



WZB

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für Sozialforschung



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Meaningful Choices. Substantive Theme and Intellectual Context of Module 3 of the CSES.

Hermann Schmitt & Bernhard Wessels

Observation:

- We know a lot about how and why voters vote
- We do know little about how and why voters vote depending on how they can vote

Resulting Question

- How do choice sets/choice options effect voting and the rational of voting?

Meaningful Choices - Theory, Concept, Relevance

Elections:

only electoral democracy
or meaningful elections?

Prerequisites of polyarchy/democracy
(Robert Dahl):

- effective participation
- control of the agenda

Consensus among the varying concepts/theories of democracy:

- Democracy implies choices
- Choices should have effects

Thus, democracy needs

Meaningful choices. Definition

distinctiveness of choice options

effectiveness of the electoral linkage

Meaningful choices

—Match between demand and supply

Precondition

—Supply: Choice set is differentiated

—Demand: Voter's choice is structured

Choice set

- What: agenda
- How: policies
- Who: actors (candidates; parties)

Evaluative criteria

(retrospective/prospective):

- ideology/positions of actors
- Performance of actors

Institutions condition choices and their effectiveness

- **Openness of the electoral system**

 - i.e. majoritarian/proportional; hurdles;
proportionality; type of vote

- **Openness of the party system**

 - i.e. rules for the establishment of parties

- **Type of government**

 - i.e. single party, coalition, presidential

Hypotheses on Choices and Behavior I

likely determinants of distinctiveness and effectiveness

- cleavage structure
- format of the party system
- ideological polarization of party competition
(declining due to dealignment and the demise of communism)
- divided government and more generally multi-level governance

Hypotheses on Choices and Behavior II

reasons of a possible decline/absence of meaning in the choice set

- dealignment and the growing homogenization of societies
- change of parties and how voters relate to them
- modern campaigning

Hypotheses on Choices and Behavior III

likely voters reactions if choices cease to be meaningful

- turnout decline
- rise of anti-system parties
- decline of system support

Indicators of a Meaningful Choice Set (Micro)

Policy and ideological differences between the different choice options:

- perceptions and evaluations of differences in issue positions and/or issue emphasis of parties and/or candidates
- perceptions and evaluations of ideological distances between parties and/or candidates

Performance and competence differences between the different choice options:

- measures of competence of parties and/or candidates in order to discount policies or ideologies

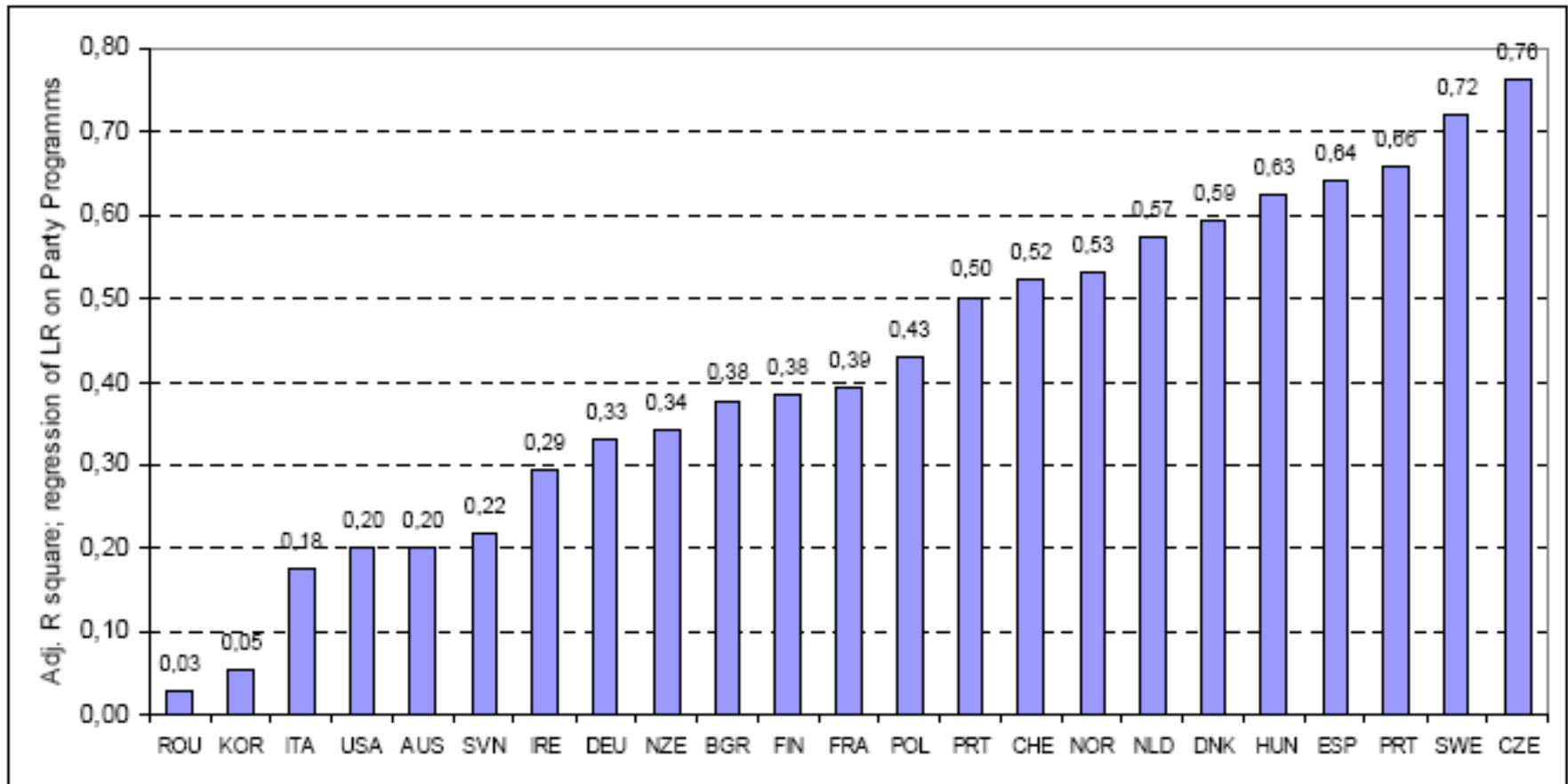
Perceived actor constellations:

- identifiability of alternative governments (or government coalitions)

<i>competence and performance of actors</i>
most important problem (MIP)
party/candidate competency MIP
second most important problem (SMIP)
party/candidate competency SMIP
third most important problem (TMIP)
party/candidate competency TMIP
government performance in general
<i>distinctiveness of choice options and inclusiveness of choice set</i>
difference between parties in campaign
hypothetical choice if voting compulsory
alternative choice
negative choice

Wessels/Schmitt, forthcoming in Thomassen

Figure 2: R^2 , Regression of Perception of Parties' L-R Positions on 14 Factor Scales



Source: Regression model as in table 3, R square from country-wise regressions.

Logit (pVote Choice) = a

+ b1*LR Distance

+ b2*Party Rating

+ b3*Party Representation

+ b4*Clarity of Policy Positions

+ b5*Eff. Parties

+ b6*LR Range

+ b7*LR Differentiation

+ *b8*(LR Distance*Clarity of Policy Positions)*

Figure 3: Marginal Effect of Proximity conditioned by the Strength of Re-Conceptualization of Policy Positions in Election Platforms on the Left-Right Scale

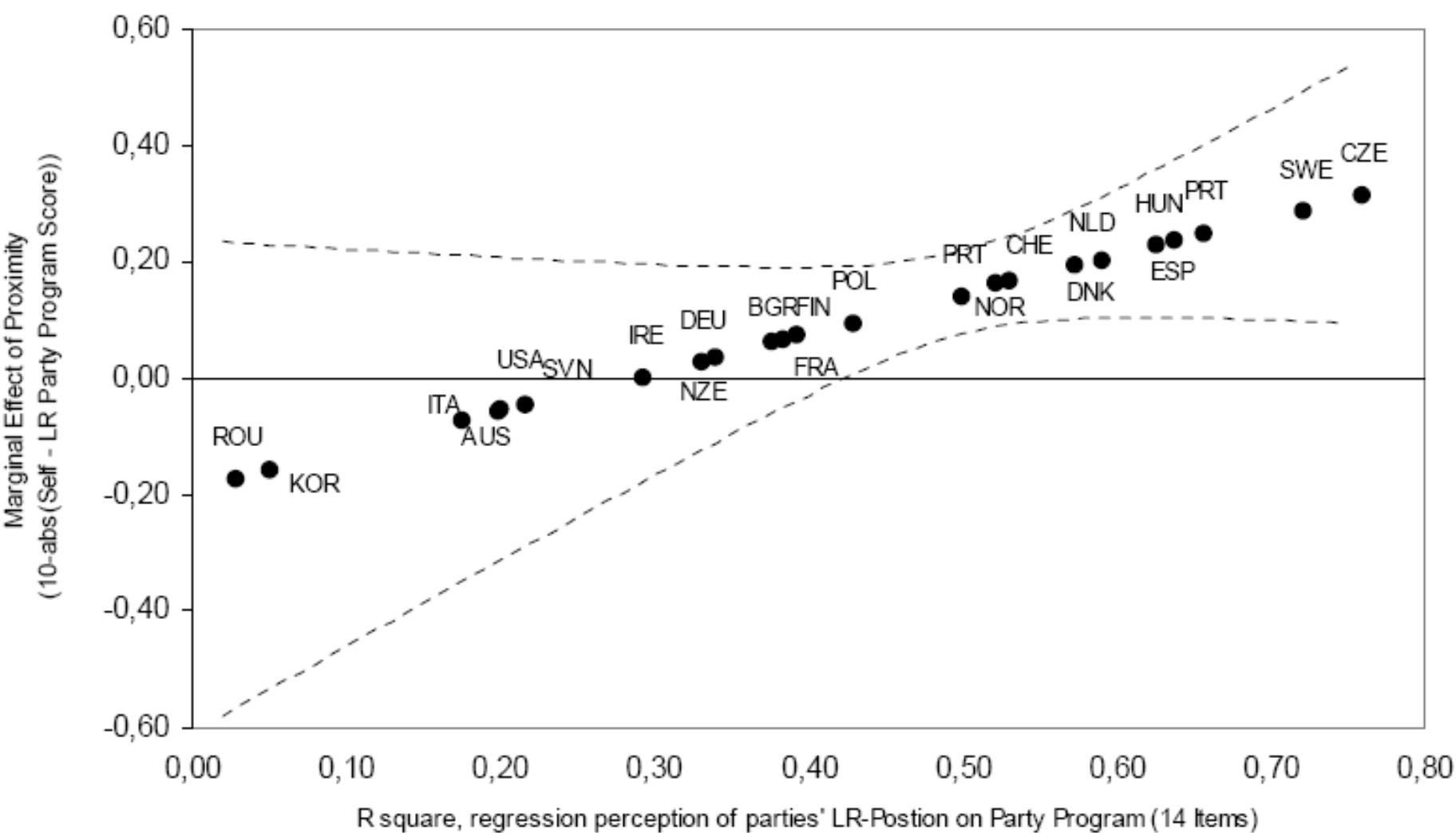
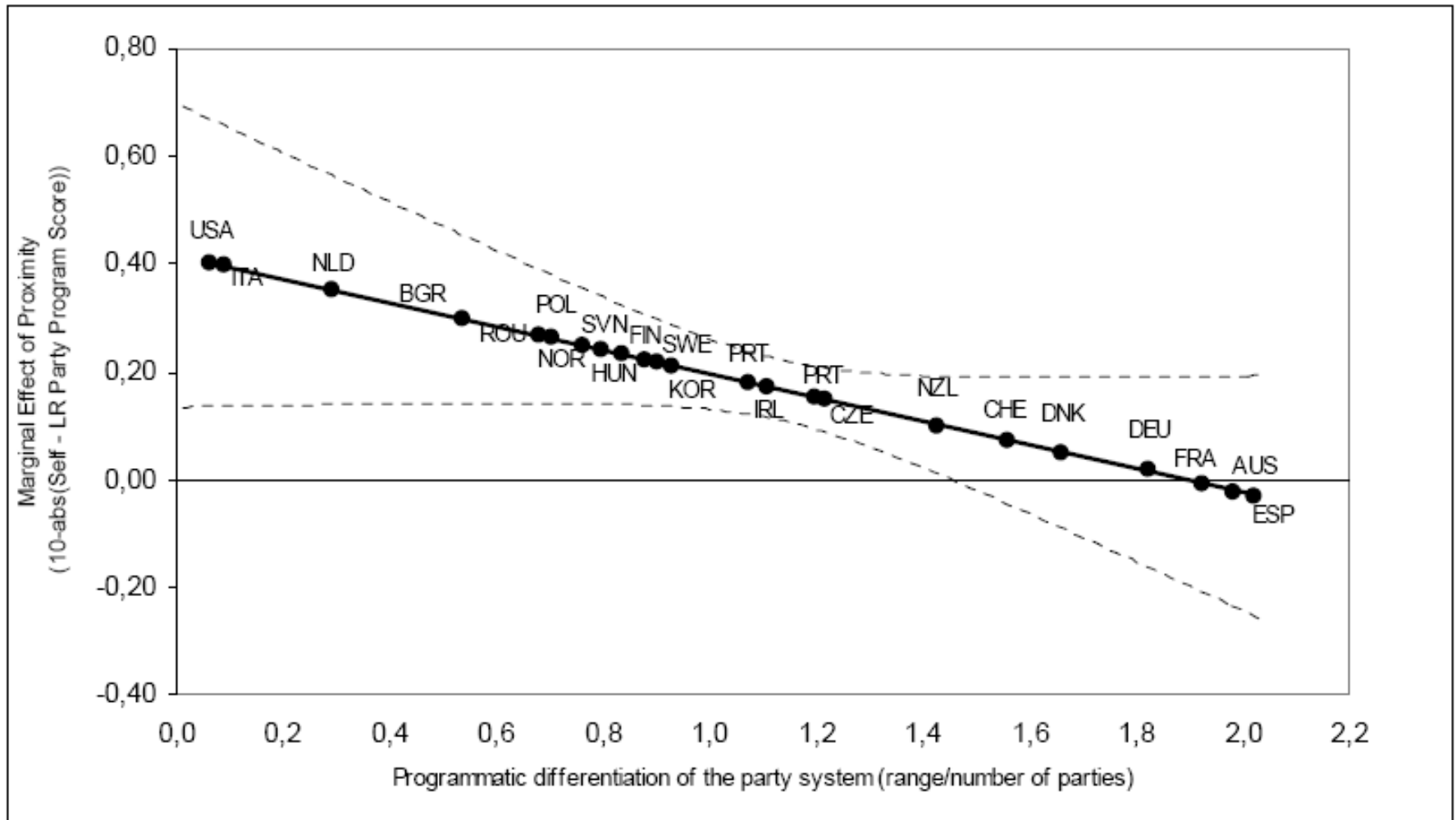


Figure 7:

Marginal Effect of Proximity conditioned by the Left-Right Differentiation of Political Supply



Survey questions

Q1a. >>> MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE - EGOCENTRIC –

TEXT: What has been the most important issue to you personally in this election?

Q1b. >>> MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE - EGOCENTRIC –

TEXT: What has been the second most important issue to you personally in this election?

Q3a. >>> PARTY/CANDIDATE COMPETENCE - FIRST
SOCIOTROPIC PROBLEM

TEXT: Thinking of the most important political problem facing [COUNTRY] which [party/presidential candidate] do you think is best in dealing with it?

- Q4. >>> WHO IS IN POWER CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE
- Q5. >>> WHO PEOPLE VOTE FOR MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE
- Q6. >>> GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE: GENERAL
- Q7. >>> IS THERE A PARTY THAT REPRESENTS RESPONDENT'S VIEWS
- Q7a. >>> PARTY THAT REPRESENTS RESPONDENT'S VIEWS BEST
- Q8. >>> IS THERE A LEADER THAT REPRESENTS RESPONDENT'S VIEWS
- Q8a. >>> LEADER THAT REPRESENTS RESPONDENT'S VIEWS BEST

- Q9a. >>> LIKE-DISLIKE – PARTY
- Q10a. >>> LIKE-DISLIKE – LEADER
- Q11a >>> LEFT-RIGHT - PARTY A
- Q12a >>> LEFT-RIGHT - LEADER A
- Q13. >>> LEFT-RIGHT – SELF
- Q17. >>> DIFFERENCES OF CHOICE OPTIONS

During the election campaign, would you say that there were major differences between the [parties/ candidates], minor differences, or no differences at all?

- Q18. >>> CAMPAIGN INVOLVEMENT
- Q19. >>> SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRATIC PROCESS
- Q20. >>> ARE YOU CLOSE TO ANY POLITICAL PARTY