

The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems

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More than two decades ago, Stein Rokkan argued for coordinated, crossnational research to explore, in ways that are not possible "through secondary analysis of independently conducted surveys, the structural contexts of the individuals' reactions to politics" (1970, p. 15). Although multi-national data collections that enhance the comparative study of public opinion have been carried out, Rokkan's plea for research that would illuminate how electoral systems constrain and condition the beliefs and behaviors of citizens has gone unheeded. Our purpose is to heed Rokkan's call.

This paper lays out several sets of ideas that might serve as the focus for an internationally collaborative program of research among election studies conducted in democracies around the world. We envision that the ICORE Conference in Berlin this August will be the first of several occasions on which we can work together to specify a research agenda, study design, and instrumentation that will permit the coordinated, international, comparative study of electoral systems in 1996 and beyond. We imagine that social scientists within each polity will be responsible for securing funding and managing the implementation of their country's national election survey. We envision a portion of each nation's election study will be devoted to instrumentation that will grow out of this collaboration.

This paper identifies three general themes around which this collaborative effort might be organized: electoral institutions (parliamentary versus presidential systems of government; the electoral rules that govern the casting and counting of ballots; political parties); the role that political parties play in encapsulating political conflict (economic; racial and ethnic, and environmental); and the nature of political alignment in the face of social change. For each theme, we briefly describe some of the issues at stake and identify some of the empirical propositions that might organize the inquiry. We then provide an overview of a possible study design, the kinds

of individual and macro-level data that might be collected, and close by suggesting how the planning process might unfold at the Berlin Conference and beyond.

Electoral Institutions

If elections are central to democracy, then how should a society organize the institutions that govern the processes by which government leaders are selected? The possibilities are legion. Should there be a parliament or a president and a legislature? Should legislative seats be allocated in proportion to the popular vote, or should the winner in each district take all? Should there be two, or three or a dozen political parties? Should the parties be strong or weak, centralized or decentralized, ideologically unified or diverse?

These are not merely abstract considerations that busy social scientists as they ponder the meaning of democracy. They are the pragmatic issues that policy makers, constitutional experts, and the founders of democratic systems have debated, increasingly so over the last two decades, as new democracies have emerged in southern and eastern Europe, in Latin America, East Asia, and Africa. Such debates are heated because the political stakes could not be higher: institutional arrangements influence the distribution of power; shape the ways that politicians pursue their goals; and constrain the ability of citizens to control their government.

How the institutional arrangements that govern elections affect voters in a particular polity can only be appreciated through comparative research. Without variation in institutional arrangements, it is impossible to learn how any particular configuration of American institutions structures votes, public opinion, and political participation. We need to examine how otherwise comparable citizens behave when operating under different institutional constraints -- and this requires that we move beyond a single nation's borders.

A standard motivation for comparative political analysis is generalization: comparative analysis opens the door to discovering whether theories developed in one context travel to other places. Should the empirical implications of a theory be replicated in different settings (especially in maximally different settings), then confidence in the theory naturally increases (Bendix 1963; Przeworski and Teune 1970). Replication and generalizability are perfectly respectable motivations for mounting programs of comparative research, but they do not, by themselves, constitute a compelling claim on the energy and resources needed to mount a large-scale international collaboration.

A more compelling rationale for the comparative study of electoral systems rests, we believe, upon the theoretical and substantive advances that will emerge from understanding how the institutional arrangements that govern the conduct of elections affect the nature and quality of democratic choice as expressed through popular elections. Only through comparative analysis, where citizens are observed under different institutional settings, can the impact of institutions be established. Only through comparative analysis can the relative performance of different democratic arrangements be established.

Parliamentarism vs. Presidentialism

Parliamentary and presidential government are the two principal models by which democracies are organized. In a parliamentary system, the chief executive and cabinet are responsible to the legislature: the legislature chooses them and the legislature can remove them from office. In a presidential system, the chief executive is a single person, popularly elected for a constitutionally prescribed period of time, who, under normal circumstances is not subject to removal by the legislature (Lijphart 1984, 1992). In presidential systems, then, the people have two agents; in parliamentary systems, one.¹

Critics have mounted several arguments against presidential government. They claim that the stability that ensues from the set length of presidential and legislative terms can be politically crippling. Unpopular executives are difficult to remove; political stalemate between the executive and the legislature is hard to break; there is little opportunity for the continuous readjustments that events may demand (Linz 1990). Critics also argue that the winner-take-all rule for selecting presidents "tends to make democratic politics a zero-sum game, with all the potential for conflict such games portend" (Linz 1990). Cabinet selection rarely ameliorates electoral

disproportionalities; presidentialism provides too few incentives for executives to make amends with losers; losers have little reason to try to cooperate with the new president (Lijphart 1992).

Finally, under presidentialism, two popularly elected, independent institutions creates problems for coalition building and executive-legislative cooperation. When presidents do not enjoy majority party support in the legislature the potential exists for deadlock and paralysis. Divided control of government exacerbates the problems of coordination inherent in a presidential system (Sundquist 1988; Fiorina 1990; Ginsberg and Shefter 1989; for a dissent, see Mayhew 1991). Chronic impasse invites regime instability and breakdown (Mainwaring 1990; for a dissent see Shugart and Carey 1992).

Divided control of government also obscures accountability and thus threatens a basic principle of democratic governance. When it is ambiguous which party is in power, it is difficult to figure out who should be held accountable. At election time, public discourse can deteriorate into arguments over who is to blame instead of discussions over what should be done. If voters are supposed to choose either on the basis of their evaluation of the government's performance, or on the basis of the policies the parties offer, then the ambiguity produced from divided control obscures the electoral alternatives. Under a system of divided government, elections cannot "create winners with the power to make and implement policies" (Ginsberg and Shefter 1989). In the extreme, divided control "invalidates the entire theory of party government and presidential leadership" (Sundquist 1988, p. 626).

Parliamentary democracy, is more apt to succeed, or so its advocates claim, because it escapes the problems associated with temporal rigidity and majoritarianism, and because the vote of confidence can resolve inter-branch conflicts.

Defenders of presidential government offer several arguments of their own. They claim that presidential systems provide greater accountability because they offer a more straightforward connection between the choice the electorate makes at the ballot box and the expectations to which policy makers are held (Shugart and Carey 1992). A number of factors supposedly contribute to this greater accountability. Some think that the direct, popular election of an executive that cannot be removed by shifting coalitions in the legislature is more democratic (Lijphart 1992). In presidential systems, voters can easily sanction the executive for its poor performance in office. But, when governments change between elections (as often happens in parliamentary systems), accountability is weakened: who should voters blame on election day (Powell 1989)? Identifiability of alternative governments may also be greater in presidential systems where the connections between the votes cast and the government that is likely to form is clearer (Strom 1990; Shugart and Carey 1992).

Defenders of presidential government also note the familiar brief on behalf of checks and balances. As James Madison argued, a presidential system provides an opportunity for an independent legislature to check the executive on the merits of proposed legislation and vice versa. This is, of course, simply the flip-side of the argument that presidential systems encourage institutional gridlock.

Finally, supporters argue that presidential systems do a better job of representing local interests. In parliamentary systems, legislators are more preoccupied with national policy concerns to which their party's electoral fate is linked (Shugart and Carey 1992). Presidential systems, on the other hand, allow local interests and particularism to be promoted in legislative elections while national interests and policy can be advanced in the vote cast for president (Cook 1989; Overby 1989).

Many of the arguments we have just rehearsed entail assumptions about voters: about the information that they possess, the beliefs they hold, and the considerations they bring to bear on the electoral choices they make. Such assumptions, it is important to point out, are rarely tested.

For example, accountability is a positive attribute of presidentialism if citizens really do see a more straightforward connection between the electoral choices they make and what policy makers are likely to do. If accountability makes retrospective sanctions of the executive more available in presidential than in parliamentary systems, then one should find that voters in presidential systems have greater clarity about the

performance of the incumbent government and are more willing to rely on retrospective evaluations in their vote choice.

Or, to take another example, consider the charge that divided control of government obscures accountability in presidential systems. Nowhere has this claim been confronted with evidence. Do citizens living under divided government have more difficulty figuring out who is to blame than citizens living under united presidential government or parliamentary rule? Under divided control are voters less likely to rely on retrospective evaluations of the performance of the executive when casting their ballots? We simply don't know.

Do coalition governments (common in parliamentary regimes) obscure accountability and reduce the ability of the electorate to assign blame (Austen-Smith and Banks 1988, 1990; Laver and Shepsle 1990; Strom 1990)? How does a party's participation in a coalition government affect the public's evaluation of the party? Do all parties in the coalition get held equally accountable or does the size of the party or its role (share of portfolios) affect the extent of blame or credit? And, does a change in the composition of a parliamentary government during the period between elections make it more difficult for voters to know whom to blame on election day? We do not know.

Nor do we know whether accountability is undermined in presidential systems because voters give too much weight to the personal attributes of presidential candidates and too little weight to issues. Does the evidence sustain this familiar critique of American presidential elections? Do the personal characteristics of party leaders play a less dominant role in parliamentary systems or do parliamentary systems have the functional equivalent in the popular election of the prime minister (Lijphart 1992)?

Before concluding that identifiability is an attractive property of presidentialism, one needs to know whether voters in parliamentary systems indeed have trouble identifying the alternative governments that are likely to form after the election (Valen 1992; Huber and Powell 1993). If identifiability holds, then voters in presidential systems should be more likely than their counterparts in parliamentary regimes to rely on prospective evaluations in casting their ballots.

Are local interests really better represented in legislative elections conducted under a presidential system of government? Do local concerns figure more prominently in campaigns and weigh more heavily in the way that voters make choices in legislative elections? Anecdotal information on this point abounds, but systematic, comparative analysis of campaigns and voter choice does not exist. Cain, Fiorina, and Ferejohn's (1987) comparison of legislative elections in Great Britain and the United States has certainly raised doubts about whether local concerns are unique to legislative elections conducted in presidential systems. (Also see Finer 1985; Bogdanor 1985; Katz 1986; and Mair 1986.)

The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws

Laws determine how citizens cast votes, how votes are aggregated, and how aggregated votes are converted into positions of governmental authority. Such laws constitute a second set of institutional arrangements for crossnational study. Electoral systems differ in the formula used to decide how votes are translated into legislative seats, in district magnitude and threshold, in ballot structure, and in the timing of elections. [2](#)

Electoral laws have profound political effects. For example, proportional representation produces more parties and less disproportionality in the conversion of votes to seats than do plurality and majority systems (Duverger 1954; Rae 1971; Lijphart 1984; Riker 1986; Lijphart 1990). Although all systems benefit large parties at the expense of smaller ones, plurality systems discriminate against small parties more than do PR systems. Because the barriers to entry are so low, PR systems encourage extremist parties, protest parties, and parties that appeal to relatively small groups (Katz 1980; Powell 1982). Single-member-district, plurality rules, on the other hand, are more likely to encourage decisive elections that create clearly responsible, durable, single-party, majority governments (Duverger 1954; Powell 1989). The larger the district magnitude, the greater the number of parties and lower the disproportionality in representation (Rae 1971; Taagepera and Shugart 1989). As district magnitude grows, representation is defined less by geography and more by ideological or sectoral interests (Rae

1971; Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Lijphart 1990). High thresholds of representation discourage small parties, though ballot structure does not affect the number of parties (Rae 1971; Lijphart 1990).

Although we know a fair amount about how electoral laws affect the number of political parties, the ways in which votes get converted into legislative seats, and the strategies that political parties pursue, we do not possess, as Michael Steed (1985) has argued, knowledge of the ways in which electoral laws ultimately affect voters and their representation in government.

Some of the effects of electoral laws are indirect -- the laws influence the number and nature of the political choices that voters confront and this in turn influences the way that voters make choices. We consider these indirect effects in a moment. Here we suggest some of the ways that electoral laws may directly affect the choices voters make.

For example, which electoral laws facilitate the close connection between individuals and their representatives and which do not (Bogdanor 1985)? Just what are the circumstances under which personal ties between citizens and candidates matter to voters? How do variations in district magnitude, for instance, affect the nature of the interaction between constituents and their representatives? When electoral laws permit representatives in a multi-member district to free ride on constituent services performed by their colleagues, does the propensity to engage in constituency service and develop personal relationships with constituents go down (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina 1987)?

Do high district thresholds not only discourage parties from contesting seats, but do they also discourage voters from casting their ballots for small parties that hover perilously close to the threshold? How powerful are Duverger's (1954) "psychological effects" in reducing the tendency for voters to waste their vote on smaller parties that have no chance of winning seats? Is the effect really a psychological one, as Duverger posited, or does it stem from the unwillingness of parties to invest scarce resources in those districts where things seem hopeless? Although it is well understood that different voting rules offer different opportunities and incentives for strategic voting (Cain 1978; Niemi, Whitten and Franklin 1992; Black 1978; Johnston, et al. 1992) it is not at all clear whether the propensity of citizens to engage in strategic behavior varies with the occasions that electoral rules present.

These questions, which are fundamental to our understanding the political consequences of electoral laws, deal with the impact of these laws on individual citizens: on the ways they make choices and on the relationship they establish with their representatives. They are questions that as yet have no firm answers.

Political Parties

Democracy, E. E. Schattschneider argued, is "unthinkable save in terms of the parties" (1942, p. 1). Modern democratic theorists of all stripes embrace parties as institutions that organize electoral competition, aggregate disparate social interests, mediate social conflict, increase voter rationality, enlarge the electorate through mobilization, link people to their government, and constrain those in positions of power. ³ In emerging democracies, it is the political parties that play an instrumental role in consolidating the new regimes (Mainwaring 1988; Dix 1992).

But how well do political parties actually perform these functions? Electoral systems differ in conspicuous ways with respect to parties: in their number, ideological distinctiveness, and their organizational strength. Our concern here is with understanding how such differences affect party performance in democratic societies.

Perhaps the most glaring difference among electoral systems is the sheer number of political parties that compete for popular support. Although the relationship between electoral laws, social divisions and the number of parties are well understood,⁴ the advantages and disadvantages of a two-party system is still contentiously debated.

Defenders argue that a two-party system provides a greater potential for accountability. With only two parties, voters can more easily assign blame and sanction the one in government for its poor performance. Two parties simplify the alternatives and make the voter choice easier (Schattschneider 1942; Dahl 1966; Epstein 1967).

With only two parties accountability is not blurred; there is no confusion over how much credit or blame voters should assign to each party (Strom 1990). Identifiability is also high: there is no doubt about the alternative governments that are likely to form after the election. There is no need for complicated coalition bargaining after the ballots have been counted. For this reason, some have argued that two-party systems are more democratic.

Two-party systems are also thought to moderate politics. In their effort to capture power, parties must forge majority coalitions and to do so, they must appeal to a great variety of diverse interests. To build heterogeneous coalitions, parties must modulate their ideological fervor and converge to the middle of the ideological spectrum (Schattschneider 1942; Downs 1957; Key 1964; Lijphart 1984). As a result, two-party systems are thought to produce more stable governments (Powell 1982; Lijphart 1984; Taagepera and Shugart 1989).

The two-party system is not without critics, of course. One line of argument points to the logical contradiction between claims that two-party systems both cause parties to converge to the middle of the ideological spectrum and create greater accountability. Convergence reduces the clarity of the alternatives and makes it difficult, so the argument goes, for voters to decide. Nor does a two-party system assure clarity about who to hold accountable.

One of the most powerful arguments on behalf of multi-partyism is that it is more representative than two-partyism. Many parties offer voters a larger menu of choices, providing them the opportunity to cast a ballot for a party that is closer to their ideal point (Powell 1989; Shugart and Carey 1992). Representation is enhanced between elections because in multi-party systems small parties are present in the legislature and/or the government (Powell 1989). Multi-party systems, in sum, do a better job of articulating and providing voice to a diverse range of interests.

Representativeness and accountability are clearly at odds with each other, though. A party system cannot maximize on both. If voters are offered only two alternatives, the choice is efficient -- it is easy for voters to select among competing government options. But only two choices are bound to leave many voters feeling inadequately represented, whoever may win. On the other hand, if there are many viable choices, voters may have a better chance of finding a party that matches their preferences, but assessing responsibility and directing the preferred composition of the government by means of the vote will be more difficult (Shugart and Carey 1992). Parliamentary systems that afford voters clear governmental accountability are low on responsiveness; those that score high on responsiveness seldom afford clear governmental accountability (Powell 1989).

Although we know much about how electoral arrangements affect the electoral styles of political parties (e.g. Katz 1980), we know little about the impact of different party systems on beliefs and behavior of ordinary people. Whether two-party or multi-party systems best facilitate democracy depends on how citizens think, what they know, and how they choose.

Do citizens in fact have more trouble assigning blame under a multiparty than two-party system, making accountability lower? How is blame handed out to members of a coalition government? Is identifiability of the government that will emerge after the election really lower in multi-party systems or are the coalitions fairly predictable? (See, for example, Laver and Shepsle 1990; Valen 1992; Huber and Powell 1993.)

How does voter choice differ between two-party and multi-party systems? Do two parties really simplify the voter's task, and do many parties make things more confusing? In multi-party systems is a citizen better able to find a party that approximates her ideal point (Huber 1993; Strom 1990)? When parties stake out ideologically distinct positions on salient issues, do citizens have an easier time perceiving where the parties stand than when party positions are muddled? As the ideological distinctiveness of parties grows, is there a parallel increase in the intensity with which mass publics hold their opinions, in the ideological coherence that underlies those opinions, or in the impact of issues on vote choice?

Does strategic voting mitigate the representational benefits claimed for multi-party systems? Under what circumstances will voters decide to throw their support to a larger party that has a chance of winning a seat? What is the impact on ordinary citizens of the parties acting strategically by entering into alliances with other parties through joint lists, list alliances, or through legislative or portfolio coalition? Do voters get confused about the position of the various parties in the coalition? Does party attachment and loyalty go down?

Parties can also be thought of as organizations, and as such, they differ enormously in structure and strength (Katz 1980; Mayhew 1986; Mainwaring 1988; McDonald and Ruhl 1989; Dix 1992; Janda 1993). In some systems, parties are strong: the party maintains control over resources and nominations; there are local, regional, and national organizations; there is formal party membership; local party organizations play an important role in the social life of citizens (Michels 1962; Duverger 1954; Gosnell 1968; Banfield and Wilson 1963; Wilson 1962, 1973). In other systems political parties are relatively weak (Mayhew 1986).

In recent decades, parties have declined as other institutions have taken over many of their traditional functions (Ware 1985; Flanagan and Dalton 1984). Interest groups press citizen concerns outside of party channels; the mass media inform and mobilize (Ranney 1983; Semetko, et al. 1991); party leaders have lost their grip over the slating of candidates (Katz 1986); centralized, capital intensive, professional campaign organizations have replaced decentralized, labor intensive, grassroots political organizations.

Does it matter whether parties are weak or strong? Do strong parties do a better job of educating the electorate and structuring their political outlooks than do weak parties (Kleppner 1982; McGerr 1986)? Are citizens more attached or more loyal to strong parties than to weak ones? What types of party organizations are most effective at mobilizing citizens to action and what impact does party mobilization have on citizens' political beliefs, information about politics, stands on issues, party loyalty and likelihood of participating in politics? Does mobilization have an equalizing effect because it incorporates into electoral coalitions citizens (often the havenots) who otherwise would not take part in politics (Schattschneider 1942; Key 1949; Dahl 1966)?

Encapsulizing Political Conflict

One way to assess differences among party systems is to examine how well they "encapsulate conflict." How well do party systems constrain social divisions to ameliorate social conflict (Bartolini and Mair 1990, pp. 1-2)? We suggest three issue domains -- economic change; ethnic and racial conflict; and global environmental change -- that we think will provide opportunities for understanding the way in which party systems encapsulate conflict.

Economic Change

The international economy is undergoing profound changes. In Eastern Europe and parts of Asia, market economies are replacing systems of central economic planning. Efforts to attract western investment, trade, and economic aid have expanded as the former Soviet Union and its satellite states strive toward greater economic integration with the West. In Western Europe, under the European Union, capital, goods, and labor are moving more freely among member states. From Brussels come regulations on everything from taxes to farm subsidies, to auto safety and air pollution standards. With the lowering of barriers to international trade and the globalization of the world economy has come the birth of new economic sectors and the death of others. Some citizens, in some countries, in some economic sectors are thriving; others are failing.

What are the political consequences of these economic changes? Has there been a shift in the expectations and demands that citizens place on government? How have these economic changes affected the nature of political cleavages and party coalitions as manifested in opinion, vote choice, party allegiance, and alliances among social groups and economic sectors? How do differing levels and duration of unemployment influence the relationship between economics and voting? Does this relationship vary according to differences in economic structure? Is there a relationship between the longterm strength of a nation's economy and attitudes towards democracy?

While much is known about the relationship between short-term economic changes and electoral choice within individual countries, [5](#) we know little if anything about how political parties exploit or ameliorate the political conflict that emerges from moments of profound economic change. We know little about how differences in political and economic systems impact on the nature of the relationship between economics and politics.

The Politics of Ethnic and Racial Conflict

The eruption of ethnic and racial conflict all over the world provides a second case in point. Poverty, civil war, unemployment and the lack of economic opportunity have led hundreds of thousands of people to flee Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Central and South America to seek work and asylum in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. The numbers have more than doubled over the last five years. Coupled with faltering economies, the rise in immigrants has led to increased hostility against foreign workers, immigrants, refugees, and racial minorities. Manifestations of this hostility regularly dot the headlines of the international press: vicious attacks by skinheads in Germany against immigrants; ethnic cleansing in Bosnia; assaults against Asian students in the U.S; tensions between nationalists and ethnic Turks in Bulgaria; the awakening of racial identity in Uruguay. The political manifestations of this hostility are visible in the rise of parties and candidates that have championed anti-immigrant themes: the neo-Nazi movement and Republicans in Germany; the anti-immigrant Freedom Party in Austria; the British National Party; Le Pen's National Front in France; and the nativist campaigns of Patrick Buchanan and David Duke in the United States, to name a few. New laws to tighten restrictions on immigration are sweeping Europe.

There are several questions to explore here. What are the electoral consequences of racial, ethnic, and anti-immigrant hostility? What kinds of party systems exacerbate the conflict; which ameliorate it; or is this kind of conflict simply unaffected by variations in the number and nature of political parties? What difference does it make, if any, whether racial, ethnic, and anti-immigrant hostility is institutionalized, as parties form or change to give expression to these sentiments?

Global Environmental Change

Conflict over environmental policy provides the third case. Population growth, industrialization, and the concentration of people into urban centers are placing steep demands on the world's natural resources. Global environmental changes of profound proportions are taking place. Some scientists argue that these changes to the global environment threaten the very inhabitability of the earth.

A wide range of public policy questions -- from loss of bio-diversity, to hazardous waste disposal, energy conservation, and air and water pollution arise from these global changes. The political manifestations of the debate over these policy questions are plainly visible. Social movements, political groups and parties have organized to shape public opinion, social and political behavior, to influence who gets elected to public office, and to prevail on the kinds of policies that governments and the private industry adopt. The environmental movement has brought about tremendous social and political change, particularly in Western Europe (Kitschelt 1989).

No nation will be able to escape coping with these environmental issues over the next decade. The pressure to face the consequences of water pollution, carbon dioxide emissions, and climatic change, for example, will arise both from political groups and environmental problems within national borders, and from the deliberations and actions that international bodies (such as in the European Commission or the Earth Summit) take in response to changes in the global environment.

We are interested in understanding the political manifestations of environmental issues: the nature of public opinion on environmental policy questions, the antecedents of those opinions, and the broader consequences of all this for politics. How do ordinary citizens come to understand such profound and complicated issues? How do these issues get politicized (Downs 1972)? What kinds of citizens are politicized first (Zaller 1992)? What is the process by which parties mobilize public opinion into political advantage? How do environmental issues get played out in national political campaigns and with what electoral consequences? What effect does this have on electoral alignments and election outcomes (Kitschelt 1988, 1989; Rudig and Franklin 1992; Rudig 1991; Frankland and Schoonmaker 1992)?

How do different party systems cope with conflict that arising over the environment? Do some party systems encapsulate conflict over environmental issues better than do others? What strategies do party elites pursue to ameliorate or exacerbate conflict over environmental issues and with what effect? What kinds of party systems are better able to insulate themselves from environmental issues and from the disruptions they may cause to

existing political alignments? What impact do environmental issues have on the ways that citizens evaluate political parties and candidates and on electoral choice?

Clearly, an international inquiry into environmental politics must attend to the Greens. By the end of the 1980s every country in western and northern Europe had a party known as the Greens or by some similar name (e.g. Green List in Italy, Green Alliance in Ireland and Finland, Green Alternatives in Austria, Green Ecology Party in Sweden, Ecologist Party in Belgium). Many of them controlled seats in national parliaments. Green parties developed overseas in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina and Chile, as well. And after the revolutions of 1989, Green parties or groups emerged in eastern Europe. Although the origins and structure of some of these parties has been researched (e.g. Kitschelt 1989; Rudig 1990; Rudig and Franklin 1992), little is known about the circumstances and institutional arrangements that favor their success.

Political Alignment in the Face of Social Change

Lipset and Rokkan's (1967, p. 13) claim that "the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s" set in motion a torrent of research. The class, religious, ethnic, linguistic, and regional foundations of party alignments have all been documented, and in the beginning it appeared that in Western democracies, at least, electoral stability prevailed as Lipset and Rokkan had predicted (Alford 1967; Rose and Urwin 1969, 1970; Lijphart 1979; Lijphart 1980; and Dix 1989).

Over the last three decades, however, electoral alignments have weakened, party strength has grown increasingly volatile, and party systems have become increasingly fragmented.⁶ In Belgium, Switzerland, Canada, and Britain, for example, voters have thrown new electoral support to parties based upon linguistic and ethnic cleavages long thought to have been depoliticized. Elsewhere new parties have championed causes that cut across existing party lines: constitutional reform for Dutch Democrats, traditional morality for new Christian Democratic parties in some Scandinavian countries, tax reductions for Glistrup's party in Denmark, and civil liberties for the Italian Radicals. Electoral support for parties of the left has declined across Europe. Ecological or "green" parties have placed environmental issues on the political agenda, slowly increasing year to year their share of the popular vote (Franklin, Mackie, and Valen 1992). These developments have not only transformed the nature of their party systems, they have called into question the relevance of the social cleavages that had once prevailed.⁷

As a consequence of these trends, social cleavages no longer explain vote choice the way they once did (Inglehart 1977; Clarke, et al. 1980; Rose 1982; Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck 1984; Borre 1984; Dalton 1988; Dix 1989; Franklin, et al. 1992; Klingemann and Wattenberg 1992). As social cleavages have diminished, so too have partisan ties. The evidence of party decline is widespread: it is apparent in Britain (Sarlvik and Crewe 1983), Germany (Dalton 1992), France (Beck 1984), the Netherlands, Italy, Scandinavia (Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck 1984), and Australia (McAllister forthcoming; also see Czudnowski 1976; Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck 1984; Holmberg 1992; Percheron and Jennings 1981; Wolinetz 1988; Klingemann and Wattenberg 1992).

Lipset and Rokkan's social structural paradigm implied that citizens cast ballots not as the autonomous individuals beloved of liberal theorists but as members of social groupings. But with traditional cleavages playing a less important role now than in the past, new explanations of vote choice are obviously required. What is needed, in short, is a genuinely comparative cross-national study of electoral alignments in the face of social change (see Franklin, Mackie, and Valen 1992).

Study Design

The many important questions we have raised about the consequences of electoral systems are empirical matters and wide-open. Taken together, they mandate a particular study design. First, the study must include citizens living under different combinations of institutional arrangements that shape the conduct of elections and the organization of parties. Second, within each polity we need to gather both micro-level data on the opinions, beliefs, and behaviors of ordinary citizens and macro-level data on the political parties and on the institutional arrangements that characterize the electoral system. We presume that institutional arrangements affect how

citizens make sense of and take part in politics. Along with Kaase, we insist that although "voting behavior must be studied individually and can be measured individually . . . it cannot be explained by relying on the study of individuals alone. Individuals are embedded in institutional, organizational and local contexts" (1987, p. 485).

Third, the data must be collected in a comparable fashion across polities to permit valid comparisons. This means, among other things, comparable survey questions embedded in comparable instruments, administered through comparable field procedures. Finally, the data need to be organized in a fashion that will facilitate comparative analysis.

This design will support a variety of analytic strategies that exploit the connections between macro- and micro-levels of analysis (Rokkan 1970). These data permit analysis of the impact of macro-level variables (the institutional arrangements that govern elections) on micro-level variables (the political beliefs and behaviors of ordinary citizens). The data will also support micro-micro comparisons for those who wish to examine relationships among individual characteristics, opinions, predispositions, choices, and behaviors; micro-macro studies concerned with the effects of the attitudes and decisions of citizens on the policies, strategies and tactics of the parties (e.g. Strom 1990; Huber 1993) and on the electoral system as a whole and on government output; as well as macro-macro investigations concerned with the ways in which institutional structures affect the maintenance, legitimation and stabilization of political systems.

With these considerations in mind, we envision a broad, international collaboration among election studies conducted in the world's democracies. Social scientists within each country will be responsible for securing funding and managing the implementation of their country's national election survey. Each study will devote a portion of its questionnaire to items that grow out of this collaboration. We invite participation from election studies conducted in both consolidated democracies and those undergoing democratic transition. Although the impact of electoral institutions and the nature of political choices may be quite different across these two sets of regimes, analysts may choose to restrict analysis to one of the two regime types to thus focus on nations that are similar in some respects, though dissimilar with respect to other variables on which one might want to make comparisons. On the other hand, allowing broad and systematic comparison between citizens and electoral institutions in consolidated regimes to those in nations undergoing the transition to democracy, will allow one to answer some of the most pressing questions about democratic consolidation. What differences exist across regime types in the attachment to and evaluation of political parties and the political regime? What differences are there in the extent to which citizens embrace democratic norms and values?

We think the number of collaborators should be as inclusive as possible both to ensure that all kinds of democratic regimes are represented in the study and, more pragmatically, to help overcome the classic problem in comparative analysis: many variables, but few cases (Lijphart 1971; Jackman 1985; Collier 1991).

Survey Instrumentation

We envision that the development of survey instrumentation will be a collaborative effort that will build upon an international planning process, pilot work, and pretesting, which we describe in more detail below. Here we indicate, selectively and schematically, the kinds of measures that need to be considered for inclusion in this international collaboration to pursue the substantive and theoretical concerns introduced above. Some of this instrumentation is already in hand; some must be developed over the next two years.

We obviously need to measure vote choice in national elections as well as the nature and level of citizen participation in electoral politics. We must keep in mind that understanding political participation requires an appreciation of the ways that political parties and other organizations mobilize citizens both directly and through social networks.

To understand whether the number and ideological distinctiveness of political parties affect citizens' political opinions and the ideological coherence that might underlie those opinions, we need to know people's views on public policy questions as well as the underlying values and predispositions that might structure those opinions.

A key to understanding the consequences of differences in the number, ideological distinctiveness, and organizational strength of parties is understanding the nature of the relationship between citizens and political parties. Part of the task is to assess how people evaluate and identify with parties. To identify which electoral arrangements make it easier for voters to assess the positions of parties and to find a choice close to their ideal point, requires that we measure not only voters' issue positions, but their perceptions of the parties' positions as well. Such information will also make it possible to identify the political circumstances that prompt voters to act sincerely; to act strategically; or to act out of ignorance.

To assess the impact of electoral laws on strategic voting will also require measures of the perceived electoral viability of each political party. How likely is it that the party will capture a seat in the electoral district or that it will help organize the government? We need to know whether voters regard some options as wasted votes.

Elections are also opportunities for citizens to endorse or repudiate the performance of the incumbent government. Measures of citizens' retrospective evaluations of the government performance will enable us to assess how electoral institutions, divided control of government, and party participation in a governing coalition affect the capacity of citizens to sort out who is to blame and to translate that blame into sanctions at election time. New instrumentation will need to be developed to measure retrospective evaluations beyond the economic domain.

To figure out whether voters in presidential systems give excessive weight to the personal attributes of candidates will require textured measures of voters' perceptions of party leaders and candidates. How do citizens evaluate the personal character of leaders and candidates and under what circumstances do these assessments affect vote choice.

To determine whether citizens in presidential systems are closer to their representatives than are their counterparts in parliamentary systems requires measures of the various ways citizens interact with their representatives.

To examine the capacity of different party systems to "encapsulate conflict" will focus on conflicts that arise over economic, environmental, racial and ethnic difference.

Macro-Level Data

To implement a comparative study of electoral systems also requires data on the attributes of the social, economic, political, and institutional settings in which citizens find themselves. We think that international teams of social scientists should collaborate to collect macro-data that can be wedded to the individual level data collected in each polity. Data on electoral institutions are readily available from a number of published sources (e.g. Rose 1974; Mackie and Rose 1991). Several teams of social scientists are already gathering data on political parties, their organizational structure and their political positions (e.g. Katz and Mair 1992; European Consortium for Political Research Manifestos Group 1992). Social scientists interested in understanding the impact of the media on public opinion and electoral choice (e.g. Semetko, et al. 1991) should join together to gather data that can be used in conjunction with the individual level survey data on candidate evaluation, issue agendas, and electoral choice. Another team of researchers may collect aggregate data on inequality, discrimination, immigration, and population size and concentration (matched as closely as possible to each survey respondent's jurisdiction) in service to the theme of racial and ethnic conflict. And, to fully realize the power of the comparative analysis of the capacity of different political systems to encapsulate conflict over environmental policy, we need information about the changing environmental conditions that respondents face.

Study Planning

The Berlin Conference represents the first step in the international planning process. The central purpose of the Conference is to bring together social scientists and directors of national election studies who are interested in joining in this international effort and to begin to forge a consensus around the substantive themes that should guide this collaborative enterprise.

We have good reason to believe that this international collaboration will succeed. First, initial discussions among members of ICORE and other social scientists who conduct election studies elsewhere in Europe, in the Americas, and in Asia have been met with enthusiasm both for the collaborative effort itself and for the various topics which have been proposed as possible themes along which to organize research efforts. Second, as perusal of election study questionnaires currently in use around the world will reveal, there is a substantial amount of overlap in the themes (and in many cases the questions).

There is, however, a big difference between overlap in themes and survey questions and fully comparable, coordinated, data collections. We envision that from the Berlin Conference several working committees will emerge to formulate concrete proposals on various aspects of the study design and instrumentation. Funding is in hand to bring together in 1995 a subset of the participants in the Berlin Conference to work out the careful and detailed planning will be needed to insure comparable data collections across political systems. Sample design and field procedures must be standardized. Measures must be valid and reliable both within and across political and cultural settings. Survey questions, response categories, and question order need to be comparable (Przeworski and Teune 1970; Kish 1993). Questionnaires will need to be translated and back-translated. Following this second conference there will be ample opportunity for the piloting and pretesting of new instrumentation in a variety of polities before the actual field work begins in 1996.

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FOOTNOTES

1. There is great variation within each of these ideal types. In parliamentary systems the position of the prime minister ranges between one of preeminence to one of virtual equality with the other ministers (Lijphart 1984). In some presidential systems, the president has extraordinary legislative (and non-legislative) powers (as in the United States), while in others, the executive is so weak that the system is difficult to distinguish from a parliamentary one (Shugart and Carey 1992).

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2. Majority, plurality, and proportional representation constitute the three broad types of electoral formula, though there is great variation in the specific voting rules used to compute winners and losers within each system (Rae 1971; Lijphart and Grofman 1984). District magnitude is the number of seats that are chosen within a legislative district. Threshold constitutes the minimum percentage of the popular vote in a district a party must receive before it is eligible to obtain a seat. Categorical ballots permit citizens to vote for only one party competing for the office. Ordinal ballots permit voters to divide their votes among candidates or different parties or to vote in a manner that expresses their preference ordering among the parties or candidates (Rae 1971). In presidential systems, legislative elections can either be concurrent with the presidential election, non-concurrent, or both.

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3. See Schattschneider 1942; Key 1949; Downs 1957; Dahl 1966; Epstein 1967; Huntington 1968; Sartori 1976; Sorauf 1976; Lawson 1980; and Eldersveld 1982.

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4. Proportional representation, large district magnitudes, low thresholds and multiple social divisions encourage more parties (Powell 1982; Lijphart 1984; Taagepera and Grofman 1985).

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5. Fiorina 1981a; Eulau and Lewis-Beck 1985; Hibbs 1987; Lewis-Beck 1988; Kinder and Kiewiet 1981; Norpoth, Lewis-Beck, and Lafay 1991; Clarke and Whitely 1990; Powell and Whitten 1993.
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6. Pedersen 1979; Wolinetz 1979; Maguire 1983; Mair 1983; Saarlvik and Crewe 1983; Dix 1984; Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck 1984; Crew and Denver 1985; Wolinetz 1988. Looking over a longer haul (1885-1985), Bartolini and Mair find that there is no trend in the volatility of electoral results. The increase in instability that took place since the 1960s is not exceptional when put into a broader historical context.
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7. Why have traditional social cleavages declined? Rural sectors have diminished. Education has increased. Mass communication has cut across traditional religious, group, and class based forms of political learning. Fewer people are socially integrated into traditional class or religious networks or share the values of these milieu. Society has grown more secular. Economic conflicts are still salient, but social class is a poor guide to one's positions on such issues as tax reform privatization of government services, or deficit spending. Out of economic growth and security have grown new values and issues that cut across traditional social divisions (Inglehart 1977, 1990; Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck 1984; Dalton 1988).
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