

Making Electoral Democracy Work: Voters, Parties, and the Rules of the Game

Summary

Elections and electoral rules matter. Imagine the outcome of the 2000 U.S. presidential election if Nader supporters had voted strategically for Gore rather than voting for their preferred candidate. Imagine the U.S. government's response to Hurricane Katrina if the voter turnout of poor Americans matched that of their affluent counterparts. It matters whether people vote or not and it matters how they vote. It also matters what the electoral rules of the game are. Imagine how Canadian politics might have unfolded if the distortions in converting votes into seats produced by Canada's electoral system had not contributed to the near-annihilation of the Progressive Conservative Party and the electoral breakthrough of two regionally-based parties (Reform in the West and the Bloc in Quebec) in the 1993 federal election.

Our project brings together an exceptional team of economists, political scientists, and psychologists from Canada, Europe, and the United States to undertake the most ambitious study ever undertaken of the impact of electoral rules on the functioning of democracy. There are three inter-related components. The first involves an intensive analysis of *party strategies* in twenty elections in five different countries. Our innovative approach combines qualitative and quantitative methods to throw new light on how electoral rules influence party strategies and, hence, the options that are available to voters at election time. Canada, France, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland have been chosen in order to maximize variation in electoral arrangements. The second component is a *panel survey of voters* in the same five countries. The *same* people will be interviewed in different elections at the national, sub-national, and supranational level. This will make it possible to determine how individual preferences interact with the salience and competitiveness of elections and electoral rules to shape electoral behaviour. The final component is a coordinated series of innovative *experiments* designed to complement the analyses of party strategies and the voter survey by explicating the underlying causal mechanisms.

Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

Elections are the defining characteristic of representative democracy. They serve as the fundamental mechanism for ensuring that governments are responsive and accountable to their citizens. Elections embody the democratic principle of political equality: every eligible citizen has the right to vote and every vote counts equally. In practice, however, the rules that govern elections are never neutral. They bolster the electoral chances of some political parties and hinder those of others. They may also deter the formation of new parties. How parties respond to the opportunities and constraints affects the choices that are available to voters on Election Day. The result is that some citizens are less likely than others to make their preferences count. If their preferred party is systematically disadvantaged or if no party shares their positions, voters may ultimately lose confidence in the democratic system. On the other hand, a proliferation of parties may lead to ineffective or unstable governance.

Our goal is to develop a comprehensive understanding of how the rules of the game influence the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between citizens and parties. The results will yield crucial insights into the workings of electoral democracy and provide vital information about the consequences of institutional design to organizations dedicated to promoting electoral democracy.

The most fundamental institutional rule is the electoral system, which defines how votes are cast and seats are allocated in a given election (Blais and Massicotte 2002). There are four basic types of electoral system: plurality (the candidate with the most votes wins), majority (it takes more than half of the votes to win on the first count or round), proportional representation or PR (the number of seats a party obtains is established on the basis of a divisor or quota), and mixed (a combination of PR and plurality or

majority). As we elaborate below, the impact of the electoral system on the behavior of parties and voters is often indirect and conditional, and so we focus particular attention on the electoral context, especially the competitiveness and salience of different elections.

Political Parties: Strategic Options

Electoral democracy rests on a straightforward idea; citizens elect their fellow citizens to represent their interests and values. In reality, however, this is a complicated process in which political parties inevitably loom large by defining the options available on the ballot. Citizens' choices cannot be understood without first attending to the strategic decisions made by party elites. Examining the factors that shape these decisions is our first domain of inquiry.

Political parties have a number of decisions to make when an election occurs. Should they enter the race or stay out? Should they run candidates nationally or only in selected districts and regions? Should they compete independently at election time or attempt to coordinate their electoral strategies with other parties? Should they attack their opponents? What issues should they emphasize? What types of candidates should they put on the ballot and in which districts? When should they propose female or minority candidates? How should they spend their campaign finances? What types of mobilization should they use? The answers to these types of questions together determine a party's strategy.

Crucial to a party's strategic calculation is the electoral system (Cox 1999). Our project provides the first comprehensive cross-national analysis that has ever been undertaken of the impact that different electoral systems have on party strategies. We intend to focus on four aspects: inter-party coordination, campaign strategies, mobilization, and candidate selection.

- **Inter-Party Coordination:** One strategic choice that parties must make is whether to compete independently at election time or to coordinate their electoral activity with other parties through some form of pre-electoral coalition (Powell 2000; Golder 2005, 2006; Blais and Indridason 2007). To date, the empirical literature on coalitions has focused almost entirely on the process of government formation (Laver 2003). Our research will make a significant contribution to the literature on coalition formation by determining the factors that influence whether parties decide to make electoral agreements and what type of arrangements they make.

Deals with other parties can be costly because they stir up strong controversy among party militants. Accordingly, deals will occur only when the expected benefits are sufficiently high. We expect the structure of incentives offered by the electoral system to have a significant impact on a party's cost-benefit calculation. The types of electoral coordination that offer the largest potential benefits—offering joint lists in PR systems or selectively running candidates and trading endorsements in majoritarian (plurality and majority) systems—are also usually the most costly as they are likely to upset potential candidates as well as party militants. Since majoritarian systems make it harder to accommodate potential candidates (especially compared with PR systems that use party lists), we expect parties in majoritarian systems to opt for less involved forms of electoral coordination, such as signalling their willingness (or not) to form a government with particular parties.

- **Campaign Strategies:** Campaign strategies are the actions taken by the parties to influence voters' decisions. They include the choice of policy positions, the relative emphasis given to various issues (policy salience), the use of negative ads, and appealing to voters to vote sincerely or strategically. The predominance of the Downsian spatial model has led scholars to focus on policy positions but in an age when politics has become increasingly media-centered, policy salience is potentially as crucial as policy

position (Manin 1997). Our project will be the first to examine how electoral institutions affect the choice of both policy salience and policy positions in a cross-national setting.

Campaign strategies also include how parties choose to act towards their competitors. One option is to go on the attack. Although there is a vast empirical literature on the consequences of negative campaigns (Ansolabehere et al. 1999; Lau et al. 1999; Geer 2006) and some intriguing theoretical work on the determinants of negative ads (Skaperdas and Grofman 1995), there is little systematic research on why parties do or do not attack their opponents, and how these decisions are affected by the structural incentives created by the electoral system.

Another option for a party is to completely ignore one or more of its opponents. Meguid's (2005, 2008) analysis of single-issue niche parties highlights the dilemma that major parties face with respect to niche parties: if they respond, they risk heightening the salience of the issue and increasing the visibility of weak opponents. We propose to broaden this perspective by considering how the rules of the game affect the strategic responses that major parties adopt to counter niche parties. For example, the winner-take-all nature of majoritarian systems means that minor parties are unlikely to influence the electoral outcome, thereby reducing the need for major parties to address the issues championed by minor parties.

- **Mobilization:** Mobilization refers to how parties use their limited resources to target voters. A principal form of mobilization aims at persuading supporters to turn out to vote. We intend to examine how the effectiveness of voter mobilization strategies varies across electoral systems and the salience of the election. Successfully canvassing a relatively small number of voters in majoritarian electoral systems can have a significant effect on the outcome whereas its effect in proportional systems would be marginal. Trying to boost turnout in elections where turnout is low to begin with may be a more viable strategy. Parties must also choose whether to run a national campaign based on a cohesive party platform or to adopt fragmented campaign messages that promise different things to different constituents (Dixit and Londregan 1998). Mobilization tactics can have significant effects on voters' satisfaction with democracy. Highly fragmented campaigns may in the long run reduce voters' confidence in parties if these parties are unable to fulfill the conflicting campaign promises they make to different constituents. Very little research exists on the factors that influence the mobilization strategies chosen by parties. Our study breaks new ground by opening up an important new line of research.

- **Candidate Selection:** Another strategic choice involves the selection of candidates. For example, when and why do parties select female or minority candidates? There is a rich literature on the relationship between electoral systems and the representation of women and minorities (Salmond 2006; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005; Trounstine and Valdini 2008). While the attitudes of voters may play a role in explaining the under-representation of certain groups, the choices that parties make are a precondition for attaining equal representation. The parties' decision to offer female or minority candidates is a strategic choice and, as such, should depend on whether the electoral system rewards or punishes overtures to women and minority groups (Norris 2004; Myerson 1993). In addition, parties appear to respond to the behaviour of other parties in their decision to nominate women (Matland and Studlar 1996) and to gender gaps in opinion about welfare state policies (Rosenbluth et al. 2006). A lively debate currently rages over whether gender and minority quotas improve the legislative representation of these groups, increase their satisfaction with the political system, and change the language and substantive content of election campaigns. Our research design allows us to address these important issues as electoral institutions and quota requirements vary within the countries we examine. Focusing on elections at different levels of government also allows us to consider whether the success of women and minority groups depends on the salience and competitiveness of the electoral contest.

There is a rich literature on voter behaviour. In contrast, relatively little has been written on party strategies. This imbalance is unfortunate given the obvious reciprocal relationship between voters and party elites at election time. Our project aims to remedy this situation by providing a comprehensive cross-national examination of how the electoral system and key aspects of the electoral context (competitiveness and salience) influence party strategies in twenty elections.

Citizens' Choices

The second research focus is on the choices that citizens make. Voters have to decide whether they will vote or not, and if they vote, which party or candidate to support. That decision is intertwined with the decisions that parties make, as party strategies determine the choice set from which voters can choose.

- **The Decision to Vote:** From a rational choice perspective, citizens will vote only if the expected benefits of voting outweigh the associated costs (Downs 1957). Expected benefits depend on two things: the anticipated policy outcome of a particular candidate or party winning and the probability that one's individual vote will decide the election result. The stronger one's preference for a given party over the others, the greater is the propensity to vote (Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Citizens who are indifferent or ambivalent should be more inclined to abstain: there is no rational reason to vote if one is indifferent among the alternatives (Brennan and Lomasky 1993; Achen and Sinnott 2007; Sanders 1998). Thus, one key to understanding variations in voter turnout is the strength of voter preferences. More proportional electoral systems tend to produce many parties with distinct ideological positions (Katz 1980), but it is not clear whether voters develop stronger or weaker preferences when they have more options to choose from. There is a greater chance of finding a party that is close to their own position, but having more parties may make it more difficult to choose among them (Blais and Bodet 2006). Our study will provide the first systematic analysis of the impact of the electoral system on the strength of preferences.

The expected benefit of voting also hinges on the probability of having a direct impact on the election outcome. In elections with large electorates, this probability is tiny (Owen and Grofman 1984) and so a strict rational choice model predicts that most people will abstain. The fact that in reality many citizens do vote, even though the expected benefits are so small, gives rise to what is called the "paradox of voting" (Ferejohn and Fiorina 1974). One solution to this paradox is to posit the existence of non-instrumental, expressive benefits: people vote because they feel it is their civic duty to do so and they derive some personal satisfaction from fulfilling that duty (Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Blais 2000, Campbell 2006). Our study will take a novel approach by systematically examining how much civic duty matters in *different* elections, and how it interacts with other contextual factors.

We will focus on two key contextual characteristics that may affect the influence of duty on voting: the competitiveness of the election and its salience. Previous research has suggested that the competitiveness of the election is an important determinant of turnout: people are more inclined to vote when they believe that the outcome of the election is not a foregone conclusion (Franklin 2004). However, it is possible for an election to be highly competitive while being of little import. The salience of an election is a function of its potential impact on policy-making. The more powerful the person or assembly to be elected the greater the incentive to vote. The conceptual distinction between "first-order" and "second-order" elections is useful here (Reif and Schmitt 1980). National-level elections are considered to be first-order elections, while elections at the supra- or sub-national level typically qualify as second-order elections. The stakes are assumed to be lower in second-order elections and the lower the perceived stakes, the less reason there is to vote (Heath et al. 1999). However, some second-order elections are less second-order than others. Indeed, for some groups of voters, sub-national elections may actually be more salient than national elections (Cutler 2008). Our study will substantially advance understanding of how the competitiveness and salience of elections affect the propensity to vote and the role of civic duty.

The study also offers a unique opportunity to examine the effect of mobilization efforts on the decision to vote or not to vote. Our analysis of party strategies will provide a wealth of data on mobilization strategies. A number of studies have shown that party mobilization affects turnout and that people who are contacted by parties are more likely to vote (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Cox and Munger 1989; Gerber and Green 2000; Clarke et al. 2004; Vowles 2002). These studies have been case-specific. More recently, Karp et al. (2008) have looked at the impact of party mobilization comparatively and have come up with some intriguing results (most importantly, they conclude that party mobilization cannot explain the higher turnout observed in PR systems). Our detailed analysis of 20 different elections will enable us to ascertain the conditions under which party mobilization matters most and least.

- **Vote Choice:** We need to understand not only why people do—or do not—vote but also why those who vote choose a given party or candidate. Most models of vote choice assume that voters vote “sincerely”, that is, they vote for the party they prefer, whether it is the party whose policy position is closest to their own (Westholm 1997), the party that is on their side on the major issues (Rabinowitz et al. 1989), or the party they deem to be the most competent in handling key issues (Clarke et al. 2004).

The social choice literature suggests, however, that under some conditions vote choice may well be strategic: some voters will reach the conclusion that they are better off strategically supporting a second choice party or candidate that has a better chance of winning (Cox 1997). There is a large empirical literature on the amount and nature of strategic voting (for Canada, see Blais et al. 2001 and Merolla and Stephenson 2007; for the US, Abramson et al. 1992; for Britain, Alvarez et al. 2006; for France, Blais 2004; for Germany, Gschwend 2004; for Switzerland, Kriesi 2003; for Spain, Lago 2008), but little in the way of systematic comparative analysis (but see Abramson et al. 2008). We aim to make three major contributions to the understanding of strategic voting. First, we will determine how the electoral system affects the amount of strategic voting. The standard assumption in the literature has been that rational deviations from “sincere” voting are more frequent under majoritarian systems. However, no voting system is strategy-proof (Gibbard 1973; Satterthwaite 1975) and evidence of substantial strategic voting has recently been uncovered in countries with proportional or mixed systems (Aldrich et al. 2003; Abramson et al. 2008; Blais et al. 2006; Gschwend 2007; Kedar 2005; Bargsted and Kedar 2007). We will systematically compare the amount of strategic voting that occurs in different electoral systems. Second, we will determine for the first time whether certain types of people have a systematic tendency to vote sincerely or strategically: is a person who casts a strategic vote in one election prone to do so in another? Third, when considering the voters’ strategic options, we will explicitly take into account the possibility of abstaining. Rather than voting for their second-choice party, some voters may simply lose interest in the election and opt out. This will represent the most comprehensive analysis to date of why certain kinds of individuals are inclined to vote sincerely, why others are inclined to vote strategically and still others tend to abstain, and how this varies across electoral systems.

Theoretically, the decision to cast a strategic vote presumes a degree of political sophistication on the part of voters. However, there is considerable debate in the literature regarding voter competence. One of the most longstanding findings of survey research has been that most voters typically know about politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1995; Fournier 2002). What is in contention is whether lack of knowledge impedes voters’ ability to vote “correctly” in the sense of voting for the party whose positions correspond with their own interests and preferences. Optimistic accounts suggest that voters can rely on heuristics, or information shortcuts, to make the same choice that they would make if they were well informed (Lupia 1994; Popkin 1991; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991; Gigerenzer and Todd 1999; Kriesi 2005). On the other side, skeptics draw on work in cognitive psychology (Nisbett and Ross 1980; Kahneman et al. 1982; Dougherty et al. 2008) to offer a number of reasons why voters risk getting it

“wrong” when they apply otherwise useful heuristics to the political sphere (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000; Lavine and Gschwend 2006). When people rely on heuristics, they are processing information peripherally rather than centrally (Cacioppo and Petty 1985; Fiske and Taylor 1991; Chaiken et al. 1989); they are prone to draw on crude stereotypes (Devine 1989; Dovidio et al. 1997); they tend to be over-confident in their judgments (Allwood and Montgomery 1987; Griffin and Tversky 1992; Maysless and Kruglanski 1987); and the resulting errors in judgment are resistant to correction (Piattelli-Palmarini 1994).

We will weigh in on this debate by assessing how institutions and context affect the use of heuristics and the prevalence and seriousness of errors in citizens’ decisions. Research in both psychology and political science shows that heuristic use varies with the complexity of the decision task (Bodenhausen and Wyer 1985; Abelson and Levi 1985; Lau and Redlawsk 2001). Our goal is to determine how the type of electoral system and the resulting complexity of the decision context affect citizens’ ability to make “correct” voting decisions. We will also examine the effect of salience: the greater the perceived importance of the election, the greater the incentive for voters to “get it right”. The consequences of “getting it wrong” bear emphasis: given the uneven social distribution of political information (Althaus 1998), certain segments of the population are less likely to translate their needs and wants into the appropriate political choices and the system may be less democratically responsive in consequence.

Finally, the bottom line question is how citizens themselves evaluate the rules under which they choose their representatives. Anderson and Guillory (1997) have shown that while overall satisfaction with democracy does not vary much across electoral systems, there is a smaller winner/loser gap in satisfaction in more proportional systems. We intend to advance understanding of this critical issue by considering how the electoral system, contextual factors such as competitiveness and salience, and party strategies (such as the negative tone of campaigns) affect the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the workings of electoral democracy. The implications for democratic legitimacy are profound.

The objective of this project is to provide a rich and nuanced interpretation of the meaning of elections in contemporary democracies. We need to understand why people decide to vote the way they do and why many of them choose to abstain. We need to determine whether their vote choice reflects their true preferences or is the outcome of strategic calculations. We need to know whether voters who are not well informed are still able to make the “right choice”. However, it is impossible to make sense of voters’ choices without taking into account party strategies because the set of choices that voters are offered depend on parties’ strategic decisions. Both party and voter behaviour are affected by institutional rules, and the impact of these rules depends on contextual factors such as salience and competitiveness. Our carefully crafted research design combines extensive analyses of parties’ campaign and mobilization strategies, survey data on citizens’ perceptions and behaviour, and laboratory experiments. In the process, we will provide a rich picture of how citizens’ preferences are transformed—or not—into electoral outcomes and how this affects their judgments of the performance of their democratic system.

Research Design

The overall purpose of the study is to examine how the rules of the game affect the reciprocal interaction between parties and citizens and thus the performance of electoral democracy. To do so, we need to conduct a systematic analysis of both party and voter behaviour in a variety of contexts in countries with different electoral systems.

We are proposing an ambitious comparative study of party strategies and vote choice in 20 legislative elections to be held in five countries: Canada, France, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland. These countries differ substantially with respect to electoral systems while all being well established democracies. For

national legislative elections, we have at least one case for each of the major types of electoral system: Canada uses the plurality (first-past-the-post) rule, France has a majority (two-round) system, Germany is a mixed system, and Spain and Switzerland both utilize proportional representation (Switzerland has a more “personal” type of PR, in which voters can vote for specific candidates associated with different parties). France and Switzerland offer the additional advantage of having different types of electoral systems for different elections. France has a two-round system for its legislative elections, PR for European elections and two rounds with a small dose of proportionality for regional elections; Switzerland has a PR system for the National Chamber and cantonal parliamentary elections but a majority two-round system for Council of State elections. Germany’s mixed system will enable us to see how the same voters behave when they cast two different ballots under two different rules. Finally, Spain and Switzerland both hold simultaneous elections for the lower and upper houses under different voting rules, enabling us to compare party and voter behaviour in the two elections.

The goal is to examine how and why voter and party behaviour varies across space and time. Accordingly, we will study party strategy and vote choice in different elections at different levels of government in each country. Three of the countries are federal (Canada, Germany, and Switzerland) and two are unitary (France and Spain; Spain is constitutionally a unitary country, even though it is highly decentralized, with strong autonomy for some regions). In each of the federal countries, we have selected two subunits, based on four criteria: (1) their party systems differ substantially (in order to examine contextual effects within the same electoral system); (2) their socio-demographic profiles vary; (3) each unit is sufficiently large (this applies mostly to Switzerland); (4) the elections are as close in time as possible. Our country coordinators (see below) made the final choices on the basis of these criteria. They selected the provinces of British Columbia and Ontario in Canada, Baden-Wurttemberg and Berlin in Germany, and the cantons of Zurich and Lucerne in Switzerland.

In France, Spain, and the two German länder, we will study three elections: one sub-national, one national, and one supra-national (European Parliament). In the two Canadian provinces and the two Swiss cantons, we will examine two elections, one federal and one regional (local elections cannot be included in these two countries because they are mostly non-partisan in Canada and because each commune has its own calendar in Switzerland). This yields a total of 20 elections. The elections to be covered will all occur in the 2011/2014 period, allowing us sufficient time to prepare and pre-test our data collection instruments.

Our cases are carefully chosen cases to maximize variation in electoral rules and contexts while minimizing differences on other dimensions. However, it can be difficult to distinguish causes from effects in real-world settings. To overcome this limitation, we will perform a series of experiments on the impact of electoral and party systems. These carefully crafted experiments are designed to specify how changes in voting rules and other contextual factors affect behaviour in the controlled laboratory environment. Experiments permit the researcher to manipulate simulated conditions and to ascertain their effects on behaviour while holding other factors constant; the results are therefore unambiguous with respect to causal direction. Laboratory experiments are the major tool for investigating human behaviour in psychology, and are becoming increasingly important in other domains. Four years ago the Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to an economist and a psychologist for contributions to this field, and experimental research is now witnessing substantial growth in political science as well (Druckman et al. 2007; Loewen 2008).

This unique and innovative research design thus combines detailed study of party behaviour in a variety of elections with systematic analyses of voters’ decision-making processes in the very same elections, and laboratory experiments designed to test the underlying causal mechanisms. It provides a powerful

means of understanding the relationship between parties and voters that is at the heart of the working of electoral democracy.

Analyzing Party Strategies

Our analysis of party strategies is the first ever to be specifically designed to understand how the behaviour of parties and candidates depends on the institutional context in which they compete. The goal is to determine how the decisions made by party elites shape the set of choices available to voters at election time. Without understanding where this menu of choices comes from, it is impossible to fully understand voter behaviour. Surprisingly few studies have examined the strategies adopted by parties; fewer still have sought to assess systematically and cross-nationally how institutional and contextual factors condition electoral contests. Analyzing party strategies cross-nationally requires a highly coordinated data collection effort that encompasses different types of data, both qualitative and quantitative. We will focus on four aspects of party strategy: inter-party coordination, campaign strategies, mobilization, and candidate selection. While our data collection efforts are guided in substantial part by theory, in-depth case studies will be critical in pointing us towards relevant data that existing theories may have ignored. Our goal is to build an innovative and unique data set on party strategies that will enable us to address questions about party strategy that remain unanswered in the existing literature.

- **Inter-Party Coordination:** Data on electoral coordination—whether parties compete independently or coordinate with other parties in some form of pre-electoral coalition—will be obtained from official statistics, election archives, and media coverage. The use of media sources is especially important in documenting low level forms of electoral coordination, such as signals of willingness (or unwillingness) to form government coalitions after the election.

- **Campaign Strategies:** We will rely on several sources to create a unique data set on campaign strategies that captures information on policy positions, issue emphasis, negative campaigning, and so on. Part of our data collection effort will follow existing research by examining party manifestos and press releases. We will also systematically collect campaign commercials on television, the internet, and newspapers, as well as speeches made by party leaders throughout the electoral campaign. We will conduct a content analysis of these data using both traditional and more advanced methods of text analysis based on correlation and scaling (Wordscore, Wordfish) and computational linguistics (Wuest et al. 2008). All the data will be made available on the project's website for further analysis and replication by other scholars. The content analyses will be complemented by a series of interviews with campaign managers to gain more detailed information about campaign strategies. The interviews will be semi-structured to ensure consistency across different contexts while allowing for enough flexibility to offer fresh insights into party strategy.

- **Mobilization:** A key component of a party's mobilization strategy is how it spends its money. Where possible, we will collect data on how the parties and the candidates spend their funds during an election campaign. Unfortunately, some countries do not require parties to divulge information about their spending. Accordingly, we will also collect data on the frequency of visits to each constituency by party leaders, as well as counts of advertisements collected from broadcast and print media. These additional data will allow for a systematic comparison of mobilization efforts across all five countries and across elections for the same parties.

- **Candidate selection:** Data will be collected on a variety of candidate characteristics, including sex, minority status, and quality. There is a large literature on the impact of competitiveness and type of electoral system on the representation of women and minorities (Matland 1995; Matland and Studlar

1996; Rule 1992; Norris 2004; Trounstein and Valdini 2008). Our powerful research design will make it possible to compare how these groups fare under *different* electoral systems within the *same* country.

It is worth highlighting some features of the dataset that we propose to build. First, the data come from a variety of qualitative and quantitative sources. Each election will be the subject of a case study and we will place great emphasis on producing comparable data for each election and each country on a set of 'core' variables that are central to the project. Second, our data collection and coding will take account of the dynamic nature of campaigns. For example, our data on campaign strategies will enable us to determine not only which parties use negative ads, but which party is the first to go on the attack and under what circumstances. Third, our data collection will not be limited to the 'core' variables. We will also collect additional data that are election-specific if they are useful in testing additional implications of our theories and if they are available with relative ease. This ambitious comparative analysis of party strategies will produce an innovative data set that will allow us to make a crucial contribution to the field on many scores:

- **Cross-National Perspective:** Surprisingly few studies have examined the strategies adopted by political parties, and very few of those that have are cross-national in perspective. Accordingly, it is difficult to know whether factors found to influence party strategies in one country are idiosyncratic to that country or can be generalized to other countries. Our study will remedy this by examining party strategies from an explicitly cross-national perspective.
- **Different Types of Elections:** Most existing studies of party strategies look at the decisions that party elites make in a particular election. A novel feature of our research program is the analysis of strategies in different types of elections (supra-national, national, regional, local) in five countries with differing electoral arrangements. This is essential for determining whether the strategies that parties follow vary depending on the salience and competitiveness of elections.
- **Joint Examination of Voter and Party Choices:** Existing studies examine elite and voter behaviour separately. However, the choices that political parties and voters make at election time are clearly endogenous. How people vote depends on which parties decide to run and what their policies are. Similarly, whether a party decides to run and what policies a party chooses depends on how voters are expected to behave. This endogenous relationship means that it is crucial to jointly examine the choices of voters and parties. Our project is ideally placed to do this: focusing on party strategies while at the same time surveying voters allows us to analyze the strategic interaction between elites and citizens.
- **Elite Surveys:** We will also be conducting the first ever cross-national interviews of campaign managers and party elites to focus on how and why they choose the strategies that they do. These semi-structured interviews will allow us to provide a rich understanding of the factors that affect and constrain the choice of strategies.
- **Comparative Case Studies:** We will conduct in-depth analyses of party strategies in selected elections to test more directly some of the interpretations that emerge from our quantitative research. These detailed studies are also intended to deepen our understanding of the goals that party organizations pursue.

In sum, we propose a rich multi-method comparative examination of party strategies that will allow us to explain the choices that parties make before and during election campaigns.

Making Sense of Citizens' Choices

In a democracy citizens decide who will govern them. It is thus crucial to understand why people make the choices that they do. To do so, it is necessary to tap voters' attitudes and perceptions and to examine how they relate to the ultimate decision. Our study of citizens' vote choice will be primarily based on a large voter survey. This survey will be unique in at least three critical ways. First, we will survey voters in 20 different elections, the very same elections that are covered in our analysis of party strategies. This will allow us to examine how the factors that affect vote choice vary across electoral systems and types of elections (from the most to the least salient, and from the most to the least competitive). Second, we will have rich data on party strategies in the same elections, and so we will be able to examine the link between party behaviour and voter behaviour. In fact, some of the party data (on party mobilization, for instance) will be incorporated into the survey data set. Third, this will be a panel survey where the *same* individuals are interviewed for each election in the given country/province/land/canton. This will enable us to ascertain the stability of voters' attitudes and perceptions and, most importantly, to determine whether the same individuals choose differently when they find themselves in a different context. Our goal is to examine how the determinants of vote choice vary across countries and subunits within countries, across types of voters, and across types of elections for the same individuals. As far as we can tell, this will be the first cross-national multi-level panel election survey ever conducted.

- **The Decision to Vote:** An important objective of the research is to contribute to understanding of the decision to vote or not to vote. From the major interpretations offered for turnout (see the discussion above), several key variables can be identified. First, if citizens construe elections as an opportunity to express their opinions, a strong predictor of turnout is the existence and strength of preferences (Achen and Sinnot 2007). A second perspective contends that the most crucial factor is citizens' adherence to the norm that they have a duty to vote. People who feel that it is their moral obligation to vote almost always vote whatever the circumstances (Blais 2000). The third model focuses on the context of the election, most particularly its salience and competitiveness (Franklin 2004). The survey will include questions on each of these aspects: party identification and preferences among the parties and leaders, sense of civic duty, and perceptions of the importance of the election and the closeness of the race, both nationally and locally.

- **Vote Choice:** Special attention will be given to how partisan preferences and strategic considerations weigh in the final vote choice. Besides the questions on preferences mentioned above, we will have a battery of questions on strategic considerations: perceptions of the viability of the parties/candidates, both nationally and locally, as well as expectations about the likely coalitions to be formed after the election. The questionnaire will also include factual questions to measure citizens' level of political awareness, which will allow us to examine how political preferences and strategic calculations play differently among the most and the least informed segments of the public (see Zaller 1992).

Finally, while the main focus will be on vote choice, we will also have a battery of questions tapping voters' satisfaction with democracy and their evaluations of the electoral institutions. Dalton (2004), in particular, has documented the erosion of political confidence in advanced democracies and the growth of support for institutional reform. Our questions will yield valuable information on evaluations of the electoral process in different countries and contexts. We will pay particular attention to the attitudes of those who support losing candidates (Anderson et al. 2005), a crucial indicator of democratic legitimacy.

The questionnaire will be administered via the Internet. An Internet survey offers a number of important advantages. First, Internet surveys produce less measurement error than telephone surveys or face-to-face interviews because they are less subject to social desirability bias (Chang and Krosnick 2001, 2002). This is an especially important consideration given that people may be reluctant to admit that they did

not vote. Second, the proportion of households with Internet access continues to grow, while response rates for telephone surveys continue to decline. Third, refined matching methods can be used to improve the representativeness of Internet samples. Fourth, Internet surveys make it easier to reach young adults. This is an advantage given the extent to which generational change has dampened voter turnout. Fifth, previous research suggests that Internet and telephone surveys produce similar findings regarding the determinants of vote choice (Sanders et al. 2007). Finally, Internet surveys are cheaper, allowing a larger sample size and thus greater statistical power.

The survey will include approximately 80 questions. The cross-sectional samples will consist of at least 3,000 respondents for each election in France and Spain and at least 2,000 respondents for each election in each sub-national unit in Canada, Germany, and Switzerland. The goal is to obtain the highest retention rate possible in waves two and three and the maximum number of panel respondents (who agree to participate in each of the two or three waves). More specifically, we aim to get 1,500 three-wave panel respondents in France and Spain, 1,300 two-wave respondents in each of the two Canadian provinces and two Swiss cantons, and 1,000 three-wave respondents in each of the two German Lander. Fresh respondents will be added at each wave so as to ensure a total sample of 3,000 (or 2,000 for sub-national units) for each election. By comparing “fresh” and “old” respondents, we will be able to ascertain and correct potential “non retention” bias.

We have obtained two quotes for the survey. The quotes establish that the cross-national panel survey that we propose is feasible and that it can be conducted within our budgetary parameters. As indicated in our memo on the quotes, we have two options. The first is to engage further discussions with the firm that made the strongest proposal and to ask them to make a revised proposal that would include steps to increase the retention rates. The second option is to have a new call for bids in early 2010. If the project is funded, we will choose between the two options in January 2009, after consultation with the scientific advisory board, taking into account comments/suggestions from the referees and the Committee.

The cross-national multi-level panel design will enable us to make a number of significant contributions to our knowledge of the workings of electoral democracy:

- **Strategic versus Sincere Voting:** For the first time, it will be possible to systematically assess the impact of electoral rules on vote choice. The survey design will enable us to compare the relative frequency of strategic versus sincere voting, not just across the five countries, but across regions within these countries, across individuals with varying levels of information, and for the *same* individuals across different elections. We will also be able to determine whether the propensity to vote strategically is affected by parties’ attempts to prime or de-prime strategic considerations (see the section on party strategies).
- **Civic Duty:** While there is evidence to suggest that social norms affect the decision to vote, cross-sectional analyses of the impact of civic duty on the propensity to vote are plagued by rationalization effects. The design of our panel survey guards against these effects, while simultaneously enabling us to determine how a sense of civic duty interacts with the perceived salience of an election. Analyzing the impact of civic duty for the *same* voters in both first-order and second-order elections will reveal whether people still feel a moral obligation to vote when they think that the election is of little consequence.
- **Subjective Perceptions:** Much of the existing research on the effects of electoral competitiveness and salience relies on objective indicators, but there is growing evidence that subjective perceptions are only weakly related to the objective indicators (Blais and Bodet 2006;

Levine 2007). Our survey will enable us to compare voters' subjective perceptions with objective reality and to specify under which conditions and for which kinds of voters the relationship between the two is strongest and weakest. We will also be able to compare perceptions of competitiveness and viability in PR and majoritarian systems. Recent research suggests that competitiveness should be conceptualized differently in the former (Blais and Lago forthcoming) and that voters use simple heuristics such as whether a party won any seat in the previous election (Lago 2008). Drawing on our analyses of party strategies, we will also determine when and where parties' attempts to influence voters' perceptions are most and least successful.

- **The Role of Information:** The ability of voters to express their needs and wants in their choice of party on election day hinges crucially on their level of political information. Strategic voting, in particular, presumes some knowledge of the way the electoral system works and an awareness of parties' electoral chances. However, differences in material circumstances, cognitive skills, educational attainment, and experience mean that the distribution of political information is uneven (Bartels 2005). One of our goals is to determine how electoral rules condition the impact of information on voters' decision calculus. This will complement our experimental examination of the use of heuristics, discussed below. For the first time, it will be possible to show whether certain types of voters are more disadvantaged by particular electoral arrangements than others. Answering this question cuts to the core of what political equality means in practice.
- **Satisfaction with Democracy:** Including items designed to assess respondents' perceptions of system responsiveness and satisfaction with democracy will allow us to answer a crucial question: how do the electoral rules of the game affect democratic legitimacy? Are citizens more satisfied with the way electoral democracy works when electoral arrangements make for more choice? Does the salience of the election affect the degree of satisfaction? Recent work has shown that losing generates ambivalent attitudes about how democracy works (Anderson et al. 2005). Thanks to the panel component of the survey design, we will be able to compare how the same people react to the outcome of different elections, and to ascertain in what kinds of context losers do or do not change their views about the workings of electoral democracy.
- **Joint Examination of Individual Level and Contextual Factors:** Our research is specifically designed to examine how the vote decision hinges on the interaction between the preferences of individual citizens and the context in which they decide. We will incorporate a rich variety of contextual data into the survey data set and use multi-level analyses (Long and Shively 2005) to examine the impact of characteristics of the local constituency.

Traditionally the study of voting has relied on surveys of specific elections. While a great deal has been learned from such surveys, fundamental questions about the impact of electoral arrangements on the quality of electoral democracy can only be definitively addressed by comparing the behaviour of the *same* voters in elections operating under different rules, and by linking voters' behaviour to the strategic choices made by the political parties. This is exactly what our study will do. We will create a rich data set that will allow us to test a wealth of hypotheses that data restrictions have precluded in the past.

Examining Behaviour in Experimental Settings

Our observational analyses of party strategies and voter choice will be complemented by a series of innovative decision-making experiments designed to ascertain the impact of electoral institutions on party and voter behaviour. These experiments will enable us to cross-check and validate the findings that emerge from the voter survey and/or analyses of party strategy (converging results will be deemed to be more robust; inconsistent results will call for further analyses) and to examine specific hypotheses that

cannot be properly tested with the party strategy and survey data. These experiments will also allow us to fine tune key aspects of the data collection, including experimental treatments that can be embedded in the surveys. For instance, we want to include measures of risk aversion in our voter survey in order to investigate the potential link between attitudes towards risk and the propensity to vote sincerely or strategically. Experiments can determine which verbal measures of risk aversion are most strongly correlated with behaviour and should be included in the survey (see Engle-Warnick et al. 2008).

Most of the experiments will be voting experiments in which the participants will be invited, at the end, to choose among the parties or candidates. The primary dependent variables in these experiments will be whether participants decide to vote or to abstain, whether they vote sincerely or strategically, and whether they vote “correctly” or not (as defined by Lau and Redlawsk 2001). In each experiment, one or two contextual variables will be manipulated. These include the electoral system (plurality/majority/PR/mixed), the number of parties or candidates, and the amount information that the participants have about other participants’ preferences and behaviour. Some of the experiments will also look at the impact of rules and context on voters’ preferences and their general evaluations of the electoral process, as well as their search for information and their use of decision-making heuristics.

These experiments provide a powerful methodology for isolating the effects of a given electoral rule on voter behaviour, free of all the possible confounding factors that operate in real-world elections. They will enable us to compare how voters behave under different electoral rules, to ascertain how the vote calculus varies depending on the number of parties or candidates voters can choose from, and to determine the impact of information about which candidates or coalitions are viable in an election.

We will make use of the distinct and complementary methods and theoretical emphases of political psychology and experimental economics (McDermott and Rose 2002). In political psychology experiments, issues of affect (Newman et al. 2007) and variations in modes of information processing are often prominent concerns. Political psychology experiments typically seek to provide relatively realistic political stimuli, for example, by having participants read newspaper articles or watch television news. They generally do not provide financial incentives, and participants do not compete or interact strategically. While employing a variety of theories and techniques, economics experiments generally remain closely tied to economists’ traditional concern with calculated behaviour and strategic interaction. Deviations from strict rational choice assumptions receive particular attention. Participants often compete in games of strategic choice and are given pecuniary incentives to perform well. Experimental conditions and stimuli tend to be abstract, intended to reveal features of decision making that apply to a wide range of settings.

The general strategy in the psychology experiments will be to create simulated campaigns with parties having different party platforms, followed by a vote. The randomized treatments will involve holding elections under different voting rules (plurality, majority/two rounds, PR, and mixed), varying the number of candidates, and providing some participants with information about the parties’ standing in the polls. Most experiments will involve a series of elections in order to examine learning effects. A major objective of the psychology experiments will be to examine voters’ use of information shortcuts when they have to vote under a situation of imperfect information. Experiments will be designed to determine what heuristic strategies voters are using and with what consequences, and to ascertain how these heuristic strategies vary depending on the voting rule, the number of ballot options, and the amount of poll information available. Some of the experiments will be inspired by the methodology developed by Lau and Redlawsk (1997) to measure the correspondence between voters’ predispositions and their vote choice. The crucial questions to be addressed in these experiments are whether voters are better able to vote “correctly” (in the sense of choosing the party or candidate that is closest to their own ideological

or policy positions) under some voting systems than others, when there are fewer or more parties, or when they do or do not have poll information.

The economics experiments will focus on strategic calculations (Camerer 2002). One set of experiments will be inspired by recent work by Blais et al. (2007, 2008). Their experiments compared the vote choice of groups choosing among the same set of candidates, but under different rules, in order to determine whether the propensity to strategically desert unviable candidates is stronger in one-round than in two-round elections. We plan to extend this work by comparing vote choice under each of the four main voting systems. A second series of experiments will specifically test how the competitiveness of the election affects turnout (Levine and Palfrey 2007; Duffy and Tavits 2008). We will enrich this line of research by comparing how competitiveness plays out depending on the electoral rules. Another set of economics experiments will deal specifically with the issue of strategic considerations under coalition governments. The objective is to see how information about potential coalitions can affect vote choice. Different groups of voters will be exposed to different pieces of information about the willingness of parties to form post-election coalitions, the purpose being to ascertain how such information influences vote choice (see Gschwend and Hooge 2008).

We will also perform a number of experiments designed to complement our empirical investigation of party strategies. One of our key concerns here is to advance understanding of the factors that affect party coordination and competition. The experiments will be designed to examine the factors that induce parties to make—or not to make—electoral alliances with some of their competitors. These experiments will place participants in the role of party leaders who have to decide, before an election, whether to run alone or to make an alliance with another party. The idea is to compare participants' behaviour when we vary the electoral system, the number of parties, or the amount of information, and to see how much learning or adaptation takes place over time. In some of these experiments, we will use ordinary adult participants simulating the roles of party elites. For others, we will recruit local party activists and officials as research subjects (Harrison and List 2004).

A final set of experiments will focus on the reciprocal relationship between political parties and voters. Following the innovative work of Goodin et al. (2008), we will design experiments in which some of the participants will be party leaders and others will be voters. The election will entail two stages; first the parties decide whether they run alone or make an alliance, then the voters choose among the options they are offered. The treatment will be the electoral system, and so the participants will be randomly allocated to plurality, majority, PR, or mixed systems elections.

The experimental component of our project will be conducted in two facilities. The Bell Laboratory at the Centre for Interuniversity Research and Analysis on Organizations (CIRANO) in Montreal has a laboratory funded by the Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI) with up to 100 workstations for large-scale voting experiments, as well as a professional staff to recruit participants and to set up and run experiments. The laboratory is used by researchers from institutions in Canada, the United States, and Europe. The applicant is a Fellow of CIRANO, and a co-applicant is the Vice President of its Experimental Economics Group. The second site is the Political Opinion Laboratory at the University of British Columbia. Also funded by CFI, it has 18 work stations with state-of-the-art social psychology experimentation software. The Director of the Laboratory is a co-applicant.

To sum up, our multi-country, multi-method research design will enable us to make a lasting contribution to the understanding of how electoral democracies actually function. The proposed study covers countries which operate under a variety of electoral rules, it encompasses both parties and voters, and it examines how each set of actors behaves in different electoral contexts. Finally, the causal

processes through which the rules of the game affect the behaviour of both parties and voters will be explicated and tested through a series of laboratory experiments. This will be the most ambitious coordinated research enterprise ever conducted on the workings of electoral democracy.