and all T's are significant. This model has an

adjusted R-square of 0,71 (see table A1 in the appendix). However, seven variables for 21 cases do not leave a lot degree of freedom. Furthermore, we are interested in the question whether supply characteristics or institutional characteristics matter more.

If one takes the two blocks of characteristics apart, supply characteristics seem to be somewhat more important for turnout. All supply characteristics have a significant impact on turnout (table 4).

Table 4: Regression of Turnout on Supply Characteristics

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	Sig T
Effective Number of Parl Parties	4,182	1,830	0,438	0,035
Programmatic Differentiation	0,806	0,366	0,402	0,042
Closeness, Mean	-1,400	0,428	-0,602	0,005
(Constant)	57,078	8,828		0,000

F = 5,271 Signif F = 0,009
Adjusted R Square 0,390

The same is not true for the institutional characteristics. Only government turnover stays significant. The predictive power of the model is much weaker also. Whereas supply factors bind about 40 percent of the variance, institutional characteristics bind roughly 30 percent (table 5).

Table 5: Regression of Turnout on Institutional Characteristics

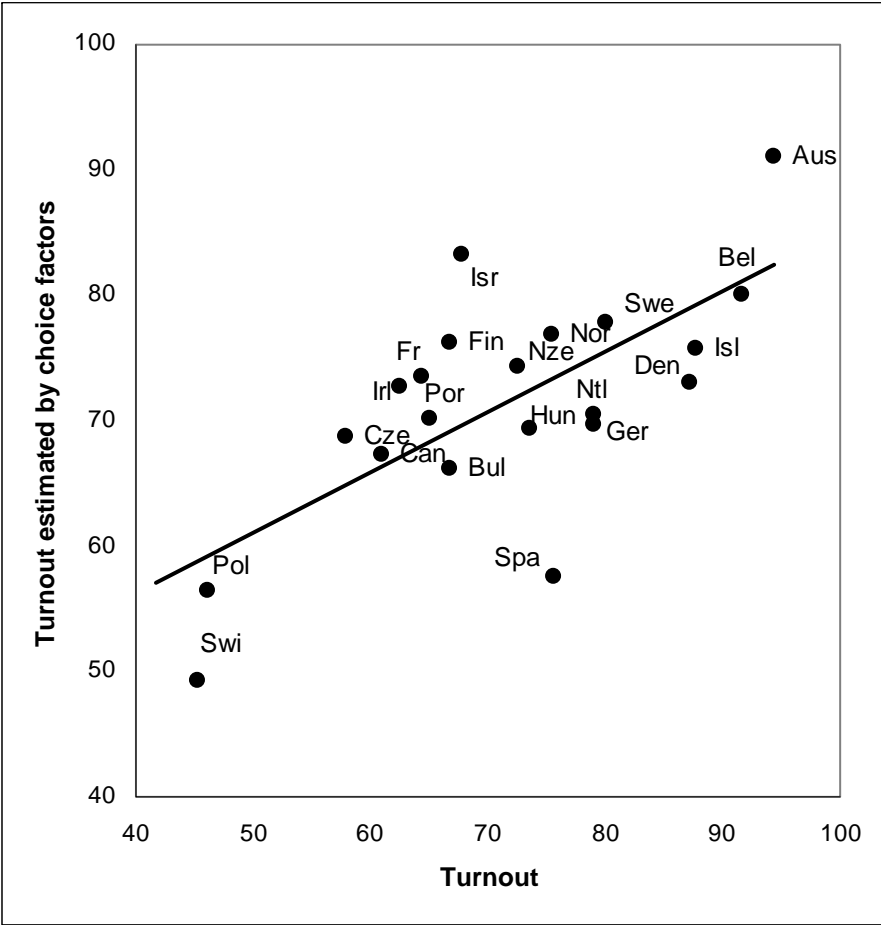
Variable	B	SE B	Beta	Sig T
Turnover, Government	-11,715	4,100	-0,738	0,011
Manufactured Majorities	-1,767	1,294	-0,648	0,191
Accountability/Representation	14,709	9,245	0,326	0,131
Engineering stable Majorities	1,606	1,584	0,494	0,326
(Constant)	78,036	14,284		0,000

F = 3,131 Signif F = 0,044
Adjusted R Square 0,299

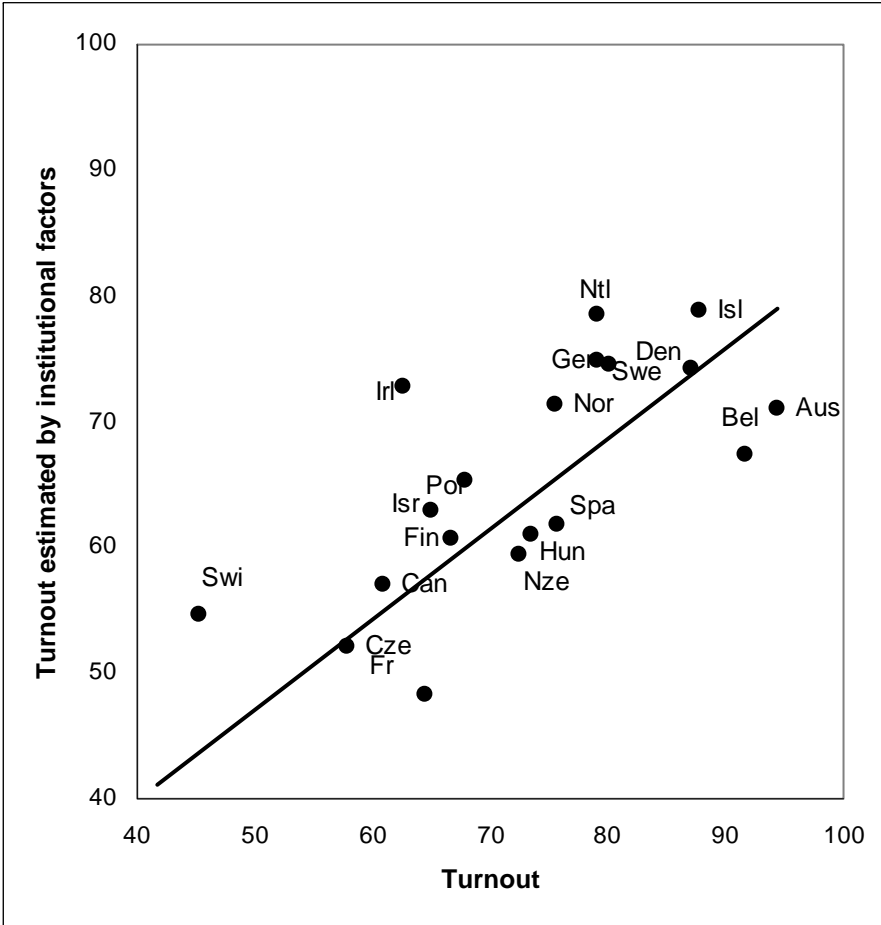
However, looking to the scatterplots comparing empirical values for turnout with the estimated ones shows that both equations demonstrate their capacity to reproduce empirical values to some extent (figure 1a+b). However, residuals show some differences between the models with regard to over- and underestimation, which shows that the factors have different impact.

Figure 1: Comparing Empirical and Estimated Turnout Regressed on Supply and Institutional Characteristics

a) Turnout Regressed on Supply Characteristics
(Results from Table 4)



b) Turnout Regressed on Institutional Characteristics
(Results from Table 5)



This first test shows that supply and institutional factors are relevant for the meaningfulness of choice as far as it finds impression in turnout. However, residuals show that the factors measured are either incomplete, or do not fully translate into individual's perceptions. Therefore, the next question is as to which degree individual level measures reflect the macro characteristics.

5.2 Translation of Macro Characteristics to Micro Perceptions

The crucial question is as to which degree the macro characteristics of supply and institutions translate into micro perceptions and evaluations. Hypotheses can be formulated straight-forward:

a) General level

- Supply and institutional characteristics increasing meaningfulness of voting and elections should also increase the perception as voting as relevant;
- The same applies to the perception that government matters.

b) Representation

- if political supply is structured in a way making choice meaningful, the proportion of voters able to identify a party which represents them should be higher;
- If political institutions are effective, this should allow parties to do their job in the interest of the voters. This implies that parties' performance is higher.

c) Structure of supply

- If characteristics enhance a differentiated supply this should increase the ability to judge about parties. Thus, the proportion of voters able to place parties on the left-right scale should increase with the differentiation of supply;
- Furthermore, if supply is more differentiated at the macro level this should yield the perception of a differentiated supply, i.e. the perception of polarization.

We have tested these hypotheses by using the same regression models as for turnout: one model characterizing the supply situation, another one characterizing the institutional setting. Result of these regressions is summarized below in parsimonious way (table 6):

Table 6: Are Macro Characteristics Reflected at the Micro Level? Test Summary

Micro variables	Support for	
	Supply Hypothesis	Institutional Hypothesis
<i>General</i>		
- voting matters	NO	-
- government matters	-	Weak (0,21)
<i>Representation</i>		
- party representation of r	YES (0,33)	-
- party performance good	-	YES (0,68)
<i>Supply Structure</i>		
- ability to place parties (LR)	NO	-
- Extreme Polarization	NO	-
- Polarization of the Big	NO	-
- Hypothesis not applied		
Coefficients are adj. R-Square.		

Results of these regressions yields limited support for the hypothesis. Four out of five hypotheses related to supply characteristics failed. Of the two hypotheses, which are related to institutional effectiveness one is very weakly supported the other reasonable.

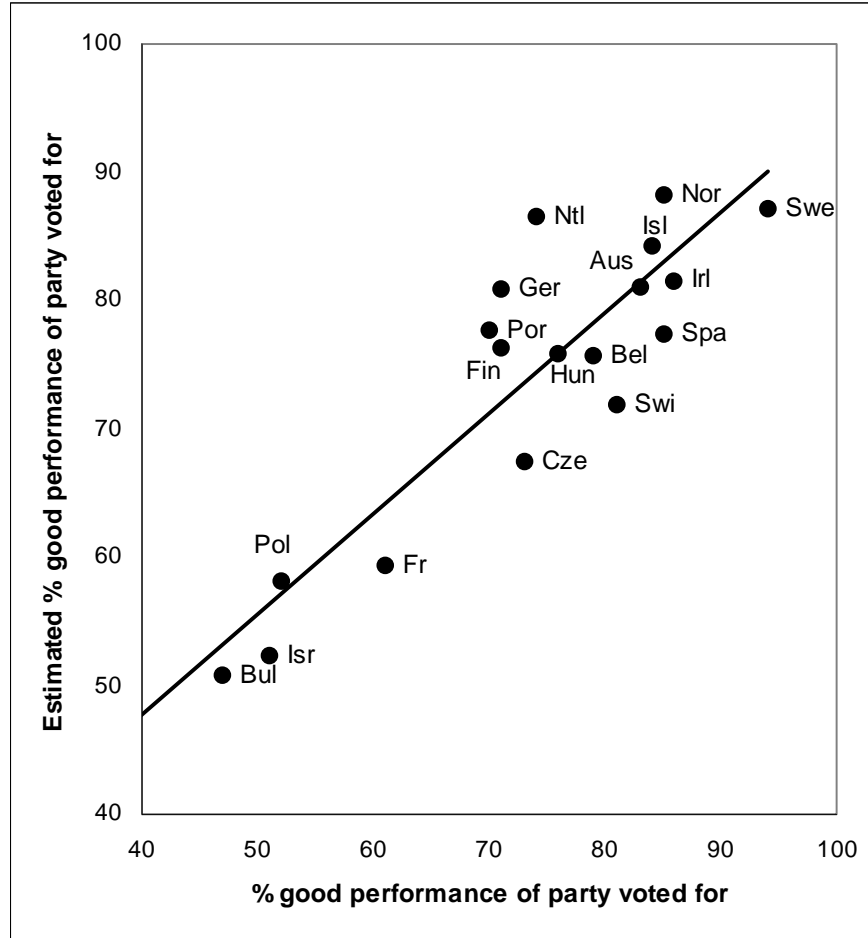
The ability of parties to perform, and thus the respective perception is higher in systems, which have effective institutions, producing enduring government, clear majorities, and high accountability. Where supply structures are meaningful, voters find it easier to identify a party, which represents them. The scatterplot of empirical against estimated values shows a quite perfect linear relationship of party performance and institutions (figure x).

For the feeling of being represented, the scatterplot shows a heteroscedastic relationship. The higher the proportion of voters feeling represented the more variance is in the estimates, i.e. residuals get larger (figure 2a+b).

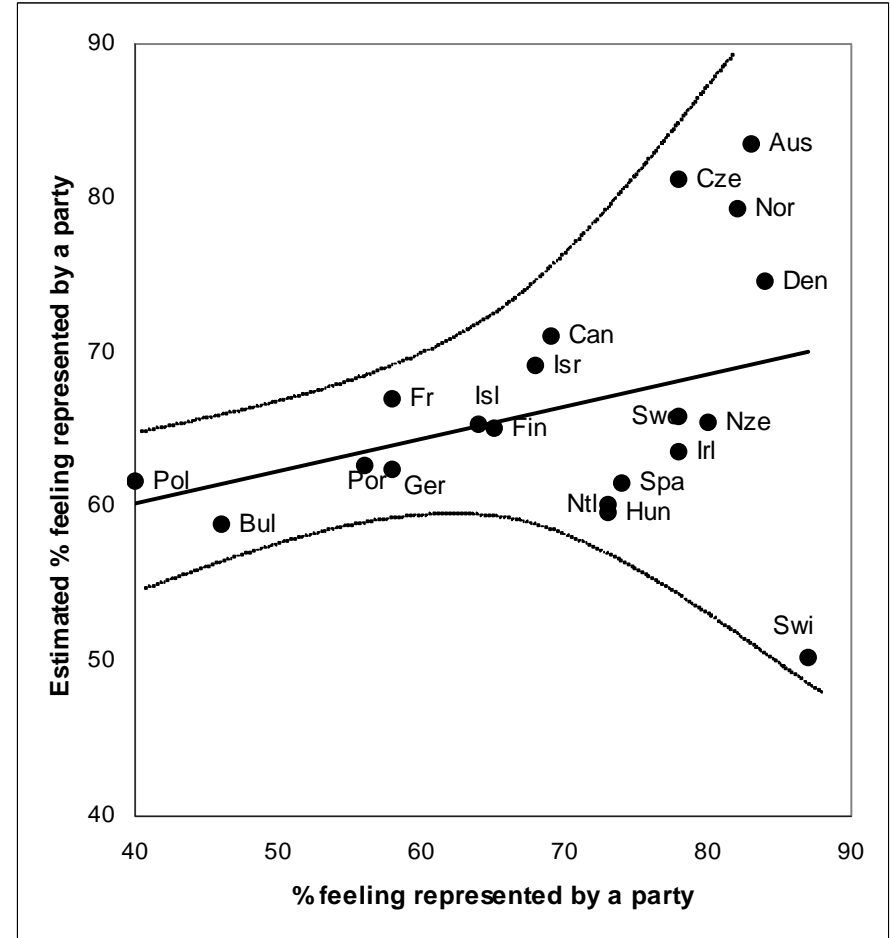
The insight from these findings is that macro characteristics of supply and institutions obviously matter for different aspects of representation but not for the evaluative capacity of electorates to determine positions in the political supply structure.

Figure 2: Comparing Empirical and Estimated Individual-level Perceptions Regressed on Supply and Institutional Characteristics

a) Party's Performance Regressed on Institutional Characteristics



b) Feeling of Party Representation Regressed on Supply Characteristics



6. Conclusion

The first and tentative exploration of the conceptually and empirical new land of meaningful choices has produced mixed findings. The theoretical exploration has made clear that two dimensions have to be considered: the evaluation of choice sets, and the evaluation of the institutional setting. The first dimension defines how meaningful the supply is. Central concern here is to which degree voters are confronted with alternatives they can choose from in an election. The second dimension defines how effective electoral systems and the system of representation and government are in handing over the choices made in an election.

The essence of these considerations is that both - choice sets *and* elections as institutions - have to be meaningful in order to make a democracy more than electoral democracy. Only than, this is the basic argument, choices can be meaningful. Meaningful choice sets *and* meaningful elections make up for meaningful choices.

The one dimension realizes in supply structures, the other in the architecture and working of the institutions. Materialization takes place at the macro-level but has to be perceived at the micro-level in order to become relevant for political action.

Consequently, macro characteristics relevant for the meaningfulness of choices and elections have been identified. Since in the literature about electoral systems the trade-off between representation and governance which directly translates into a trade-off between choice and institutional effectiveness, it has been explored as to which degree this trade-off materializes in the macro configuration. Our analysis finds limited evidence for this claim. However, if governance is maximized, disproportionality is high.

A first test whether macro configurations matter for behavior has explored as to which degree supply and institutional characteristics shape turnout. Results show that if supply structures allow for meaningful choice sets, and if institutions are effective in translating voters' will, turnout is higher than in the contrary situation.

The second step was to test whether macro structures are perceived accordingly. We have differentiated between perception at the general level, with regard to representation, and with regard to the structure of supply. Seven hypotheses, five related to the macro

characteristics of supply and micro-level perceptions or evaluations, and two hypotheses related to institutional characteristics and their mirror at the micro-level, have been tested with little success at the general level and the supply structure. Neither does supply structures matter for the perception of the relevance of voting, nor for the ability to place parties on the left-right scale, and the resulting polarization at the micro level. Only three hypotheses find some support: where institutions are effective, who governs is perceived as relevant. In addition, with regard to representation, results demonstrate some evidence for the supply and the institutional hypothesis. Where supply structures allow for choices, it seems to be easier to identify a political offer for ones own representation. Where institutional effectiveness is higher, parties' performance is on average higher.

The tentative conclusion from these findings must stress the relevance of aspects related to representation. The relevance or meaningfulness of choice comes from two dimensions, the supply, and the institutions, as argued above. However, the macro characteristics affect three perceptions, which relate to representation: party representation, party's performance, and governments.

The puzzle from the analysis is that there is strong evidence that macro characteristics in both dimensions affect the attractiveness of elections and thus political behavior, perceptions of representation, but not the perception of the structure of political supply. The puzzle is that voters obviously are able (or not) to evaluate the supply structure irrespective of macro characteristics, but that perception of representation depends on macro characteristics.

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Appendix

Table A1: Regression of Turnout on Supply and Institutional Characteristics

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	Sig T
Effective Number of Parl. Parties	3,572	1,595	0,374	0,043
Programmatic Differentiation	1,009	0,277	0,504	0,003
Closeness (of the actual Race)	-0,965	0,243	-0,552	0,002
Turnover, Government	-11,569	2,780	-0,729	0,001
Engineering stable majorities	2,956	1,186	0,910	0,027
Manufactured Majorities	-2,767	0,871	-1,015	0,007
Accountability/Representation	15,588	6,676	0,345	0,036
(Constant)	56,449	13,028		0,001

F = 7,85394 Signif F = 0,0008
Adjusted R Square 0,70579

A2. Countries covered

Covered: 21 CSES II Countries

AUS 04, BEL 03, BUL 01, CAN 04, CZE 02, DEN 01, FIN 03, FRA 02, GER 02 a,
HUN 02, ICE 03, IRE 02, ISR 03, NET 02, NZ 02, NOR 01, POL 01, POR 02, SPA 04,
SWE 02, SWI 03

Excluded (missing macro- or micro-variables)

BRA 02, TAIW 01, HON 04, JAP 04, KOR 04, MEX 03, PHIL 04, UK 05, UK 05,
US 04

A3. Variables/Data Used

I. Macro-Level

Source: Macro Data Bank, Research Unit "Democracy," WZB

Var-Name	Concept	Measurement
EGOV_A50	Closeness (of the actual Race)	Absolute percent point difference of the vote share of government parties of the just elected government from 50 percent.
MGov_a50SSum	Closeness, Mean	Mean of absolute percent point difference of the vote share of government parties from 50 percent of all democratic elections since 1945.
DP_Gallaghe	Disproportionality	Gallagher
ENPS-Taage0	Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties	Mean of effective number of parliamentary parties over the whole period of democratic elections since 1945, Seats based (Taagepera)
MGOV_SV	Engineering stable majorities	Disproportionality between Government majority's votes and seats

ManufP	Manufactured Majorities	%-difference between votes and seats of government when votes are less than 50 percent, otherwise 0.
Mean NoGP	Mean Number of Parties in Government	a) Mean number of parties in government
Elect. NoGP	Number of Parties in Elected Government	b) Number of parties in elected government
HDK_PS_W	Programmatic Differentiation	Difference on Klingemann's Left-Right Party Manifesto Scale between all party pairs, standardized and weighted by seats
Gov4Year	Turnover, Government	Mean number of governments in a four years, measured over the whole period of democratic elections since 1945

Other Sources

Var-Name	Concept	Measurement
WBI Account.	Accountability/Representation	World Bank Accountability Score 2004
WBI GovEff	Effectiveness	World Bank Government Effectiveness Score 2004

II. Micro-Level (Aggregates)

Label	Measurement
Voting matters	% Voting makes a difference, highest value (5)
Government matters	% Government matters, big difference
Party representation of respondent	% who mentioned a party by which they feel represented
Party performance good	Performance of party voted for, % very good, good
Ability to place parties (LR)	% of Rs not evaluating any party on Left-Right Scale
Extreme Polarization	distance between average left-right placements of polar/extreme parties
Polarization of the Big	distance between average left-right placements of the two largest parties in the election (proportion of the popular vote)