# Voters' Perceptions
# of Party Politics

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## - A Multilevel Approach

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From a late night conversation between two taxi
drivers waiting for customers in central Uppsala,
2007:

Driver 1: *"It's annoying when customers cannot
separate left from right."*

Driver 2: *"Yeah, but I think most Swedes have a
problem with that. Everyone who rides with me
dislikes the moderates[1], but still they won the elec-
tion"*.

(quoted in Rasti, Claesson, Fjellborg, and Jonason
(2007:8), translation mine)

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[1] Moderates = The Swedish conservative party, Moderata samlingspartiet.

# Contents

# Acknowledgments

The acknowledgments are among the first things that you meet when opening a doctoral thesis. Surprisingly often, it is notable just how many people were involved in the projects, judging by the thanks being offered; yet many suppose that the writing of a doctoral thesis is a rather lonely journey.

Almost every time I have looked at the dedications in various books, I ended up concluding confidently that my own acknowledgments would be very short. This intended brevity was and is due to my sincere intention to thank only those who contributed substantially to the project (this should not be understood as arrogance but rather as a sincere thankfulness to those who helped improved my work and supported me during the years).

Now that my project is ending and it is time to consider to whom I owe a debt of gratitude, I recognize that these acknowledgments will not be that short after all, and thus that the journey has not been that lonely.

I thank primarily my first supervisor Mikael Gilljam for always giving sharp, sensible and careful comments. In particular I appreciate your often very straight forward opinions, even if at the time they seemed sometimes a little too straight forward. I am also in great debt to my second supervisor, collaborator and friend Henrik Oscarsson who has always been helpful, supportive and a great source of inspiration. Working with you has taught me as much about the craftsmanship of doing empirical research as have all the books I read during these years.

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# Introduction


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### Introduction

Modern representative democracies are most properly described as government by the consent of the governed rather than government by the people (Manin 1997; Schattschneider 1960). Elections are central to the democratic process and several scholars of modern democratic theory have struggled to determine the circumstances under which meaningful and effective representation can exist. One of the more prominent models used for theorizing on these matters is the responsible party model (RPM), which outlines a number of conditions that must be met in order for public policies to reflect mass opinion. In the RPM parties are assumed to present prospective policy programs during the election campaigns and so provide the basis for the choices voters will make. The voters are assumed to vote for the party whose policy program is closest to their own policy preferences. The elections are in this context reckoned as a process of mandate giving and when in government, parties will strive to fulfill the mandate by implementing their policy programs. Elections should thus function as a mechanism for generating agreement in the opinions of the voters and their elected representatives (Adams 2001; APSA 1950; Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Pennings 1998; Thomassen 1999).

Voters' perceptions of parties' policy positions are essential since democratic representation, conceived here as the correspondence between public policies and attitudes among voters, is unlikely to result from elections in which voters do not know where the parties stand or strongly disagree among themselves about the positions of parties. Under such a circumstance, the mandate apparently given would not necessarily reflect policies desired by a majority of the voters (Berelson 1952; Downs 1957; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; Stokes 1963; van der Brug 1997).

Several studies have demonstrated that voters often are relatively uninformed about political matters (Bartels 1996; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Carpini and Keeter 1996; Converse 1964; Page and Shapiro 1992; Petersson 1998 *et al.*), and that voters often disagree in their

15

perceptions of the positions held by parties or candidates (Berelson 1952; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; van der Eijk, Franklin, *et al.* 1996). For example, in the American presidential election of 1948, Berelson found that only about 16 percent of the voters perceived the two candidates correctly (Berelson 1952). There are, however, just a few studies that have uncovered occasions where large collective misperceptions among voters have occurred (Converse 1975; Granberg 1985). More commonly, the aggregated mean or median perception among voters when placing parties or candidates on various scales tends to be a reasonably accurate representation of reality (Granberg 1993; Marcus 1982; Page 1978; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b; van der Brug 1997; 1998).

The overarching research task in this book, however, is not to identify instances of large disagreement among voters or between voters and 'their' representatives. Instead, this study will focus on perceptual agreement (PA) among voters and the circumstances which (would) promote it. The term perceptual agreement refers here to the extent that voters' views of a party's policies coincide. The fact that voters collectively tend to perceive the positions of parties or candidates correctly is of course encouraging for the representative democracy. Nevertheless, even if the mean and median voter perception tends to be accurate, it does not necessarily tell us that much about the relevance of the perceptions for the vast majority of the voters. From this perspective, a high PA among voters is of particular importance for a properly functioning representative democracy. If there is no agreement among voters about what parties stand for, then the individual choices apparently guided by policy preferences will turn out to be indistinguishable from random noise. Agreement about parties' policies allows the collective outcome of such choices to be intelligible and, as such, it affects the extent to which voters are meaningfully represented in a political system. By allowing voters to make informed electoral choices, perceptual agreement is an important determinant of the outcomes of electoral processes (Granberg and Holmberg 1988; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b). It is therefore important to assess the factors that affect the extent to which voters share common perceptions of parties' policy positions.

Most research on political perceptions among voters has however, focused mostly on the impact of individual-level characteristics or cognition. Factors such as political knowledge (van der Brug 1997), left-right self placement and sympathy for a party, have proven to be influential on the accuracy and agreement in voters' perceptions (Granberg 1993; Popkin 1991). Other studies have shown that contextually related features such as differences in the political system (Granberg and Holmberg 1988) or the salience of an issue (Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Oscarsson 1998; van der Brug 1997) can influence voters' perceptions of party positions. Despite this work, not much is known about various contextual influences on vot-

ers' perceptions, *i.e.* whether the perceptual process is determined mainly by external stimulus or internal features. This is a relevant question that remains unanswered.

The aim of this book is to deepen our understanding of which factors that affect PA, *i.e.* the extent to which voters share common perceptions of parties, by introducing some questions that more or less have been absent in prior research on the subject. More specifically, the aim is to study how voters' perceptions of parties' policy positions are affected by and interact with different political-institutional contexts. The project expands existing research on policy representation in general and voters' perceptions in particular and contributes to the existing literature by addressing three sets of research questions.

Firstly, the project draws the electoral and institutional context into the research on perceptions and perceptual agreement. Just as Madison asserted two centuries ago, it is today widely believed that architectural creation of political institutions is one of the cornerstones of a well-functioning representative democratic system (cited from Ferejohn and Kuklinski 1990). Or as Key (1966) once noted, a political system gets the citizens it deserves. A common notion within the literature on electoral institutions is that the adoption of different electoral formulas creates different incentive structures for both individual voters and rational vote-seeking politicians, which affect their behavior (Farrell 1997; Norris 2004). For similar reasons, the institutional settings also might bring different incentives that will motivate and assist voters when they acquire information about the parties' policy positions. Institutional settings thus may have consequences for voters' PA.

Secondly the project brings the political parties into the PA equation. The RPM emphasizes the importance of responsible and cohesive parties that hold stable and divergent policy positions. Political parties serve as carriers of continuity, values and ideologies and are viewed as an important ingredient in representative democracy (Hoffman 2005; Katz and Mair 1995). In spite of the organizational transformations that are claimed to have occurred today, political parties rather than single candidates remain the main actors in most modern representative systems (Dalton 1985; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996). Earlier studies have shown that both voting behavior and the amount of political information among voters is affected by various features of political parties, such as political labels (Snyder 2002), the electoral size (Cox 1997; van der Eijk, Franklin, and van der Brug 1999) or their ideological positions (Macdonald, Listhaug, and Rabinowitz 1991; Macdonald and Rabinowitz 1993; Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989). Many political parties in modern times are facing problems with declining numbers of party members (Holmberg 2007; Mair and van Biezen 2001) but they still (may) play crucial and im-

portant roles as orientational instruments in the process of informing voters about political issues.

Thirdly, the study investigates how individual voters interact with factors related to the political parties and the institutional context, thereby affecting the voters' PA. Consequently, three sets of variables related to three different levels (systems, parties and individual voters) are modeled simultaneously in order to asses which factors or combination of factors has the greatest impact on PA of the voters. The study also examines to what extent differences in context might exaggerate or mitigate the tendency by individual voters to yield to 'wishful thinking' when identifying party positions (*i.e.* a tendency among individuals to place parties or candidates that they like close to themselves while those that are disliked will be pushed away when placing parties or candidates on various scales). It has, for example, been asserted that wishful thinking is a direct consequence of ambiguity and indistinctness in the political alternatives confronting voters (Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Holmberg 1999b). It has also been claimed that proportional electoral systems tend to promote more centralized party organizations that are more programmatically and ideologically oriented compared to parties in more disproportional or majoritarian systems (Holmberg 2006; Norris 2004). If this is true, we could reasonably also expect lower degrees of assimilation and contrast effects among voters in more proportional electoral system, which in turn should promote PA.

The general theme through the book is thus a normative concern with political representation and the circumstances under which effective political representation can exist. The book also provides an evaluation of the popular responsible party model. The study is based on three independent empirical studies which cover different but overlapping research fields such as voting behavior, political parties and electoral systems but have political representation in general and political perceptions among voters in particular as the common denominators. The analysis of the study is carried out by combining cross sectional time series data on individual voters with observations on party characteristics and electoral systems by using the results of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project (CSES) and the European Voter project.

The present study shows that institutions matter and that factors related to the institutional structure exert significant direct effects on voters' PA but that the political parties also mediate a series of important indirect effects on the voters. Differences related mainly to political parties followed by those of individual voters (such as behavior and characteristics) are, however, of greatest importance for shaping and affecting voters' PA.

A discussion of some of the basic requirements in the RPM for effective representation and the importance of left-right ideology as an information cue for voters follows this introduction. Next comes a discussion of the

18

dependent variable perceptual agreement and then a section on empirical and methodological considerations. The chapter closes with a presentation and summary of the results.

## A model of political representation

Regular, competitive and free elections are the main instrument for political representation in contemporary representative democratic systems (Lau and Redlawsk 2006). Elections provide citizens with an opportunity to influence the direction of public policy directly through their ballots. The participation in the policy making process is necessarily indirect since most democratic systems are very large scale. It is therefore important that on the election day, citizens are able to make informed and reasoned choices. An essential condition of representative democracy is the ability for parties and voters to communicate effectively so that voters are able to distinguish between different policy alternatives. Poor communication in this regard may seriously degenerate the quality of government. If voters' perception of a party or a candidate's position is blurred this may in the worst-case lead to serious distortions in the relationship between citizens and government with the 'wrong' policies getting enacted (Granberg and Holmberg 1988; van der Brug 1997).

In simplified models of democracy, elections constitute the link between citizens and their representatives and the latter are often viewed as delegates of the former, acting on their behalf and according to their will (Holmberg 1997; Monroe 1998; Page and Shapiro 1983; Schmitt 2000; Stimson 1995).[2] Political parties are central in this context, serving as mediators between public preferences and policy outcomes as they translate problems into programs and - when in government - translate programs into action. These steps are an intrinsic part of indirect democracies and are the heart of the mandate and sanction theory, also known as the responsi-

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[2] In reality, the relationship is more complex than this as parties not only present policy programs for the voters' to decide upon, but also try to convince the voters that their policies are the most reasonable. In the literature on models of representation, there is usually a distinction between *elite-driven* and *mass-driven* processes. Simple dichotomies may be helpful but they seldom capture the whole concept; therefore, many scholars use the concept of *dynamic representation* where the process is more or less *elite-* or *mass-driven* (Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Holmberg 1997).

ble party model.[3] The RPM has been the normative foundation in several studies concerning the functions of representative democratic systems, where it has been used to theorize about the necessary conditions for citizens to select parties or candidates that represent their policy preferences (Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Pedersen 1983; Pennings 1998).[4]

The RPM has often been criticized from a normative point of view for being a populist theory missing essential democratic values such as division of powers *i.e.* checks and balances. From an empirical perspective the model is often said to be unrealistic. The merit of the model however, is that it is useful when studying the actors and the processes of political representation in a systematic manner. The founding assumptions of the model can then be used as benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of different aspects of systems of political representation, *i.e.* the 'chain' of representative democracy (Thomassen 1999).

The RPM presumes that during an election campaign parties will present policy programs from which voters will make their choices and which will serve as a prospective mandate. Typical criteria assessed by the model are that parties should present divergent and stable policy programs so that voters are given meaningful electoral choices. With respect to the voters', the RPM assumes that in some manner voters base their decisions on a comparative evaluation of the competing policy programs and then vote for the party or candidate whose policy-program best matches with their own preferences (APSA 1950; Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Thomassen and Schmitt 1997).[5]

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[3] However, just as the voters' preferences are expected to influence how they are evaluate the policy programs of the parties' in the mandate model, the preferences of the voters are also central in the accountability model of voting. The main difference between the two models is that while the mandate model is prospective the accountability model is retrospective in the sense that voters are assumed to evaluate the parties on their past record rather than their programs for the future (Holmberg 2006). Nevertheless, the focus in this thesis is on elections viewed as a vehicle of preference aggregation through a process of mandate giving, just as in the RPM, rather than the elections as a process of sanctions and accountability.

[4] It should be noticed that the mandate theory does not necessarily imply that a representative democratic system has to rely on parties as the main actors in the shaping, the creation or the translation of the public opinion. In reality however, political parties have come to play an important roll in almost every modern democratic system (Dalton 1984; Katz and Mair 1995) even though their influence varies between countries due to factors such as the type of electoral system (Holmberg 2006).

[5] From a spatial perspective the model assumes that all issues, parties, candidates and voters can be located in an n-dimensional space, where smallest spatial distance is decisive for how voters choose to cast their ballots (Downs 1957).

The model can be summarized as:

1. There must be at least two parties that are competing with different programs.
2. The political parties should present stable and divergent policy positions so that the voters are given meaningful electoral alternatives.
3. The parties need to be internally cohesive with sufficient party discipline to enable them to implement their policy programs.
4. Voters are expected to vote rationally which implies voting for the party whose program are closest to their own preferences.
   a) Voters need to have policy preferences.
   b) They are aware of the main differences between the policy positions represented by different parties.

## Evaluating the responsible party model

The responsible party model has also been labeled 'the not so responsible party model' (Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996). It has been discussed if the model asks too much of both parties and voters. The RPM demands that voters are well-informed on the policies of the parties and that they have preferences and it prescribes that political parties behave responsibly and formulate stable and divergent policy propositions. Despite the fact that normative models in general do not need to be realistic, it is interesting to ask whether there is any empirical validity to the model or if it just reflects a normative ideal of party-based representation that is somewhat beyond the reach of reality?

Turning to the first element in the model as outlined above, it is clear that two or more parties are represented in the party system in most parliamentary democracies through out the world and especially in a European context. Furthermore, it is the political parties rather than the individual candidates that are the main actors in the parliaments (Dalton 1985; Granberg 1985; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Katz and Mair 1995).[6] From

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[6] Unless noted otherwise, the analyses in this book will focus on the perceptions of party positions rather than those of individual candidates. The knowledge about party positions is, of course, only one type of political information on which voters can base their decisions. However, the theoretical implications of this study are equally applicable to candidates.

this perspective, the first criterion of the RPM seems to be well met.

Concerning whether parties in general present stable and divergent policy positions or not, the second element of the RPM, several scholars have demonstrated a decline in ideological polarization between the major political parties in several West European party systems during the 1980's and the 1990's (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Oscarsson 1998; van der Brug 1997). Researchers on party behavior have come to a slightly different conclusion however, namely that over a longer time perspective the decline in ideological polarization is not a linear phenomenon and that parties in general are behaving as stipulated by the RPM. In contrast to the debate about the end of ideologies and the transformation of parties into 'catch-all' entities with vague election manifestos, the authors of the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) conclude that party ideologies are as vital as ever and that their ideological positions are both as stable and as diverse as required by the RPM (Adams 2001; Budge 1994; Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, and Tanenbaum 2001; Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987; Gunther and Diamond 2003; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994). The current study assumes with some justification that the second element of the RPM is adequately fulfilled.

An investigation by Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge (1994) of the relationship between the electoral policy programs of parties and the policies they enact when in power provides empirical support for the third element of the RPM. Based on ten western countries over a 40 year period, the results show a clear relationship between what politicians say and what they ultimately do. The authors conclude that election manifestos indeed predict party actions and that parties are the central actors in representative political systems (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994). Research on parties' specific election promises provides further support, in that parties are found to act on most of their promises in most systems investigated (Mansergh and Thomson 2007; Naurin (forthcoming 2009); Royed 1996).

The fourth and final element(s) of the RPM relate to individual voters and voting behavior. As set out by the RPM, political representation is only obtained if citizens vote according to their policy preferences. For several decades of research on voters and elections it was believed widely that the decisions made when voting were a result mainly of long term factors such as social alignment and partisanship (Farrell 1996). Less attention was spent on the effect of various contextual or short term factors on voting behavior. The received wisdom about voting behavior was reconsidered several times since voters from the mid-1970s onwards in both Western Europe and North America became more disposed to vote according to their policy preferences rather than to different group or party loyalties (Finkel 1993; Holmberg 2004; Lane, Martikainen, Svensson, Vogt, and Valen 1993; Narud and Aalberg 1999; Oscarsson 1998; Smith 2001). To-

day, the left-right ideology is held as the single most important predictor behind party choice in Western countries (Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; van der Eijk, Franklin, and van der Brug 1999; van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005). It would appear then, that in the last few decades the first part of the fourth element of the RPM has been met satisfactorily as well.

The final underlying criterion in the RPM (4b) asserts that voters should be informed and knowledgeable of the main differences between the parties' policy positions. In this respect the amount of political knowledge among voters is an important determinant of the quality of the outcomes of electoral processes, as it is more likely that well informed rather than ill-informed voters make electoral decisions that properly reflect their attitudes toward public policies. Of concern are several empirical studies that demonstrate that the average level of political knowledge among the citizens in many countries is modest at best (Bartels 1996; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Carpini and Keeter 1991; Carpini and Keeter 1996; Converse 1970; Petersson 1998 *et al.*). If the process of representation is to be acceptable normatively, a necessary condition that must be fulfilled is that voters have explicit preferences and that they are informed about different policy alternatives (Adams 2001; Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Naurin 2003; Pennings and Lane 1998; Thomassen 1999; van der Brug 1999a). If voters are not capable of an enlightened and educated understanding (see Dahl 1989), the idea of representative democracy is beyond reach (Lupia and McCubbins 1998).

One can conclude that at the least from a West European perspective, most aspects of the RPM are met to a large extent. Nevertheless, as stipulated by the RPM, no matter how often all the criteria above are met, if the requirement of informed and knowledgeable voters is not met then democratic representation is unattainable. Perceptual agreement is essential here as an expression of effective and successful communication within a system. PA is, hence, an indication of collective rationality and successful communication within a political system.

Next follows a discussion of how vote decisions based on agreement among voters about parties' ideological left-right positions can work as a guarantor of effective policy representation.

## Informed votes and reasoned choices – a foundation of representative democracy

For more than a half century, voters' knowledge on matters of political or societal character has been the subject of several studies. Many of these

23

studies came to the conclusion that the amount of detailed information among voters was poor in general and that the normative requirement of reasoned choice was beyond the capability of the vast majority of the citizenry (Lupia and McCubbins 1998; see for example Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960). According to Lupia and McCubbins the divergence between the necessity of delegation and citizens' incapability of reasoned choices constitutes a democratic dilemma as it threatens to reduce the idea of representative democracy to an illusion (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Many scholars and political commentators consider that the dilemma is real and that voters generally are ignorant of the details in the decisions they face (Bartels 1996; Berelson 1952; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Carpini and Keeter 1996; Converse 1964; Dean and Moran 1977; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; Key 1966; Kinder and Sears 1985; Kuklinski 2002; Luskin 1987; Page and Shapiro 1992; Petersson 1998 *et al.*; Schumpeter 1950; Zaller 1992).[7]

There is however, no consensus among researchers when it comes to questions about the levels of political information among citizens. Some scholars argue that voters are not as uninformed about political matters as some studies have reported (Holmberg 2000; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; Key 1966; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979; Oscarsson 1998; Page and Shapiro 1992). It has also been suggested that the political skills of voters have improved during the second half of the last century due to the growth of the mass-media, the development of the welfare state, rising levels of formal education and an increasing social and geographical mobility among citizens (Thomassen 2005). Those who hold that voters tend to be relatively uniformed about political matters can be divided into two sub camps: those who hold a positive view of voters' potential abilities; and those who are negatively disposed.

Among the latter group we find of those who are negatively disposed towards the individual voters' abilities and believe that a true democratic society in many ways is an illusion and those who yet still believe that a good democratic society is possible. This idea originates with Condorcet (see Page and Shapiro 1992) and relies on statistical theory indicating that individual shortcomings will equal out on average and the collective opinion will therefore be rational (Ferejohn and Kuklinski 1990; Oscarsson 1998; Page and Shapiro 1992).

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[7] A valid explanation for the often low amount of information among voters is that among most citizens the interest in politics is often moderate (Zaller 1992).

**Figure 1.** A classification of different theoretical strands about information and voting behavior
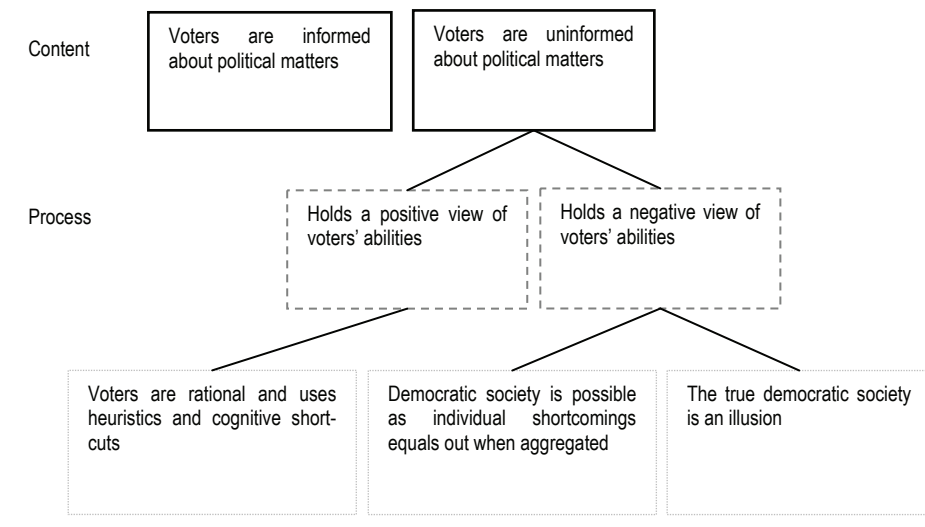


An alternative position to be found in this debate (but also constituting a bridge of sorts between the first two overarching positions) emanates from the positive tradition and argues that voters in fact are capable of making complex decisions and doing so, what is more, on the basis of very little information (Adams 2001; Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich 1984; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; Lupia 1994; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Oscarsson 1998; 2006; van der Brug 1997). The key point here is the fact that voters use heuristics in their decision making, and this is claimed to be a sufficient basis for reasoned choices (Feldman and Conover 1983; Fiske and Linville 1980; Kinder 1993; Popkin 1991; Slothuus 2008; Tomz and Sniderman 2004; Zaller 1992). Anthony Downs furthermore, argued in defense of the uniformed votes that it was irrational for a voter to be fully informed about the policies of the parties or candidates on a range of different issues. This because the costs personally are too high in relation to the collective gain from voting as one's vote drowns in the sea of other votes (Downs 1957).[8] Voters therefore sensibly use information shortcuts

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[8] According to Downs' model, governments formulate policy to satisfy as many voters as possible; but no voter will be pleased by a policy if s/he does not prefer it over the alterna-

25

when considering how to vote.[9]

## The importance of heuristics for political representation

An electorate with clear and shared perceptions of the party space has re-peatedly been identified as one important prerequisite for successful politi-cal representation (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; van der Brug 1997). A range of studies in the field of political representation focus on citizens' abilities to perceive political messages from elites, *i.e.* how well policy al-ternatives and issue positions are being communicated to citizens. In order to achieve a meaningful communication, citizens need to gain clear, shared and correct views of the main alternatives and be able to identify the most important differences between them (Berelson 1952). To manage all of this in an efficient way, rational voters use heuristics – *i.e.* ideologies, cognitive schemas or belief systems – as cost-reducing devices or cognitive shortcuts (Downs 1957; Popkin 1991; Zaller 1992).

The idea that voters can make reasoned choices on the basis of limited information is today a rather established concept within the field of voting studies. In the 1950s, for example, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954) and Downs (1957) argued that voters rely on opinion leaders, political par-ties and ideologies to overcome their information shortfalls. Anthony Downs in particular, delivered the insight in An Economic Theory of De-mocracy that parties' ideological positions serve as one of the more promi-nent cognitive cues or information short cuts for voters (see also Oscarsson 1998; Popkin 1991; van der Brug 1997). Ideologies are thus working as

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tives. In order to prefer one policy over the other, a voter needs to be informed about the alternatives. In this situation, information enables voters to have specific preferences, which in turn influence government policies that affect them. By voting, a citizen then has the op-portunity to influence the government policies for the next mandate period; and by voting on the grounds of expected performance, a voter tries to maximize his/her utility. If the utility is too low and the information cost is too high, a voter may abstain. Downs' theory assumes that peoples' perceptions of parties and policies are guided by a common underly-ing spatial structure. In a two-party system, parties and voters are normally seen as distrib-uted along a single ideological dimension, most commonly the left-right dimension. In order to maximize their vote-share parties make adjustments to their position in either direction along the conflict dimensions in an attempt to attract as many voters as possible (Downs 1957). In a multi-party system the situation is a bit more complex since the electoral competi-tion is often fought on the basis of multiple dimensions and the relative importance of the different dimensions is likely to be weighted different by each actor (Robertson 1976; Sjöblom 1968; Stokes 1963).

[9] The theory draws heavily from rational choice theory where voters are assumed to be cogni-tive misers but by using various types of information short cuts they will still be able to act rationally when deciding which candidate or party to vote for (Zaller 1992).

cognitive schemas which voters use in order to process real-world information or, to some extent, compensate for a lack thereof.[10] Downs built his theory partially on the empirical findings of the Columbia studies (see Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960), suggesting that voters mostly lack knowledge about governments and politics (Popkin 1991). Downs point was that voters' lack the incentives to collect information about political matters for the sole purpose of improving their voting choices. Note that by relying on cognitive cues and schemas voters are not sacrificing their issue orientation; instead, they are dealing with it in a more economical way (Downs 1957).[11]

Nevertheless, reasoned choices based on cognitive schemas do require some knowledge and voters have two options to gain this knowledge. Firstly, they can obtain knowledge from personal experience. Secondly, they can obtain knowledge from other voters (Lupia 1994; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). In many political situations, only the second option is available because politics can encompass problems that are unfamiliar to the voters' own experience (Lane 1995). A person who wants to make a reasoned choice consequently must have the opportunity to learn from external sources (Lupia and McCubbins 1998).

Scholars have delivered several explanations for different sources of

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[10] Party ideologies are generally reckoned as being concretized through the party program and advertised in the election manifestos, which in the U.S are often referred to as election platforms (Budge 1994). In agreement with most discussion, the concept of ideology is here understood as a value or belief system that is accepted as fact or truth by some group, composed of sets of attitudes towards the various institutions and processes of society. It provides the believer with a picture of the world both as it is and as it should be, and in so doing, it organizes the tremendous complexity of the world into something fairly simple and understandable; ideologies thus provide a cognitive structure through which to interpret and understand events (see Demker 1993; Kilander 1991; Page and Shapiro 1992 for a similar interpretation).

[11] The problem with an uninformed electorate may also be of less importance when considering the fact that factual knowledge of the kind often measured in election surveys is not always decisive for reasoned choices (Churchland 1995). Or as Page and Shapiro put it: "*Does it really matter whether people can name political figures, so long as they can find or recognize their names when needed and know something about the main candidates on the ballot? How important was it to be able to identify SALT or NATO or other acronyms, so long as people knew the United States belonged to an anti-Soviet military alliance and had talked about arms control with the USSR? Is it really necessary to know the length of terms of office? Elections come when they come, regardless*" (Page and Shapiro 1992:12). According to these authors, many of the questions about political Information in surveys are founded on more lexical matters and details, which is the main reason why voters in general are often seen as being uninformed. Page and Shapiro's point is that questions like that do not necessarily capture the essence of a reasoned choice (see also Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004).

learning *e.g.* potential cognitive cues and schemas. Some scholars argue that people rely on factors such as ideology, *i.e.* left-right position (Bobbio 1996; Budge *et al.* 2001; Oscarsson 1998; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b) social class (Oskarson 1994) and party identification (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960). How voters make choices is inherent in the varying value and usage of party cues. Party identification has traditionally been identified as a well-known and widely used voter cue (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Enelow and Hinich 1984; Fiorina 1981; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979; Popkin 1991; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). It is, however, not an equally valuable cue for all voters or in all situations. Party identification is a useful cue only if it conveys information about knowledge and trust. If voters are going to be affected by partisan appeals, they must be able to recognize speakers who share their party identification. They also must have some basis for trusting these speakers, and this may be obtained from the perception of common interests with the speakers or from their own party or from the presence of some external factor that bestows trust-worthiness on the speakers (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Other types of cues are economic or sociotropical evaluations (Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; Kumlin 2004; Pattie 2001). Certain issues are more important than others for most voters, which may imply known issue biases (Calvert 1985). According to spokesmen of the accountability model, many voters base their decisions on a retrospective evaluation of a party or a candidate, where certain histories of observed behaviors may be a guiding principle (Downs 1957; Holmberg 1999a). Alternative channels to information on political matters may emerge from a search for parties or candidates with shared policy interests or elite status (Zaller 1992). Some scholars argue that people learn from the aggregate actions of others, as represented by histories (Fiorina 1981; Key 1966), or opinion polls (McKelvey and Ordeshook 1985). Clearly, there are several types of cognitive cues accessible to voters.

It is of course an individual question as to what kind of cues a voter will make use of but it also depends on what cues are available. Election campaigns are central with regard to improving or making cues available for voters (Popkin 1991). During election campaigns, numerous speakers from political parties, interest groups, media organisations, friends and family offer advice to voters about how they should cast their ballots. Since campaigns have a framing effect they will also be important for unifying the electorate around a given set of issues, as some dimensions or cleavages will be highlighted during a campaign, and this will assist voters to make their choices (Budge *et al.* 2001; Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987; Klinge-mann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Popkin 1991).

In spite of this large body of literature, we do not know much about the

quality of the cues or how well they function. In fact, can more detailed information be substituted by cues and schemas? Lupia and McCubbins tried to answer this question by testing theories on connectionism, in experimental studies.[12] Their study confirms that voters do not necessarily need detailed political information to make a reasoned choice as the use of different cognitive cues can sufficiently inform them (Lupia 1998; 1994). In conclusion, Downs (1957) asserted that it is rational for a voter to be ignorant on political information from a cost-benefit perspective and Lupia and McCubbins showed that by using cognitive cues voters can obtain sufficient information for making reasoned choices (Lupia and McCubbins 1998 see also; Tomz and Sniderman 2004 for a similar study).

However, the debate between heuristics versus factual knowledge has become more nuanced in recent years, since different studies confronting theories about short-cuts with empirical data, have ended up with diverse and many times discouraging results (Luskin 2002). Bartels and Oscarsson for example, empirically demonstrated that 'knowledge effects' do exist in the aggregated votes of the American and Swedish electorate. The authors conclude that an extensive use of cognitive heuristics cannot fully compensate for a voter's lack of factual political knowledge (Bartels 1996; Oscarsson 2007). Other studies showed that almost all voters utilize cognitive heuristics, especially in situations where the decisions are complex and this use increases the probability of correct voting among more knowledgeable voters, but has the opposite effect among novices (Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Lau and Redlawsk 2001). Recently, Blaies et. al. presented evidence of an information effect in three out of six Canadian elections. The analysis also showed that when the positions of all parties were clearly visible for the voters, there was no information effect and the shortcuts employed by the less informed voters seemed to work efficiently. One drawback however, was that the less informed voters often did not consider the full set of available options (Blais, Gidengil, Fournier, and Nevitte 2009). It has also

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[12] Connectionism is a concept taken from the cognitive science and can best be explained as the process where people systematically connect current observations of their physical world to physical or emotional responses derived from experience. Connectionist models show how people systematically attribute meaning to new or relevant objects by connecting them with already familiar objects, procedures, or people. Connectionist activity underlies the capacity of recognizing features or patterns given only partial information and, by focusing attention on different features of one's sensory input, the ability in an instant to see complex analogies by recalling relevant information, (Lupia 1998). Reasoned choice would require encyclopaedic information without a process like connectionism, with such a process, reasoned choice requires less information (Popkin 1991).

been shown that different ideological schemes affect attitudes towards the third sector (*i.e.* voluntary, non-profit organizations) among voters in Sweden (Kumlin 2001). Yet another Swedish study, based on a self-recruited convenience sample, points towards the fact that knowledge about parties' ideological position can be used as an information rationale/cue for parties' positions on a row of underlying factual issues, even for the group of least informed voters (Dahlberg 2009).

An explanation for the variation in the results of the studies presented above, aside of differences in terms of operationalizations and research design, could be that the theories about ideological short-cuts were developed mainly in an American context. Previous studies show that there are substantial differences between the political contexts of America and Europe, with differences in the impact of ideology on voting behavior providing one of the greatest contrasts (Granberg and Holmberg 1988). It has also been suggested that different sources of information are not equally valuable in retrospective or prospective elections (Oscarsson 2007). This implies that even if theories of ideological short-cuts tend to be falsified in certain contexts, this does not necessarily mean that they lack validity in other contexts.

Prior research forms the basis of a conclusion that short-cuts cannot fully substitute for an absence of factual political knowledge but under certain circumstances and to some extent, they can be used as an information substitute that will improve individuals' behavior more than would chance alone. More research is needed before we can say anything more certain about the use and the qualities of different short-cuts and schemas. Probably it is not as simple as an either/or question but rather a matter of different ways of processing political information.

Based on prior research, I argue that if voters can make adequate electoral choices by using cognitive cues in a context of limited information, then one of the more prominent and valid information shortcuts available to them will be the parties' ideological left-right positions. The strength of the left-right dimension is that it summarizes positions on a large number of underlying issues and ultimately, does not only structure voters' preferences but may also be used as an information rationale. By being knowledgeable about the left-right dimension, information regarding the parties' left-right positions can be used as information short cuts to the parties' standpoints on several concrete issues (Downs 1957; Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; Oscarsson 1998; van der Brug 1997; 1999a). Perceptual agreement among voters on parties' ideological left-right positions can thus work as a guarantor for successful political representation.

## Ideology as a cognitive cue

History provides endless examples of the extensive use of spatial metaphors for organizing abstract social, political and religious beliefs and thought systems (Laponce 1981). In West European countries, the left-right dimension has had a major impact on voting behavior for a long time. Political actors and issues are often discussed in media or by political commentators with metaphorical reference to points on a left-right continuum (Budge *et al.* 2001; Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987; Dahlberg and Oscarsson 2006; Oscarsson 1995; Thomassen 1999; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b; van der Eijk, Franklin, and al. 1996; van der Eijk, Franklin, and van der Brug 1999).[13] Since its origin in the late 18th century, the bipolar left-right construction has shown a remarkable resilience, reproducing itself in new polities and in new historical and social contexts. The absorptive power of the left-right semantics is impressive; for instance in Europe, religious, liberal economic and materialist values all contribute to a rightist identification of citizens while secular, anti-capitalistic and post-materialist values contribute to leftist identification (Knutsen 1995a; Knutsen 1999; Mair 1997). Although the substantive meaning and interpretation of the left-right distinction has not remained the same for two hundred years – excepting for the key element of 'equality' (Bobbio 1996) – the distinction has played a crucial role as an information cost reducing device for political actors. Leaders have made extensive use of the left-right grammar for sending political messages that otherwise probably would have been incomprehensible for many voters. The left-right distinction thus has an important orientational function for individual citizens, as well as communicative function for political systems (Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Inglehart and Klingemann 1976).

Of course, the left-right dimension is not the only conflict dimension represented in most political systems.[14] One objection might be that the ideological left-right division is only valid for well-established idea-based parties, with their origins in the ideologies of the 19:th century, and does

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[13] This spatial metaphor is as old as modern representative democracy itself and has obviously survived through the centuries. The left-right dichotomy derives from the days of the French revolution where the national assembly was organised with the radicals sitting to the left and the conservatives to the right (Oscarsson 1998; Holmberg 2004)

[14] For example, the result from a study made by Paul Warwick shows that among 16 West European countries three common dimensions can be identified, where the left-right dimension is the most prominent one followed by social control and post-materialism (Warwick 2002).

not necessarily encompass interest parties or more recently emerged parties with other values, such as environmental movements etc.[15] However, Swedish election studies have shown that the left-right dimension tends to reproduce itself so that it lasts over time and embraces parties that initially do not fit in the ideological left-right dimension (Oscarsson 1998). This is also something that happened with D'66, a democratic party founded in Holland in 1966 with the aim to break up traditional cleavages and ideologies. Notwithstanding this ambition, the party soon developed into a leftist liberal party with few explicit ambitions to 'shatter' the existing party system (van der Eijk and Niemöller 1983). This implies that newcomers that survive the first critical years tend to absorb into the party system and the dominating conflict dimensions in politics such as the left-right dimension.

We cannot say for certain what the spatial left-right distinction itself has meant for the formation and functioning of Western representative democracies. It is not very controversial however, to conclude that the left-right metaphor provides a powerful base for communication and that the process of political representation is more efficient if citizens and elites share the same perceptions of the ideological landscape, utilizing a common political language.

## Potential (dis-)advantages when studying voters' perceptions of the left-right positions of political parties

Even though the left-right dimension was and still is one of the most prominent conflict dimensions in many countries there are signs that it has decreased in importance in recent years (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). This may be true to the extent that the distances between parties have been decreasing during the last decade, as in the case of Sweden (Holmberg 2000; Oscarsson 1998) and in the Netherlands. However, the results from a comparative longitudinal analysis of eight West European countries also indicate that there is a pronounced tendency for the bulk of the public to place themselves in the centre of the left-right scale (Knutsen 1998).

Nevertheless, we know from extensive previous research that a moderate-to-strong left-right dimension occurs in all countries within the Euro-

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[15] Most parties do, however, have some kind of ideological foundation. Even if a party is founded upon traditional ideological belief systems or is meant to represent the interest of a certain group of people or organized around other values, there is often a common set of ideas or values that constitutes the core of the party (Bäck and Möller 2003).

pean Union (Budge *et al.* 2001; Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Knutsen 1988; Knutsen 1989; Knutsen 1995a; van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005; Warwick 2002).[16] Recent studies have underscored the importance of left-right in European politics. Studies of perceptual accuracy – which require comparisons of elites' and citizens' positioning – have shown that European voters have fairly accurate perceptions of parties' left-right positions. Moreover, European voters are generally more accurate about left-right positions than they are for any other comparable issue dimension (van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b). Results from a recent comparative study made by Dahlberg and Oscarsson also show that European parties are scattered across most of the left-right ideological spectrum and that the left-right dimension represents a strong, and even the strongest, structuring force on citizens' political preferences (Dahlberg and Oscarsson 2006). Voters' perceptions of party positions along the left-right dimension is still very informative with regard to the main forces that shape government formation, party competition and voting behavior in a vast majority of EU countries. At least within a European context, it therefore seems as the left-right dimension still remains a relevant factor for structuring voters' party preferences. But even if political orientation is one of the strongest predictors of voting preferences, these policies will not reflect a voter's attitudes if s/he does not correctly perceive the parties' policy positions.

Voters' perceptions of party positions are influenced by the salience of an issue. Compared with other kinds of issue dimensions, the strength of the left-right dimension could be that it is not as sensitive to salience as are other position issues such as nuclear power, abortion etc. that tend to go through some kind of life-cycle (Gilljam 1988; Oscarsson 1998; van der Brug 1997).

Most political systems are, of course, best depicted as multidimensional political landscapes. However, for two important reasons this study will be limited to the left-right dimension. Firstly, the left-right dimension represents the single common denominator of most national party systems. It is more or less salient in all countries covered in this study. The second argument is of a more practical nature and concerns the fact that the left-right dimension is the only available and comparable dimension in most election studies through out the world. Furthermore, the left-right dimension is not too vulnerable to a frequent problem with comparative designs concerning variations in the questioning between different national election surveys.

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[16] Ireland being the interesting exception where religion outscores left-right ideology (see Klingemann and Fuchs 1995).

The left-right question is fairly invariable and usually takes the form: "*Where would you place party x on a left-right scale stretching from y to z?*". The advantage of survey questions like this is that we do not have to consider what the left-right dimension actually means or what it contains in every single country, even if to some extent left-right issues will differ between countries depending on history, traditions, culture, etc.[17]

## Perceptual agreement - the dependent variable

An underlying implication of the responsible party model is, as mentioned, that voters and their elected representatives share relatively similar perceptions and that those perceptions held by the voters' are in correspondence with the positions of the parties' or the candidates in different issue dimensions (APSA 1950). Votes based on perceptual agreement in left-right terms will yield meaningful mandates for the policies that parties propose to the extent that left-right perceptions of the voters accurately reflect policy posi-

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[17] Political perceptions or the ability of putting parties in their place on a left-right scale demands some kind of knowledge or sophistication. In democratic theory there is a long tradition that prescribes an informed citizenry as a crucial element to democratic politics (see Dahl 1989). But what exactly is political knowledge or sophistication? According to Converse (1964), political sophistication is a cognitive property such as a belief system used when considering different alternatives or thinking abstractly about politics, for example, on how different issues fit together in a coherent framework. Also Luskin (1987) defines political sophistication or knowledge as a set of beliefs and attitudes which constitutes a cognitive complexity about politics. Given a common definition of the concept of political knowledge/sophistication, a second question is how political information or sophistication can be measured empirically? Most scholars typically rely on two different measures of political knowledge. The first and probably most simple approach often uses an individual item, mostly a NES item asking for the interviewer's subjective assessment of the respondent's level of knowledge about politics (Bartels 1996). The second most common strategy is to use series of factual questions from NES and construct some kind of index used as a knowledge scale, where respondents are ranked by how many questions they answer correctly (Carpini and Keeter 1996; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; Zaller 1992). Despite their popularity, both these methods have their drawbacks. Most importantly one single item can seldom measure the complexities of political sophistication and will thus inevitably tend to become extremely imprecise (Levendusky 2003). Nevertheless, given that a common definition of perceptions is that it refers to the cognitions or beliefs that voters have of different political phenomena, such as: 'party A is opposed to death penalties' or that 'party B is a left winged feminist party' (Granberg and Holmberg 1988). I prefer to use this question as a measure for voters' perceptions rather than voters' political knowledge. Especially since knowledge, in my view, is a broader and more comprehensive concept that demands several different empirical measures compared to perceptions.

tions of parties (van der Brug 1999a).

Party positions often serve as anchors and at least two kinds of party positions can be distinguished from a voter perspective: ideological positions and positions on concrete issues. Ideological positions on a left-right dimension have been shown to summarize party policies effectively on a wide range of specific policies and issues, both in terms of position issues and priorities. Earlier research has shown that cues, such as the left-right positions of political parties, have validity and often are highly accurate. In several studies it has been proven that the aggregated mean or median position among voters when placing parties or candidates on various scales tend to be reasonably accurate when confronted with alternative sources of the same assessment (Granberg 1993; Page 1978; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b; van der Brug 1997; 1998).

In a study by Wouter van der Brug (2001) in the Netherlands, voters' perceptions of party positions were contrasted with alternative indicators of parties' policy positions such as party manifestos, surveys among the member of the parliament and roll-calls. The results showed that voters' perceptions of party positions on six different issues were in general accurate, even for the least informed group of voters. These results are also confirmed in van der Brug and van der Eijk's study of the European parliament election in 1994 in which they compared the perceptions of voters in the member states with the perceptions of the members of the European parliament on similar issues. The results showed that voters' perceptions of party positions were moderately to strongly related to the parties' 'true' positions. The results also indicated that the accuracy was considerably higher in the case of left-right positions (van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b). Voters who use left-right ideologies as cues or information shortcuts to assess parties' stand-points on specific issues may thus acquire adequate perceptions even when all direct information concerning the parties' positions is missing.

If elections are to function as vehicles for preference aggregation, a party's election platform must however, to some extent be perceived in a similar manner by a vast majority of the voters (Downs 1957; Stokes 1963). PA is a relevant constituent in this respect.

Perceptual agreement is, however, not necessarily the same as perceptual accuracy as the possibility that all voters are wrong simultaneously cannot be excluded. That has happened, even though it is an exceptional event. Philip Converse drew attention to the example of the 1968 primary elections for the U.S. party nominations, where Eugene McCarthy opposed the sitting president, Lyndon, B Johnson. McCarthy was the 'dove' fighting against the 'hawk' with a main election pledge to disengage the U.S. from the Vietnam War. In the election, McCarthy received 42 percent of the votes against 48 percent for the sitting president, a result that was interpreted as a major victory for the peace movement. However, survey data later showed that the major support for McCarthy came from 'hawks' in

who's opinion the Johnson administration was not pursuing the war with enough vigor. The 'hawks' who had supported McCarthy assumed that he disagreed with Johnson for the same reasons as they did (Quoted from van der Brug 1997). Misunderstandings between voters and their representatives, as in this example, are probably rare. It nonetheless, illustrates the importance of effective communication and that voters' accurately perceive the parties' or the candidates' positions on different issues or conflict dimensions.

Finding valid indicators of a party's true position is a problem related to the question of perceptual accuracy and is especially a problem in comparative research. An objective measure for accuracy would of course be suitable but as far as I am concerned, the closest comparative and 'neutral' source would be to use election manifestos. Such data do exist through the work conducted by the Comparative Manifesto Project ((CMP) see Budge et al. 2001) but only for a limited number of countries, and this is inadequate for this study as it requires the variable for all the country/election data points.18 However, in the Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems dataset (CSES) the placement of parties have been made by both voters and experts in almost each country. Table 1 presents the results from a comparison between voters and experts when placing parties on an eleven point left-right scale. Accuracy is here measured as the absolute deviation between the mean position for a specific party in a country as perceived by the voters and the placement of the same party made by a country expert(s). The coefficient thus indicates the average deviation in each country between voters and experts. Agreement is calculated as van der Eijk's measure for agreement on ordered rating scales (van der Eijk 2001). The coefficient is bound between -1 and +1, where -1 indicates total disagreement and +1 is the same as maximum agreement. A uniform distribution yields an agreement value of 0.[19]

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[18] Moreover, in order to construct a left-right scale based on election manifestos one need a solid knowledge about the parties over time in all the countries, and that is difficult to acquire. An inductive solution on the problem could be to look for relationships within the election manifestos by factor analysis, a method used by the CMP. Nevertheless, since the left-right dimension is a spatial concept, there will be a proximity relationship between the election manifestos and the left-right position, where parties on the left-wing will emphasize left issues and visa versa. Factor analyses are prone to generate deceptive results for this reason (van der Brug 2001). Another drawback related to the use of factor analysis on manifesto data is that the variables tend to outnumber the cases (Franzmann and Kaiser 2006; Pelizzo 2003).

[19] This measure is explained further later in the book.

**Table 1.** Perceptual accuracy and agreement among voters in 32 countries between 1996-2005.

| Country | Year | Accuracy | Agreement | n: | Country | Year | Accuracy | Agreement | n: |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Spain | 2000 | .00 | .54 | 1208 | Norway | 2001 | .52 | .63 | 2052 |
| Great Britain | 2001 | .07 | .61 | 3326 | Denmark | 2001 | .52 | .64 | 2026 |
| Iceland | 2003 | .13 | .63 | 1446 | Ireland | 2002 | .56 | .48 | 2367 |
| Netherlands | 1998 | .15 | .64 | 2101 | Sweden | 1998 | .58 | .67 | 1157 |
| USA | 2004 | .16 | .40 | 1066 | Canada | 1997 | .58 | .35 | 1851 |
| Portugal | 2005 | .17 | .48 | 2801 | New Zealand | 2002 | .65 | .43 | 1741 |
| Canada | 2004 | .21 | .65 | 1674 | Finland | 2003 | .69 | .54 | 1196 |
| Chile | 2003 | .28 | .57 | 1418 | Korea Rep. of | 2004 | .71 | .39 | 1500 |
| Spain | 2004 | .29 | .56 | 1212 | Hungary | 1998 | .76 | .47 | 1525 |
| Germany | 2002 | .30 | .54 | 1023 | Mexico | 2003 | .78 | .19 | 1991 |
| Slovenia | 1996 | .30 | .34 | 2031 | Germany | 1998 | .78 | .50 | 2019 |
| Sweden | 2002 | .33 | .67 | 1060 | Peru | 2000 | .83 | .18 | 1102 |
| Israel | 2003 | .33 | .51 | 1212 | Romania | 1996 | .83 | .25 | 1175 |
| Czech Rep. | 2002 | .35 | .62 | 948 | Hungary | 2002 | .89 | .55 | 1200 |
| Austria | 1996 | .36 | .44 | 1798 | Spain | 1996 | .89 | .54 | 1212 |
| Denmark | 1998 | .36 | .69 | 2001 | Czech Rep. | 1996 | .98 | .56 | 1229 |
| Portugal | 2002 | .44 | .61 | 1303 | Netherlands | 2002 | .99 | .65 | 1574 |
| Israel | 1996 | .45 | .50 | 1091 | France | 2002 | 1.03 | .44 | 1000 |
| Taiwan | 1996 | .46 | .39 | 1200 | Belgium (flan.) | 1999 | 1.04 | .37 | 2179 |
| Taiwan | 2001 | .49 | .36 | 2022 | Poland | 2001 | 1.20 | .46 | 1794 |
| Chile | 1999 | .49 | .54 | 2048 | Mexico | 1997 | 1.33 | .15 | 2033 |
| Bulgaria | 2001 | .50 | .18 | 1482 | Brazil | 2002 | 1.41 | .66 | 2514 |
| Austria | 2004 | .51 | .41 | 1769 | Mexico | 2000 | 1.43 | .18 | 1766 |
| Great Britain | 1997 | .51 | .47 | 2897 | Poland | 1997 | 1.55 | .51 | 1302 |
| New Zealand | 1996 | .52 | .51 | 1855 | Korea Rep. of | 2000 | 1.75 | .45 | 1100 |
| Over all (mean): | - | - | - | - | | 2000 | .63 | .48 | 1652 |

*Comment:* Data is from Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), Module 1 & 2. Accuracy is measured as the absolute deviation between the mean position for a specific party in a country as perceived by the voters and the placement of the same party made by a country expert(s). Agreement is calculated as van der Eijk's measure of agreement for ordered rating scales (van der Eijk 2001).

The result supports earlier findings that the mean placement of parties made by voters is highly similar to that of experts. The exceptions are to be

found in countries where the left-right dimension may not be a relevant or salient ideological dimension such as Korea (1.75), Poland (1.55), Mexico (1.43) and Brazil (1.41) (see appendix for a detailed description of the countries).

The fact that the average and the median perception of party positions among voters tends to reflect some kind of 'true' position is, of course, encouraging. Nevertheless, even if the mean or median voter perception tends to be accurate it does not necessarily tell us anything about the relevance of the perceptions for the vast majority of the voters, since individual short-comings tend to cancel out on an aggregated level. Clearly, there is variation among voters when placing parties on a left-right scale due to perceptual distortions and the fact that ideologies are abstract and to varying extent may mean different things for different voters. A vague or blurred ideological position or party profile renders perceptual distortions which in turn may obstruct the emergence and formation of public opinions, resulting in unsupported policies getting enabled (Holmberg, Westerståhl, and Branzén 1977). Vague or ambiguous positions among the parties may also invite higher degrees of wishful thinking among the voters as "*it is easier to see what you want to see if what you look at is a bit fuzzy and far away*" (Holmberg 1999b:236-237). If public policies are to reflect the will of a majority of the people, the perceptions of policy should be accurate for as many voters as possible. Otherwise this may lead to a serious distortion in the relationship between citizens and its government. It is therefore not enough to only focus on accuracy for the mean or the median voter position. One also has to consider the agreement in voters' perception on parties' policy positions. This aspect is one that prior research often has neglected.

Convinced by the findings by the authors mentioned above and the results in table 1, this study will turn towards and focus on the agreement among voters on parties' policy positions. If we can be convinced that the mean and/or the median position of a party most of the time depicts a party's 'true' policy position, then votes based on PA will yield meaningful mandates for the policies that the parties propose (van der Brug 1999a). PA among voters on parties' ideological left-right positions can thus work as a guarantor for successful political communication and representation.[20]

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[20] Most of the times the interpolated median and the mean values are approximately equal However, an argument why the interpolated median sometimes is a better indicator on a party's position than the mean value can be illustrated by the case of 'Fremskrittspartiet', the progressive party, in Norway in the election of 1973. The party was founded the same year and the voters were obviously confused about the party's left-right position. According to the

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The concept of perceptual agreement was originally used by Granberg and Holmberg, although they labeled it as perceptual consensus (Granberg and Holmberg 1988).[21] Nevertheless, this book will use a measurement on PA invented by Cees van der Eijk. This coefficient builds on the distribution of voters' placement of a party's position on in our case, a left-right scale. It was originally developed for measuring agreement in ordered rating scales and can be used as a measurement for single parties but it may also be aggregated to serve as a comprehensive measure for the party system as a whole. The coefficient is bound between -1 to 1 and it reaches it minimum of -1 when half the sample places a party on either extreme of the scale respectively, that is, maximum disagreement. On the other hand, when all respondents place the party in the same category – that is, as maximum agreement - the coefficient attains +1. A uniform distribution yields an agreement value of 0 (van der Eijk 2001). A more detailed description of the measure can be found in each of the articles in the study.

It needs to be mentioned already here that since PA is an aggregate measure of dispersion among groups of voters, it does not tell anything about the perceptions of individual voters which are the unit of analysis in the third article of this book. This limitation has been overcome by focusing on the deviation between the median position of the parties, based on the results from the placement of the parties for the whole electorate, and the placement of parties made by individual voters on a left-right scale. By focusing on the deviation among individual voters in the third article (referred to as perceptual deviation (PD)), we have the opportunity to study the impact of different individually related factors on the perceptions of parties' left-right positions among voters.

From this perspective, I argue that the concept of perceptual agreement is well suited as a measurement of the strength of the link between citizens and their elected representatives. If voters are agreeing on the position of parties, this means that they share a common view on the choices they have in an election, something that reduces the probability for misunderstandings between voters and their representatives (see also van der Brug 1997).

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frequencies in the election study, the voters placed the party accordingly, from left to right: 169, 48, 20, 35, 19, 49 and 391. It is rare that voters actually are disagreeing (PA -.05) on a party's position such as in the case with Fremskrittspartiet in 1973 (even if there were some agreement on that the party should be placed on an extreme position but not on which of the two extremes). However, a frequency like this yields a mean value of 4.91 with a standard deviation of 2.58 and a variance of 6.66 while the interpolated median value is thus 6.57. Considering that the mode is 7 the median position, after all, seems to be the most valid estimate for a party's left-right position.

[21] Most commonly, this coefficient indicates to what extent voters agree on a party's or a candidate's position usually measured on an ordinal scale.

If the PA is high among voters in a specific group or in a certain context, this will be interpreted as an indication of successful communication between the voters' and their representatives. If voters are aware of, *i.e.* agreeing on party positions, then the elections can be considered to work as a channel between the mass and the elite. PA is thereby an indirect measure of accuracy among individuals. On the other hand, if voters agree to a large extent on the position of a party or a candidate, but their aggregated perception is inaccurate, then it can be discussed as to whether it is the representatives or the voters that failed or how otherwise can so many be wrong simultaneously?

## Theoretical expectations – towards an integrated general model of perceptual agreement

Political representation is a result of interactions among parties and voters or other organizations – with particular interests and ideas – about what course of action should be taken. The sum of these interactions constitutes the policy process. But this interactive process is part of a wider environment, or context. Understanding contexts or rather the impact of different contexts on voting behavior in general and voters' PA in particular is vital for understanding different policy processes. The political context shapes the ways in which policy processes work.

Inspired by an institutional rational choice perspective, context here refers to those aspects of the political arena that are relevant for action. Context matters for political representation in a range of interrelated ways. Context shapes the effectiveness or appropriateness of different actions among actors. In some contexts, it will be more effective to act in a certain way; in other contexts, acting in the same way would be ineffective (Nash, Hudson, and Luttrell 2006). Political context refers here to aspects such as formal and informal rules that govern the interactions among parties and voters, such as electoral systems and party systems. Usually, the concept of a party system is defined as a set of formal and informal rules that influence the behavior and the interactions of the significant parties within a given country (Keman 1997; McLean 1996), which is also a common definition of the concept of institutions (Peters 1999). In this book, a distinction is made between formal and informal rules, where formal rules refer to the electoral systems and informal rules to the party systems. Together formal and informal rules compose the context at the level of the system. But for individual voters even the parties *per se* are a part of the context at the middle level, which affects individual voting behavior on a micro level (see f.c. Cox 1997; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; Snyder 2002; van der

Brug, Franklin, Popescu, and Toka 2008; van der Eijk, Franklin, and van der Brug 1999). In that sense, even political parties may be regarded as informal institutions acting on a middle level that affects the behavior among individual voters, at the same time as both parties and voters are affected by the institutional structure on the system level. Consequently, we expect formal or informal institutions to create an incentive based structure for bounded rationality (see Downs 1957; Gordon and Segura 1997; Norris 2004; Peters 1999), affecting both parties and voters. The outcome is thus dependent on a combination of individual preferences and the rules that govern the game, where the latter are assumed to be exogenous[22] to individual behavior (Johnson 2002). From this perspective, the causal mechanisms are constituted by the fact that different institutional or contextual factors are expected to either have motivational or facilitative effects on individual voters. A motivational factor will thus induce voters to obtain information about the political parties while a facilitative factor will simplify this process. Both motivational and facilitative factors can therefore be expected to affect the voters' perceptions of the party positions in terms of PA (see Franklin 1996; Franklin, van der Eijk, and Oppenhuis 1996 for a further discussion on motivational and facilitative determinants of voting behavior).

In conclusion, we believe that different factors related to all three levels are interacting and affecting voters' PA of parties left-right positions such shown in figure 2.

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[22] Assuming exogeneity is not unproblematic. As an example it can be discussed whether it is the proportional formula itself that tends to create more fragmented party systems or do divided societies prefer proportional systems rather than more majoritarian systems (Johnson, Shively, and Stein 2002; Norris 2004).

**Figure 2.** Theoretical relationships between individual, party, and system related factors and voters' perceptual agreement.
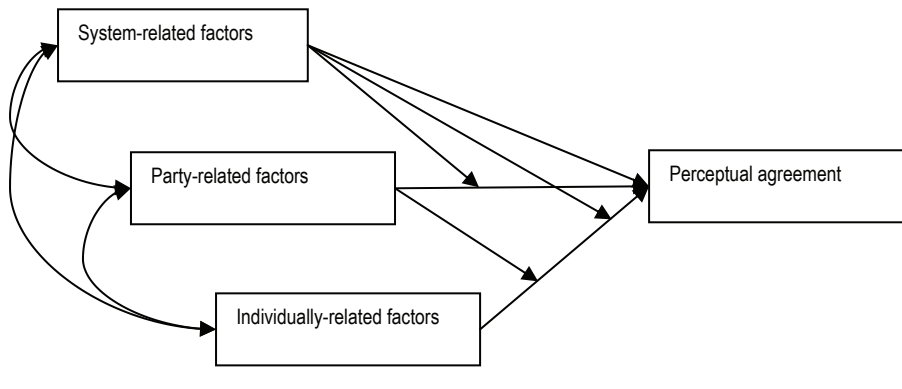


## The impact of system related factors on voters' perceptual agreement

*Formal political institutions*

Just as James Madison asserted more than two centuries ago, it is widely believed today that one of the corner stones of a well-functioning representative democratic system lies in the architectural creation of political institutions (Quoted from Ferejohn and Kuklinski 1990). Or as Bingham Powell put it: *"Elections are not the only instruments of democracy. They must be helped by […] rules [or institutions] that encourage communication and cooperation"* (Bingham Powell 2000:4). A common notion within the literature is that the adoption of proportional- or more majoritarian formulas creates incentives for rational vote-seeking politicians to emphasize either programmatic or particularistic benefits during the election campaigns (Farrell 1997; Norris 2004). The electoral threshold and the district magnitude have been proven to affect the degree of national competitiveness, which has consequences for how parties organize and compete. Large proportional districts tend to imply more centralized party organization, which in turn are expected to induce more programmatically oriented parties (Bingham Powell 1986; Farrell 1996). Proportional systems with a strong focus on cohesive parties may thus correspond better to representation according to the RPM, where voters vote prospectively for parties according to their policy preferences; while more majoritarian systems may contribute to grater strains of government accountability and retrospective voting as

these systems tend to emphasize single candidates and strong governments (Holmberg 2006; Sartori 1997).

Large vote-seat disparities may, however, affect the incentives for individual voters to obtain political information and the usefulness of getting informed about the policy positions of the parties may be more limited. This aspect refers to Duverger's mechanical- and psychological effects of different electoral systems. The mechanical effect refers to the actual difference between vote-shares and seat-shares, produced by the electoral formula.[23] The psychological effect is in turn a result of the mechanical effect since knowledge of the mechanical effect will affect the behavior of the actors (Duverger 1954). Accordingly, voters are expected not to vote for small parties when the size of the constituency is small or the legal threshold is high, as they would not want to waste their vote on a party with a small chance of entering parliament. A high degree of disproportionality in a system may hence induce voters to view the elections as a process of selecting government while elections in a more proportional system may tend to be regarded as an expression of preferences (Downs 1957). In short, when the size of the constituency is small and the threshold is high, we presume that voters will be less motivated to acquire information about the policy positions of the smaller national parties, whilst the opposite will be true for the bigger parties. The more *proportional* the nature of an electoral system is the higher will then the incentives for the parties and the candidates be to adhere to programmatic ideological campaigning; this should generate a higher PA among voters on parties' policy positions.

Generally, the effects of electoral systems on individual voters are assumed to be indirect and expressed through the impact of electoral systems on the political parties and the party systems. Electoral systems have consequences for the party systems since as Downs (1957) argued, more majoritarian electoral rules are most likely to produce centripetal two-party systems where the competing parties will be clustered in the centre of the ideological or political spectrum. Sartori (1976) provided a complementary argument that a multiparty system would generate centrifugal incentives for party competition (see also Cox 1990; Merrill and Adams 2002). Hence, we believe that system related factors will affect both parties and voters and that there will be both an important direct effect of the system related variables on voters' PA and an indirect effect mediated by the po-

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[23] The term electoral system is generally referring to four different concepts, namely the district magnitude, the legal threshold, the ballot structure and the electoral formula (Arnold 2007).

litical parties. Theoretically we believe that a) different formal and informal institutional factors may facilitate and/or motivate voters when receiving or apprehending political information at the same time as b) different institutional settings may affect voters' PA indirectly by their impact on the behavior of parties. The institutional context will thus affect the degree or rather the direction of the competition among parties in the form of centrifugal or centripetal party competition. It is reasonable to assume that higher degrees of centrifugal competition will lead to greater *divergence* in the parties' ideological positions (*i.e.* greater distances between the parties' positions in the policy space) which may make it easier for voters to discern the parties' positions and thereby also cause higher degrees of PA. Divergence hence will function as an intervening variable in the model. We are in this respect dealing with a set of interaction terms between the effective number of parties and the system related factors that may affect the degree of competition among parties.

The ballot structure is another aspect of electoral systems that, according to Norris, creates incentives for rational vote-seeking politicians to emphasize either programmatic or particularistic benefits during election campaigns (Norris 2004). Usually, the ballot structure is closely related to the basic type of electoral system even though theoretically, different ballot types can be used within all systems. Broadly speaking, ballots can be divided into four subgroups consisting of 1) party ballots, 2) candidate ballots, 3) preference ballots and 4) dual ballots (Farrell 2001; Norris 2004). A hypothetical consequence of the use of these ballot types is that in the cases of the candidate and the preference ballots, politicians will face stronger incentives to distinguish themselves from their competitors within their own party by emphasizing particularistic policies or benefits offered through constituency service. In contrast, politicians in proportional systems using closed party ballots will hypothetically face greater incentives to rationally focus on collective party appeals and party cohesion by emphasizing programmatic and ideological benefits and policies (Norris 2004). However, there may also be a direct effect of the ballot structure on PA since *party-ballots* offer fewer choices (*i.e.* require less political knowledge and thus have lower decision costs) and this could assist voters and thus generate higher degrees of PA.

The constitution, of a country *i.e.* whether it has a parliamentary, semi-presidential or presidential system is also likely to affect the levels of PA beyond the effects of electoral rules and party systems. The reason for this is that it may be more difficult for voters to discern parties' policy positions in systems where there is a separation of powers, since this creates a more complex institutional environment. Legislative and presidential parties have different roles in the policymaking process in presidential systems. From a voter perspective, parties in *parliamentary* systems may thus appear as

more solid since they only have one face to present to voters compared to parties in presidential systems (Arnold 2007), which can be expected to facilitate voters' perceptions of parties' left-right positions. PA is hence expected to be higher among voters in parliamentary political systems.

*Informal political institutions*
When it comes to informal political institutions, we know that PA over parties' ideological positions is also dependent on both the salience of the respective ideological dimensions in a polity and on the extent to which the parties define themselves along these dimensions (Oscarsson 1998; van der Brug 1997). According to Thomassen, simple and unidimensional belief systems are desired characteristics of representative democracies, since political representation may be difficult to obtain if voters have idiosyncratic sets of policy preferences that motivate their decisions (Thomassen 1999). The core idea here is simplicity in the political world as an important component of effective political representation. According to this perspective, ideology provides the fundamental means of communication and constitutes a linkage between citizens and elected representatives. A simple and unidimensional system will thus have a facilitating effect on the voters because the parties are defined according to the same policy dimension, and in that parties and voters share a political language. This will in turn make the cognitive cues used by voters more efficient and, with only one policy dimension, there is also less to learn about the parties' policies. But a simple and highly unidimensional party system is not enough by itself. According to Thomassen, it also needs to be structured according to a left-right dimension so that the communication between voters and their representatives is clear and efficient. For this reason we expect voters' PA to be higher for parties in systems that are more *unidimensional* and structured according to a *left-right dimension*.[24]

However, if voters shall be represented satisfactorily, the 'breadth of alternatives' is important as well. For example it has been argued that a broader range of parties leads to greater representation of diverse values (John M. Carey cited from Hoffman 2005), minority groups (Lijphart 1999) and women (Norris 2004).[25] With an increasing number of political

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[24] Just as in Thomassen's simplicity hypothesis where the importance of a shared one-dimensional belief system is emphasized, Downs' original model of party competition is also based on the assumption that all parties compete along a unidimensional left-right continuum (Downs 1957).

[25] This is not to say that a two-party system is less democratic than a multiparty system as they both meet the requirements from democratic theory (Sartori 1997).

alternatives the motivation to seek information about the parties can be expected to increase among voters. A high degree of party system fragmentation will also encourage the parties to differentiate themselves in terms of ideology from the competitors in an attempt to mobilize their electoral support (Downs 1957). The *effective number of parties* may thus be an important causal force behind the degrees of agreement in voters' perceptions and thereby also a prerequisite for a functional representation. However it cannot be excluded that there might be an upper limit with diminishing returns, where too many parties implies increasing decision costs (Hoffman 2005), which will affect PA among voters as well.

Earlier studies have proven that a high degree of *competition* among parties for the 'same' voters will affect voters' will to participate (Franklin, van der Eijk, and Oppenhuis 1996). If many voters are likely to support more than one party, it is expected that this will raise further incentives for the party leaders to mobilize their voters, which in turn can be expected to both motivate and facilitate voters when acquiring political information.[26]

As mentioned earlier, the institutional context is expected to affect the direction of the party competition within a political system in terms of centrifugal or centripetal party competition. Centrifugal party competition will in turn, imply greater divergence in the parties' ideological positions. That parties shall present divergent policy positions is also a criterion asserted by the RPM. The more divergent the parties' policy positions are with respect to one another, the more likely it is that the voters will correctly apprehend the party's policy position correctly. *Divergence* is hence an important attribute of the party systems that will have a positive impact on voters' PA.

Overall, eight different explanatory factors related to the electoral and political system can be identified in the literature. Among the factors classified as formal institutions we have 1. *the effective threshold/proportionality*, 2. *the ballot structure* and 3. *type of constitution*. Among the informal institutionally related factors we find: 4. *the effective number of parliamentary parties*, 5. *the degree of unidimensionality*, 6. *the strength of the left-right dimension* and 7. *the degree of competition* and 8. *divergence*.

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[26] Voters can, of course, be mobilized on other factors beyond their value or issue orientations as well. At the same time, we know that the amount of party affiliated voters has steadily decreased during the last decades as has the impact of social class on voting behavior in general (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Narud and Allberg 1999; Thomassen 2005).

**Table 2.** The expected direction of the effect of the independent system related variables on divergence and perceptual agreement.

| Independent variables | Dependent variables | |
|---|---|---|
| *Formal institutional factors* | *Divergence** | *Perceptual agreement* |
| The effective threshold | - | - |
| Proportionality | + | + |
| Ballot structure | + | + |
| Type of constitution | + | + |
| *Informal institutional factors* | | |
| Effective number of parliamentary parties | + (-) | + (-) |
| Unidimensionality | + | + |
| Strength of the left-right dimension | + | + |
| Degree of party competition | + | + |

*Comment*: (+) indicates an expected positive impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable and (-) the opposite. *Divergence is here treated as being both a dependent and independent variable. This since the institutional context is expected to cause divergence in the party system while divergence in turn is expected to have an independent positive impact on PA.

## The role of political parties for voters' perceptual agreement

Political parties rather than single candidates are today the main actors in most modern representative systems even if there are signs of that parties in general have become more candidate centered in recent years (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Political parties are however, an important ingredient in a representative system as carriers of continuity, values and ideologies (Dalton 1985; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Hoffman 2005; Katz and Mair 1995). Even though many political parties today face problems with declining memberships (Mair and van Biezen 2001), they may still have a viable and important function as orientational instruments for voters when becoming informed about political matters. The RPM also emphasizes the importance of cohesive parties with responsibly formulated stable and divergent policy positions. A direct consequence in this aspect is that if parties present stable and divergent policy positions, this should have an increasing positive effect on voters' PA. As earlier mentioned, less divergent policy positions could thus impede the process of information acquisition among voters since it may be difficult to discern the differences between the parties (divergence is hence an important attribute connected both to individual parties and to party systems as such). For the same reason, less stability in a party's policy position may be another factor that will obstruct the emergence of PA among voters. Especially since voters are often supposed to evaluate a party's policy position based on information about current, past and expected future performance (Downs 1957). In both cases *stability* and *divergence* are expected to increase PA since these two factors may have a facilitative effect among individual voters.

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Where the RPM highlights the behavior of political parties, other theories on political parties are more focused on various characteristics and attributes. It has been proven for example, that the electoral size of a party may affect voting behavior among individuals in terms of strategic voting (Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; van der Eijk, Franklin, and al. 1996).[27] According to Kirchheimer, catch-all parties are characterized as being big and having vague ideological positions as a distinctive feature (Dittrich 1983; Kirchheimer 1990). Inspired by Kirchheimer's work, it is reasonable to expect that bigger parties in general will be less ideologically distinctive compared to smaller parties such as interest based or regional ones. In order to gather a large national electoral base, all else being equal, a party needs to bring together groups of voters with sometimes diverse interests. This is best done by downplaying ideological differences and promoting issues that are less likely to meet resistance in the electorate. If bigger parties tend to be less distinctive in their ideological positions, a party's *electoral size* thus can be expected to have implications for the clarity of voters' perceptions of the policies. Party size should have a negative effect on PA.

Political parties are also more or less attached to different dimensions (Budge 1994; Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987) and research has shown that perceptual agreement varies considerably between different party families (Dahlberg, Berlin, and Oscarsson 2005). An acceptable explanation of this phenomenon may be that parties that are closely attached to the left-right dimension often have names such as 'social democrats', 'liberals' or 'conservatives' that in themselves work as brands signaling a position on the left-right continuum (Budge *et al.* 2001). It has been suggested that these *labels* sometimes works as cues for voters when acquiring information about parties' policies or their left-right positions (Downs 1957; Snyder 2002). A party's ideological affiliation, if revealed in the name of the party, may then guide the voters when acquiring information and promote PA.

Another party characteristic related factor that can be expected to influence the perceptions among voters is the *age of a party*. Logically, it should be easier to know something about the position of an old established party. In addition, newer parties are also likely to more frequently adjust or change their policies and ideological profiles, which in turn may be confusing for voters (van der Brug, Franklin, Popescu, and Toka 2008). Hence we expect PA to be higher for older and longer established parties.

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[27] For example that bigger parties may have greater chances of getting their policies enacted in the parliament or that smaller parties will find it hard to pass the electoral threshold.

To conclude, five different factors related to the political parties can be discerned, two are behaviorally related factors: 1. *stability* and 2. *divergence* in the parties' left-right positions and three are characteristically related factors: 3. *electoral size*, 4. *ideologically related party labels* and 5. *party age*.

**Table 3.** The expected direction of the effect of the independent party related variables on perceptual agreement.

| Independent variables | Dependent variable |
|---|---|
| *Behaviourally related party factors* | *Perceptual agreement* |
| Stability | + |
| Divergence | + |
| *Characteristically related party factors* | |
| Eelectoral size | - |
| Ideologically related party labels | + |
| Party age | + |

*Comment:* (+) indicates an expected positive impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable and (-) the opposite.

## Causes of misperceptions among individual voters

Much research has been spent on the impact of individual-level characteristics on voting behavior and party choice, such as socio-economic status, education and party identification (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Fiorina 1981; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004). When it comes to political perceptions, factors such as political knowledge, left-right self placement and party sympathy have proven to be influential (Granberg 1993; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Popkin 1991; van der Brug 1997). The study of perceptions has a long tradition within the research field of election studies. Nonetheless Granberg and Holmberg claim that research on the factors that account for the adequacy of political perceptions is something that is needed in particular (Granberg and Holmberg 1988). Earlier research in this specific area has, however, shown that perceptions among voters with greater levels of political knowledge is often more accurate and that the degree of political knowledge also affects the PA among voters (van der Brug 1997).

Education and age often are stressed as important factors behind voting behavior in general and political knowledge or sophistication in particular. The level of knowledge of voters affects which information is used when getting informed about political matters. It has been suggested that more highly educated voters rely on a wider range of sources of information than do less educated voters. However, more education does not necessarily mean more factual knowledge since educated voters are also sampling information and using various cues. The main difference between voters with

differing levels of education lies in that highly educated voters use the available cues more efficiently (Popkin 1991). Political knowledge is also, as mentioned, one of the factors that have been proven to affect the perceptions among voters (van der Brug 1997).[28]

However, political knowledge is not exclusively obtained through formal education. Empirical results indicate that older people in general know more about politics compared to younger people (Milner 2002; Popkin 1991). This could be interpreted as a consequence of socializing where a voter becomes more and more familiar with election procedures, parties and politicians within a society. In a comparative study made by Sören Holmberg and Henrik Oscarsson the effect of *education, age* and *gender* on political information indicates that older educated men tend to be better informed about political matters (Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004).[29] These three factors thus may be expected to have a facilitative influence on voters and thereby positively influence PA, since more political knowledge/sophistication should mean lower decision costs.

Political ideologies, such as the left-right positions of political parties have both an affective and a cognitive component. Most voters are able to relate to parties in terms of left and right, which is the cognitive part, and at the same time many voters identify themselves with an ideological predisposition on the same dimension, which is the affective part.[30] According

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[28] It can be questioned whether education is the actual source of political knowledge, however, education is one of few voter characteristics that can be measured and used for country comparative studies, which is why education often functions as a proxy for different levels of political sophistication.

[29] In the literature on voting behavior it has often been stressed that political interest is an important determinant of the degree of political sophistication among voters (Franklin, van der Eijk, and Oppenhuis 1996). Unfortunately, there is no question included in the datasets for measuring political interest among voters.

[30] In prior research it has been asserted that the ideological, the partisan and the social components are three major constituents of individuals' self-placement on the left–right dimension. The ideological component refers to the link between an individual's left–right self-placement and his/her attitude toward the major value conflicts in western democratic systems such as socioeconomic, religious, or the new politics (Ingelhart and Klingemann 1976; Knutsen 1995b; Knutsen 1997). The party component implies that a voter may primarily identify him/herself with a specific party instead of an ideological position. This in turn implies that voters may adopt ideological labels for themselves derived from the parties they identify with, which in turn may be unrelated to their own issue orientations (Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Ingelhart and Klingemann 1976; Knutsen 1997). Finally, the social component refers to the citizens' social identities and their locations in the social structure in relation to their left–right orientation (Freire 2006; Ingelhart and Klingemann 1976). According to Klingemann's and Ingelhart's study, the party component has the strongest impact on voters' left-right self placement followed by the ideological component. This means that for a

to the balance theory proposed by Heider (1946), people are motivated strongly to maintain cognitive balance. Cognitive balance is a tendency for individuals to impose order and structure on the world in a psychological processing of events. As a consequence, when placing parties or candidates on various relational scales, individuals tend to locate parties or candidates that they like closer to themselves whilst those that are disliked will be pushed away. The tendency to 'push and pull' on the basis of liked or disliked is also known in social judgment theory as contrast effects, which is a form of perceptual distortion. This phenomenon, also known as 'wishful thinking', is a less formal way to deal with cognitive imbalances. A direct consequence of wishful thinking is subjective agreement between self placement and party- or candidate placements, which in turn tends to result in perceptual distortions. Displacement theory is emphasizing assimilation and contrast and proposes that perceptual distortions occur due to ego involvement and one's affective orientation toward parties or candidates (Granberg 1993; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Popkin 1991). Results from earlier studies on perceptions have also shown that there is a u-shaped relationship between self placement among voters and the perceived distance of parties, where voters with more extreme self placements tend to perceive greater distances between the parties than do centrist individuals (Granberg 1993). Consequently, we expect that *party sympathy*, such as whether a voter likes- or dislikes a specific party, and the *ideological distance* between a voter's self-placement and the placement of parties on the left-right continuum will have a negative impact on PA.

Taken together, five different independent factors that can be expected to affect voters' PA and that are related to individual voters are identified: 1. *party sympathy,* 2. *the ideological distance between a voter's self-placement and the placement of parties on the left-right continuum,* 3. *education,* 4. *age* and 5. *gender.*

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large number of voters the left-right terminology has a major component that is based on party identification instead of issues or value orientations. However, in a more comprehensive study made by Knutsen (1997), the results show that the impact of the party component on voters' left-right selfplacement is not as big as Klingemann and Ingelhart suggested. Moreover, if value orientation is set as prior to party choice in a causal sense, found empirical support that it is value orientation rather than party choice that have the greatest impact on individuals' left-right self-placement in most countries included in his study. The results from a study made by van der Eijk and Niemöller (1992) also show that voters' ideological orientations are more or less independent of their social positions, at least in the case of the Netherlands.

**Table 4.** The expected direction of the effect of the independent individual related variables on perceptual agreement.

| Independent variables | Dependent variable |
|---|---|
| | *Perceptual agreement* |
| Party sympathy | - |
| Ideological distance | - |
| Education | + |
| Age | + |
| Gender | + |

*Comment:* (+) indicates an expected positive impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable and (-) the opposite.

## Determinants of perceptual agreement

Despite a large field of research on perceptions and misperceptions among individual voters, not much is known about various contextual influences on voters' perceptions of parties' policy positions. From earlier research we know that the level of PA varies between different countries (Dahlberg, Berlin, and Oscarsson 2005; Dahlberg and Oscarsson 2006). One can hypothesize that these differences result not so much from diversity among the electorates but from differences among the political systems. Hence we expect the system and party related variables to have an independent impact on voters' PA and that individually related features might be interacting with the political context.

For example, in the theoretical section it was suggested that proportional electoral systems tend to promote more centralized and programmatically and ideologically oriented party organizations. In more disproportional systems, on the other hand, the parties are expected to be downplaying ideological differences and promoting policies and issues that are less likely to meet resistance in the electorate in order to gather a large national electoral support base (Norris 2004). Reasonably, if ideologically committed and centralized party organizations using bonding rather than bridging strategies, is a profound attribute in more proportional political systems, then the voters in these systems could be expected to develop stronger and more affective attachments to the parties. This in turn could increase their inclination towards wishful thinking and, hence, generate lower degrees of PA.

An alternative hypothesis in this respect, following Holmberg's argument, is that wishful thinking appears when voters are looking for parties who's positions are fuzzy and unclear (Holmberg 1999b). If party representatives in more proportional or competitive systems are more eager to define their party as clearly apart from their competitors as possible, these system related variables could alternatively work as a facilitative contextual

factor. A facilitative contextual factor may thus have a decreasing impact on the effect of the affectively related variables on voters' perceptions and, hence, the voters' inclination to wishful thinking, which should generate higher degrees of PA. For the same reason, we could also expect a similar effect from the remaining contextual party related variables. If parties hold divergent policy positions, have labels that signal theirs positions on the left-right continuum and are of small or medium electoral size this should facilitate voters when acquiring information about the parties and consequently, bring clarity in their perception of the parties' policy positions.

Concludingly, in an attempt to specify which causal mechanisms that are at hand, all factors listed above related to the right hand-side of the equation can, as mentioned, be divided into the three broader and to some extent also overlapping classes of facilitative, motivational and affectively related factors. These are in turn working at three different levels, system- party- and individual level and are expected to influence PA among voters of parties' ideological positions. A motivational factor is here understood simply as a factor that mainly will make voters more motivated to seek information about the parties' policies or policy positions. A facilitative factor will on the other hand, have a simplifying effect and make it easier for voters to obtain information about the parties' policies or discern the parties' policy positions. Taken together, we believe that facilitative and/or motivational factors will have a positive impact on voters' PA. An affective factor will in turn have a disturbing effect on the perceptions of voters which may imply higher degrees of 'wishful thinking'.[31] This is of course a simplistic division and many factors can be considered to varying extents as being facilitative, motivational and/or affective. The purpose with this distinction is, however, to try to deepen our understanding of what exactly makes some independent variables to covary with PA and not others.

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[31] In this respect Franklin (1996) makes a division between instrumental motivation, resources and mobilization instead of facilitative and motivational factors. Among the factors behind instrumental motivation we have contextual explanations such as the degree of proportionality in the electoral system. Resources are referred to as mainly being individual characteristics such as education or age. Mobilization in turn is referred to as factors related to the electoral campaign such as saliency of different issues etc. (see also Franklin et al. 1996). The data on which this study is based unfortunately does not allow us to include any variables of mobilization, thus only the concepts of facilitative and motivational factors will be used. The facilitative factors are thus referring to the same category of variables as does the term resources.

**Figure 3.** Determinants of perceptual agreement at system-, party- and individual level and whether they are to be reckoned as being motivational or facilitative in character.

*System-related factors*
S1 – Eff. threshold/proport. (M)
S2 – Eff. number of parties (F & M)
S3 - Ballot structure (F)
S4 - Parlamentarism (F)
S5 - Unidimensionality (F)
S6 - Strength of left-right dim. (F)
S7 - Competition (F & M)
S8 - Divergence (F)

*Party-related factors*
P1 - Stability (F)
P2 - Divergence (F)
P3 - Ideological party family (F)
P4 - Party age (F)
P5 - Party size (F)

*Individually-related factors*
I1 - Like-dislike (A)
I2 - Left-right distance (A)
I3 - Education (F)
I4 - Age (F)
I5 - Gender (F)

a1  a2  a3  a4  a5  a6

Perceptual agreement

*Comment:* (M) = motivational factor, (F) = facilitative factor and (A) = affective factor. (a1-a6) = arrow 1-6.

In figure 3, we find the *effective threshold/proportionality* among the motivationally related system factors since voters are expected to avoid voting for small parties when the size of the constituency is small or the legal threshold is high, as they do not want to waste their vote on a party with little chance of gaining entrance to the parliament. As such, they will also be less motivated to acquire information about all parties. With an increasing number of political alternatives represented in the parliament, *i.e. the effective number of parties*, the motivation to seek information can on the other hand be expected to increase among voters.

Party-ballots reside among the facilitatively related system factors, since these offer fewer choices. A simple and *unidimensional* belief system structured along a *left-right dimension* can, together with *parliamentary constitutional systems* also be expected to have a facilitative effect on voters' perceptions of parties' left-right positions. Moreover, if voters find a number of different parties potentially worthy of support, it can be expected that the degree of *competition* among the parties will increase, which in turn

will raise further incentives for the party leaders to mobilize their voters, which will motivate and facilitate for voters when acquiring information about the parties. *Divergence* in the parties' policy positions will also have a facilitative effect by making it easier for voters to discern the parties' positions. With respect to *the effective number of parties* it is also reasonable to expect that the competition in multiparty systems will tend to be more focused on the parties which will force them to appeal more clearly to the voters. Thus the mechanism can be reckoned to be both facilitative and motivational in character, with the exception of that too many parties may decrease PA.

Turning to the facilitative party related factors, voters are supposed to evaluate a party's policy position based on information about current, past and expected future performance (Downs 1957). In both cases greater *stability* and *divergence* are expected to increase PA since they may have a facilitative effect among individual voters. A party's *ideological affiliation* (if revealed in the name of the party) and the *age of a party* (as it will be easier to apprehend or to know something about the position of an old established party) may also guide the voters when acquiring information and thereby promote higher degrees of PA. However, if bigger parties tend be less distinctive in their ideological positions, a party's *electoral size* can also be expected to have implications for voters' PA. Hence, we expect PA to be lower for bigger parties and *vice versa*.

Considering the remaining facilitative and individually related factors of *education, age* and *gender,* earlier research has shown that more educated and older people and men in general are better informed about political matters (Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004). Since more political information reasonably means lower decision costs these three factors can be expected to have a facilitative influence on voters' perceptions, which in turn should generate higher levels of PA. It is not clear-cut whether factors such as party sympathy or the ideological distance between voters and parties, should be considered facilitative or motivational in character. Since these two components are best described as cognitive factors that are either clearly motivational or facilitative, I prefer to label them as affective factors that may have a disturbing effect on an individual voter's perceptions of the parties' policy positions, which in turn may affect PA.

## Data, research design and outline of the study

The research questions addressed above all require some kind of cross-sectional time-series data.[32] Unfortunately, it is today not possible to both get comprehensive cross-sectional and time-series data on systems, parties and voters from a single data-set. Different sources of data have been used due to this obstacle. Moreover, since the explanatory factors from all three levels outlined earlier together make a total of 17 independent variables, potential interaction effects excluded, the model quickly becomes incomprehensible. The study is therefore, as mentioned, divided into three steps represented by three separate articles, where each article has its focus directed towards a specific level or combination of levels of explanatory factors but with voters' PA as the dependent variable in all. The first article focuses on the impact of factors related to electoral and party systems on voters' PA of parties' left right positions. In the second article examines the effect of the behavior and the characteristics of the political parties on voters' PA. Finally, the third article examines the impact of individual parties and system related features together with the effect of individually related factors on PA.

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[32] Time-series data is in this respect needed for investigating the impact of stability in parties' ideological positions on voters' PA.

**Table 5.** Article summary and outline of the study

| Article 1 - Perceptual Agreement in Different Institutional Contexts | Article 2 - Political Parties and Perceptual Agreement | Article 3 - Misperceptions and Effective Representation |
|---|---|---|
| Investigates the direct and indirect impact of factors related to electoral systems and party systems on PA by focusing on their impact on a) divergence in party positions through centripetal- or centrifugal competition and b) voters' PA. <br><br> Divergence in party positions is in this respect expected to have an important facilitative effect on PA. <br><br> In more detail it tests the impact of effective thresholds, ballot structures, the number of parties, dimensionality and the strength of the left-right dimension on divergence in party positions and voters' PA. <br><br> (arrow 1 in figure 3) | Focuses on the effect of the behavior and characteristics of political parties on voters' PA. <br><br> More specifically it evaluates a) the effect of behavior related factors such as stable and divergent party positions on voters' PA and b) the impact of characteristic related factors such as the parties' age, electoral size and ideological family belonging on PA. <br><br> (arrow 4 in figure 3) | Examines the simultaneous impact of characteristics related to individual voters, political parties and system related qualities on PA among individual voters. <br><br> It also investigates to what extent individually related factors, such as perceived ideological distance between voters and parties, affects PA and interacts with the contextual factors. <br><br> (arrows 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 in figure 3) |

In article 1 and 3 the analyzes are based on data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) module 1 and 2, collected in post election surveys in 32 countries during 1996-2001 and 2001-2004 respectively. The dataset covers a total of 63 elections with 396 political parties and 56 067 voter respondents. The strength with the dataset, besides that it is cross-national, is that it contains both micro-level data that include vote choice, candidate and party evaluations etc. and macro-level data on aggregate electoral returns, electoral rules and party characteristics. This conjunction allows for conducting cross-national analyses on the effects of institutions on voting behavior. The data can be obtained from the CSES Secretariat, Centre for Political Studies, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan. The data can also be downloaded from: http://www.umich.edu/~cses.

The accomplishment of the CSES study implies that some countries are represented up to three times and others less often, which might bring problems related to the use of time-series cross-sectional data. As time points are so few, the dataset cannot be considered as a time series but still there are observations over time. The dataset has therefore been analyzed for the presence of autocorrelation but neither a Correlogram test nor the

Durbin-Watson statistic indicates any great degree of autocorrelation. However, since the analysis sets out to investigate the impact of contextually related factors on voters' PA, it is less desirable that countries appear an unequal number of times. For this reason the data in article number 1, has been weighted according to how many times each country is represented in the data set.

In article 2, where the effects of stability in party positions on voters' perceptions is examined, one needs time-series data. This requirement is problematic. In Sweden, for example, national election studies have been carried out since 1956 but the question about parties' left-right positions was only included since 1979. To obtain enough cases for efficient estimates, time-series data from election studies in Norway, Sweden, Germany and The Netherlands were pooled into one data-set with 26 parties covered in 35 elections from the mid-seventies onwards. In practice this means 26 parties in an average of eight elections in each country which gives an effective N of 187 parties. The data was gathered from the database constructed by the European Voter Project and can be obtained from the Central Archive for Empirical Social Research (ZA) at the University of Cologne with the study number 3911 (Mochmann, Oedegaard, and Reiner 1998). Complementary data for the post-1998 elections not included in the European Voter database has in the case of elections in The Netherlands' in 2002 and 2003 been gleaned from Irwin (2005), that for Norway in 2001 and for Sweden in 2002 comes from the Swedish Social Science Data Archive (SSD), http://www.ssd.gu.se. Data for Germany in 2002 has been taken from the CSES-project.

One could also consider a strategy of weighting the data in article number 3 as was done in article number 1, since the analyses sets out to investigate the impact of contextually related factors on voters' perceptions. Such a design would, without the inclusion of any weights or by not controlling for the election waves, in practice implies that the computer treats them as individual and unique country observations. This may in turn result in an overestimation of the effects of the system related variables, since most countries that appear several times in the data are west European countries with proportional multiparty systems. However, by controlling for the election waves (*i.e.* repeated cross section observations for some countries) we do not need to consider the fact that the design of the CSES study implies that some countries are represented up to three times while other countries only are represented once. The study is conducted with a multilevel design with three levels based on a stacked data-matrix with data on individual voters and various system characteristics in 29 countries. Moreover, since PA is an aggregated measure of dispersion on a party level, nothing can be said about the effect of the independent variables on the perceptions among individual voters. For this reason, the third article is based on perceptual

deviations (PD) as an alternative operationalization to PA, perceptual deviation is constructed as the absolute deviation for an individual's placement of a party and the median placement of the same party. The dependent variable is hence working as a proxy for perceptual agreement (and to some extent also perceptual accuracy) on an individual level.

All together, the articles on which this book is based covers 34 countries that are:

**Figur 4.** Countries included in the study



Countries included in the study

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Australia | 10 France | 19 Netherlands | 28 Slovenia |
| 2 Belgium | 11 Germany | 20 New Zealand | 29 Spain |
| 3 Brazil | 12 Hungary | 21 Norway | 30 Sweden |
| 4 Bulgaria | 13 Iceland | 22 Peru | 31 Taiwan |
| 5 Canada | 14 Ireland | 23 Philippines | 32 Ukraine |
| 6 Chile | 15 Israel | 24 Poland | 33 United Kingdom |
| 7 Czech Republic | 16 Japan | 25 Portugal | 34 United States |
| 8 Denmark | 17 Lithuania | 26 Republic of Korea | |
| 9 Finland | 18 Mexico | 27 Romania | |

A more detailed description of the research design, methods and different operationalizations or measurements used in the study can be found in each article.

## Limitations of the study

Both perceptual agreement and political contexts are, of course, produced by a range of factors that are not included in this study, such as the intensity of an election campaign, the perceived importance or excitement of an election (see Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Oscarsson 1998) or media

structure and economy (Arnold 2007). However, there are several reasons for only including contextual factors related to electoral systems, parties and party systems or voters in this study. The factors listed above have all been identified theoretically or empirically in current research or in other related literature on the subject as being important determinants behind voting behavior. However, in this study the most relevant factors concern differences between systems, which means the comparisons must be between countries in order to obtain variation in the factors. Comparative studies of voting behavior of this sort is complicated since: 1) we are constrained to using secondary data which means that theoretically important variables are sometimes missing; and 2) even if certain questions or variables are present in different national election studies, it is not always possible to make valid comparisons. For example, how do we construct a truly objective comparative measure of political knowledge or of the excitement or importance of an election? Of course, one could consider including different global measures of corruption, freedom of the press, state of the economy, GDP etc. However, most countries yielding relevant and comparable data on voting behavior are, with few exceptions, highly industrialized and from the western hemisphere and can be seen as highly similar with regard to measures such as freedom of the press or corruption. Even if political representation, as mentioned, is the result of different interactions among a range of different actors such as political parties, interest organisations, lobby groups, media etc. it probably is not that controversial to maintain that parties and voters, with few exceptions, are the most central actors, within most political systems of today (Dalton 1984; Sjöblom 1968).

## Results – how contexts affect voters' perceptual agreement

The three studies forming this project have produced a number of empirical findings that extend our understanding of how agreement in voters' perceptions of parties' policy positions can be obtained. Hereafter, summaries of the findings follow along with a more general discussion of their theoretical implications.

### Perceptual agreement in different institutional contexts

The first article takes the rich literature of electoral systems and constitutional design as its point of departure. In the traditional literature of constitutional design and electoral outcomes the focal point is mainly on how parties and party systems are affected by different institutional factors,

which in turn are assumed to influence voters as well (see for example Duverger 1954; Lijphart 1984; Sartori 1976). Recently there has been a renewed interest in electoral engineering where researchers have set out to empirically investigate how voting behavior, *per se*, is affected by the institutional context (Norris 2004; Reynolds 2002; van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). The first wave of research focused on the impact on parties and assumed that voters would be affected as well, whilst the second wave of research mainly investigated how voters are affected by the context by assuming that the political parties mediate the impact of system factors on voters.

The effect of electoral system design on both parties and voters in most studies is seldom empirically tested simultaneously. The present study intends to do exactly that, using data on electoral systems, parties, and voters. More specifically the aim is to investigate how formal and informal electoral institutions are affecting voters' PA of parties' left-right positions, both directly by bringing to bear different facilitative or motivational incentive structures and indirectly via the impact of the institutional context on the political parties in terms of centrifugal or centripetal party competition.

This means that the study deals with a causal model with two dependent variables - where the main dependent variable being voters' PA. The second dependent and mediating variable is divergence in parties' left-right positions brought about by centrifugal or centripetal party competition caused by differences in the institutional settings.

Figure 4 shows the theoretical relationship between the variables at each level included in the study

**Figure 4.** Causal model of different determinants of voters' perceptual agreement.
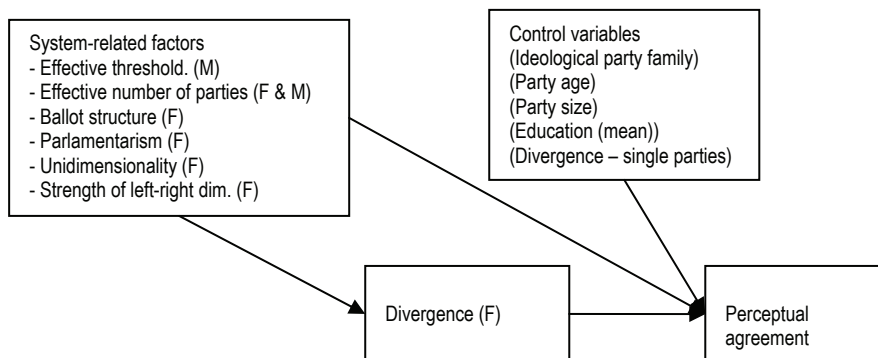


*Comment:* (M) = motivational factor, (F) = facilitative factor.

61

*The impact of the electoral context on party system divergence*
Theoretically it is expected that formal and informal institutions will generate different incentives for parties and voters. In relation to the parties it is supposed that parliamentary and more proportional electoral multiparty systems using closed party ballots and structured along a strong left-right dimension will raise incentives towards centrifugal party competition, in terms of which the parties will appeal more ideologically or programmatically to the voters. An increasing degree of centrifugal competition should generate more divergent party systems that in turn should smooth the process of voter information gathering, which should have an increasing impact on PA.

The empirical results show that the number of parties, *per se*, has a negative effect on party system divergence, which is not surprising since more parties logically means less unique space for each party. On the other hand, the effective threshold - which is a combination of the average district magnitude and the electoral threshold - has a positive impact on party system divergence. The positive effect of the effective threshold is intelligible because higher thresholds usually result in fewer political parties. There also was a rather strong positive effect of parliamentarism on divergence which is well in line with our theoretical expectations, since parliamentary systems are assumed to bring greater focus on the parties, which is expected in turn to increase the competition among parties.

According to Downs' theory (1957), centrifugal competition is most likely to appear in multiparty systems. In order to correctly specify the theoretical model, the analysis included interaction terms between the effective number of parliamentary parties and unidimensionality, the strength of the LR-dimension, the ballot structure and parliamentarism (*i.e.* all variables that are expected to affect the degree of competition among parties). Accepting Downs' proposition, it is a reasonable expectation that the effect of these four variables on party system divergence is dependent on the number of parties. An increasing amount of competition among parties in a two-party system should then result in centripetal incentives for the parties while the opposite should be true in multiparty systems.

The empirical results revealed that the interactions between the effective number of parties and the ballot structure, the strength of the left-right dimension and parliamentarism had significant and positive effects on divergence. This is an interesting finding by itself since a) it supports the hypothesis that party ballots and parliamentarism (assumed here to imply centralized party organizations and party cantered political systems) affect the degree of competition among parties, and b) it empirically supports Downs' hypothesis regarding of the centrifugal tendency of competition in

a multiparty system. It indeed seems that the effect of the ballot structure and parliamentarism on the degree of divergence depends on and increases with the number of parties.

*The impact of the electoral context on voters' perceptual agreement*
Considering the effects of the electoral context, it is expected that the effective threshold, the ballot structure, the degree of unidimensionality, the constitution and strength of the left-right dimension together with the number of parties will have an independent effect on the PA among voters as well. Lower thresholds will suppress the feeling of '*wasted votes*' and thereby raise incentives to obtain information about the policy positions of the parties, which will have a positive impact on PA. Strong, unidimensional left-right oriented parliamentary constitutional systems on the other hand, are expected to produce a simpler political structure which will facilitate the voters' understanding of the parties' policies. In addition, the use of party ballots together with party system divergence is expected to have a facilitative effect on voters' perceptions. These factors altogether will have a positive impact on voters' PA.

Positive and significant effects were found in the case of the direct effects on PA, namely the effective number of parties, parliamentarism and party system divergence. A rather strong effect of party system divergence supports the expectation derived from the RPM that divergent policy positions are important not only for single parties but also for party systems so that voters are given meaningful electoral choices.

A positive effect of the number of parties on PA is an interesting finding. According to the theoretical expectations, an increasing number of parties will a) force the parties to profile themselves ideologically more clearly for the voters, and b) motivate voters to inform themselves about the parties' policy positions since there is a greater variety of choice. It also was hypothesized that a positive effect of the number of parties would be associated with greater information costs for the voter, which in turn was supposed to have a negative impact on PA. This hypothesis found no support in this study.

Another expectation was that parliamentary constitutional systems would have a simpler political structure which should facilitate the voters' in gathering information about the parties' policy positions. A positive and direct effect of parliamentarism on voters' PA confirms this hypothesis. Substantively, this implies that if the USA, or any other presidential system, switched to a parliamentary system such used by Norway, the Netherlands etc., the PA among voters might increase by approximately 20 percent.

The results overall show that institutions matter. There are significant and positive relationships between party system divergence and parliamentarism, the effective threshold, the ballot structure and the degree of unidi-

mensionality in an electoral system. There is also a positive and significant relationship between the degree of party system divergence and voters PA.

Significant direct effects on PA among voters can be found from the effective number of parties. This factor was considered as having a motivational effect on voters, which confirms the theoretical assumption that the 'breadth of alternatives' may motivate voters to get informed about the parties' policy positions. Direct and significant effects were also found between PA and parliamentary systems. This factor was assumed to be mainly facilitative in character. Voters therefore seem to find it easier to apprehend the positions of parties in parliamentary systems with a stronger focus on the political parties. The fact that both these classes of variables had significant effects on PA indicates that voters do not necessarily need to be cognitive misers, as simplicity in the political system is not the only factor that accounts for higher degrees of PA.[33]

In conclusion, the results show that there exist both direct effects on voters' PA produced by the electoral and political context and an important indirect effect mediated by the parties, since one of the strongest effects on PA was caused by party system divergence. Representation in the form defined by the RPM, hence seems to work best in parliamentary multiparty systems, that have many parties that hold divergent policy positions.

This study consequently, contributes to a deepened understanding of how factors related to both electoral systems and party systems affect voters' PA. It also makes a contribution to research on the impact of electoral systems on party systems, by testing how differences in electoral systems generate incentives for varying degrees of centrifugal or centripetal competition among political parties.

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[33] The positive and significant effect of the effective number of parliamentary parties on perceptual agreement warrants cautious interpretation for several reasons. 1) The relationship can of course result from the fact that voters in general tend to become more motivated to seek information actively about the parties. 2) It might, however, also result from the fact that the competition in multiparty systems tends to be more focused and centred around the parties which forces them to appeal more clearly to the voters, and thus the mechanism behind higher degrees of PA is more facilitative than motivational in character (many factors of course, are to a varying extent both facilitative and motivational). 3) It can also be an effect of methodological short-comings in the sense that when placing parties on an eleven point left-right scale, there is 'less space' for variation for each party. For example, a voter may well be familiar with two or three of the national parties but not the rest. However, s/he might well have some vague sense of the positions of these other parties and by knowing the positions for some parties s/he can also figure out where to place the rest of the remaining parties on the left-right scale.

### *Political parties and perceptual agreement - the influence of party related factors on voters' perceptions in proportional electoral systems*

The RPM emphasizes a number of conditions that must be met in order to reach the normative ideals of political representation, where public policy reflects the will of a majority of the voters. Principle among these conditions is the presence of responsible parties that hold stable and divergent policy positions thereby giving voters a meaningful set of electoral choices. Less divergent policy positions could thus impede the process of information gathering by voters since it may be difficult to discern the differences between the parties, and this may in turn affect the degree of PA among voters.

Whereas the RPM highlights the behavior of political parties, other theories on political parties focus more on various characteristics and attributes such as electoral size, age and party labels. For example, according to Kirchheimer, big catch-all parties are characterized as being less distinctive in their ideological positions (Kirchheimer 1990). A party's electoral size can then be expected to have implications for the agreement in voters' perceptions of the parties. Other scholars have suggested that the labels of the parties can work as cues for voters when acquiring information about parties' policies or their left-right positions (Budge 2001; Downs 1957; Snyder 2002). It has also been suggested that newer parties are likely to adjust or change their policies and ideological profiles more frequently, which in turn may be confusing for voters (van der Brug, Franklin, Popescu, and Toka 2008).

The second article therefore focused on how agreement among voters' perceptions of parties' policy positions is affected by 1) the behavior of the parties such as the degree of stability and divergence in their policy positions and 2) by various party characteristics such as the electoral size, the age and the labels of the parties.

Figure 5 shows the theoretical relationship between the variables included in the study

**Figure 5.** Causal model of different determinants of voters' perceptual agreement.

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│ Party-related factors            │
│ - Stability (F)                  │              ┌──────────────────────┐
│ - Divergence (F)                 │─────────────▶│ Perceptual agreement │
│ - Ideological party family (F)   │              └──────────────────────┘
│ - Party age (F)                  │
│ - Party size (F)                 │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
```
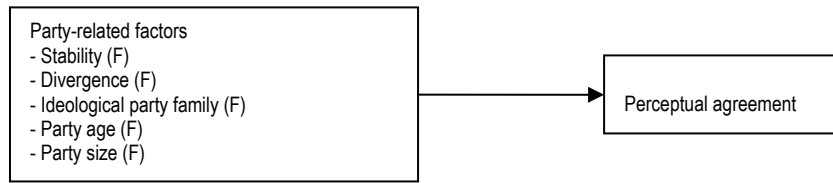
*Comment:* (F) = facilitative factor

*How party related factors affect perceptual agreement among voters*
The analyzes show that both stability and divergence have significant effects and that they are of considerable importance in explaining variation in voters' PA. The degree of divergence in a party's ideological position especially seems to have a decisive impact on PA among voters. An interpretation of these results is that it simply becomes easier to obtain information when the position of parties are more stable over time and divergent from one another, as this reduces the information costs. Responsible parties with stable and divergent policy positions thus are normatively appealing and an important condition behind effective representation as outlined by the RPM.[34]

Concerning the characteristically related variables, the age of a party is of minor importance, as the effect of this variable was not significantly different from zero in any of the analyzes. It should, however, be mentioned that party labels (*i.e.* the parties' ideological family affiliation) does have a rather strong and positive impact on PA but the effect is only significant in the analyses reported in the third article.[35]

Shifting attention to the variables that have a negative impact on voters' PA, it becomes clear that the effect of party size on PA is small but robust

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[34] A study by Knutsen and Kumlin (2005) also proved that ideological polarization among the main political actors in a system has a rather strong impact on voters' value orientations. The authors conclude that greater ideological divergence among political alternatives affects the extent to which voters can receive ideological cues from the parties, which in turn affects their value orientations.

[35] One reason behind this result could be that in the CSES dataset the number of parties is 296 instead of 135 as in the European voter dataset.

compared to the effect of the two behaviorally related variables. It appears that greater electoral support for a party means less agreement among voters on its policy position. The result is not unexpected as 'catch-all' parties, according to Kirchheimer's theory, should be less ideologically committed in order to appeal to a wider electorate (Kirchheimer 1990).[36]

A common conclusion on the causes of PA is that voters' perceptions of party positions is a result of ideological predisposition (Granberg 1988) and cognitive capabilities (Granberg 1988; van der Brug 1997) as well as the salience of the different issues (van der Brug 1997; 1999b; Oscarsson 1998). The present study shows that voters' perceptions also are affected by different features related to the political parties and that it is the behavior rather than the characteristics of the parties that is of importance for PA among voters. In general, voters seem to find it easier to perceive the position of small- to medium sized political parties that hold stable and divergent policy positions and that belong to ideological party families related to the left-right dimension. In contrast to the literature on voting behavior that emphasizes the importance of well-informed and knowledgeable voters as an important ingredient in effective policy representation, the second article of this book shows that responsible parties that represent stable and divergent policy positions are needed as well.

## *Misperceptions and effective representation - the simultaneous impact of party systems, electoral systems, political parties and individual characteristics on voters' perceptions*

The first two articles on which this book is based focus on the effect of parties, party systems and electoral systems on PA of parties' left-right positions among voters. In order to make a more comprehensive analysis of the factors that cause and influence PA, it is necessary to pay attention to the individually related variables that can be expected to affect the PA. The focus of the third article is on how both individually related features and various contextual factors related to parties and the political systems can

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[36] However, since bigger parties also are more electorally successful (given an operationalization of size in terms of share of votes) it is counter-intuitive that more successful parties may promote weaker PA, given their likelihood of incumbency, resources, and opportunities to communicate policy agendas. Nevertheless, parties may be succeeding due to the perceptual disagreement they are able to construct within their electorates but this question is well beyond the scope of this article.

affect voters' perceptions. The study also investigates how factors related to both individual voters and political parties interact with the institutional context and thereby affect the PA.

Much research has been spent on the impact of individual-level characteristics on political perceptions, where factors such as political knowledge, left-right self placement and party sympathy have been proven to be influential (Granberg 1993; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Popkin 1991; van der Brug 1997). It has also been shown that individuals tend to place parties or candidates that they like closer to their self-identified position while parties or candidates that are disliked will be pushed away when placing parties or candidates on various scales. Perceptual distortions or 'wishful thinking' occur due to ego involvement and an affective orientation toward parties or candidates (Granberg 1993; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Popkin 1991).

However, since PA is an aggregate measure of dispersion among groups of voters (see Granberg & Holmberg 1988; van der Eijk 2001) it does not inform about the perceptions of individual voters. As mentioned, this limitation has been overcome by focusing on the deviation between the median position of the parties, based on the results from the placement of the parties for the whole electorate, and the placement of parties made by individual voters on a left-right scale. By focusing on the deviation among individual voters (hereafter referred to as perceptual deviation (PD)), we have the opportunity to investigate how different individually related factors are affecting the misperceptions among individual voters concerning the parties' left-right positions.

The objective of this study is twofold. Firstly, the aim is to investigate which factors or groups of factors related to either individuals, parties or the electoral/political systems that exert the greatest influence on the perceptual deviations among individual voters. Secondly, the aim is to examine to what extent individual behavior is affected by or interacts with the context, *i.e.* characteristics related to the parties or the systems. We know from the literature of electoral systems that the adoption of proportional- or more majoritarian formulas creates incentives for rational vote-seeking politicians to either emphasize programmatic or particularistic benefits during the election campaigns (Farrell 1997; Norris 2004). We thus can ask whether contextual differences exaggerate or mitigate the tendency among individual voters to yield to 'wishful thinking' and thus affect the voters' perception of the parties?

Figure 6 shows the theoretical relationship between the variables at each level that are included in the study

**Figure 6.** Causal model of different determinants of voters' perceptual deviations.



*System-related factors*
- Disproportionality. (M)
- Eff. number of parties (F & M)
- Strength of left-right dim. (F)
- Competition (F & M)

*Party-related factors*
- Divergence (F)
- Ideological party family (F)
- Party age (F)
- Party size (F)

*Individually-related factors*
- Party sympathy (A)
- Left-right distance (A)
- Education (F)
- Age (F)
- Gender (F)

Perceptual deviation
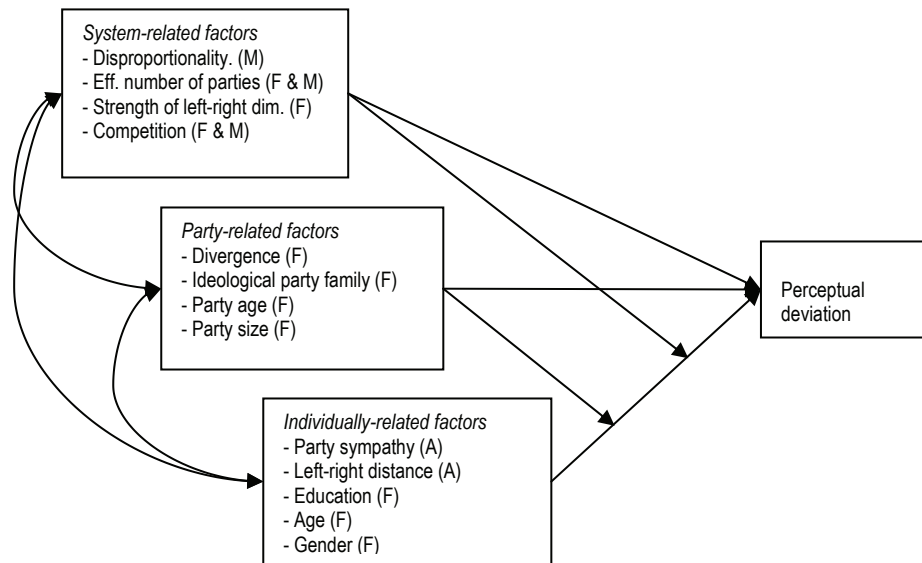
*Comment:* (M) = motivational factor, (F) = facilitative factor and (A) = affective factor.

*The impact of factors related to individual voters, parties and political systems on voters' perceptual deviation.*

Prior research has pointed out concerning the effects of the individually related variables that ideologies have both cognitive and affective parts. A consequence of the latter is that voters tend to strive for cognitive balance, and will tend to '*pull*' favorably viewed parties closer and '*push*' disliked parties further away from their own position than they are in reality. The empirical results of the third article clearly show that it is the perceived left-right distance between a voter's own position and the position of the parties that has the greatest negative influence on voters' PD, no matter kind of party or political system. This result strengthens earlier findings in this field that '*push and pull*' effects grow stronger the greater the perceived distance between a voter and a specific party.

Education exerts the greatest impact among the individually related factors that have a decreasing effect on PD. Just as expected, the predicted levels of PD decrease with greater education or when moving from women to men. Excepting that the effect of age is not significant, these results resemble those of Holmberg and Oscarsson (2004) showing that the degree of political knowledge or sophistication is higher in general among educated men, which, reasonably, should also generate a lower degree of per-

69

ceptual deviation.

Among the party related factors, the results of the third article confirm again that divergence in a party's left-right position has the most significant total effect on PD among individual voters. The more a party differs in its left-right position from its' opponents, the lower the PD will be among voters. Turning to the system related variables, it is only the degree of competition that has a significant effect on the deviations among individual voters. More competitive party systems to some extent do motivate voters and promote party representatives to profile a party's position more clearly in terms of ideology, even though the effect is rather small. According to Downs (1957), it is strategically reasonable and important for party leaders to emphasize the differences between the parties in more competitive systems, where voters are likely to be favorably disposed to a number of parties. Concludingly, party related factors are the single most important group of variables for explaining voters' PD closely followed by individual factors. The greatest total effect was also found from the degree of divergence in parties' left-right positions. The system related variables in contrast, seem to have the lowest influence on voters' PD.

*How factors related to individual voters, parties and political systems are interacting and affecting perceptual deviations among voters.*
Results to this point have shown that the perceived ideological distance between voters and parties has a strong impact on voters' perceptual deviations. However, it was expected theoretically that proportional electoral systems would promote more centralized, programmatic and ideologically oriented party organizations. In more disproportional or majority systems on the other hand, the parties are expected to be more '*all embracing*' and downplay ideological conflicts and focus on more particularistic policies since they seek to appeal to the '*whole*' electorate (Norris 2004). A similar logic applies to the aspect of more vs. less competitive party systems. The more competitive a system, the more motivated the party leaders will be to profile their parties by emphasizing differences to their competitors. Ideological undertones and statements might be of great importance when distinguishing '*us from them*' in this respect. Reasonably, if ideologically committed and centralized party organizations and the use of bonding rather than bridging strategies, is a fundamental attribute of more competitive political systems; then the voters in these systems could be expected to develop stronger and more affective attachments to the parties. This should in turn even further increase the affective effect of the ideological distance between voters and parties.

In contrast, following Holmberg's argument, wishful thinking appears when voters are looking at parties that are a bit fuzzy and unclear (Holmberg 1999b). If party representatives in more competitive systems are more

70

eager to profile their parties as clearly as possible compared to other competing parties, the degree of competition could alternatively work as a facilitative contextual factor that might have a decreasing impact on the effect of the affectively related variable ideological distance on voters' PD.

The results showed that there is a small but significant additional interaction effect of left-right distance and competition under control for all other variables included in the model, and this supports the alternative hypothesis inspired by Holmberg. This means that the negative effect of left-right distance on PD decreases as competition increases. This strengthens the suspicion that the affective part of left-right distance is increasing in less competitive systems as the parties are expected to downplay the differences between themselves and the competing parties under such circumstances. This in turn makes it harder for voters to discern the parties' policy positions which accentuate the tendency to 'wishful thinking' among voters. In more competitive systems, on the other hand, the parties are more inclined to profile themselves in terms of ideology and other policy positions. Moreover the effect of left-right distance on PD also decreases as divergence increases and increases for every increase in party size.

A conclusion from the results is that voters in the main, do not seem to be as affectively related to the parties as earlier research claimed. Instead it seems as '*push and pull*' effects occur when the policy positions of the parties are blurred because a position is shared by several parties or the party is big or the party does not have an ideological brand name that gives a clue to its expected position or the degree of competitiveness with in a system. It therefore seems that to a large extent misperceptions are the product of a complex and indistinct party space. In line with Heider's argument (Heider 1946), voters wish to maintain cognitive balance and in order to achieve this they want structure and clarity in the party space and they will turn to wishful thinking if this is not forthcoming.

The explanatory variables in this study were divided into three broad categories of facilitative, motivational and affective factors. The results in this article give support to just one fully affective factor, namely the distance between a voter's self-placement and the placement of parties. The greater the distance, the more blurred the perceptions of the parties' positions seems to be. A row of facilitative factors can however, mitigate this tendency. Among the individually related factors, more highly educated men displayed lower degrees of PD. Among the party related factors, a party's electoral size tended to render more distorted perceptions, a finding that is well in line with our expectations about big 'catch-all' parties. The factor that promoted lower PD the most was divergence. Being able to relate a party label to the left-right dimension also promoted lower PD to some extent.

A not too far fetched conclusion then is that the greater responsibility

for obtaining an effective system of representation in terms of policy lies with the political parties. Wishful thinking among voters seems to occur when party positions are blurred or unclear. On the system level, a high degree of competition tended to yield less PD among voters. What these factors have in common is that they are facilitative rather than motivational in character. An objection might be that competition qualifies as a motivational factor as well. This is true in the sense that voters may be more motivated by increased electioneering but at the same time, when the competition is high, parties are expected to profile themselves more clearly.

## Discussion, theoretical implications and conclusions

Clear and common perceptions among voters on parties' policy positions are an essential ingredient of effective policy representation. The traditional literature has often emphasized that parties matter, not only as sources of information, but also as anchors that increase the efficiency of heuristic processing. It is well-documented today that the amount of detailed information among voters often is poor (Bartels 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Significantly, it has been shown that voters do not necessarily need detailed information in order to make complex decisions, since they tend to use heuristics *i.e.* information short-cuts. Cues from political parties are essential in this regard, as voters can compensate by substituting knowledge of party ideology for lacking information on concrete issues (Zaller 1992; Lupia 1998; Slothuus 2008). Thus, voters may actively use their knowledge of the parties to interpret complex political issues and messages. Voters' perceptions of the parties' policy positions are essential in this context since they affect the extent to which voters are meaningfully represented in a political system. If there is neither agreement nor accuracy among voters on what parties stand for, individual choices guided by policy preferences will be indistinguishable from random noise (Granberg 1988; van der Brug 1999b).

The overarching aim with this book has been to investigate the circumstances under which perceptual agreement among voters on parties' policy positions can be obtained. Whereas earlier studies of the causes of perceptual agreement argued that perceptions of party positions among voters result mainly from internal individually related features (Granberg 1988; Oscarsson 1998; van der Brug 1997; 1999b), this study shows that voters' perceptions also are affected by external factors related to the political and electoral systems as well as the political parties.

Research on constitutional design and electoral outcomes has traditionally focused either on how different institutional factors affect parties and

party systems or how electoral systems affect individual voters. Whilst the former focus mainly assumed the influence of institutions on individual voters, the latter assumed the influence of institutions on parties. The analyses reported in this book aimed to contribute to this research field by taking a more comprehensive grip of one of the issues and investigate how both parties and voters are affected simultaneously by the institutional context. The results show that institutions matter and that there exist significant direct effects produced by the electoral and political context on voters' PA but also significant indirect effects mediated by the political parties. Constitutional design matters for voters' PA but the influence is mainly indirect since constitutions and rules seem primarily to affect the behavior of parties, which in turn has decisive impact on voters' perceptions of parties' policy positions.

The common characteristic of the contextually related factors shown by this study to improve the perceptual process among voters is that they mainly are facilitative. Consequently, political representation, as defined by the RPM, seems to works best in multiparty parliamentary systems with proportional representation and a strong left-right dimensional structure, in which parties holds stable and divergent policy positions. Simplicity in the political system may thus increase the agreement among voters when perceiving the positions held by the parties.

The particularly large impact of party related factors on voters' PA points towards the fact that the responsibility for obtaining efficient policy representation lies in the hands of the political parties to a large extent. Wishful thinking among voters in particular seems to occur when party positions are blurred or unclear due to a complicated and indistinct party space. Hence, the RPM has proved to be a fruitful model to proceed with when striving to understand how to obtain effective political representation.

A rather widespread and pessimistic view about the weakened links between parties and voters that is prevalent amongst scientists in Western Europe at least, may thus need to be nuanced. Political parties today clearly are facing a widespread decline in membership and a disengagement by citizens from party politics (Mair and van Biezen 2001; Holmberg 2007). This trend may not however, mean a concomitant decline in meaningful representation, as voters still are able to form accurate opinions about the policy positions of the parties. Cues from the political parties are nonetheless central for the formation of meaningful opinion among voters (Zaller 1992; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Slothuus 2008). Bryce (1921) was probably correct in that modern representative democracies cannot function effectively without political parties, as they obviously are important actors in the process of representation. In this respect, PA among voters on parties' policy positions is essential and the behavior and characteristics of parties are here central as being the most important determinants of PA.

# Appendix

**Table 1.** Institutional characteristics in 35 countries in 58 elections between 1996-2004.

| Country | Year | Electoral system | District magnitude | Party threshold | Ballot structure | Seats | Effective # of parties | Competition | Divergence | Strength of left-right dimension | Unidimensionaliy | Disproportionality | Effective threshold | Parliamentarism | Perceptual agreement |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Denmark | 1998 | List PR | 7.9 | 2.0 | Pref. | 179 | 3.7 | 2.4 | 1.5 | 1.0 | .5 | 1.9 | 2.0 | Parl | .7 |
| Sweden | 1998 | List PR | 1.7 | 4.0 | Pref. | 349 | 3.9 | 1.9 | 1.7 | 1.0 | .5 | 1.0 | 4.0 | Parl | .7 |
| Sweden | 2002 | List PR | 1.7 | 4.0 | Pref. | 349 | 4.2 | 2.6 | 1.6 | .8 | .5 | 1.2 | 4.0 | Parl | .7 |
| Bulgaria | 2001 | List PR | 7.7 | 4.0 | Party. | 240 | 2.4 | 1.8 | 1.6 | .7 | .5 | 6.5 | 4.0 | Parl | .7 |
| Netherlands | 2002 | List PR | 15.0 | .7 | Party. | 150 | 5.0 | 3.8 | 1.5 | .8 | .4 | 1.3 | 2.6 | Parl | .7 |
| Netherlands | 1998 | List PR | 15.0 | .7 | Party. | 150 | 4.4 | 2.7 | 1.4 | 1.0 | .4 | 1.1 | .7 | Parl | .6 |
| Denmark | 2001 | List PR | 7.9 | 2.0 | Pref. | 179 | 5.2 | 2.1 | 1.6 | .6 | .5 | .8 | 2.0 | Parl | .6 |
| Norway | 1997 | List PR | 8.6 | .0 | Party. | 165 | 4.4 | 2.0 | 1.6 | 1.0 | .5 | 3.7 | 4.0 | Parl | .6 |
| Iceland | 2003 | List PR | 1.5 | 5.0 | Party. | 63 | 4.0 | 2.2 | 2.1 | .2 | .5 | 1.9 | 16.0 | Parl | .6 |
| Norway | 2001 | List PR | 8.3 | .0 | Party. | 165 | 5.6 | 3.2 | 1.5 | 1.0 | .4 | 2.3 | 4.0 | Parl | .6 |
| Czech Rep. | 2002 | List PR | 14.3 | 5.0 | Pref. | 200 | 3.9 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 1.0 | .5 | 5.1 | 5.0 | Parl | .6 |
| Netherlands | 2003 | List PR | 15.0 | .7 | Party. | 150 | 6.0 | 3.8 | 1.3 | .8 | .4 | 1.4 | 2.3 | Parl | .6 |
| Portugal | 2002 | List PR | 1.5 | .0 | Party. | 230 | 3.2 | 1.1 | 1.9 | .8 | .5 | 5.0 | 6.6 | Parl | .6 |
| Great Britain | 2001 | Majority (FPP) | 1.0 | - | Cand. | - | 2.7 | 1.9 | 1.7 | 1.0 | .6 | 16.6 | 37.5 | Parl | .6 |
| Iceland | 1999 | List PR | 6.2 | 5.0 | Party. | 63 | 3.5 | 2.2 | 2.0 | .2 | .3 | 1.2 | 16.0 | Parl | .6 |
| Chile | 2003 | List PR | 7.7 | .0 | Pref. | 200 | 2.3 | 1.8 | 2.0 | 1.0 | .6 | 2.4 | 25.0 | Div | .6 |
| Spain | 2004 | List PR | 6.7 | 3.0 | Party. | 350 | 3.1 | 1.0 | 2.1 | 1.0 | .6 | 5.1 | 9.7 | Parl | .6 |
| Czech Rep. | 1996 | List PR | 25.0 | 5.0 | Pref. | 200 | 4.3 | 1.6 | 1.8 | .5 | .6 | 9.0 | 5.0 | Parl | .6 |
| Hungary | 2002 | Qvasi-Maj. Mixed | 1.0 | .0 | Dual. | 176 | 2.7 | 1.3 | 1.8 | .8 | .7 | 25.1 | 4.0 | Parl | .6 |
| Spain | 1996 | List PR | 7.0 | 3.0 | Party. | 350 | 2.8 | 1.3 | 1.7 | .9 | .4 | 5.6 | 9.7 | Parl | .5 |
| Finland | 2003 | List PR | 13.3 | .0 | Pref. | 200 | 4.8 | 3.2 | 1.3 | .2 | .3 | 3.0 | 5.2 | Div | .5 |
| Germany | 2002 | Qvasi-Prop. Mixed | 1.0 | .0 | Dual. | 299 | 3.4 | 2.3 | 1.5 | .8 | .6 | 3.1 | 5.0 | Parl | .5 |
| Chile | 1999 | List PR | 7.6 | - | Pref. | - | 2.2 | 2.2 | 2.1 | 1.0 | .5 | 5.9 | 25.0 | Div | .5 |
| Spain | 2000 | List PR | 7.0 | 3.0 | Party. | 350 | 2.5 | 1.0 | 1.6 | .6 | .7 | 5.1 | 9.7 | Parl | .5 |
| Switzerland | 1999 | List PR | | - | Pref. | - | 4.4 | 1.9 | 1.5 | - | - | 3.1 | 8.6 | Parl | .5 |
| Israel | 2003 | List PR | 12.0 | 1.5 | Party. | 120 | 4.2 | 2.1 | 1.4 | 1.0 | .6 | 2.0 | 1.5 | Parl | .5 |
| New Zealand | 1996 | Qvasi-Prop. Mixed | 1.0 | .0 | Dual. | 69 | 4.0 | 1.7 | 1.6 | .3 | .4 | 4.5 | 5.0 | Parl | .5 |
| Poland | 1997 | List PR | 7.5 | 5.0 | Pref. | 460 | 3.9 | 2.0 | 1.7 | .1 | .5 | 1.7 | 5.0 | Parl | .5 |
| Japan | 1996 | Qvasi-Maj. Mixed | 1.0 | 16.7 | Dual. | 300 | 4.0 | 1.9 | 1.8 | 1.0 | .3 | 13.2 | 25.1 | Parl | .5 |
| Israel | 1996 | List PR | 12.0 | 1.5 | Party. | 120 | 3.7 | 1.4 | 1.4 | .9 | .7 | 1.9 | 1.5 | Parl | .5 |
| Germany | 1998 | Qvasi-Prop. Mixed | 1.0 | .0 | Dual. | 299 | 3.4 | 3.1 | 1.2 | 1.0 | .5 | 3.1 | 5.0 | Parl | .5 |
| Ireland | 2002 | STV | 4.0 | .0 | Pref. | 166 | 3.3 | 2.7 | 1.3 | .4 | .3 | 6.4 | 14.9 | Parl | .5 |
| Lithuania | 1997 | Semi-Prop. | 1.0 | - | Dual. | - | 2.5 | 1.9 | 1.3 | .3 | .5 | 14.6 | 5.0 | Parl | .5 |
| Hungary | 1998 | Qvasi-Maj. | 1.0 | .0 | Dual. | 176 | 3.5 | 1.9 | 1.6 | .5 | .6 | 22.4 | 4.0 | Parl | .5 |

| | | Mixed | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Great Britain | 1997 | Majority (FPP) | 1.0 | - | Cand. | - | 2.8 | 1.1 | 1.4 | 1.0 | .5 | 16.8 | 37.5 | Parl | .5 |
| Poland | 2001 | List PR | 11.2 | 5.0 | Pref. | 460 | 3.7 | 1.7 | 1.5 | .3 | .4 | 5.4 | 5.0 | Parl | .5 |
| Korea Rep. of | 2000 | Qvasi-Maj. Mixed | 1.0 | .0 | Dual. | 243 | 2.8 | 1.0 | 1.0 | .5 | .6 | 14.5 | 32.0 | Div | .5 |
| Belgium (wall) | 1999 | List PR | 7.5 | - | Pref. | - | 3.8 | .7 | .5 | .3 | .4 | 2.6 | 8.8 | Parl | .5 |
| France | 2002 | Two-Round System | 1.0 | 12.5 | Pref. | 577 | 4.8 | 1.9 | 1.0 | .5 | .4 | 17.7 | 37.5 | Div | .4 |
| Austria | 1996 | Majority (Alt. Vote) | 1.0 | - | Cand. | 150 | 2.9 | 2.0 | 1.4 | .6 | .5 | 11.6 | 37.5 | Parl | .4 |
| New Zealand | 2002 | Qvasi-Prop. Mixed | 1.0 | .0 | Dual. | 69 | 3.8 | 2.0 | 1.4 | 1.0 | .4 | 1.9 | 5.0 | Parl | .4 |
| Austria | 2004 | Majority (Alt. Vote) | 1.0 | .0 | Cand. | 150 | 2.8 | 2.0 | 1.6 | .9 | .5 | 7.9 | 37.5 | Parl | .4 |
| USA | 2004 | Majority | 1.0 | .0 | Cand. | 435 | 2.1 | .9 | 2.0 | 1.0 | .4 | 2.5 | 37.5 | Div | .4 |
| Korea Rep. of | 2004 | Qvasi-Maj. Mixed | 1.0 | .0 | Dual. | 243 | 3.4 | 1.2 | 1.6 | .0 | .6 | 12.1 | 32.0 | Div | .4 |
| Taiwan | 1996 | Qvasi-Maj. Mixed | 9.1 | .0 | Dual. | 225 | 2.5 | .3 | 1.8 | .5 | .2 | 5.6 | 11.3 | Div | .4 |
| Belgium (flan.) | 1999 | List PR | 7.5 | - | Pref. | - | 5.5 | 1.4 | .9 | 1.0 | .4 | 2.6 | 8.8 | Parl | .4 |
| Taiwan | 2001 | Qvasi-Maj. Mixed | 5.7 | .0 | Dual. | 225 | 3.5 | 1.8 | 1.3 | 1.0 | .5 | 3.6 | 11.3 | Div | .4 |
| Canada | 1997 | Majority | 1.0 | - | Cand. | - | 3.9 | .9 | 1.4 | .9 | .4 | 13.2 | 37.5 | Parl | .4 |
| Slovenia | 1996 | Semi-Prop. | 11.0 | - | Pref. | - | 4.3 | 1.7 | 1.3 | .6 | .6 | 2.5 | 3.0 | Parl | .3 |
| Ukraine | 1998 | Semi-Prop. | 1.0 | - | Dual. | - | 3.2 | 1.9 | .9 | .7 | .4 | 8.9 | 4.0 | Div | .3 |
| Romania | 1996 | List PR | 11.0 | - | Pref. | | 3.3 | 2.8 | 1.2 | .2 | .4 | 5.8 | 3.0 | Div | .3 |
| Mexico | 2003 | Qvasi-Maj. Mixed | 1.0 | 2.0 | Dual. | 500 | 3.2 | 2.0 | 1.4 | .9 | .5 | 8.4 | 22.7 | Div | .2 |
| Brazil | 2002 | List PR | 19.0 | .0 | Cand. | 513 | 5.0 | 1.7 | .9 | .1 | .4 | 3.3 | 3.8 | Div | .2 |
| Peru | 2000 | List PR | 12.0 | - | Pref. | - | 2.2 | 1.9 | .5 | .7 | .5 | 6.1 | .6 | Div | .2 |
| Mexico | 2000 | Qvasi-Maj. Mixed | 1.0 | 2.0 | Dual. | 500 | 3.0 | 1.8 | 1.4 | .8 | .5 | 8.4 | 22.7 | Div | .2 |
| Mexico | 1997 | Qvasi-Maj. Mixed | 1.0 | 2.0 | Dual. | 500 | 3.4 | 1.2 | 1.3 | 1.0 | .5 | 8.4 | 22.7 | Div | .2 |
| Peru | 2001 | List PR | 4.8 | - | Pref. | - | 4.1 | 1.9 | .8 | .1 | .5 | 14.6 | .6 | Div | .1 |

*Comment:* Data on effective threshold and district magnitude is taken from Anckar (2002). Data on ballot structure is taken from Norris 2004. The effective number of parliamentary parties was calculated on the vote-shares using the index of Laakso and Taagepera, also known as Herfindahl's index of concentration (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). Disproportionality is calculated according to Gallagher's least square index (Gallagher 1991). Competition is an additive index based on the questions "like-dislike party a-i". If a voter has given a party a score of 6 or higher the variable is coded as 1 and 0 otherwise. The variables are then added together into one single variable with a maximum value of 9 in the case where a voter prefers all parties. Perceptual agreement is based on van der Eijk's measure of agreement (van der Eijk 2001). Divergence is calculated as the average distance between the parties in a party system, weighted by the size of the parties. Unidimensionality is based on the CSES-question 'like-dislike' and calculated with a multiple unidimensional scaling technique using 'Mudfold' (van Schuur and Post 1990). Only respondents that assigned a 'like-dislike' to all parties are included in the unfolding analyses. Since a dichotomous unfolding model (MUDFOLD) was employed, cut-points for 'picked' party had to be selected. A party was considered 'picked' by a respondent if the party scored 6-10 on the eleven-point like-dislike-scale. This range of evaluative response had to be adjusted to find better j-scales: a) range 5-10, b) range 4-10. There are a number of possible reasons why a stimuli (party) may not be unfoldable, such as if the stimuli is too popular or too unpopular, if a stimuli is very close to another stimuli, or if a stimuli does not fit the scale (the responses to the stimuli was guided by a completely other principle, or ideology, than all other stimuli). Strength of left-right dimension is the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between voters' ordering of parties in terms of left-right (mean values) and the ordering of parties according to the first dimension received by the unidimensional scaling procedure. Information about the division of powers is taken from: http://en.wikipedia.org /wiki/List_of_countries_ by_system_of_ governmen t#Full_presidential_ systems. All other information is taken from CSES.

# Article 1

# Perceptual Agreement in Different Institutional Contexts

# Perceptual Agreement in Different Institutional Contexts

## Abstract

The large amount of research on constitutional design and electoral out-comes has long focused on how parties and party systems are affected by different institutional factors. These factors in turn have been assumed to influence voters as well. The present study aims to make a contribution to this research field by combining two strands of research and investigating how parties and voters are affected *simultaneously* by the institutional context. More specifically, the aim is to test how various formal and informal electoral institutional settings affect voters' perceptual agreement of parties' left-right positions, both *directly* by bringing to bear different facilitative or motivational incentive structures and *indirectly* by the impact of the institutional context on the parties in terms of centrifugal or centripetal forces on party competition. The results show that institutions matter and that there are significant direct effects on voters' perceptual agreement. Moreover, there are also important indirect effects mediated by the political parties. In short, the study shows that in more proportional and unidimensional po-litical systems parties tend to position themselves more clearly in terms of ideology, which in turn contributes to higher degrees of perceptual agree-ment among voters.

*Key words:* perceptual agreement, electoral systems, policy representation, left-right ideology, party competition.

## Introduction

Modern representative democracies are most properly described as gov-ernment by the consent of the governed rather than government by the people (Manin 1997; Schattschneider 1960). Elections are central in this context and several scholars of modern democratic theory have struggled to

determine the circumstances under which meaningful and effective representation can exist. One of the more prominent models that often is used for theorizing on these matters is the responsible party model (RPM), which outlines a number of conditions under which policies will reflect mass opinion (APSA 1950; Thomassen 1999). A founding assumption that can be deduced from this model is that an electorate with clear and commonly held perceptions of the party space is an important prerequisite for successful political representation (Converse 1975; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; van der Brug 1997).[37] Political perceptions affect the extent to which voters are meaningfully represented in a political system and thus they are important determinants of the outcomes of electoral processes (Granberg and Holmberg 1988).

Prior research on political perceptions among voters has mostly focused on the impact of individual-level characteristics, cognitions or values, where factors such as political knowledge (Brug 1997), left-right self placement and whether a voter likes or dislikes a specific party have proven to be influential (Granberg 1993; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Popkin 1991). Other studies have shown that contextually related features such as the nature of the political system (Granberg and Holmberg 1988) or the saliency of an issue (Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Oscarsson 1998; van der Brug 1997) also influence voters' perceptions of party positions. Notwithstanding the findings of these authors, not much is known about various contextual influences on voters' perceptions; and the relevant question whether it is external political stimuli or internal features among individuals that mainly determine the perceptual process remains unanswered.

The large amount of research on constitutional design and electoral outcomes has long focused on how different institutional factors affect parties and party systems, which is assumed to influence voters as well (Duverger 1954; Lijphart 1984; Sartori 1976). For example, it is widely believed that proportional representation tends to produce multiparty systems with ideologically committed and cohesive parties, while plurality/majority representation is known for producing more stable two-party systems with what tend to be all-embracing policy platforms. These differing circumstances are in turn expected to have consequences for voting behavior since proportional systems will motivate voters to vote prospectively according to

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[37] The concept of perception refers to the cognitions or beliefs that voters have about different political phenomena. An individual's perceptions may be conveyed as: 'party A is opposed to death penalties' or that 'party B is a left wing feminist party'. The main difference between attitudes and perceptions is that the former builds on evaluative judgments while the latter does not (Granberg and Holmberg 1988).

the RPM, while voters in more majoritarian systems will tend to vote retrospectively, according to the accountability model (Holmberg 2006; Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin 1999).[38]

Access to comparative data on voters in different countries has increased in recent years and this has renewed interest in institutional design and the outcomes there of. Instead of just assuming that electoral systems have an impact on voting behavior, recent studies have set out to investigate empirically how the institutional context affects voting behavior *per se* (Norris 2004; Reynolds 2002). While the first wave of research on constitutional design focused on the impact on parties and assumed that voters would be affected as well, the second wave of research has mainly investigated the impact of electoral systems on voters by assuming that the effect partly is mediated by the effect of the context on the parties.

The present study aims to make a contribution both to the research of political perceptions among voters and to the field of constitutional design. It does this by taking a more comprehensive grip on one of the issues and investigating how both parties and voters *simultaneously* are affected by the institutional context. More specifically, the aim of this study is to bring institutions into the equation and investigate how various formal and informal electoral institutional settings might affect voters' perceptual agreement (PA) of parties' left-right positions. Theoretically, the institutional context is expected to affect voters' PA both *directly* - by bringing to bear different facilitative or motivational incentive structures - and *indirectly* - by the impact of the institutional context on the parties in the form of centrifugal or centripetal party competition (higher degrees of centrifugal competition will reasonably imply greater divergence in the parties' ideological positions, which should make it easier for voters to discern the parties' positions). A common notion within the literature on electoral institutions is that the adoption of different electoral formulas creates different behavior modifying incentive structures, both for individual voters and rational vote-seeking politicians (Farrell 1997; Norris 2004). For similar reasons, it can be expected that different institutional settings may also bring different incentives that will motivate and assist voters when acquiring information about the parties' policy positions and in turn this may have consequences for voters' PA (see Franklin, van der Eijk, and Oppenhuis

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[38] The main difference between these two models from a voter perspective is that the elections in the first case are viewed as an expression of preferences while in the latter case are seen as an opportunity for voters to hold their governments and representatives accountable for previous actions (Downs 1957; Holmberg 2006).

1996 for a further discussion on motivational and facilitative factors).

Consequently, the present study deals with two dependent variables, the main one being voters' PA of parties' left-right positions and the second and mediating variable being the divergence in parties' left-right positions brought about by centrifugal or centripetal party competition due to the differences in the institutional settings. The study builds on data from the Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems (CSES) which combines contextual features (variables) of electoral systems and individual party characteristics with cross-national surveys of voting behavior.

The next section provides a discussion of some of the basic requirements of the RPM for effective representation, and follows with a discussion of the importance of left-right ideology as a cue for voters when acquiring information. Next is an introduction to the dependent variable PA, followed by a theoretical discussion of the impact of formal and informal electoral institutions on PA. The penultimate section presents considerations about the data, the research design and some methodological reflections. The paper concludes with a presentation and summary of the empirical findings.

## The role of belief systems and perceptual agreement for effective policy representation

The responsible party model presumes that parties present policy programs during election campaigns which serve as a basis for voters' choices and consequently as prospective electoral mandates. According to the model, political parties are reckoned to be the central actors in this indirect process of linking the preferences of the citizen to public policies. A criterion of the model is that parties should present divergent and stable policy programs so that voters are given meaningful electoral choices. The model assumes theoretically that voters base their vote-decisions on a comparative evaluation of the policy programs presented by the competing parties and candidates and choose the program that matches best with their own preferences (Adams 2001; APSA 1950; Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Thomassen 1999).[39] An assumption that can be deduced from the model is that an elec-

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[39] Even if there are signs that parties in general have become more candidate-centred in recent years, it is in most Western democracies and especially among the European democracies still the political party rather than the individual candidate that is the main actor in parliament (Dalton 1985; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Katz and Mair 1995; Dalton and Wattenberg

torate with clear and shared perceptions of the party spectrum is an important prerequisite for successful political representation (Converse 1975; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; van der Brug 1997). Hence, the quality of political perceptions affects the extent to which voters are meaningfully represented in a political system and thus is an important determinant of the outcomes of electoral processes (Granberg and Holmberg 1988).

However, several studies carried out during the past decades have shown that American voters in general are not particularly well informed on political or societal matters (Bartels 1996; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Carpini and Keeter 1996; Page and Shapiro 1992). There is little reason to suppose the American case is unique and thus it is possible that reasoned choices are beyond the capabilities of the vast majority of democratic citizenry (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). In spite of this, one argument why political representation in mass democracies can work at all is that citizens and elites often share political concepts (Bartels 1996; Luskin 2003) and that rational voters use heuristics such as ideologies, cognitive schemas or belief systems as cost-reducing devices or shortcuts (see Downs 1957; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Zaller 1992).

The idea that voters use heuristics and to some extent can make reasoned choices on the basis of limited information, *i.e.* low information rationality, is a fairly well established concept within the field of voting studies (see Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Popkin 1991).[40] The role of belief systems such as political ideology in models of political representation has also been emphasized by Jacques Thomassen (1999). However, the existence of a common cognitive map of the political landscape is not enough to achieve effective representation. For the functioning of modern mass democracies the communication between masses and elites also needs to be clear and simple and this is best served by the existence of a simple common political language, spoken and understood by both elites and masses. According to Jacques Thomassen, "*the effectiveness of the responsible party model depends on the extent to which the policy views of both the masses and elites are constrained by a one-dimensional conflict dimen-*

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2000). For this reason the analyses in this article will focus on the perceptions of party positions rather than those of individual candidates. The theoretical implications are, however, equally applicable for candidates.

[40] The debate between heuristics versus information has in recent years become more nuanced due to the diverse and many times discouraging results from a number of empirical and more rigorous tests of the theories of heuristics. A more recent conclusion is thus that information matters and that short-cut, after all, cannot fully replace an absence of factual political knowledge. Nevertheless, cognitive short-cuts can under certain circumstances be used as an information substitute that allows individuals to perform better than by pure chance (Bartels 1996; Blais, Gidengil, Fournier, and Nevitte 2009; Kumlin 2001; Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Luskin 2002; Oscarsson 2007).

*sion, more specifically, a left-right dimension*" (Thomassen 1999:34). From this perspective, a unidimensional conceptual system is a much desired characteristic of representative democracies and as such, the left-right ideology provides the fundamental means of communication and constitutes a crucial linkage between citizens and their elected representatives (compare Downs 1957).

The existence of a simple political language understood by both elites and masses, thus is an important requirement for the functioning of modern mass democracies.[41] Compared to more issue specific positions, the advantage with knowledge of parties left-right ideological positions is that it can be used as an information short cut to the parties' standpoints on many concrete issues (Downs 1957; Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Holmberg 1981; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; Oscarsson 1998; van der Brug 1997; 1999a).[42] The bipolar left-right construction has shown remarkable resilience, reproducing itself in new historical and social contexts, constantly challenged and reshaped by new political dimensions. The incorporative power of the left-right semantics is impressive. For instance, religious, liberal economic and materialist values all contribute to rightist identification among citizens, while secular, economic leftist and post-materialist values contribute to a leftist identification (Knutsen 1995; Knutsen 1999; Oscarsson 1998). Although the substantive meaning and interpretation of the left-right distinction have not remained the same over the centuries – albeit with the exception of the key element of 'equality' (Bobbio 1996) – the distinction has played a crucial role as an information cost reducing device for political actors (Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Inglehart and Klingemann 1976). Thus, the merit of the left-right distinction is to a large extent its simplicity and not its content. Based on prior research, I emphasize that if voters, in a context of limited information, indeed can make adequately informed electoral choices using cognitive cues, one of the more prominent and valid information shortcuts available to them is the party's ideological left-right position.

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[41] Just as in Thomassen's simplicity hypothesis, where the importance of a shared one-dimensional belief system is emphasized, Downs original model of party competition also assumes that all parties compete along a unidimensional left-right continuum. The presence of a unidimensional left-right oriented policy space may thus be an important requirement when testing Downsian theoretical assumptions.

[42] There is very likely a reciprocal relationship between parties left-right positions and how voters perceive them: voters use their perception of parties left-right positions to assess party positions on concrete issues and recursively, concrete issues affect how they are perceived in terms of left-right (van der Brug 1997).

Vote-decisions based on ideology can however, only result in meaningful representation if the perceived positions of the parties reflect their actual policies and if the voters' agree among themselves in their perceptions of the parties' left-right policy positions. Votes based on agreement between voters on left-right characterization and between voters and their candidate representatives on proposed policy will then yield meaningful mandates for the parties (van der Brug 1999a). One must, however, draw attention here to a distinction between accuracy and agreement in voters' perceptions.

If perceptual accuracy is understood as the agreement among voters and their representatives on proposed policies, then a related problem is to find a valid indicator of a party's true position. Alternative sources of party-related data concerning parties' policy positions such as party manifestos, surveys among the members of the parliament or parliamentary vote roll-calls are, from a country comparative perspective, difficult to find and sometimes even more difficult to compare. However, such a study made by Wouter van der Brug on the Netherlands showed that voters' aggregated perceptions of party positions on six different issues were accurate in general, even for the least informed group of voters (van der Brug 1998).

If public policies are to reflect the will of a majority of the people, the perceptions of those policies should be accurate for as many voters as possible. Otherwise this may lead to a serious distortion in the relationship between citizens and government where unsupported policies get enacted. Even if the mean- or the median voter position reflects a party's position accurately, it does not necessarily tell that much about the quality in the perceptions of voters, since individual misperceptions will tend statistically to be canceled out on an aggregated level. To know about quality one also must consider the agreement among voters in their perception of the parties' ideological positions. Assuming that voters' aggregated left-right perceptions accurately reflect the 'true' policy positions of the parties, then votes based on PA about policies will yield meaningful electoral mandates (van der Brug 1999a). Hence, PA is an indication of successful communication within a political system and can thus work as a guarantor for successful political representation.

Donald Granberg and Sören Holmberg (1988) originated the concept of perceptual agreement, although they used the term perceptual consensus. The present article uses a measurement of PA devised by Cees van der Eijk (2001). This coefficient builds on the distribution of voters' placement of a party's position on, for example, a left-right scale. It was originally developed for measuring agreement in ordered rating scales and can be used either as a measurement for single parties or aggregated to form a comprehensive measure for the party system as a whole. The coefficient ranges between values -1 (maximum disagreement) to 1 (maximum agreement).

## How do institutional contexts affect voters' perceptual agreement?

Neither the literature on voting behavior nor that on political systems offer many clear theoretical assumptions on how different contextually related factors might affect voters' PA. Rational choice institutionalism however, takes as its theoretical point of departure the claim that formal and informal rules and institutions generate different incentive structures that are able to shape and constrain political behavior. Following the work of Pippa Norris (2004), the present article rests on the assumptions that: a) formal and informal institutional rules shape the incentives for both politicians and voters and, b) politicians are rational vote-maximizers who respond strategically to the institutional incentives when striving for office.

As mentioned, this study aims to investigate how different formal and informal electoral institutional settings *directly* and *indirectly* affect voters' PA of parties' left-right positions. Theoretically we believe that a) specific formal and informal institutional factors may facilitate and/or motivate voters when receiving political information, simultaneously, and b) different institutional settings may also affect voters' PA *indirectly* by the impact of the institutional context on the behavior of parties.[43] According to Downs (1957) and Sartori (1976) the institutional context affects the direction of the competition among parties in terms of centrifugal or centripetal tendencies. Higher degrees of centrifugal competition will reasonably imply greater divergence in the parties' ideological positions, which in turn should make it easier for voters to discern the parties' positions and thereby result in greater PA. The degree of divergence in parties' left-right positions is, therefore, an indication of ideological distinctiveness among the parties.

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[43] Inspired by an institutionalistic rational choice perspective, context refers here to those aspects of the political arena that are relevant for action. Context matters for political representation in a range of interrelated aspects as it shapes the effectiveness or appropriateness of different actions among actors. It will be more effective to act in a certain way in some contexts and not in others (Nash, Hudson, and Luttrell 2006). Political context refers here to formal and informal rules that govern the interactions among parties and voters such as electoral systems and party systems. Usually the concept of a party system is defined as a set of formal and informal rules that direct and influence the behavior and the interactions of the significant parties within a given country (Keman 1997; McLean 1996). In this article a distinction is made between formal and informal rules, where formal rules refer to the electoral system and informal rules to the party system. Together they compose the context.

In conclusion, the present study deals with a structural model where the main dependent variable is PA and where divergence is working as an intervening variable.

**Figure 1.** Causal theoretical model of the effect of formal and informal institutions on divergence and perceptual agreement.
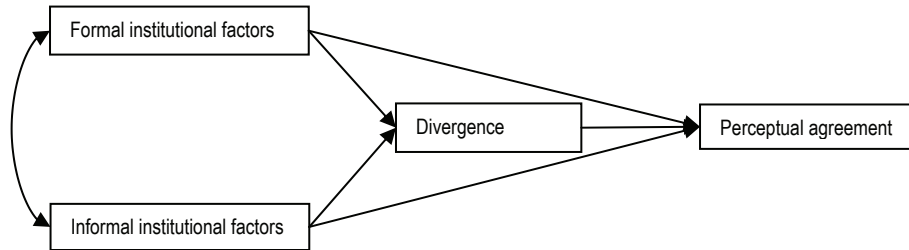


## Effects on divergence

### Formal institutional factors

Pippa Norris (2004) formulated the hypothesis that the nature of the electoral thresholds creates incentives for parties to adopt either bridging or bonding strategies during the election campaigns. The logic here is that in plurality, or majority elections - where the electoral obstacles are higher since 'the winner takes it all' - parties will lean towards deploying bridging strategies since they need a majority or a simple plurality of the votes in order to win a district. A bridging strategy hypothetically, will focus on valance issues or issues that usually are widely shared among the public in order to bring together diverse groups of voters into loose and shifting coalitions. In more proportional elections on the other hand, the electoral obstacles are lower and parties will therefore be more inclined to adopt bonding strategies and appeal to certain groups of voters instead of the whole electorate. The basis of this is that the parties are not dependent on a majority of the voters in order to become represented, and they could hardly acquire such support in practice. Hypothetically, a bonding party will turn towards more homogeneous groups of voters such as environmentalists,

workers, trade-unions, religious people or ethnic minorities by focusing on ideology or other common beliefs.[44]

These ideas match the theoretical propositions made by Anthony Downs (1957) and Giovanni Sartori (1976) about how different electoral and party systems may tend towards either centripetal or centrifugal party competition.[45] There will be consequences for the nature of party systems if parties lean towards bridging strategies under majoritarian electoral rules, since majority electoral arrangements most likely will induce centripetal incentives from the parties *i.e.* competing parties will tend to cluster at the median voter position in the center of the ideological or political spectrum.[46] Sartori developed this idea further and argued that a two-party system would produce centripetal incentives while a multiparty system would generate centrifugal competitive incentives (see also Cox 1990; Klingemann 2005; Merrill and Adams 2002). According to Sartori, the degree of competition between parties is not important in itself; instead, what is of interest is the direction of the competition. Thus differences in the forms of competition mediated by the degree of party system fragmentation directly affect the ideological distance between the parties (Sartori 1976). One can here talk about party competition in terms of penetration in society, which in multiparty systems characteristically yields campaign strategies that exaggerate the conflicts between parties in order to appeal explicitly to party loyalists (Ware 1996).

In the case of more proportional electoral systems where competing parties are expected to lean towards bonding strategies, the contrasting expectation is emergence of centrifugal incentives and the adoption of more divergent and dispersed positions on the ideological continuum or issue dimensions. Proportional electoral systems more often than not result in a large number of political parties and parties attempting to mobilize electoral support will, at least theoretically, try to position themselves more ideologically in order to differentiate themselves as much as possible from competitors (Downs 1957; Sartori 1976; Sjöblom 1968). Moreover, parties

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[44] The distinction between parties in terms of bridging or bonding is of course, an oversimplification with the single purpose to bring order in a complex reality.

[45] The term electoral system generally refers to four different concepts, namely the size of the electoral district, the legal threshold, the ballot structure and the system used for transferring votes into seats (Arnold 2007).

[46] There is an obvious reciprocal relationship between the behavior of parties and the nature of the party systems. An electoral system affects both party strategies and voting behavior, which shapes the party system and at the same time the party system affects the strategies of the parties.

in multiparty systems do not necessarily compete with all other parties, but may rather contest with their ideological neighbors (Ware 1996).

Downs and Sartoris' theory has gained empirical support in that the size of the constituencies in multi-party elections tends to promote a higher degree of centrifugal party competition, something that should signify more ideologically committed parties (Merrill and Adams 2002). In single member constituencies it will be easier for candidates to develop a kind of principal-agent relationship with voters while in multi-member districts a more successful party strategy is to create a party to voter linkage by stressing common ideological principles or programmatic party platforms (Norris 2004). In this aspect Bingham Powell talks about the degree of national competitiveness as a factor in how different electoral systems affect party organization and competition. Large districts tend to imply more centralized party organization, which in turn can be expected to induce more programmatically orientated parties (Bingham Powell 1986).[47]

The structure of the ballot is another aspect of electoral systems that creates incentives for rational vote-seeking politicians to emphasize either programmatic or particularistic benefits during the election campaigns (Norris 2004). Ballot structure normally is closely related to the basic types of electoral systems even though different ballot types theoretically can be used within all systems. Broadly speaking, there are four types of ballot: 1) party ballots, 2) candidate ballots, 3) preference ballots and 4) dual ballots.[48]

Hypothetically, in the case of the preference ballots, candidate politicians will face incentives to distinguish themselves from competitors within their own party by emphasizing particularistic policies or benefits offered

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[47] It should be noted that plurality elections, where one member from each constituency will be elected, do not require political parties. Even though candidates often are supported or even appointed by political parties they may, be free, independent individuals. In contrast, proportional elections in all varieties and forms that are used when several representatives from each constituency will be elected presuppose the presence of political parties. Parties are needed for making the lists and/or to nominate candidates. Proportionalism furthermore presupposes entities in the legislature that can be proportionally represented. Proportional methods, with the exception for the single transferable vote, are therefore unthinkable without political parties (Moberg 2005).

[48] Party ballots are normally used in closed-list multi-member districts where voters cast a single ballot for a party. Candidate ballots are used in single-member districts where voters in each constituency cast a single ballot for an individual candidate. Preference ballots are normally used in open-list multi-member districts where citizens cast a ballot for a single party but also have the opportunity to express their preferences for a particular candidate. Finally, dual ballots are used in combined/mixed electoral systems where voters can cast separate ballots in both single- and multi-member districts (Norris 2004).

through constituency service. In contrast, politicians in proportional systems using closed party ballots will have a greater incentive hypothetically to rationally focus on collective party appeals and party cohesion by emphasizing programmatic and ideological benefits and policies (Norris 2004). Ballot structure thus can serve as a proxy for the degree of party centralization. Under circumstances when ideology is of greater importance during the campaigns, parties will face stronger centrifugal incentives to lean towards bonding campaign strategies.

Another factor likely to affect the degree of divergence in the party systems is whether or not a country has a parliamentary, semi-presidential, or presidential system of governance. Hypothetically we can expect a greater focus on the parties in parliamentary systems where there is no separation of powers such as exists in presidential systems with the president and legislative chambers having different roles in the policymaking process (Arnold 2007). A greater focus on parties may in turn affect the degree of party competition and hence also the degree of divergence in the parties' ideological positions.

*Informal institutional factors*

A multidimensional policy space may decrease the probability of ideologically committed and profiled parties. Multiparty competition in a multidimensional policy space could result in a situation where representatives of each party do not engage with common issues. If the parties are inclined to focus on different issues then the prominence of each policy dimension along with characteristics such as issue ownership may be more decisive for party competition *i.e.* how the parties are appealing to the voters (Budge 1994; Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996). For example, three or more parties competing in a unidimensional left-right policy space will each need to emphasize its position in relation to the others. On the other hand, a three-way competition in a multi-dimensional policy space could result in each party emphasizing positions in different dimensions where they believe they hold an advantage over their competitors (this is also the essence of the saliency theory, see Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, and Tanenbaum 2001; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Robertson 1976) Richard McKelvey introduced a similar idea in arguing that the policy positions of parties competing in a multidimensional policy space should be more randomly distributed than in the case of parties competing in unidimensional spaces. This occurs because it is more difficult for party strategists to obtain information about the preferences of the voters in all the different policy dimensions (McKelvey 1979). Hence, if the parties compete along the same conflict dimension, it is more likely that they will depend more intensively on bonding or bridging strategies depending on

the number of parties. This will in turn have implications for the divergence among parties due to greater/lesser degrees of ideological competitiveness.

The strength of the left-right ideological dimension can be expected to raise even further incentives for parties in multiparty systems to differentiate and engage in centrifugal competition, since the left-right ideology is reckoned to be a near-global political communicative device, used and understood by both the masses and the elite (Thomassen 1999). Divergent and differentiated policy position will thereby become even more important for the parties when appealing to the electorate.

Another factor that is closely related to the electoral system is the effective number of parties. From earlier studies we know that the number of parties may affect the direction of the competitiveness among parties. As mentioned earlier, Downs assumed that a two-party system would produce centripetal incentives for the parties whereas Sartori argued that a multiparty system would generate centrifugal incentives for party competition (Sartori 1976; see also Cox 1990; Merrill and Adams 2002). According to Anthony Downs, parties in multiparty-systems will try to position themselves ideologically in order to differentiate themselves as much as possible from their competitors (Downs 1957; see also Sjöblom 1968).[49]

In conclusion, all factors that can be expected to increase the competition among parties systemically will, as a function of the number of parties, affect the direction in the party competition. In particular, a situation of more divergent policy positions is expected to increase PA among voters. Consequently, we will deal here with interaction terms between the effective number of parties and unidimensionality, the strength of left right-dimension, the ballot structure and parliamentarism.

### Effects on perceptual agreement

#### Formal institutional factors

Generally, the effect of electoral systems on voter perceptions of parties' policies is assumed to be an indirect consequence of the impact of electoral systems on the political parties and the party system. Large vote- seat disparities may, however, lower the incentives for individual voters to obtain

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[49] An objection against the assumption that multiparty systems would raise centrifugal incentives with increasing ideological distances between the parties is the fact that parties in multiparty systems often needs to cooperate both informally and formally through coalitions (Ware 1996). This does, however, not necessarily need to imply that the distances between the parties are decreasing (Sartori 1976).

political information, as the benefit of getting informed about the policy positions is more limited than when the disparities are low. This aspect refers to the mechanical- and psychological effects of different electoral systems (Duverger 1954): the mechanical effect is the difference between vote-share and seat-share resulting from the electoral formula (see also Taagepera and Shugart 1989); knowledge of the mechanical effect constitutes the basis for the psychological effect, which affects the behavior of the actors. Voters thus are expected to avoid voting for small parties when the size of the constituency is small or the legal threshold is high, as they do not want to waste their vote on parties having a small chance of gaining entry to the parliament. Consequently, electoral systems may be expected to affect the behavior of both parties and voters directly. A high degree of vote- seat disproportionality in a system may induce the voters to view the elections just as a process of selecting government while elections in a more proportional system may tend to be seen as also facilitating an expression of preferences (Downs 1957). Parties and candidates in more proportional electoral systems will, as mentioned, have a higher incentive to undertake programmatic ideological campaigning and this could generate greater PA among voters on parties' policy positions.

The effect of electoral systems on voters' PA is, hence, a dual process where certain electoral formulas may a) encourage the parties to appeal more clearly to the voters and b) make the voters more or less motivated to actively seek information about the parties' policies.

However, according to Carsten Anckar (2002) it is unlikely that voters directly evaluate which system is being used, or how big is the voting district. Instead, the psychological effect results from the impact of aggregated vote-seat disparities. For this reason Anckar claims that the degree of proportionality in fact is the most obvious effect that an electoral system has on the degree of party diversity (Anckar 2002). This might be true when it comes to party system fragmentation but the question is whether this also is true when it comes to PA among voters? One problem here is that by using proportionality as an index of differences between electoral systems, one cannot tell exactly which mechanisms are affecting voters' PA. This is because the degree of proportionality within a political system is a result of both the district magnitude together with the type of electoral system and the legal threshold. Following Anckar (2002), I too doubt that individual voters actually consider the district magnitude or which system is used for translating votes into seats. Rather, I argue that it is more likely that the effective threshold is the decisive factor when it comes to voters considering whether or not to support a party. A vote for a party that has but a small chance of receiving a mandate can be reckoned as a waste. Consequently, voters will be less motivated to acquire information about the policy positions of the smaller national parties, with only limited chance to gain en-

trance to the parliament, which in turn can be expected to affect the voter PA.

A direct effect of the use of party ballots on PA is that voters' knowledge about the parties' ideological positions should increase since as mentioned, politicians under such rules are expected to promote programmatic rather than particularistic policies. Moreover, both party ballots and candidate ballots are often nominal and voters must choose either one party or one candidate. This implies that there are 'less choices' available for a voter compared to the other two ballot types. Lower decision costs can in turn imply greater PA since there is less to learn. This is in contrast with preference- and dual ballots, where voters have the opportunity to choose party and to rank the candidates on the list or, in the case of the dual ballot, have the opportunity to choose between both a party and a candidate. Voters here are offered 'more choices' (Farrell 2001; Norris 2004). An alternative hypothesis could be formulated stating that the opportunity of greater choices can make voters more motivated to participate and, since greater choices hypothetically also demand more knowledge, PA should also be higher. It is more likely however, that both dual and preference ballots will direct the focus away from the parties and that PA after all will be higher for party policies in systems using party ballots.

Whether a country has a parliamentary, semi-presidential, or presidential system is also likely to affect the levels of PA, in addition to the effects of electoral rules and party systems. The reason for this is that it may be more difficult for voters to discern parties' policy positions in systems where there is a separation of powers since this creates a more complex institutional environment. Legislative and presidential parties have different roles in the policy making process in presidential systems. From a voter perspective, parties in parliamentary systems may thus appear as more solid since they only have one face to present to voters compared with parties in presidential or semi-presidential systems (Arnold 2007). The extent to which separation of powers obscures party positions in semi-presidential systems may, however, depend on the relative strength of the presidency versus the government. With the exception of the United States, most countries with presidential systems tend to be semi-presidential and differ widely in the relative strength of the executive. In Arnold's study, the effect of semi-presidentialism did not have a significant effect on voters' knowledge about parties' left-right position (Arnold 2007). Consequently, this study will contrast the respective effects of parliamentary systems and presidential and semi-presidial systems collectively. If parliamentary systems imply a greater focus on the parties, this will in turn facilitate an increase PA among voters.

*Informal institutional factors*

While the early institutionalists asserted that party systems and party competition mainly was the product of formal institutions, contemporary sociologists emphasized the importance of social conflict and cleavages in this regard (Ware 1996). Schattschneider (1960) criticized the sociological approach to party competition and rejected the view that parties will automatically arise in order to reflect the conflict dimensions that exist in a society. According to Schatschneider, parties cannot create cleavages but they can and will use them for mobilizing potential voters and for that reason, some cleavages will become more important than others within a political system. However, according to Thomassen (1999), simplicity in the political world is important for effective political representation. Ideology from this perspective provides the fundamental means of communication and constitutes a linkage between citizens and elected representatives. A simple and unidimensional system will thus have a facilitating effect on the voters in that each of the contesting parties is defined according to the same policy dimension and because parties and voters share a common political language. This in turn will make the cognitive cues used by voters more efficient and, with only one policy dimension, there is also less to learn about the party policies. But a simple and highly unidimensional party system alone is insufficient to ensure clear and efficient communication between voters and their representatives. For effective communication to occur, according to Thomassen (1999), the party system also needs to be structured according to a left-right dimension. For this reason we expect voters' PA to be higher for parties in systems that are more unidimensional and structured according to a left-right dimension.

Lastly, the number of competing parties – earlier argued to be a factor in determining the nature of party competition and the degree of policy divergence - may also have a direct effect on PA as there will be more alternatives from which voters must choose. On one hand, more choice may bring a sense of greater meaning to the selection, which may motivate voters to obtain information about the parties' policy positions. On the other hand, there may quite reasonably be an upper limit beyond which there will be diminishing returns: too many parties leading to high decision costs and thus a negative effect on PA. The number of parties can thus be expected to have both a motivational and a facilitative effect on PA but the interaction is an inverse one. A large number of parties can motivate voters to actively seek information since there are more alternatives to choose between but equally, a smaller field might be much easier to know something about.

## Hypotheses and theoretical expectations

A common denominator in the hypotheses presented above is, as mentioned, that formal and informal factors related to the electoral system will have both a direct and an indirect impact on voters' PA.

The *indirect impact* refers to a situation when the victory threshold is low and there are a large number of parties competing in a unidimensional left-right oriented policy space under a parliamentary constitutional system. The parties are assumed here to adopt bonding strategies due to increased competition, and ideologies and policy programs will become important instruments in the election campaign. These factors in turn are expected to give rise to centrifugal tendencies in politicians and parties, leading to more dispersed positions on the political spectrum. According to the RPM, voters should be given meaningful electoral choices and in this respect, divergent policy positions are an important feature contributing to effective representation (APSA 1950). Divergent policy positions thus can be considered to facilitate for voters by bringing clarity to their perceptions of parties' positions, and this will generate higher PA.

Conclusively, the expectation that they will affect the degree of competition among parties is the most significant common factor of unidimensionality, the strength of LR-dimension, the ballot structure and parliamentarism. Parliamentary systems are supposed to bring greater focus on the parties while the use of party ballots should promote centralized and programmatically oriented party organizations. The degree of unidimensionality and the strength of the left-right dimension are also expected to affect the competition among parties, since it is more likely that the parties will be located in the same policy space when both are high. According to Downs (1957) and Sartori (1976), however, the effect of these variables on the spatial direction in party competition is conditioned by the number of parties involved. An increasing amount of competition in a two-party system should raise centripetal incentives for the parties while the opposite should be true in multiparty contexts.

The *direct impact* on voters' PA derives from the assumption that voters will find it easier to perceive the position of parties in parliamentary and unidimensional left-right dominated multiparty systems, where the divergence in the party positions is high. The number of competing parties is expected to affect the voters in that a greater number may bring an increased sense of meaningfulness to the party choice, which may then motivate voters to investigate the parties' policy positions. The ballot structure is another factor that can directly affect PA. Hypothetically, closed party ballots present fewer choices and thus should make it easier for the voters to make informed decisions. This type of ballot should also create incen-

tives for politicians to favor programmatically oriented campaigning rather than to espouse particularistic policies. As the candidate is not the focal point in programmatic campaigning this should improve PA among voters.

The district size is a factor that, together with the electoral system and the legal threshold, affects the degree of proportionality within a political system. Nevertheless, because it is quite unlikely that the majority of voters evaluate such matters, it is the effective threshold for entry to parliament that promotes a psychological effect. When the entry threshold is high, then voters will be less motivated to obtain information about parties they perceive as not having a realistic chance of entering parliament. In this case, the principal mechanisms at work are simplicity and meaningfulness: I believe that simplicity in the political system will reduce the information costs among voters to the benefit of PA; it is however, also meaningful to seek and assimilate political information.

In conclusion, when it comes to the hypothesized indirect effect of institutional characteristics on PA, mediated through party system divergence, the mechanism is assumed to be mainly facilitative. Concerning the hypothesized direct effect of institutional characteristics on PA, the mechanisms are assumed to be both motivational and facilitative.

**Table 1.** A summary of the expected direct- and indirect effects of different institutional settings on voters' perceptual agreement.

| Variables | Indirect effects (Divergence) | Direct effects (PA) |
|---|---|---|
| *Unidimensionality* | - A more unidimensional party system is likely to increase the degree of competition among parties, which will generate centrifugal or centripetal incentives, depending on the eff. nor. of parties. | (f) - A more unidimensional party system will facilitate for voters when obtaining information about the parties, which means greater PA. |
| *Strength of left-right dimension* | - If the most prominent dimension within a system is a left-right dimension, ideology will become even more important as a campaign instrument, which in turn will affect left-right divergence in a party system depending on the nr. of parties. | (f) - If the first or strongest dimension within a system resembles an ordering of parties in terms of left-right ideology, it will be easier for voters to apprehend the party positions, which will increase PA. |
| *The effective number of parliamentary parties* | -The eff. nr. of parties is expected to influence party competition, which in turn will bring centrifugal or centripetal incentives that will affect party system divergence. | (m) - The eff. nr. of parties is expected to affect PA in that a greater amount of parties will motivate voters to obtain information about the parties due to a greater variety of alt. to choose from. (f) - However an upper limit with diminishing returns may exist where too many parties, reasonably, means increasing decision costs, which should decrease PA. |
| *The effective threshold* | -The electoral threshold is expected to generate incentives for bonding or bridging strategies, which in turn will yield centrifugal or centripetal incentives that will affect the degree of divergence within a party system. | (m) - A high electoral threshold is expected to make voters less motivated to obtain information about the parties, which will decrease PA in general. |
| *Party ballots* | -Party ballots are here reckoned to be characterizing for centralized party organization, which in turn means more ideologically or programmatically oriented parties and party representatives; which may raise centrifugal or centripetal incentives depending on the nr. of parties. | (f) - Party ballots are expected to facilitate for voters since fewer choices means decreasing information costs, which in turn should increase PA. |
| *Parliamentarism* | - Parliamentary systems are expected to generate a greater focus on the parties, why it is likely that this in turn may increase the competition among parties, depending on the nr. of competing parties, which may affect the degree of divergence in a system. | (f) - Compared to presidential systems, parliamentary systems are expected to facilitate for voters when discerning the parties' policy positions since a separation of powers creates a more complex institutional environment. |

*Comment*: (f)=facilitative, (m)=motivational.

## Data and methodological considerations

Aggregated data from different national election studies will be used with single parties as the unit of analysis. The data are derived from the CSES (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems) modules 1 and 2, which respectively represent post election surveys conducted in 33 countries during 1996-2001 and 2001-2004. A cross-national purview, the presence of both micro-level (including vote choice, evaluations of candidates and parties etc.) and macro-level data (aggregate electoral returns, electoral rules and formulas) is the strength of the dataset. These observations allow us to conduct robust cross-national analyzes on the effects of institutions on the agreement in voters' perceptions.[50]

The present dataset covers a total of 66 elections and 311 political parties. Unremarkably, countries are excluded from the analysis where relevant data on left-right positions are missing. In addition, countries such as Ukraine that were not determined as free during the survey period according to the Freedom House index have been omitted.[51] All "don't know" answers are coded as 'missing'. The time span involved means that some countries are represented up to three times, which from a small-N perspective is positive but it might bring other problems related to the use of time-series cross-sectional data. In order to check for autocorrelation, the dataset was subjected to a Correlogram and a Durbin-Watson test. Neither test indicated any kind of autocorrelation with the exception of Peru in 2001 and the Netherlands in 2002, but these proved not to have any evident effect on the overall results. A panel corrected standard error model was also used in order to detect any discrepancies but it generated similar results as the usual OLS-model with only small differences in the standard errors.[52]

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[50] The data can be downloaded from: http://www.umich.edu/~cses. The data for Netherlands in the elections of 2002 and 2003 comes from Irwin (2005). Data for Norway in 2001 and Sweden 2002 has been received from: Swedish National Data Service (SND) at http://www.snd.gu.se. Data for Great Britain has been received from the European voter project and can be downloaded from: http://www.gesis.org/en/research/EUROLAB/evoter/.

[51] 'Freedom in the world 2006. 'Selected data from freedom house's annual global survey of political rights and civil liberties'. http://www.freedomhouse.org.

[52] In contrast to the CSES module 1, three additional parties are included in the module 2 taking the total number of parties from six to nine. In order to ensure maximum comparability across countries all the measures have been based on just the six main parties, even

However, since the analysis investigates the impact of contextually related factors on voters' PA, it is undesirable that some countries appear up to three times while others occur once. Accordingly, the data has been weighted by how many times each country is represented.

Turning to the right hand side of the equation used for estimating the theoretical model, all variables are system related which, in practice, means that they are all constants within each country. Considering that statistical analysis should be performed ideally with variables referring to the same level as the dependent variables - excepting in the case of a hierarchical model - this has some implications for the statistical part of the analysis as the available number of country/year observations consists of 57 cases. A problem arises in that the model consists of eight variables with four inter-action terms, which means 66 possible combinations, yet the rule of thumb when performing the analysis at hand is that one should have at least five observations per variable combination. Since the final dependent variable, PA, can be constructed both for single parties and for the party system as such, carrying out the statistical analysis on the party level instead of aggregated country level was a solution to this problem.

Performing the statistical analysis on the party level dramatically increased the number of observations from 57 to 311. However, this means that some alternative explanations for the degree of PA must be taken into account before carrying out the analysis. For example, the directional theory of issue-voting assumes that voters mostly are not able to perceive slight differences in the positions held by parties on various issues. Parties that hold views that are more extreme on an issue dimension have the advantage of conveying a messages in a more persistent and credible manner (Gilljam 1997; Macdonald, Listhaug, and Rabinowitz 1991; Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989; Westholm 1997). Moreover, for obvious reasons the presence of parties on the left or right extremes may also affect the extent of divergence in a party system. It is therefore sensible to control for the effect of left-right extremist parties on both divergence and PA. We also know that parties are more or less attached to different dimensions (Budge 1994; Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987) and that PA is dependent not only on the salience of the left-right dimension in a polity (Oscarsson 1998; van der Brug 1997) but also on the extent to which parties define themselves along it (Dahlberg, Berlin, and Oscarsson 2005). Since this article focuses upon the left-right dimension it is a good idea to control for differ-

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though this may imply less accuracy and a deviation from other sources. The alternative would have been to only use data from module 2 but with the undesirable effect of drastically reducing the number of observations. The analyses were, however, also performed with all available parties from module 1 and module 2 included in the data set but this did not affect the results to any significant extent.

ent party families so that there is no discrimination against parties or countries that are less attached to this dimension.

The age and the size of a party can be expected to influence perceptions among voters. It is a reasonable assumption that it may be easier to know something about the position of an old, established party than it would about a younger one. In addition, the electoral size of a party may also be decisive given Kirchheimer's (1990) point that bigger parties tend to be more 'catch-all' and have vague ideologies as one of their distinctive features (Dittrich 1983; Kirchheimer 1990). If bigger parties tend be less ideologically distinctive, then a party's electoral size can be expected to have implications for voters' PA.

We also know that the composition of an electorate may affect the degree of PA among voters. People tend to interact within particular social and or economic contexts, so that individuals in one context have more in common than they do with individuals in another. These factors are mainly aggregated versions of different individual level variables such as education and age. Citizens living in an 'older' or a 'better educated' demographic context may be more capable of correctly perceiving the policy positions of the parties compared to citizens from other contexts, since they will benefit from their environment (Franklin, van der Eijk, and Oppenhuis 1996). The problem here is that we cannot control for all these factors due to the limited degrees of freedom available within the data. Nevertheless, earlier studies have found that political knowledge is the most decisive factor behind PA of individuals (van der Eijk, Franklin, and van der Brug 1999). The CSES-data does not include comparative measures for knowledge but there are measures for education which reasonably could be used as a proxy for knowledge. In this way we can control for varying degrees of education in each country, which might in turn affect the degree of PA.

The five control variables can be reduced to three by separately regressing the effects of the party related variables that are relevant for PA. We will receive a set of predicted values of PA from this procedure, which then can be used in the overall analysis as a replacement for the effects of the party related variables on PA - a so called block-wise regression (see van der Eijk, Franklin, *et al*. 1996 for a similar procedure).

Moreover, since we are dealing with a causal model where one of the variables (divergence in parties' policy positions) is working both as an independent and a dependent variable, a Structural Equation Model (SEM) is well-suited. A SEM is often used for confirmatory theory testing with the advantage that variables can be treated as being simultaneously exogenous/independent and endogenous/dependent. This makes the SEM very useful for causal modeling compared to ordinary regression in which the models cannot be tested unless they are divided and the analysis performed in two or more steps, which under present circumstances is not an optimal

solution (Saris and Stronkhorst 1984).

Yet another issue that appears when working with a comparative design like the one discussed here, is that the independent variables and the dependent variable, as mentioned earlier, are measured at different levels. The dependent variable consists of voters' PA about the left-right position of each party within an electoral system, while the independent variables relate to system characteristics that are constants within each country. In practice, this means that we are dealing with an unmeasured contextual effect where parties nested in similar contexts will appear as more alike than a random sample of parties from different contexts would do. This in turn may imply that one might risk exaggerating the effect of the contextual independent variables. A drawback related to multilevel modeling is that the observations on each level are assumed to be drawn from a random sample of observations. This criterion is seldom met and especially is not met in this study and this threatens the applicability of a multilevel design (Hox 1995; Stoker 2002). Fortunately, we can mitigate this problem by using cluster corrected standard errors and treat the countries as clusters.

## Operationalizations

*Measuring perceptual agreement*
In this article a measurement of PA constructed by Cees van der Eijk (2001) will be used. The reason for this is that customarily measures of dispersion such as standard deviations are misleading and non comparable when applied on bounded rating scales such as the left-right scale used by CSES. For example, a highly peaked distribution where the median is far from the center will yield a larger standard deviation than a less peaked distribution with a median located in the center of the rating scale. However, the empirical distributions of observations in different categories of rating scales can be decomposed into layers represented by patterns consisting of 0's and 1's with associated weights. All patterns can then be described with a value for agreement that conforms to a number of properties, such as correspondence to perfect (dis)agreement, insensitive to the length of rating scales and the location of empty categories. Because the empirical distribution is decomposed into layers, the degree of agreement can be expressed as the weighted average of agreement in each of the constituent layers, distinguished by an index $i$. where the proportions of cases contained in the layers are used as weights as:

$$A = \sum_i w_i \times A_i$$

where $i$ is an index for distinguishing the layers ($i = 1. . . k$). $w_i$ is the proportion of cases of the empirical distribution that is contained in layer $i$ and $A_i$ is agreement in layer $i$ (van der Eijk 2001). The coefficient is bound between -1 to 1 and it reaches its minimum of -1 at maximum disagreement when half the voter sample places the party on one extreme and the other half of the sample places it on the opposite extreme. Maximum agreement is when all respondents place the party in the same category and the coefficient attains +1. A uniform distribution yields an agreement value of 0. The coefficient can be used as a measurement for single parties but it may also be aggregated and serve as a comprehensive measure for the party system as a whole.

Variations in the questions asked during different national election surveys are a frequent problem associated with comparative studies. When it comes to the left-right dimension, this is a minor problem since a similar and straight forward question has been used in each national election survey. The basic form of question reads: "*In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place party A on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?*"[53] Of course, the most important and salient issue-dimensions in each country would be the ideal data, since we know that the left-right dimension is not necessarily the only or most salient issue-dimension in many countries. Nevertheless, the left-right dimension is one of the few comparable measurements for political belief systems available and is considered as one of the more common and salient issue-dimensions within several political systems (Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987; Jones 2004; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999).

A problem related with a rather broad and abstract question like this however, is that it might be understood in different ways by different individuals. A solution that sometimes is proposed is to include concrete examples or anchoring vignettes (see King 2004). However, I argue that when measuring agreement of parties' ideological positions among individuals in different countries, it is more of an advantage than a problem to use a broad and more abstract survey question like the left-right question posed above. We know or at least we can expect that the specific contents of the left-right dimension differ between countries depending on history, traditions, culture, etc (see Knutsen 1995). A more abstract question that does not consider what the left-right dimension means or contains in every single

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[53] In the Netherlands, a ten-point scale 1-10 was used for the elections of 2002 and 2003 instead of the usual eleven-point scale.

country thus overcomes this problem. The use of anchor vignettes is thereby of less value here since we mainly are interested in differences in agreement among individuals in different countries and not about what the left-right dimension means absolutely. But it is of great importance that citizens in each country perceive and understand the left-right concept in a *similar* manner. The use of examples or anchor vignettes could be more valuable in this aspect; however, vignettes demand a solid knowledge about the history and politics of each country and they might make the survey questions too different to be truly comparable.

Considering that previous research has shown that within Europe at least a moderate to strong left-right dimension is present in all countries (Klingemann 1995)[54] I argue that keeping the wording of the question at a general level, without specifying any explicit contents, is one of the most important guarantors that the left-right concept will be perceived and understood in a similar manner in each country.

*Measuring divergence*
Divergence for both single parties and party systems has been measured as the weighted average distance of a party to the other parties in a specific party system. The weights are based on the percentages of votes received by the parties and are applied in order to manage the effect of small extremist parties on the average distance between the main alternatives. The measure can formally be expressed as:

$$D = \frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{ij}^{np} \left| p_{pi} - p_{pi+j} \right| \times \left( p_{vi} + p_{vi+j} \right) | i + j \prec (np - 1)$$

where $p_{pi}$ is the left-right position of party *i* based on the interpolated median and $p_{vi}$ is the vote-share of party *i* and *np* is the total number of parties.

*Measuring the impact of electoral systems*
An electoral system is generally defined as the rules that are used for transforming votes into seats, where the most common division is made between majoritarian, proportional and mixed electoral systems (Anckar 2002; Bingham Powell 2000; Shugart and Wattenberg 2001). The greatest difference between them, at least for the first two categories, is the degree of

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[54] Ireland being the interesting exception where religion outscores left-right ideology.

proportionality. Proportionality is, however, not only an effect of the electoral formula but also a result of the level of the legal threshold and the size of the constituency (Lijphart 1994). A legal threshold mostly is used in countries with proportional systems, *i.e.* having large constituencies, while countries with more majoritarian formulas, *i.e.* having small constituencies, do not require a legal threshold. Electoral thresholds are usually assumed to have the same effect as small constituencies on the degree of proportionality.[55] This implies that these two variables are highly related to one another and therefore cannot be included in the same model due to multicollinearity. Consequently, we need a measure that captures both these dimensions such as that first developed by Taagepera and Shugart (1989) and later modified by Lijphart (1994). According to Taagepera and Shugart the effective magnitude is based on the minimum amount of votes a party needs in order to receive a mandate and the maximum amount of votes a party can get but still lose a mandate. The effective magnitude is then approximated to lie in between the minimum and maximum thresholds. Lijphart's modification of this measure consists of transforming the effective magnitude into the effective threshold such as:

$$Effective - threshold = \frac{75\%}{m+1}$$

Where *m* is the size of the constituency. In this study the effective threshold is based on Lijphart's formula.

*Measuring dimensionality and the strength of the left-right dimension*
Interpretative evaluations of qualitative sources can be used to construct a measure of dimensionality in each polity, a procedure used by Lijphart (1984). This approach however, is dependent on a solid knowledge of the politics in the particular countries. Another solution could be to rely on alternative sources of party-related data such as party manifestos, surveys among the member of the parliament or expert surveys. A problem with the latter two sources is acquiring comparable data over a period of time.

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[55] Of course, the effective threshold, the district magnitude and the electoral system variables to some extent tap the same underlying concept and thus are rather highly correlated. A factor analysis of these variables confirms earlier findings that these variables can be substituted by a factor which is highly correlated to the degree of vote/seat disparities *i.e.* the degree of proportionality within a system (see appendix). However, the purpose in the present study is to a) on a theoretical basis isolate the causal mechanism between electoral systems and PA and b) for practical reasons reduce the number of variables included in the study.

Party manifestos however, could be a fruitful path, especially since members of the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) have collected and analyzed the election manifestos of parties in 25 countries from 1945 and onwards (Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, and Tanenbaum 2001). Nevertheless, as we noted, the left-right structure is not time and context invariant and the construction of a left-right scale based on election manifestos would require a solid knowledge of the parties over time in each country and this is difficult to acquire. An inductive solution to the problem could be to look for relationships within the election manifestos by factor analysis, a method used by the CMP. Nevertheless, since the left-right dimension is a spatial concept, there will be a proximity relationship between the election manifestos and the left-right position, where parties on the left and right wings will emphasize left and right issues respectively. Factor analyses are prone to generate deceptive results under such circumstances (van der Brug 2001). A further drawback related to the use of factor analysis on manifesto data is that the variables tend to outnumber the cases (Benoit, Laver, and Mikhaylov 2009; Franzmann and Kaiser 2006; Pelizzo 2003).

A third alternative method to gain insight to the dimensionality in each polity is to rely on election study data and use some kind of multidimensional unfolding technique. An indirect measure of the degree of dimensionality within a political system can be obtained by using survey questions concerning how much the voters like or dislike different parties. Attractive multidimensional unfolding algorithms are, however, very data demanding and one must have at least eight political stimuli for each polity in order to obtain robust solutions (Dahlberg and Oscarsson 2006). Since most party systems contain less than eight parties the present study will deploy an alternative method known as a multiple unidimensional unfolding procedure (MUDFOLD), which focuses on the degree of unidimensionality (van Schuur and Post 1990).

The coefficient of scalability (Loevinger's H) varies from 0 to 1 and tells us to what extent voters' preference-orderings are in agreement with a perfect unfolding model, *i.e.* the degree of unidimensionality within a political system. The unfolding procedure tries all possible orderings of the parties and selects the unfolding model that best fits the data, *i.e.* the party ordering with the largest H-value.[56] For any given set of party preferences, there

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[56] An H coefficient smaller than .30 indicates that the structure in the data is insufficient to justify using individual items as indicators of a single latent dimension (van Schuur and Post

is often more than one plausible solution to the unidimensional unfolding problem. The guiding principle in this iterative search is that each unfolding scale should, if possible, include all main parties. The recovered unidimensional scale should be common to as a large proportion of voters as possible. Plausible models where all the large parties are included have been selected over models with better fit but where one of the relevant national parties is left out. For the unfolding analysis an evaluative measure has been used where the respondents were asked to rate the parties in terms of like-dislike. The questionnaire read: *"I'd like to know what you think about each of our political parties. After I read the name of a political party, please rate it on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that party and 10 means that you strongly like that party"*.

The unfolding procedure however, does not itself tell anything about the content of that ideological dimension since it only produces an ordering of the parties along the dimension (a so called qualitative j-scale) *i.e.* the ordering that fits best to the original like-dislike data. One way to solve this problem is to correlate the ordering of the parties in the unfolded j-scale with external data such as the respondents' placements of the parties along a left-right scale. The higher the correlation between the j-scale ordering of parties and an order based on the parties mean left-right positions, the higher is the probability that left right ideology actually is the latent principle that produced the structure of political preferences in the first place. For this purpose Spearman's rank correlation coefficient has been used (Spearman's Rho). A simple measure of the strength/saliency of left-right dimension within a polity has then been created by multiplying Loevinger's H coefficients with the Spearman's rank correlation coefficients.

## Results – does the institutional context affect voters' perceptual agreement?

In table 2, three different structural equation models are presented. Since the underlying theoretical assumption is that the effect of the system related variables on PA partly is mediated through their effect on the divergence among parties in a party system, each model is presented in two steps. The first depicts the effect of the independent system related variables on party system divergence, which is the first dependent and intervening variable;

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1990). Mudfold is distributed by ProGAMMA, P.O. Box 841, 9700 AV Groeningen, The Netherlands.

the second part shows the effect on PA of all independent variables together with divergence, now functioning as an independent variable.

The first model in Table 2 shows the effect of each independent variable under control for all other variables. However, according to Downs and Sartori's theory, the spatial direction in party competition is contingent on the number of parties and so it is necessary to include interaction terms in order to correctly specify the theoretical model empirically. This is done in the second model where four interaction terms are included between the effective number of parties and the degree of unidimensionality, the strength of the left-right dimension, parliamentarism and the ballot structure. The third model is a continuation of the first two with the exception of the inclusion of control variables. Since the units of analysis are political parties the control variables refer to different factors related to the parties that otherwise may affect voters' PA (see earlier discussion). The third model is illustrated in a path diagram (figure 2).

**Table 2.** The institutional effect on party system divergence and perceptual agreement among voters in 35 countries between 1996-2004 (unstandardized LISREL ML-estimates with cluster corrected standard errors.)

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Divergence | PA | Divergence | PA | Divergence | PA |
| *Formal institutional factors* | | | | | | |
| Effective threshold | .310*** | -.038 | .212*** | -.038 | .239*** | -.047 |
| | (.053) | (.051) | (.055) | (.051) | (.053) | (.051) |
| Party ballot | -.119** | .039** | -.215*** | .039 | -.229*** | -.017 |
| | (.052) | (.048) | (.052) | (.048) | (.050) | (.046) |
| Parliamentarism | .687*** | .426*** | .750*** | .426*** | .651*** | .374*** |
| | (.053) | (.061) | (.053) | (.061) | (.054) | (.058) |
| *Informal institutional factors* | | | | | | |
| Unidimensionality | .032 | -.046 | -.128** | -.046 | -.134*** | -.041 |
| | (.057) | (.044) | (.052) | (.044) | (.050) | (.042) |
| Strength LR-dim. | -.043 | .111** | -.034 | .111** | -.016 | .051 |
| | (.052) | (.047) | (.052) | (.047) | (.050) | (.051) |
| Eff.# parties | -.144*** | .167*** | -.093** | .167*** | -.075 | .135*** |
| | (.053) | (.049) | (.055) | (.049) | (.053) | (.046) |
| Divergence | - | .296*** | - | .296*** | - | .191*** |
| | | (.054) | | (.054) | | (.053) |
| *Interactions* | | | | | | |
| Eff.part*unidim. | - | | .030 | | .054 | |
| | | | (.060) | | (.057) | |
| Eff.part*strength LR | - | | .175*** | | .177*** | |
| | | | (.054) | | (.052) | |
| Eff.part*partbal | - | | .262*** | | .241*** | |
| | | | (.068) | | (.065) | |
| Eff.part*parlament | - | | .232*** | | .212*** | |
| | | | (.061) | | (.059) | |
| *Control variables* | | | | | | |
| Party vars. (ŷ) | | - | | - | | .166*** |
| | | | | | | (.046) |
| Education (mean) | | - | | - | | .032 |
| | | | | | | (.044) |
| Divergence (parties) | - | - | - | - | .232*** | .213*** |
| | | | | | (.046) | (.046) |
| SMCSE ≈ R² | .58 | .48 | .51 | .48 | .47 | .42 |
| RMSEA | .158 | .158 | .157 | .157 | .100 | .100 |
| Godness of Fit: | .952 | .952 | .965 | .965 | .990 | .990 |
| Adj . Godness of Fit: | .586 | .586 | .581 | .581 | .795 | .795 |
| אּ² | 110.466 | 110.466 | 78.699 | 78.699 | 22.556 | 22.556 |
| N: (Listwise) | 291 | 291 | 291 | 291 | 291 | 291 |

*Comment:* \* p<.10 \*\* p<.05 \*\*\* p <.01. Cluster corrected standard errors are shown within parentheses. SMCSE (Squared Multiple Correlations for Structural Equations) is approximately equal to R². Data has been weighted according how many times each country is represented in the data-set. The classification of different party families has been

made by the collaborators of the CSES (see appendix III). The variable is constructed as a dummy where communist-, socialist-, social democratic-, left, liberal and right liberal-, and conservative parties - which all are party families that reasonably belong to the traditional left-right distinction (Ware 1996) - have been coded as one and all other party families as zero.[57] The age and size of a party is basically the amount of years since it first was represented in the national parliament and the size is the percentage of votes received in respective elections. The effective number of parliamentary parties is calculated from the vote-shares using the index of Laakso and Taagepera -also known as Herfindahl's index of concentration (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). The variable parliamentarism is coded as a dummy where a one indicates parliamentary systems and zero semi-presidential or presidential systems. The constitutive variables for the interactions have been centred by their mean due to multi-collinearity and to avoid singularity in the covariance matrix (*i.e.* linear dependencies among the variables). The models have been calculated with LISREL 8.72 and the coefficients are unstandardized. For information about variance inflation factors (VIF), see appendix II.

In the theoretical section it was predicted that in systems with a low effective threshold and with a high number of parties competing in a unidimensional policy space, the parties would adopt bonding strategies where ideologies and policy programs will become important instruments in the election campaigns. This in turn is expected to raise centrifugal incentives for parties, which will generate greater divergence in the party systems with the parties taking more dispersed positions on the political spectrum (which is expected to have a facilitative effect on voters' PA). According to the results in table 2, it is clear that the effective number of parties, *per se*, has a significant and negative impact on divergence (-.144***) while the effective threshold (which is a combination of the average district magnitude and the electoral threshold) and parliamentarism exerts a positive effect (.310*** and .687***). Initially, these results appear to refute Downs' assumptions. It is not surprising however, that the number of parties, *per se*, has a negative effect, since more parties reasonably means less space for each individual party on the left-right continuum. From this perspective, the positive effect of the effective threshold is also reasonable since higher thresholds usually mean fewer parties. Theoretically however, we expected less divergence among parties in systems with higher thresholds since this is assumed to bring centrifugal incentives for party competition, where the parties are expected to appeal to the median voter. This does not seem to be the case due to the positive impact of the effective threshold on divergence.[58] Never-

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[57] The party families are: 01. Ecology Parties, 02. Communist Parties, 03. Socialist Parties, 04. Social Democratic Parties, 05. Left Liberal parties, 06. Liberal Parties, 07. Right Liberal Parties, 08. Christian Democratic Parties, 09. Conservative Parties, 10. National Parties, 11. Agrarian Parties, 12. Ethnic Parties, 13. Regional Parties, 14. Religious Parties, 15. Independent Parties, 16. Other.

[58] It should be noticed that the relationship between the effective threshold and the number of parties is not always that clear cut. For example, France has an effective threshold of 37.5 in the election of 2002 while the effective number of parties in the same election reaches 4.82.

109

theless, the rather strong positive effect of parliamentarism is well in line with our theoretical expectations that parliamentary systems will bring greater focus on the parties, which in turn will increase the competition among parties. The use of party ballots was also expected to work as a proxy for more centralized party organizations with less focus on individual politicians, which should increase the competition among parties and hence lead to greater divergence among them. This seems not to be the case in this model where the effect instead is negative (-.119**). However, considering that party ballots often are used in proportional multiparty systems this result might resemble the effect of the effective number of parties.

Considering the second equation in the first model it is clear that all significant system related variables have a positive impact on PA. The greatest effect is to be found from parliamentarism (.426***) while the second strongest effect comes from the degree of party system divergence (.296***). Other significant, positive effects emerge from the use of party ballots, the effective number of parliamentary parties and the strength of the left-right dimension. Except for the effective number of parties, which supports the motivational hypothesis, all other significant variables relate to the simplicity hypotheses in which facilitative factors have a positive effect on voters' PA.

At this point, the empirical results appear to refute the hypothesis that multiparty systems *per se* should cause centrifugal party competition. However, in order to generate a form of party competition that will affect the direction of the competition, the parties must compete in the 'same lane', *i.e.* over the same issues. Hence, the effective number of parties as such may not be a good measure of the degree of competition as it does not consider the dimensionality in the party space. Downs (1957) theory of party competition originally assumed a one-dimensional left-right oriented policy space in which centrifugal competition is most likely to appear in multiparty systems. We need thus to include interaction terms between the effective number of parties and unidimensionality, the strength of LR-dimension, the ballot structure and parliamentarism.

These four variables have in common that they are expected to affect the degree of competition among parties. Parliamentary systems are supposed to bring a greater focus on the parties while the use of party ballots supposedly will promote more programmatically oriented parties. The degree of party competition can also be expected to increase if the parties are concentrated/located in the same policy space, which is why the degree of unidimensionality and the strength of the left-right dimension can be ex-

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In the opposite direction, both Peru and Bulgaria tend to have relatively low thresholds but also a low number of effective parliamentary parties.

pected to affect the competition among parties. Assuming reasonably that Downs is right, the effect of these four variables on party system divergence is dependent on the number of parties and vice versa. An increasing amount of competition in a two-party system should then bring centripetal incentives for the parties while the opposite should be true in multiparty systems. The spatial direction of party competition is thus, theoretically, contingent on the degree of competition and the number of parties.

Turning to the second model which includes the interaction terms, we find a significant and positive effect on divergence in parties' policy positions of the interactions between the effective number of parties and the ballot structure (.262***), the strength of the left-right dimension (.175***) and parliamentarism (.232***). By itself, this is an interesting finding since it a) supports the hypothesis that party ballots and parliamentarism (here assumed to imply centralized party organizations and party centered political systems) affects the degree of competition among parties and b) it empirically supports Downs' hypothesis that a high degree of competition in multiparty systems will promote a centrifugal form of party competition. The effects of the ballot structure, the strength of the left-right dimension and parliamentarism on the degree of divergence seems to increase with the number of parties.[59]

When it comes to the direct effect of the independent system variables on PA in model 2, the effects are identical with the results in the first model since this is a structural equation and the interactions are relevant only for the first dependent variable, which is party system divergence.

The most interesting results are to be found in the third and final model where the control variables for the party related features are included. The direct effects of the effective threshold, the use of party ballots, the number of parties and parliamentarism on party system divergence are particularly robust when compared with the former two models, except that the effect of the effective number of parties is no longer significantly different to zero. The interaction effects are also highly similar compared to the results in the second model. Turning to the direct effect of the system related variables on PA, a pattern of robustness similar to that seen in the other models appears. The effects on PA of the strength of the left-right dimension and party system divergence, under control for all other variables in the model,

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[59] It could be argued that centrifugal party competition not only results from the number of parties but also from the effective threshold. Both an interaction between parliamentarism and threshold and a triple interaction between the number of parties, the threshold and parliamentarism were included in the model but none of them had a significant effect on divergence.

are however decreasing when the control variables are included. The divergence effect decreases from (.296**) in model 2 to (.191***) in model 3, while the effect of the strength of the left-right dimension no longer is significantly different to zero.[60] There is also a slight decrease in the amount of explained variance (from .47 to .42) in the third and final model.[61]

In an attempt to more easily illustrate the causal relationships between the variables in model three, figure 2 presents a path diagram.

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[60] A logic explanation behind this result is that if the model is run solely on a system level with countries as the units of analysis, there is a rather strong, positive and significant effect of the strength of the left-right dimension on PA. This effect holds also when the analysis is made with single parties as the units of analysis (as is shown in model 2 in the present study). However, when conducting the analyses on a system level with parties as the units of analysis, one have to control for the party related factors that might affect PA. One of these control variables is, as mentioned, the parties' attachment to the left-right dimension (see Budge 2001; Snyder and Ting 2002). However, since the strength of the left-right dimension and the parties' attachment to the left-right dimension is highly interrelated, the party related control variable captures the strength of the left-right dimension on a system level, which is why the effect disappears when the party related variables are included.

[61] This model was also run with the effective threshold replaced by both the district magnitude, the degree of proportionality (according to Gallagher's index (1991)) and a dummy for majoritarian vs. proportional electoral systems. There were no substantial differences between the models and thus it seems empirically that it is of minor importance which variable is used.

**Figure 2.** Causal path model of system related determinants of party system divergence and perceptual agreement. Unstandardized LISREL estimates for the exogenous and endogenous variables in table 2 together with the control variables (maximum likelihood).
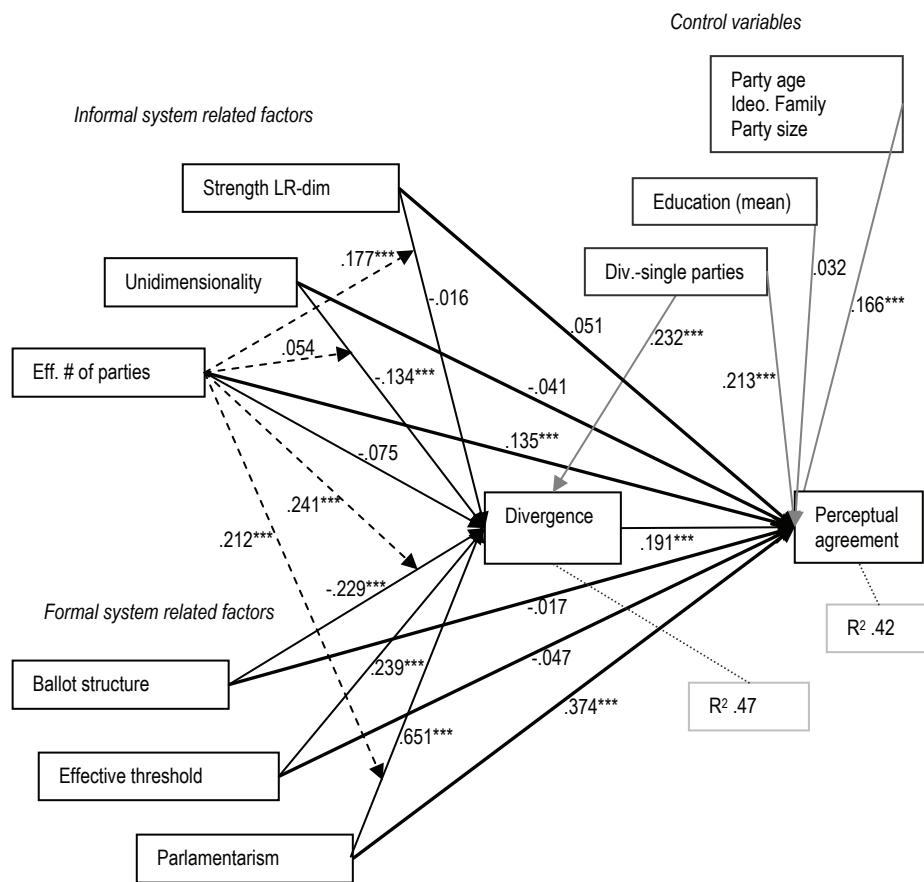


*Comment:* * p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p <.01. The model has been calculated with LISREL 8.72, coefficients are unstandard-ized. Chi-Square=22.942, df=5, P-value=.000, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) =.112. Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .989. Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) =.771.

Considering the effect of the explanatory variables on party divergence, (equation 1 in model 3), the effect of the number of parties has decreased even further and is now insignificant (-.075). The outcome of the effective threshold goes against the expectation that a high threshold should create centripetal tendencies for the parties. Admittedly, this result is not that un-

113

expected since high thresholds usually mean fewer parties competing in the same space. This however, may be a less valid explanation since the effect of the number of parties is already controlled by inclusion in the model. The constitutive effect of the ballot structure does not have the expected impact on divergence but this result could also be related to the number of parties, since party ballots mostly are used in proportional multiparty systems. But the effect of the number of parties in this aspect is already accounted for in the model.[62]

Among the more interesting results is the significant and positive effect on divergence of the interactions between the effective number of parties and the use of party ballots (.241***), the strength of the left-right dimension (.177***) and parliamentarism (.212***). Most simply, this means that for each increase in the effective number of parties, the positive effect of these three independent variables on party divergence increased accordingly. In order to assess what these interaction effects mean, four alternative regressions were made in which the effective number of parties was divided into four different groups according to the 25:th percentile values. One regression for each group of effective number of parties tests the effect of the system related variables on party divergence. The results are displayed in table 3.

**Table 3.** The conditional effect of party ballots, parliamentarism, unidimensionality and the strength of the left-right dimension on divergence in party positions for every percentile value of the effective number of parties.

| | Eff#part≈2 | Eff#part≈3 | Eff#part≈4 | Eff#part≈5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Party ballot | -.928*** | -.140 | .006 | .130** |
| Parliamentarism | -.245** | .457*** | .621*** | -.004 |
| Unidimensionality | -.660** | .715** | .376 | .021 |
| Strength LR-dim. | 1.226*** | -.253** | -.121 | .374** |
| N: | 133 | 135 | 126 | 126 |

*Comment:* The effective number of parties has here been divided into four different groups according to the percentile values such as: (min/2.825317=2) (2.847434/3.527795=3) (3.718421/ 4.176455=4) (4.238373/max=5)

Aside of difficulty in interpreting the conditional effect of the strength of

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[62] All models have also been run using the robust MM estimation technique. The results were fairly similar to those obtained from an OLS regression based on the weighted data matrix while the results from an OLS regression based on the unweighted original data differed to some extent.

the left-right dimension, the results do to some extent bring further empirical support for the hypothesis that a high degree of party competition in a multiparty system increases centrifugal incentives for the parties. Both party ballots, parliamentarism and the degree of unidimensionality was expected to increase the competition among parties and when the number of parties is low, the significant effect of these variables on divergence is negative but the opposite result is true when the effective number of parties is higher.

Among the direct effects on PA, (equation 2 in model 3) positive and significant effects are to be found from the effective number of parties, parliamentarism and party system divergence. The rather strong and significant effect of party system divergence (.191***) supports the expectation derived from the RPM, which emphasizes the importance of divergent policy positions among parties in giving voters meaningful electoral choices. The greatest initial effect is found in the dummy variable for parliamentary systems (.374***). Parliamentary systems with a greater focus on the parties may thus not only increase the competition among the parties (as both the direct effect of parliamentarism (.651***) and the interaction between the number of parties and parliamentarism (.212***) exert a rather large and significant positive effect on party system divergence), but may also produce a simpler political structure that helps voters to comprehend the parties' policy positions. The positive direct effect of parliamentarism on voters' PA confirms this hypothesis. Substantively, this means that if the USA, or any other presidential system, switched to a parliamentary system such as used by Norway, the Netherlands etc, the PA would generally increase by approximately 20 percent. [63]

The degree of unidimensionality does not seem to have any significant direct effect on the agreement in voters' perceptions and this result conflicts with Thomassen's (1999) expectation that a simple unidimensional party space should facilitate the communication between parties and voters. Another expectation that not is supported in the empirical findings is the expectation that the use of party ballots should simplify the process of voters acquiring political information, which would have a positive impact on voters' PA.

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[63] It has also been suggested that unicameral systems may have a facilitative effect on voters' knowledge about party positions (Arnold 2007). The models in this study were therefore tested with a dummy variable included for bi- and unicameral systems but the effect was small and insignificant. This variable was therefore left out of analyses in order to keep the models as parsimonious as possible.

The hypothesized direct negative effect of high effective thresholds on voters' PA is not confirmed either. The expectations that voters in more proportional systems should be more motivated to seek information about the parties and thus should present a higher PA, seems not to be the case according to the results in this study.[64] However, there is an indirect effect of the effective threshold that is positive for voters' PA since higher thresholds seems to promote greater divergence among the parties, which makes the interpretation a bit ambiguous.

Another interesting result is that the number of parties has a positive effect on PA (.135***). The theoretical expectations were that an increasing number of parties would, a) force parties to profile themselves more clearly for the voters in terms of ideology and b) motivate voters to inform themselves about the parties' policy positions due to the greater variety of parties to choose from. An issue of diminishing returns - due to an increasing number of parties bringing greater information costs having a negative impact on PA was discussed and so, a dummy-variable was included in all the models to test for this. The variable was coded as 0 if the number of parties were less than or equal to 3.73, which is the mean effective number of parties among the countries, and 1 if the number of parties exceeded 3.73. This variable had only a small and insignificant positive effect on PA, and was therefore excluded from the final analysis.

In conclusion, two of the three variables that have a significant impact on PA, namely parliamentary systems and party positional divergence, are facilitative in nature while the effective number of parliamentary parties is the only motivational factor of significance. It appears that simplicity within political systems improves the communication between voters and their representatives. This result does not necessarily mean that motivational factors are of lesser importance than facilitative ones. A significant impact on PA was found from two out of four facilitative variables in the model, whilst one out of two motivational factors were significant. It would seem that both facilitative and motivational factors in some ways are equally important.

In order to test the robustness of the model and strengthen the confidence in the effects caused by the independent variables on divergence and

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[64] An argument delivered by Gordon & Segura (1997) is that the effect of electoral systems on voters' motivation to attain information about parties' policy positions is a result of the knowledge of belonging to either a majoritarian- or a proportional system. The analysis has for that reason also been conducted with a dummy-variable with 1 for proportional systems and 0 for majoritarian systems but there were no significant changes in the estimates.

PA, an extreme bound analysis (EBA) was conducted. An EBA tests the effect of a given independent variable on the dependent variable for different combinations of all other independent variables. It then displays minimum and maximum parameter estimates for each variable together with the t-statistics, p-values and z-variables used and it also controls for multi-collinearity.

**Figure 3.** Extreme bound analysis (EBA) for the effect on divergence and perceptual agreement caused by each significant variable under different combinations of all other variables.
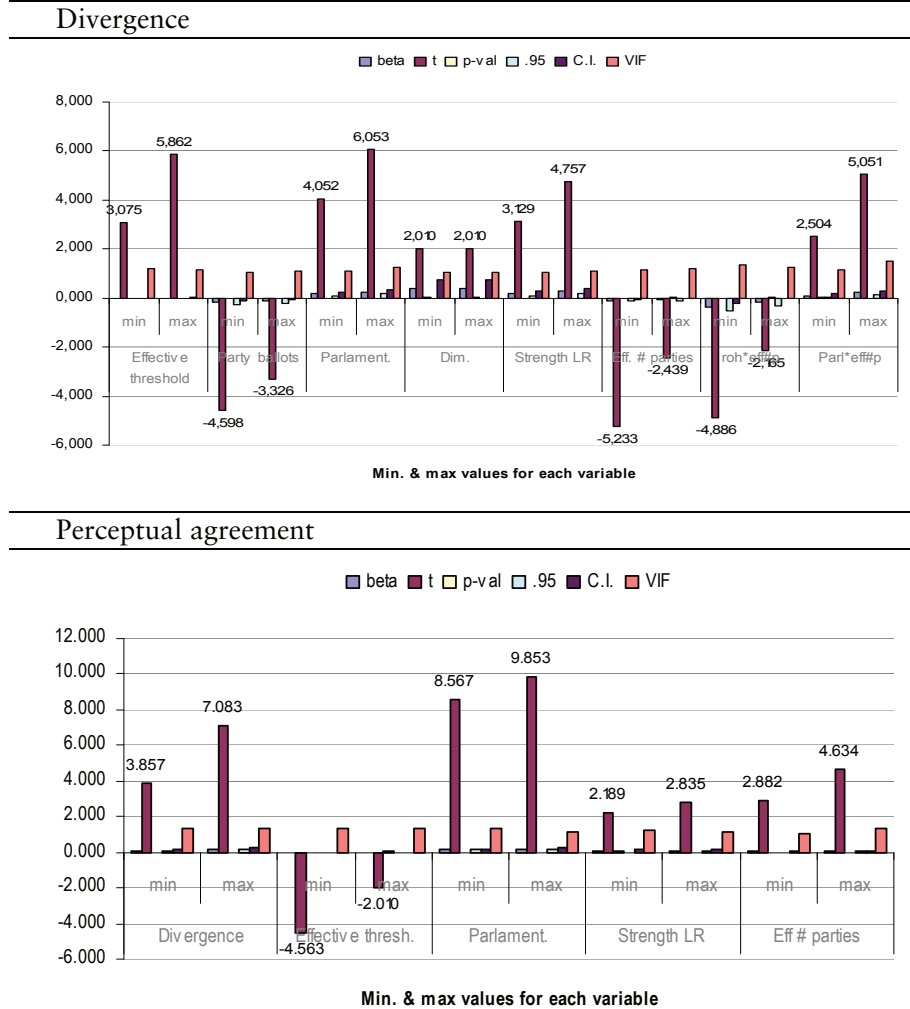


*Comment:* EBA Performs an Extreme Bound Analysis on the regressor x, for a given dependent variable y, and a set

117

of regressors z and x. Where z(nxk) and x(nxm) with k<=4. The program runs n!/(k!(n-k)!) OLS regressions by taking combinations of k<=4 Z variables among the p-listed. It then displays minimum and maximum parameter estimates for x together with their t-statistics, p-value and z-variables used and it also controls for multicollinearity. A total of 8 combinations of 1 regressor from the Z(nx8) vector were used for PA and a total of 9 combinations of 1 regressor from the Z(nx9) vector for divergence. See appendix II for a full description. When testing the robustness of the interaction effects the interaction constituencies has been 'forced' to be included in all model combinations. EBA estimates for the interaction terms between unidimensionality*eff#parties and the ballot structure*eff#parties is not available at the suggested level of confidence (.95).

Figure 3 shows the results from the EBA test for the effect of all significant independent variables on divergence and PA respectively. Clearly the effect of each variable is particularly robust through all different variable combinations of the model and the VIF-values are acceptable as well. However, the EBA could not be performed at the suggested level of confidence (.95) for the specific effect of the interactions between the effective number of parties and the degree of unidimensionality and the ballot structure on party system divergence. This was also the case for the specific effect of the ballot structure and the degree of unidimensionality on PA. This means that the significant effect of ballot structure and the degree of unidimensionality on PA is valid only in the specific model at hand. These effects cannot be considered to be fully robust because the results are no longer significant when some of the other independent variables in model 3 are omitted. Consequently, any theoretical generalizations based on these results should be made cautiously.

Aside of the control variables, it seems that parliamentarism, together with the degree of divergence among parties, exerts the largest influence on PA. However, in order to evaluate the model fully and to observe the total effect of the system related variables on PA, some of the path coefficients need to be added and multiplied together since the system related variables also have an indirect effect on PA through the effect of divergence in the parties' policy positions. Moreover, since the variables are measured at different scales the effects are still not fully comparable, which further complicates the interpretation of the substantial effects of different variables on PA. A comparison of the effect on the dependent variable caused by a certain amount of change in the independent variables is a simple procedure to mitigate this problem. The effects can then be interpreted as the average effect on PA caused by a variable, under control for all other variables in-

cluded in the model, when moving from the lowest to the highest value of the variable.[65] The results are shown in table 4.

**Table 4.** The total effect of the strength of the left-right dimension, the effective number of parliamentary parties, the ballot structure together with the effective threshold and party divergence on voters' PA when moving from the lowest to the highest value of each independent variable (unstandardized ML-coefficients).
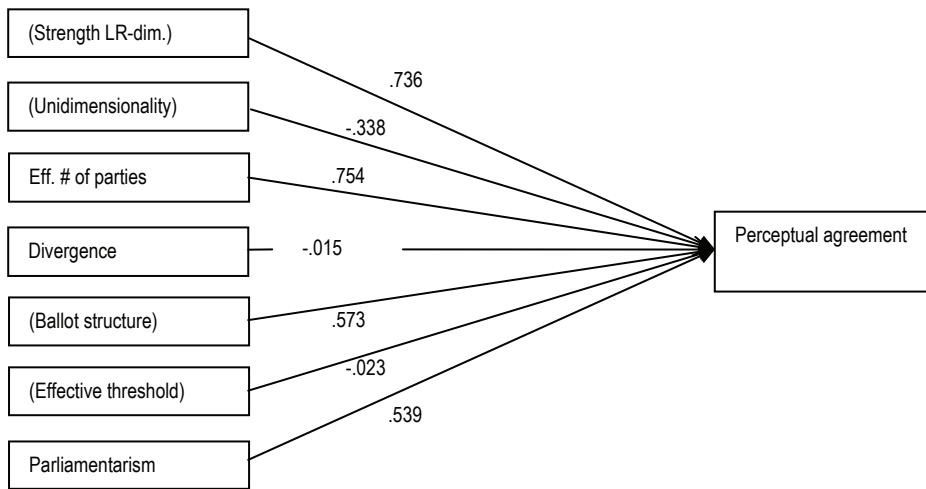


*Comment:* * p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p <.01. Variables within parentheses have only significant indirect effects on PA.

The total effect of the strength of the left-right dimension on PA with divergence in the party system mediating both the direct and indirect effects is (.736). The respective total effect of unidimensionality and the effective number of parliamentary parties is (-.338) and (.754), whilst that for the use of party ballots is (-.015). The total effect of the effective threshold and parliamentarism is (-.023) and (.539) respectively.

Clearly, the effective number of parties produces the greatest effect on

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[65] An alternative and probably more commonly used procedure is to display standardized beta coefficients. However, standardizations at best give an approximation of the relative weight of the independent variables, all other variables held constant, when explaining the variation in the dependent variable (Andrews, Morgan, Klem, and Sonquist 1973).

119

PA and this effect is positive, just as predicted by the motivational hypothesis. In the second place comes the positive effect of the strength of the left-right dimension followed by parliamentarism. Except for the negative effects of unidimensionality and the ballot structure, the results confirm the initial hypotheses. It also seems that motivational and facilitative factors are equally important determinants of PA among voters on parties left-right positions.

## Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this article was to test some of the founding assumptions about constitutional design and voting behavior. By combining contextual system related variables with cross-national surveys of voting behavior, the present study examined the effects of the electoral context on both parties and voters simultaneously, thus taking the empirical analysis a step further.

The theoretical foundations of the study rest on rational choice institutionalism and propose that formal institutions (such as the constitution, the ballot structure and the effective threshold in an electoral system) and informal institutions (such as the effective number of parties, the degree of unidimensionality in the party systems and the strength of the left-right dimension) should generate different incentives for parties and voters.

It was hypothesized that parliamentary and more proportional electoral systems with low thresholds and closed party ballots would create centrifugal incentives for parties to appeal more ideologically or programmatically to voters. In contrast, a more unidimensional multiparty system with the presence of a strong left-right dimension was hypothesized to result in centrifugal incentives with a high degree of ideological competition among the parties.

With respect to the voters, it was foreseen that an increasing degree of centrifugal competition among the parties would generate more divergent party systems that would smooth the process of acquiring information about the parties' policies. It was also predicted that the effective threshold, the ballot structure, the degree of unidimensionality and strength of the left-right dimension together with the number of parties would have an independent and direct effect on the voters as well. Lower thresholds would suppress the feeling of 'wasted votes' and thereby raise incentives to obtain information about the policy positions of the parties. Closed party ballots together with a strong and unidimensional policy space with not too many parties competing for the votes was expected to simplify the process of information gathering by voters. In contrast to presidential or semi-presidential systems, parliamentary constitutions were supposed to reduce

the information costs among voters due to a less complicated division of powers and a greater focus on the political parties.

The results showed that significant positive and negative effects indeed exist on party system divergence that are due to, on the one hand, parliamentary constitutions and the effective threshold and, on the other hand, to the use of party-ballots and the degree of unidimensionality present in an electoral system. There was also a positive and significant relationship between the degree of party system divergence and the voters' perceptual agreement. Parliamentary systems and the number of parties contributed significant direct effects on the PA among voters.

Consequently, the results confirm the existence of direct effects on voters' perceptual agreement produced by the electoral and political context and an important indirect effect resulting from party system divergence. This study supports the notion that institutions matter and that as defined by the responsible party model, effective political representation appears to work best in parliamentary multiparty systems within which the contesting parties hold divergent policy positions. The RPM proves consequently to be a fruitful model to proceed with when seeking insights as to how to obtain effective political representation.

# Appendix I

**Table 1.** Institutional characteristics of the countries included in the study.

| Country | Year | Electoral system | District magnitude | Party threshold | Ballot structure | Seats | Effective # of parties | Divergence | Strength of left-right dimension | Unidimensionaliy | Disproportionality | Effective threshold | Perceptual agreement |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Denmark | 1998 | List PR* | 7.9 | 2.0 | Pref | 179 | 3.7 | 1.5 | 1.0 | .5 | 1.9 | 2.0 | .7 |
| Sweden | 1998 | List PR* | 1.7 | 4.0 | Pref | 349 | 3.9 | 1.7 | 1.0 | .5 | 1.0 | 4.0 | .7 |
| Sweden | 2002 | List PR* | 1.7 | 4.0 | Pref | 349 | 4.2 | 1.6 | .8 | .5 | 1.2 | 4.0 | .7 |
| Bulgaria | 2001 | List PR* | 7.7 | 4.0 | Party | 240 | 2.4 | 1.6 | .7 | .5 | 6.5 | 4.0 | .7 |
| Netherlands | 2002 | List PR* | 15.0 | .7 | Party | 150 | 5.0 | 1.5 | .8 | .4 | 1.3 | 2.6 | .7 |
| Netherlands | 1998 | List PR* | 15.0 | .7 | Party | 150 | 4.4 | 1.4 | 1.0 | .4 | 1.1 | .7 | .6 |
| Denmark | 2001 | List PR* | 7.9 | 2.0 | Pref | 179 | 5.2 | 1.6 | .6 | .5 | .8 | 2.0 | .6 |
| Norway | 1997 | List PR* | 8.6 | .0 | Party | 165 | 4.4 | 1.6 | 1.0 | .5 | 3.7 | 4.0 | .6 |
| Iceland | 2003 | List PR* | 1.5 | 5.0 | Party | 63 | 4.0 | 2.1 | .2 | .5 | 1.9 | 16.0 | .6 |
| Norway | 2001 | List PR* | 8.3 | .0 | Party | 165 | 5.6 | 1.5 | 1.0 | .4 | 2.3 | 4.0 | .6 |
| Czech Rep. | 2002 | List PR* | 14.3 | 5.0 | Pref | 200 | 3.9 | 1.7 | 1.0 | .5 | 5.1 | 5.0 | .6 |
| Netherlands | 2003 | List PR* | 15.0 | .7 | Party | 150 | 6.0 | 1.3 | .8 | .4 | 1.4 | 2.3 | .6 |
| Portugal | 2002 | List PR* | 1.5 | .0 | Party | 230 | 3.2 | 1.9 | .8 | .5 | 5.0 | 6.6 | .6 |
| Great Britain | 2001 | Majority (FPP) * | 1.0 | - | Cand | - | 2.7 | 1.7 | 1.0 | .6 | 16.6 | 37.5 | .6 |
| Iceland | 1999 | List PR* | 6.2 | 5.0 | Party | 63 | 3.5 | 2.0 | .2 | .3 | 1.2 | 16.0 | .6 |
| Chile | 2003 | List PR | 7.7 | .0 | Pref | 200 | 2.3 | 2.0 | 1.0 | .6 | 2.4 | 25.0 | .6 |
| Spain | 2004 | List PR* | 6.7 | 3.0 | Party | 350 | 3.1 | 2.1 | 1.0 | .6 | 5.1 | 9.7 | .6 |
| Czech Rep. | 1996 | List PR* | 25.0 | 5.0 | Pref | 200 | 4.3 | 1.8 | .5 | .6 | 9.0 | 5.0 | .6 |
| Hungary | 2002 | Quasi-Maj. Mixed* | 1.0 | .0 | Dual | 176 | 2.7 | 1.8 | .8 | .7 | 25.1 | 4.0 | .6 |
| Spain | 1996 | List PR* | 7.0 | 3.0 | Party | 350 | 2.8 | 1.7 | .9 | .4 | 5.6 | 9.7 | .5 |
| Finland | 2003 | List PR | 13.3 | .0 | Pref | 200 | 4.8 | 1.3 | .2 | .3 | 3.0 | 5.2 | .5 |
| Germany | 2002 | Quasi-Prop.* Mixed | 1.0 | .0 | Dual | 299 | 3.4 | 1.5 | .8 | .6 | 3.1 | 5.0 | .5 |
| Chile | 1999 | List PR | 7.6 | - | Pref | - | 2.2 | 2.1 | 1.0 | .5 | 5.9 | 25.0 | .5 |
| Spain | 2000 | List PR* | 7.0 | 3.0 | Party | 350 | 2.5 | 1.6 | .6 | .7 | 5.1 | 9.7 | .5 |
| Switzerland | 1999 | List PR* | | - | Pref | - | 4.4 | 1.5 | - | - | 3.1 | 8.6 | .5 |
| Israel | 2003 | List PR* | 12.0 | 1.5 | Party | 120 | 4.2 | 1.4 | 1.0 | .6 | 2.0 | 1.5 | .5 |
| New Zealand | 1996 | Quasi-Prop. Mixed* | 1.0 | .0 | Dual | 69 | 4.0 | 1.6 | .3 | .4 | 4.5 | 5.0 | .5 |
| Poland | 1997 | List PR | 7.5 | 5.0 | Pref | 460 | 3.9 | 1.7 | .1 | .5 | 1.7 | 5.0 | .5 |
| Japan | 1996 | Quasi-Maj. Mixed* | 1.0 | 16.7 | Dual | 300 | 4.0 | 1.8 | 1.0 | .3 | 13.2 | 25.1 | .5 |

| Country | Year | System | | | Ballot | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Israel | 1996 | List PR* | 12.0 | 1.5 | Party | 120 | 3.7 | 1.4 | .9 | .7 | 1.9 | 1.5 | .5 |
| Germany | 1998 | Quasi-Prop. Mixed* | 1.0 | .0 | Dual | 299 | 3.4 | 1.2 | 1.0 | .5 | 3.1 | 5.0 | .5 |
| Ireland | 2002 | STV* | 4.0 | .0 | Pref | 166 | 3.3 | 1.3 | .4 | .3 | 6.4 | 14.9 | .5 |
| Lithuania | 1997 | Semi-Prop.* | 1.0 | - | Dual | - | 2.5 | 1.3 | .3 | .5 | 14.6 | 5.0 | .5 |
| Hungary | 1998 | Quasi-Maj. Mixed* | 1.0 | .0 | Dual | 176 | 3.5 | 1.6 | .5 | .6 | 22.4 | 4.0 | .5 |
| Great Britain | 1997 | Majority* (FPP) | 1.0 | - | Cand | - | 2.8 | 1.4 | 1.0 | .5 | 16.8 | 37.5 | .5 |
| Poland | 2001 | List PR* | 11.2 | 5.0 | Pref | 460 | 3.7 | 1.5 | .3 | .4 | 5.4 | 5.0 | .5 |
| Korea Rep. of | 2000 | Quasi-Maj. Mixed | 1.0 | .0 | Dual | 243 | 2.8 | 1.0 | .5 | .6 | 14.5 | 32.0 | .5 |
| Belgium (wall) | 1999 | List PR* | 7.5 | - | Pref | - | 3.8 | .5 | .3 | .4 | 2.6 | 8.8 | .5 |
| France | 2002 | Two-Round System | 1.0 | 12.5 | Pref | 577 | 4.8 | 1.0 | .5 | .4 | 17.7 | 37.5 | .4 |
| Austria | 1996 | Majority (Alt. Vote) * | 1.0 | - | Cand | 150 | 2.9 | 1.4 | .6 | .5 | 11.6 | 37.5 | .4 |
| New Zealand | 2002 | Quasi-Prop. Mixed* | 1.0 | .0 | Dual | 69 | 3.8 | 1.4 | 1.0 | .4 | 1.9 | 5.0 | .4 |
| Austria | 2004 | Majority (Alt. Vote)* | 1.0 | .0 | Cand | 150 | 2.8 | 1.6 | .9 | .5 | 7.9 | 37.5 | .4 |
| USA | 2004 | Majority | 1.0 | .0 | Cand | 435 | 2.1 | 2.0 | 1.0 | .4 | 2.5 | 37.5 | .4 |
| Korea Rep. of | 2004 | Quasi-Maj. Mixed | 1.0 | .0 | Dual | 243 | 3.4 | 1.6 | .0 | .6 | 12.1 | 32.0 | .4 |
| Taiwan | 1996 | Quasi-Maj. Mixed | 9.1 | .0 | Dual | 225 | 2.5 | 1.8 | .5 | .2 | 5.6 | 11.3 | .4 |
| Belgium (flan.) | 1999 | List PR* | 7.5 | - | Pref | - | 5.5 | .9 | 1.0 | .4 | 2.6 | 8.8 | .4 |
| Taiwan | 2001 | Quasi-Maj. Mixed | 5.7 | .0 | Dual | 225 | 3.5 | 1.3 | 1.0 | .5 | 3.6 | 11.3 | .4 |
| Canada | 1997 | Majority* | 1.0 | - | Cand | - | 3.9 | 1.4 | .9 | .4 | 13.2 | 37.5 | .4 |
| Slovenia | 1996 | Semi-Prop.* | 11.0 | - | Pref | - | 4.3 | 1.3 | .6 | .6 | 2.5 | 3.0 | .3 |
| Ukraine[1] | 1998 | Semi-Prop. | 1.0 | - | Dual | - | 3.2 | .9 | .7 | .4 | 8.9 | 4.0 | .3 |
| Romania | 1996 | List PR | 11.0 | - | Pref | | 3.3 | 1.2 | .2 | .4 | 5.8 | 3.0 | .3 |
| Mexico | 2003 | Quasi-Maj. Mixed | 1.0 | 2.0 | Dual | 500 | 3.2 | 1.4 | .9 | .5 | 8.4 | 22.7 | .2 |
| Brazil | 2002 | List PR | 19.0 | .0 | Cand | 513 | 5.0 | .9 | .1 | .4 | 3.3 | 3.8 | .2 |
| Peru | 2000 | List PR | 12.0 | - | Pref | - | 2.2 | .5 | .7 | .5 | 6.1 | .6 | .2 |
| Mexico | 2000 | Quasi-Maj. Mixed | 1.0 | 2.0 | Dual | 500 | 3.0 | 1.4 | .8 | .5 | 8.4 | 22.7 | .2 |
| Mexico | 1997 | Quasi-Maj. Mixed | 1.0 | 2.0 | Dual | 500 | 3.4 | 1.3 | 1.0 | .5 | 8.4 | 22.7 | .2 |
| Peru | 2001 | List PR | 4.8 | - | Pref | - | 4.1 | .8 | .1 | .5 | 14.6 | .6 | .1 |

*Comment:* Data on effective threshold and district magnitude is taken from Anckar (2002). Data on ballot structure is taken from Norris (2004). The effective number parliamentary of parties was calculated on the vote-shares using the index of Laakso and Taagepera, also known as Herfindahl's index of concentration (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). Disproportionality is calculated according to Gallagher's least square index (Gallagher 1991). Perceptual agreement is based on van der Eijk's measure of agreement van der Eijk (2001). Divergence is calculated as the average distance between the parties in a party system, weighted by the size of the parties. Unidimensionality is based on the CSES-question 'like-dislike' and calculated with a multiple unidimensional scaling technique using 'Mudfold'. Only respondents that assigned a 'like-dislike' to all parties are included in the unfolding analyses. Since a dichotomous unfolding model (MUDFOLD) was employed (van Schuur and Post 1990), cut-points for 'picked' party had to be selected. A party was considered 'picked' by a respondent if the party scored 6-10 on the eleven-point like-dislike-scale. This range of evaluative response had to be adjusted to find better j-scales: a) range 5-10, b) range 4-10. There are a number of possible reasons why a stimuli (party) may not be unfoldable, such as if the stimuli is too popular or too unpopular, if a stimuli is very close to another stimuli, or if a stimuli does not fit the scale (the responses to the stimuli

was guided by a completely other principle, or ideology, than all other stimuli). Strength of left-right dimension is the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between voters' ordering of parties in terms of left-right (mean values) and the ordering of parties according to the first dimension received by the unidimensional scaling procedure. Information about the division of powers (indicated by * for parliamentary systems) is taken from: http://en.wikipedia.org /wiki/List_of_countries_ by_system_of_ governmen t#Full_presidential_systems. All other information is taken from CSES. [1]Ukraine is excluded from the analyses in this article as it is not considered to be free according to the freedom house index (www.freedomhouse.org).

## Appendix II

**Table 1.** Correlation matrix for the Lisrel estimation.

| | Perceptual agreement | Divergence | Effective threshold | Partyballots | Strength LR-dim. | Unidimensionality | Eff. nr. of parties | Strength LR*effnrpart | Unidim*effnrpart | Partybal.*effnrpart | Votideosize | Divergence (parties) | Education (mean) | Parliamentarism | Parlam*effnrpart |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceptual agreement | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Divergence | .49 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Effective threshold | -.19 | .12 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Partyballots | .01 | -.15 | -.19 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Strength LR-dim. | .18 | .17 | .13 | -.26 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Unidimensionality | .07 | .15 | -.05 | -.04 | .23 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| Eff. nr. of parties | .19 | -.18 | -.36 | .15 | -.11 | -.26 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Strength LR*effnrpart | .20 | -.04 | -.19 | -.18 | .31 | -.01 | .15 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Unidim*effnrpart | -.12 | .06 | -.02 | .19 | -.02 | -.16 | -.17 | .06 | 1 | | | | | | |
| Partybal.*effnrpart | .00 | -.02 | .12 | .18 | -.15 | .17 | .04 | -.06 | .26 | 1 | | | | | |
| Votideosize | .31 | .23 | .22 | .00 | .25 | -.06 | .08 | -.08 | -.03 | .00 | 1 | | | | |
| Divergence (parties) | .46 | .40 | -.26 | .14 | .00 | .18 | .08 | .09 | -.02 | -.04 | .04 | 1 | | | |
| Education (mean) | .03 | .02 | .13 | -.07 | .27 | -.10 | .05 | .19 | -.03 | .01 | .13 | .03 | 1 | | |
| Parliamentarism | .57 | .38 | -.26 | -.14 | .20 | .13 | .23 | .41 | .03 | .09 | .10 | .31 | .04 | 1 | |
| Parlam*effnrpart | .02 | .10 | -.05 | .09 | .34 | .01 | -.06 | .40 | .16 | -.44 | .07 | .05 | .02 | -.11 | 1 |

N: 291

**Table 3.** Factor analysis on different factors related to the electoral systems.

| Factor | Eigenvalue | Difference | Proportion | Cumulative |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Factor1 | 2.016 | .858 | .632 | .632 |
| Factor2 | 1.158 | 1.061 | .363 | .995 |

| Factor loadings | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | Factor1 | Factor2 | | Uniqueness |
| Party threshold | -.066 | .272 | -- | .923 |
| District magnitude | .313 | -.052 | -- | .899 |
| Majoritarian | -.240 | .968 | -- | -.004 |
| Proportional | .996 | -.078 | -- | -.002 |
| Pluralistic | -.929 | -.371 | -- | -.001 |

*Comment:* A pearson's correlation between Gallagher's index of disproportionality and factor 1 gives a value of -.621.

**Table 4.** Extreme bound analysis (EBA)

| Perceptual agreement | Divergence | | Effective thresh. | | Strength LR-dim. | | Eff. # of parties | | Parliamentarism | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | min | max | min | max | min | max | min | max | min | max |
| beta | .19 | .27 | .00 | .00 | .10 | .12 | .02 | .05 | .17 | .22 |
| t | 7.12 | 1.59 | -4.88 | -2.41 | 2.96 | 3.67 | 2.06 | 5.49 | 9.46 | 11.67 |
| p-val | .00 | .00 | .00 | .02 | .00 | .00 | .04 | .00 | .00 | .00 |
| .95 | .14 | .22 | -.01 | .00 | .03 | .06 | .00 | .03 | .14 | .18 |
| C.I. | .24 | .32 | .00 | .00 | .16 | .18 | .05 | .07 | .21 | .26 |
| VIF | 1.14 | 1.03 | 1.05 | 1.15 | 1.05 | 1.02 | 1.15 | 1.03 | 1.12 | 1.01 |

| Divergence | Effective thresh. | | Ballot structure | | Strength LR-dim. | | Eff. # of parties | | Eff#part.*Str. LR. | | Parliamentarism | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | min | max | min | max | min | max | min | max | min | max | min | max |
| beta | .01 | .01 | -.15 | -.09 | .11 | .23 | -.08 | -.04 | -.20 | -.20 | .24 | .35 |
| t | 2.80 | 2.80 | -4.00 | -2.50 | 2.02 | 4.00 | -3.74 | -2.13 | -2.60 | -2.60 | 5.86 | 8.81 |
| p-val | .01 | .01 | .00 | .01 | .04 | .00 | .00 | .03 | .01 | .01 | .00 | .00 |
| .95 | .00 | .00 | -.22 | -.17 | .00 | .12 | -.11 | -.08 | -.36 | -.36 | .16 | .27 |
| C.I. | .01 | .01 | -.08 | -.02 | .23 | .35 | -.04 | .00 | -.05 | -.05 | .32 | .43 |
| VIF | 1.25 | 1.25 | 1.01 | 1.05 | 1.02 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.05 | 1.13 | 1.13 | 1.15 | 1.33 |

*Comment:* EBA performs an Extreme Bound Analysis on the regressor x for a given dependent variable y and a set of regressors z and x. Where z(nxk) and x(nxm) with k<=4. The program runs n!/(k!(n-k)!) OLS regressions by taking combinations of k<=4 Z variables among the p-listed. It then displays minimum and maximum parameter estimates for x together with their t-statistics. p-value and z-variables used and it also controls for multicollinearity. A total of 8 combinations of 1 regressors from the Z(nx8) vector were used for perceptual agreement while a total of 9 combinations of 1 regressors from the Z(nx9) vector were used for divergence.

126

# Appendix III

**Table 1.** Political parties included in the study.

| Country/Year | Partyname | Ideo. Family | Age of Party | Votes % | PA | Mean LR | Ideo. Extremism | Polarization |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Australia 1996 | Greens | ECO | 4 | 1.75 | .42 | 3.84 | 1.16 | 2.66 |
| Australia 1996 | Australian Labour Party | SOCDEM | 95 | 38.80 | .44 | 4.33 | .67 | 2.66 |
| Australia 1996 | Australian Democrats | L LIB | 19 | 6.80 | .61 | 4.69 | .31 | 2.66 |
| Australia 1996 | Liberal Party | R LIB | 52 | 38.70 | .39 | 6.44 | 1.44 | 2.66 |
| Australia 1996 | National (Country) Party | REGIO | 76 | 8.20 | .35 | 6.5 | 1.5 | 2.66 |
| Australia 2004 | Greens | ECO | 12 | 7.00 | .38 | 3.21 | 1.79 | 3.83 |
| Australia 2004 | Australian Labour Party | SOCDEM | 103 | 38.20 | .42 | 4.31 | .69 | 3.83 |
| Australia 2004 | Liberal Party of Aus | R LIB | 60 | 40.40 | .41 | 7.04 | 2.04 | 3.83 |
| Australia 2004 | One Nation | NAT | 6 | 1.20 | .51 | 4.41 | .59 | 3.83 |
| Australia 2004 | National Party of Aus | REGIO | 84 | 5.80 | .34 | 6.59 | 1.59 | 3.83 |
| Belgium Fla 1999 | Anders Gaan Leven | ECO | . | 7.36 | .44 | 3.6 | 1.4 | 3.44 |
| Belgium Fla 1999 | Socialistische partij | SOCDEM | 21 | 9.55 | .43 | 3.7 | 1.3 | 3.44 |
| Belgium Fla 1999 | Vlaamse liberalen en democraten | R LIB | 7 | 14.30 | .39 | 5.75 | .75 | 3.44 |
| Belgium Fla 1999 | Christelijke volkspartij | CH DEM | 31 | 14.09 | .34 | 5.84 | .84 | 3.44 |
| Belgium Fla 1999 | Vlaams blok | REGIO | 23 | 9.87 | .24 | 7.04 | 2.04 | 3.44 |
| Belgium Wal 1999 | Ecologistes confederes pour | ECO | 18 | 7.36 | .56 | 3.8 | 1.2 | 3.16 |
| Belgium Wal 1999 | Parti Socialiste | SOCDEM | 21 | 10.16 | .38 | 5.72 | .72 | 3.16 |
| Belgium Wal 1999 | Parti social chrettien (socialist | CH DEM | . | 5.88 | .55 | 6.96 | 1.96 | 3.16 |
| Belgium Wal 1999 | Viviant | NAT | . | 0.00 | .17 | 4.92 | .08 | 3.16 |
| Belgium Wal 1999 | Parti reformateur Liberal-front | . | . | 10.14 | .58 | 3.08 | 1.92 | 3.16 |
| Belgium Wal 1999 | National front | . | . | 1.50 | . | . | | 3.16 |
| Brazil 2002 | Workers' party | COM | 27 | 18.00 | .19 | 3.70 | 1.3 | 2.72 |
| Brazil 2002 | Brazil Social Democatic Party | SOCDEM | 18 | 14.00 | .24 | 6.42 | 1.42 | 2.72 |
| Brazil 2002 | Brazil Labor Party | SOCDEM | 25 | 5.00 | .14 | 4.71 | .29 | 2.72 |
| Brazil 2002 | Labor Democratic Party | L LIB | 27 | 4.00 | .21 | 6.15 | 1.15 | 2.72 |
| Brazil 2002 | Party of Liberal Front | LIB | 21 | 16.00 | .16 | 6.00 | 1 | 2.72 |
| Brazil 2002 | Party of Brazil Democratic | CH DEM | 21 | 14.00 | .16 | 6.08 | 1.08 | 2.72 |
| Bulgaria 2001 | Bulgarian Socialist Party | SOCIAL | 16 | . | .78 | 1.70 | 3.3 | 7.1 |
| Bulgaria 2001 | National Movement Simeon the | NAT | 5 | 42.70 | .55 | 6.54 | 1.54 | 7.1 |
| Bulgaria 2001 | United democratic forces | OTH | 17 | 18.20 | .74 | 8.80 | 3.8 | 7.1 |
| Bulgaria 2001 | Coalition; Movmnt f Rights and | OTH | 16 | 7.50 | .62 | 5.12 | .12 | 7.1 |
| Bulgaria 2001 | Movment Georgievden | . | 9 | 3.60 | .63 | 5.76 | .76 | 7.1 |
| Canada 1997 | New Democratic Party | SOCDEM | 45 | 11.00 | .48 | 3.36 | 1.64 | 2.37 |
| Canada 1997 | Liberal Party | LIB | 139 | 38.50 | .45 | 5.4 | .4 | 2.37 |
| Canada 1997 | Progressive Conservative | R LIB | 139 | 18.80 | .42 | 5.91 | .91 | 2.37 |
| Canada 1997 | Reform Party (Canadian Reform) | CONS | 14 | 19.30 | .18 | 5.96 | .96 | 2.37 |

127

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Canada 1997 | Bloc Quebecois | REGIO | 16 | 10.20 | .23 | 3.59 | 1.41 | 2.37 |
| Chile 1999 | Himanista Verde | ECO | 94 | 0.50 | .61 | 6.54 | 1.54 | . |
| Chile 1999 | Comunista | COM | 112 | 3.19 | .55 | 7.19 | 2.19 | . |
| Chile 1999 | La Democratia | SOCDEM | 35 | 48.69 | .53 | 8.70 | 3.7 | . |
| Chile 1999 | Union Democrata Independiente | CONS | 118 | 47.50 | .47 | 4.19 | .81 | . |
| Chile 1999 | Union de Centro Centro | . | 93 | 0.40 | .52 | 3.99 | 1.01 | . |
| Chile 2003 | Himanista Verde | ECO | 94 | 0.40 | .62 | 5.48 | .48 | 5.35 |
| Chile 2003 | Comunista | COM | 112 | 5.20 | .58 | 6.22 | 1.22 | 5.35 |
| Chile 2003 | La Democratia | SOCDEM | 35 | 47.90 | .62 | 8.17 | 3.17 | 5.35 |
| Chile 2003 | Union Democrata Independiente | CONS | 118 | 44.30 | .51 | 2.82 | 2.18 | 5.35 |
| Chile 2003 | (Independent candidate) | . | 23 | 1.60 | .50 | 2.91 | 2.09 | 5.35 |
| Czech Rep. 1996 | Com. Party of Bohemia and Moravia | COM | 49 | 10.30 | .88 | 0.6 | 4.4 | 8.33 |
| Czech Rep. 1996 | Social Democratic Party | SOCDEM | 128 | 26.40 | .55 | 3.38 | 1.62 | 8.33 |
| Czech Rep. 1996 | Civic Democratic Alliance | R LIB | 17 | 6.40 | .54 | 7.38 | 2.38 | 8.33 |
| Czech Rep. 1996 | Christian Democratic Union – | CH DEM | 17 | 8.10 | .55 | 6.19 | 1.19 | 8.33 |
| Czech Rep. 1996 | Civic Democratic Party | CONS | 17 | 29.60 | .78 | 8.93 | 3.93 | 8.33 |
| Czech Rep. 1996 | Republican Party | NAT | 16 | 8.00 | .07 | 5.93 | .93 | 8.33 |
| Czech Rep. 2002 | Communist Party of Czech | COM | 49 | 18.50 | .83 | 0.77 | 4.23 | 7.47 |
| Czech Rep. 2002 | Czech Social democratic Party | SOCDEM | 128 | 30.20 | .62 | 2.70 | 2.3 | 7.47 |
| Czech Rep. 2002 | Christian Democratic Union | CH DEM | 17 | 11.00 | .51 | 5.74 | .74 | 7.47 |
| Czech Rep. 2002 | Civic Democratic Party | CONS | 17 | 24.50 | .65 | 8.24 | 3.24 | 7.47 |
| Czech Rep. 2002 | Freedom union - democratic | . | 8 | 4.50 | .51 | 6.92 | 1.92 | 7.47 |
| Denmark 1998 | Socialist People | SOCIAL | 47 | 7.50 | .69 | 2.52 | 2.48 | 6.12 |
| Denmark 1998 | Social Democrat | SOCDEM | 25 | 35.65 | .72 | 4.35 | .65 | 6.12 |
| Denmark 1998 | Centre Democrat | L LIB | . | 4.30 | .73 | 5.53 | .53 | 6.12 |
| Denmark 1998 | Liberal | LIB | 136 | 23.83 | .62 | 7.55 | 2.55 | 6.12 |
| Denmark 1998 | Conservative | CONS | 36 | 8.86 | .64 | 7.23 | 2.23 | 6.12 |
| Denmark 1998 | Danish People | NAT | 11 | 7.35 | .73 | 8.64 | 3.64 | 6.12 |
| Denmark 2001 | Socialist People's party | SOCIAL | 47 | 6.00 | .66 | 2.78 | 2.22 | 6.66 |
| Denmark 2001 | Radical left | SOCIAL | 101 | 9.20 | .68 | 4.61 | .39 | 6.66 |
| Denmark 2001 | Social democrats | SOCDEM | 135 | 25.90 | .67 | 4.38 | .62 | 6.66 |
| Denmark 2001 | Left Liberal Party | LIB | 136 | 29.00 | .60 | 7.32 | 2.32 | 6.66 |
| Denmark 2001 | Conservative People's party | CONS | 136 | 10.30 | .60 | 6.98 | 1.98 | 6.66 |
| Denmark 2001 | Danish Peoples' party | NAT | 11 | 13.20 | .62 | 8.13 | 3.13 | 6.66 |
| France 2002 | Socialist Party | SOCIAL | 37 | 24.10 | .39 | 3.61 | 1.39 | 5.43 |
| France 2002 | Workers' Struggle | SOCDEM | 38 | 1.20 | .52 | 2.30 | 2.7 | 5.43 |
| France 2002 | Republican and civic movement | L LIB | 14 | 1.10 | .44 | 4.62 | .38 | 5.43 |
| France 2002 | Union for french democracy | LIB | 28 | 4.79 | .44 | 6.37 | 1.37 | 5.43 |
| France 2002 | Rally for the republic | CONS | 30 | 19.90 | .41 | 6.66 | 1.66 | 5.43 |
| France 2002 | National front | NAT | 34 | 11.34 | .45 | 7.85 | 2.85 | 5.43 |
| Finland 2003 | Green League | ECO | 19 | 8.00 | .61 | 4.76 | .24 | 5.12 |
| Finland 2003 | Left Alliance | SOCIAL | 16 | 9.90 | .57 | 2.37 | 2.63 | 5.12 |
| Finland 2003 | Social democratic Party | SOCDEM | 107 | 22.90 | .45 | 4.72 | .28 | 5.12 |
| Finland 2003 | Christian Democrats | CH DEM | 48 | 5.30 | .51 | 5.83 | .83 | 5.12 |
| Finland 2003 | National Coalition Party | CONS | 88 | 18.50 | .52 | 7.49 | 2.49 | 5.12 |
| Finland 2003 | Centre Party | AGRA | 100 | 24.70 | .60 | 6.20 | 1.2 | 5.12 |
| Germany 1998 | Greens/Alliance 90 | ECO | 26 | 6.70 | .53 | 2.9 | 2.1 | 4.23 |
| Germany 1998 | Party of Democratic Socialism | SOCIAL | 17 | 5.10 | .55 | 2.07 | 2.93 | 4.23 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Germany 1998 | Social Democratic Party | SOCDEM | 143 | 40.90 | .59 | 3.36 | 1.64 | 4.23 |
| Germany 1998 | Free Democratic Party | R LIB | 58 | 6.20 | .56 | 4.96 | .04 | 4.23 |
| Germany 1998 | Christian Democratic Party | CH DEM | 61 | 28.40 | .42 | 5.7 | .7 | 4.23 |
| Germany 1998 | Christian Social Union in Bavaria | CH DEM | 61 | 6.70 | .36 | 6.3 | 1.3 | 4.23 |
| Germany 2002 | Greens/Alliance 90 | ECO | 26 | 8.60 | .60 | 2.61 | 2.39 | 5.36 |
| Germany 2002 | Party of Democratic Socialism | SOCIAL | 17 | 4.30 | .27 | 2.68 | 2.32 | 5.36 |
| Germany 2002 | Social Democratic Party | SOCDEM | 143 | 38.50 | .62 | 3.23 | 1.77 | 5.36 |
| Germany 2002 | Free Democratic Party | R LIB | 58 | 7.40 | .64 | 5.53 | .53 | 5.36 |
| Germany 2002 | Christian Democratic Union | CH DEM | 61 | 29.50 | .58 | 6.74 | 1.74 | 5.36 |
| Germany 2002 | Christian Social Union in Bavaria | CH DEM | 61 | 9.00 | .54 | 7.54 | 2.54 | 5.36 |
| Great Britain 1997 | Labour | SOCDEM | 106 | 43.20 | .40 | 3.97 | 1.03 | 3.2 |
| Great Britain 1997 | Conservative | CONS | 165 | 30.60 | .42 | 7.17 | 2.17 | 3.2 |
| Great Britain 1997 | Scottish National Party | REGIO | 72 | 2.00 | .37 | 4.47 | .53 | 3.2 |
| Great Britain 1997 | Plaid Cymry | REGIO | 81 | 0.50 | .50 | 4.53 | .47 | 3.2 |
| Great Britain 1997 | Liberal Democrats | OTH | 147 | 16.70 | .65 | 4.71 | .29 | 3.2 |
| Great Britain 2001 | Labour | SOCDEM | 106 | 40.67 | .54 | 5.60 | .6 | .12 |
| Great Britain 2001 | Conservative | CONS | 165 | 31.70 | .67 | 5.48 | .48 | .12 |
| Great Britain 2001 | Liberal Democrats | OTH | 147 | 18.25 | .63 | 5.48 | .48 | .12 |
| Hungaria 1998 | Socialist Party | SOCIAL | 17 | 32.90 | .40 | 2.93 | 2.07 | 4.98 |
| Hungaria 1998 | Worker's Party | SOCIAL | . | 3.95 | . | . | | 4.98 |
| Hungaria 1998 | Alliance of free Democrats | LIB | 18 | 6.90 | .46 | 3.99 | 1.01 | 4.98 |
| Hungaria 1998 | Alliance of Young Democrats. | CH DEM | 18 | 29.40 | .49 | 6.48 | 1.48 | 4.98 |
| Hungaria 1998 | Justice and Life Party | NAT | 13 | 5.50 | .57 | 7.91 | 2.91 | 4.98 |
| Hungaria 1998 | Independent Smallholder's Party | AGRA | 76 | 13.20 | .44 | 7.13 | 2.13 | 4.98 |
| Hungaria 2002 | Socialist Party | SOCIAL | 17 | 42.10 | .62 | 1.87 | 3.13 | 6.23 |
| Hungaria 2002 | Worker's Party | SOCIAL | 18 | 2.80 | .52 | 7.68 | 2.68 | 6.23 |
| Hungaria 2002 | Alliance of free Democrats | LIB | 18 | 5.50 | .53 | 7.87 | 2.87 | 6.23 |
| Hungaria 2002 | Alliance of Young Democrats. | CH DEM | 18 | 41.10 | .58 | 8.10 | 3.1 | 6.23 |
| Hungaria 2002 | Justice and Life Party | NAT | 13 | 4.40 | .60 | 4.16 | .84 | 6.23 |
| Hungaria 2002 | Independent Smallholder's Party | AGRA | 6 | 0.80 | .43 | 2.87 | 2.13 | 6.23 |
| Ireland 2002 | Green (Comhaontas Glas) | ECO | 25 | 3.80 | .53 | 4.36 | .64 | 3.38 |
| Ireland 2002 | Labour (Pàiriti Lucht Oibre) | SOCDEM | 105 | 10.80 | .52 | 3.61 | 1.39 | 3.38 |
| Ireland 2002 | Fianna Fail ('Solidiers of Destiny') | L LIB | 80 | 41.50 | .50 | 6.44 | 1.44 | 3.38 |
| Ireland 2002 | Progressive Democrats | LIB | 21 | 4.00 | .47 | 6.31 | 1.31 | 3.38 |
| Ireland 2002 | Fine Gael ('Family of the Irish') | R LIB | 84 | 22.50 | .49 | 6.06 | 1.06 | 3.38 |
| Ireland 2002 | Sinn Fein ('We Ourselves') | NAT | 101 | 6.50 | .37 | 3.06 | 1.94 | 3.38 |
| Iceland 1999 | Left Greens | ECO | 8 | 9.12 | .60 | 2.39 | 2.61 | 6.01 |
| Iceland 1999 | Social Alliance Party | SOCDEM | 7 | 26.78 | .67 | 3.65 | 1.35 | 6.01 |
| Iceland 1999 | Liberal Party | LIB | 7 | 4.17 | .37 | 5.54 | .54 | 6.01 |
| Iceland 1999 | Independence Party | CONS | 77 | 40.74 | .66 | 8.4 | 3.4 | 6.01 |
| Iceland 1999 | Progressive Party | AGRA | 90 | 18.35 | .69 | 5.7 | .7 | 6.01 |
| Iceland 2003 | Left Greens | ECO | 8 | 8.80 | .61 | 3.25 | 1.75 | 6.09 |
| Iceland 2003 | Social Alliance Party | SOCDEM | 6 | 31.00 | .63 | 5.10 | .1 | 6.09 |
| Iceland 2003 | Liberal Party | LIB | 7 | 7.40 | .57 | 6.50 | 1.5 | 6.09 |
| Iceland 2003 | Independence Party | CONS | 77 | 33.70 | .65 | 9.34 | 4.34 | 6.09 |
| Iceland 2003 | Progressive Party | AGRA | 90 | 17.30 | .68 | 7.04 | 2.04 | 6.09 |
| Israel 1996 | Avoda (Left Block) | SOCDEM | 38 | 27.50 | .47 | 3.12 | 1.88 | 5.95 |
| Israel 1996 | Meretz (Left Block) | L LIB | 32 | 7.50 | .70 | 1.51 | 3.49 | 5.95 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Israel 1996 | Likud | NAT | 18 | 25.80 | .53 | 7.46 | 2.46 | 5.95 |
| Israel 1996 | Shas (Religious Block) | IND | 22 | 8.70 | .36 | 6.21 | 1.21 | 5.95 |
| Israel 1996 | Mafdal (Religious Block) | IND | 50 | 8.10 | .47 | 7.31 | 2.31 | 5.95 |
| Israel 2003 | Labor | SOCDEM | 38 | 14.50 | .41 | 2.88 | 2.12 | 6.48 |
| Israel 2003 | Meretz (Left Block) | L LIB | 14 | 5.20 | .64 | 1.76 | 3.24 | 6.48 |
| Israel 2003 | Likud | NAT | 33 | 29.40 | .55 | 7.75 | 2.75 | 6.48 |
| Israel 2003 | National Union | NAT | 7 | 5.50 | .63 | 8.24 | 3.24 | 6.48 |
| Israel 2003 | Shinui | IND | 7 | 12.30 | .44 | 4.88 | .12 | 6.48 |
| Israel 2003 | Shas (Religious Block) | IND | 22 | 8.20 | .41 | 7.00 | 2 | 6.48 |
| Japan 1996 | Social Democratic Party | COM | 10 | 6.40 | .50 | 2.41 | 2.59 | 5.19 |
| Japan 1996 | Communist Party | SOCDEM | 84 | 13.10 | .63 | 4.66 | .34 | 5.19 |
| Japan 1996 | Democratic Party of Japan | LIB | 10 | 16.10 | .50 | 5.2 | .2 | 5.19 |
| Japan 1996 | New Frontier Party | R LIB | 12 | 28.00 | .40 | 5.9 | .9 | 5.19 |
| Japan 1996 | Liberal Democratic Party | CONS | 51 | 32.80 | .49 | 7.6 | 2.6 | 5.19 |
| Korea 2000 | New Korean Party of Hope | SOCDEM | 6 | 0.40 | .46 | 4.21 | .79 | 2.35 |
| Korea 2000 | Grand National Party | CONS | 9 | 39.00 | .39 | 5.66 | .66 | 2.35 |
| Korea 2000 | Millenium democratic Party | CONS | 6 | 35.90 | .44 | 5.44 | .44 | 2.35 |
| Korea 2000 | United Liberal Democrats | CONS | 8 | 9.80 | .46 | 6.56 | 1.56 | 2.35 |
| Korea 2000 | Democratic Peoples Party | CONS | 6 | 3.70 | .49 | 5.7 | .7 | 2.35 |
| Korea 2000 | Democratic Liberal Party | CONS | 6 | 1.20 | .48 | 5.36 | .36 | 2.35 |
| Korea 2004 | Democratic labor party | SOCDEM | 6 | 13.00 | .36 | 4.38 | .62 | 3.82 |
| Korea 2004 | Our Party | LIB | 3 | 38.30 | .40 | 4.85 | .15 | 3.82 |
| Korea 2004 | Grand National Party | CONS | 9 | 35.80 | .42 | 8.20 | 3.2 | 3.82 |
| Korea 2004 | Millenium democratic Party | CONS | 6 | 7.10 | .41 | 7.24 | 2.24 | 3.82 |
| Korea 2004 | United Liberal Democrats | CONS | 8 | 2.80 | .31 | 7.91 | 2.91 | 3.82 |
| Korea 2004 | National integration | . | . | . | .45 | 6.42 | 1.42 | 3.82 |
| Lithuania 1997 | Social Democrat Party | SOCDEM | 17 | 7.30 | .46 | 4.35 | .65 | 5.99 |
| Lithuania 1997 | Democratic labor party | SOCDEM | . | 11.10 | .57 | 2.07 | 2.93 | 5.99 |
| Lithuania 1997 | Christian Democrat Party | CH DEM | 16 | 13.20 | .41 | 6.9 | 1.9 | 5.99 |
| Lithuania 1997 | Homeland (Fatherland) Union- | CONS | 13 | 28.70 | .59 | 8.06 | 3.06 | 5.99 |
| Lithuania 1997 | Nationalist party | NAT | . | 1.70 | .26 | 3.82 | 1.18 | 5.99 |
| Lithuania 1997 | Centre Union | AGRA | . | 6.80 | .57 | 3.75 | 1.25 | 5.99 |
| Mexico 1997 | Cardenista Party | OTH | . | 1.12 | .44 | 2.65 | 2.35 | 3.34 |
| Mexico 1997 | Ecological Party | ECO | 16 | 3.82 | .16 | 3.73 | 1.27 | 3.34 |
| Mexico 1997 | Democratic Revolution Party | SOCDEM | 17 | 25.70 | .00 | 4.73 | .27 | 3.34 |
| Mexico 1997 | Labour Party | SOCDEM | 16 | 2.53 | .32 | 3.15 | 1.85 | 3.34 |
| Mexico 1997 | National Action Party | R LIB | 67 | 26.63 | -.06 | 5.22 | .22 | 3.34 |
| Mexico 1997 | Institutional Revolutionary Party | NAT | 77 | 39.11 | .06 | 5.99 | .99 | 3.34 |
| Mexico 2000 | Labour Party | ECO | 16 | 1.80 | .06 | 4.34 | .66 | 3.97 |
| Mexico 2000 | Democratic Revolution Party | SOCDEM | 17 | 16.60 | .17 | 3.92 | 1.08 | 3.97 |
| Mexico 2000 | Ecological Party | SOCDEM | 16 | 3.90 | .30 | 3.35 | 1.65 | 3.97 |
| Mexico 2000 | Cardenista Party | SOCDEM | 48 | . | .39 | 2.72 | 2.28 | 3.97 |
| Mexico 2000 | Institutional Revolutionary Party | R LIB | 77 | 36.89 | .25 | 6.69 | 1.69 | 3.97 |
| Mexico 2000 | National Action Party | NAT | 67 | 38.29 | -.10 | 5.37 | .37 | 3.97 |
| Mexico 2003 | Partido del Trabajo | ECO | 16 | 2.40 | .45 | 2.47 | 2.53 | 3.73 |
| Mexico 2003 | Partido de la Revoluciòn | SOCDEM | 17 | 17.60 | .21 | 3.75 | 1.25 | 3.73 |
| Mexico 2003 | Partido Verde Ecologista de | SOCDEM | 16 | 4.00 | .19 | 3.88 | 1.12 | 3.73 |
| Mexico 2003 | Convergencia | SOCDEM | 7 | 2.30 | .44 | 2.46 | 2.54 | 3.73 |

130

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mexico 2003 | Partido Revolucionario | R LIB | 77 | 48.00 | -.20 | 5.46 | .46 | 3.73 |
| Mexico 2003 | Partido Actiòn Nacional | NAT | 67 | 23.10 | .03 | 6.19 | 1.19 | 3.73 |
| Netherlands 1998 | Green Left | ECO | 16 | 7.30 | .68 | 2.84 | 2.16 | 4.38 |
| Netherlands 1998 | Socialist Party | SOCIAL | 35 | 3.50 | .64 | 2.8 | 2.2 | 4.38 |
| Netherlands 1998 | Labour Party | SOCDEM | 60 | 29.00 | .61 | 4.25 | .75 | 4.38 |
| Netherlands 1998 | People's Party for Freedom and | LIB | 58 | 24.70 | .60 | 7.18 | 2.18 | 4.38 |
| Netherlands 1998 | Democrats 66 | LIB | 40 | 9.00 | .69 | 5.07 | .07 | 4.38 |
| Netherlands 1998 | Christian Democratic Appeal | CH DEM | 26 | 18.30 | .61 | 6.23 | 1.23 | 4.38 |
| Netherlands 2002 | Groen Links | ECO | 16 | 5.10 | .71 | 2.65 | 2.35 | 5.11 |
| Netherlands 2002 | SP | SOCIAL | 35 | 6.30 | .70 | 2.48 | 2.52 | 5.11 |
| Netherlands 2002 | Labour Party | SOCDEM | 60 | 27.30 | .64 | 3.84 | 1.16 | 5.11 |
| Netherlands 2002 | People's Party for Freedom and | LIB | 58 | 17.90 | .62 | 7.59 | 2.59 | 5.11 |
| Netherlands 2002 | Democrats 66 | LIB | 40 | 4.10 | .63 | 4.82 | .18 | 5.11 |
| Netherlands 2002 | Christian Democratic Appeal | CH DEM | 26 | 28.60 | .59 | 6.74 | 1.74 | 5.11 |
| Netherlands 2003 | Groen Links | ECO | 16 | 7.00 | .68 | 3.31 | 1.69 | 5.25 |
| Netherlands 2003 | SP | SOCIAL | 35 | 5.90 | .60 | 3.36 | 1.64 | 5.25 |
| Netherlands 2003 | Labour Party | SOCDEM | 60 | 15.10 | .62 | 4.43 | .57 | 5.25 |
| Netherlands 2003 | People's Party for Freedom and | LIB | 58 | 15.40 | .61 | 8.03 | 3.03 | 5.25 |
| Netherlands 2003 | Democrats 66 | LIB | 40 | 5.10 | .61 | 5.44 | .44 | 5.25 |
| Netherlands 2003 | Christian Democratic Appeal | CH DEM | 26 | 28.00 | .62 | 7.30 | 2.3 | 5.25 |
| New Zealand 1996 | Labour | SOCDEM | 90 | 28.19 | .57 | 3.82 | 1.18 | 5.35 |
| New Zealand 1996 | Alliance | SOCDEM | 14 | 10.10 | .51 | 2.68 | 2.32 | 5.35 |
| New Zealand 1996 | Act New Zeeland | R LIB | 11 | 6.10 | .60 | 8.03 | 3.03 | 5.35 |
| New Zealand 1996 | Christian Coalition | CH DEM | 11 | 4.33 | .29 | 6.67 | 1.67 | 5.35 |
| New Zealand 1996 | National | CONS | 70 | 33.84 | .53 | 7.68 | 2.68 | 5.35 |
| New Zealand 1996 | New Zeeland First | NAT | 13 | 13.35 | .55 | 5.44 | .44 | 5.35 |
| New Zealand 2002 | Green Party | ECO | 16 | 7.00 | .44 | 2.65 | 2.35 | 4.64 |
| New Zealand 2002 | Labour | SOCDEM | 90 | 41.30 | .33 | 3.96 | 1.04 | 4.64 |
| New Zealand 2002 | Act New Zeeland | R LIB | 11 | 7.10 | .43 | 7.29 | 2.29 | 4.64 |
| New Zealand 2002 | National | CONS | 70 | 20.90 | .43 | 6.85 | 1.85 | 4.64 |
| New Zealand 2002 | New Zeeland First | NAT | 13 | 10.40 | .41 | 6.48 | 1.48 | 4.64 |
| New Zealand 2002 | United Future | . | 5 | 6.80 | .52 | 5.58 | .58 | 4.64 |
| Norway 1997 | Socialist Left Party | SOCIAL | 45 | 6.00 | .68 | 2.41 | 2.59 | 5.89 |
| Norway 1997 | Labour Party | SOCDEM | 112 | 35.10 | .48 | 4.8 | .2 | 5.89 |
| Norway 1997 | Progress Party | R LIB | 33 | 15.30 | .66 | 8.3 | 3.3 | 5.89 |
| Norway 1997 | Christian People's Party | CH DEM | 73 | 13.70 | .63 | 5.77 | .77 | 5.89 |
| Norway 1997 | Conservative Party | CONS | 124 | 14.30 | .66 | 8.04 | 3.04 | 5.89 |
| Norway 1997 | Centre Party | AGRA | 85 | 8.00 | .67 | 4.15 | .85 | 5.89 |
| Norway 2001 | Socialist Left Party | SOCIAL | 45 | 12.55 | .63 | 2.77 | 2.23 | 5.32 |
| Norway 2001 | Labour Party | SOCDEM | 119 | 24.29 | .55 | 4.58 | .42 | 5.32 |
| Norway 2001 | Progress Party | R LIB | 33 | 14.64 | .61 | 8.09 | 3.09 | 5.32 |
| Norway 2001 | Christian People's Party | CH DEM | 73 | 12.40 | .64 | 5.89 | .89 | 5.32 |
| Norway 2001 | Conservative Party | CONS | 122 | 21.21 | .66 | 8.04 | 3.04 | 5.32 |
| Norway 2001 | Centre Party | AGRA | 86 | 5.56 | .66 | 4.46 | .54 | 5.32 |
| Peru 2000 | Partido Aprista | RELIG | 7 | 5.84 | .00 | 4.86 | .14 | 3.14 |
| Peru 2000 | Frente ind. Moralizador | RELIG | 9 | 7.89 | .12 | 4.83 | .17 | 3.14 |
| Peru 2000 | Peru Possible | IND | 7 | 22.84 | .24 | 6.54 | 1.54 | 3.14 |
| Peru 2000 | Solucion Popular | IND | 50 | 0.00 | .31 | 3.4 | 1.6 | 3.14 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Peru 2000 | Renaciemento Andino | IND | 7 | 0.00 | .17 | 4.7 | .3 | 3.14 |
| Peru 2000 | Unitad Nacional | OTH | 11 | 0.00 | .24 | 4.08 | .92 | 3.14 |
| Peru 2001 | Partido Aprista | SOCDEM | 7 | 19.70 | .04 | 4.9 | .1 | 2.35 |
| Peru 2001 | Peru Possible | IND | 7 | 26.30 | .08 | 5.03 | .03 | 2.35 |
| Peru 2001 | Frente ind. Moralizador | OTH | 9 | 11.00 | .21 | 5.23 | .23 | 2.35 |
| Peru 2001 | Unitad Nacional | . | 11 | 13.80 | .21 | 6.15 | 1.15 | 2.35 |
| Peru 2001 | Solucion Popular | . | 50 | 3.60 | .05 | 5.19 | .19 | 2.35 |
| Peru 2001 | Renaciemento Andino | . | 7 | 1.40 | .28 | 3.8 | 1.2 | 2.35 |
| Poland 1997 | Union of Labour | SOCIAL | 14 | 4.70 | .35 | 4.1 | .9 | 6.49 |
| Poland 1997 | Democratic left alliance | SOCDEM | 15 | 27.10 | .66 | 1.66 | 3.34 | 6.49 |
| Poland 1997 | Freedom Union | LIB | 12 | 13.40 | .45 | 5.61 | .61 | 6.49 |
| Poland 1997 | Solidarity Election Action | CH DEM | 10 | 33.80 | .63 | 8.15 | 3.15 | 6.49 |
| Poland 1997 | Movement for the Reconstraction | NAT | 11 | 5.10 | .49 | 7.44 | 2.44 | 6.49 |
| Poland 1997 | Peasant Party | AGRA | 16 | 6.90 | .46 | 3.74 | 1.26 | 6.49 |
| Poland 2001 | Coalition democratic left | SOCDEM | 7 | 41.00 | .73 | 1.32 | 3.68 | 6.75 |
| Poland 2001 | League of Polish Families | CH DEM | 5 | 7.90 | .40 | 7.21 | 2.21 | 6.75 |
| Poland 2001 | ELF Defence of the Polish | AGRA | 5 | 10.20 | .36 | 4.63 | .37 | 6.75 |
| Poland 2001 | Polish People's Party | AGRA | 16 | 9.00 | .45 | 4.31 | .69 | 6.75 |
| Poland 2001 | Law and Justice | OTH | 5 | 9.50 | .40 | 6.65 | 1.65 | 6.75 |
| Poland 2001 | Citizen's Platform (PO) | . | 5 | 12.70 | .37 | 6.34 | 1.34 | 6.75 |
| Poland 2001 | Coalition Electoral Action | . | 5 | 5.60 | .61 | 8.07 | 3.07 | 6.75 |
| Poland 2001 | Freedom Union | . | 12 | 3.10 | .33 | 6.12 | 1.12 | 6.75 |
| Portugal 2002 | Communist Worker's (Portuguese | COM | 36 | 6.97 | .62 | 1.95 | 3.05 | 6 |
| Portugal 2002 | Socialist Party | SOCDEM | 33 | 37.84 | .62 | 4.62 | .38 | 6 |
| Portugal 2002 | Social Democrat Party | LIB | 32 | 40.15 | .55 | 7.31 | 2.31 | 6 |
| Portugal 2002 | Popular Party | CONS | 32 | 8.75 | .54 | 7.72 | 2.72 | 6 |
| Portugal 2002 | Unitarian Democratic Coalition | . | 19 | 7.00 | .66 | 1.9 | 3.1 | 6 |
| Portugal 2002 | Left Block | . | 7 | 0.00 | .69 | 1.72 | 3.28 | 6 |
| Romania 1996 | Democratic Convention of | SOCDEM | 16 | 30.20 | .35 | 6.78 | 1.78 | 2.94 |
| Romania 1996 | Party of Social Dmocracy | SOCDEM | 16 | 21.50 | .21 | 3.84 | 1.16 | 2.94 |
| Romania 1996 | Democratic Party | ETHN | 14 | 12.90 | . | . | | 2.94 |
| Romania 1996 | Social Democratic Union | ETHN | 14 | 12.93 | .38 | 5.32 | .32 | 2.94 |
| Romania 1996 | Party for National Unity | REGIO | 16 | 4.36 | .17 | 4.74 | .26 | 2.94 |
| Romania 1996 | National Peasant and Chritian | . | . | . | . | . | | 2.94 |
| Romania 1996 | Democratic Union of Hungarians | . | 16 | 6.60 | .14 | 5.28 | .28 | 2.94 |
| Romania 1996 | Greater Romania Party | . | 15 | 4.50 | . | . | | 2.94 |
| Slovenia 1996 | Social Democratic Party of | SOCDEM | 17 | 16.10 | .32 | 6.18 | 1.18 | 3.13 |
| Slovenia 1996 | United List of Social Democrats | SOCDEM | 17 | 9.00 | .34 | 3.44 | 1.56 | 3.13 |
| Slovenia 1996 | Liberal Democratic Party | LIB | 17 | 27.00 | .36 | 3.9 | 1.1 | 3.13 |
| Slovenia 1996 | Christain Democrats | CH DEM | 17 | 9.62 | .29 | 6.57 | 1.57 | 3.13 |
| Slovenia 1996 | People's Party | AGRA | 18 | 19.00 | .41 | 5.88 | .88 | 3.13 |
| Slovenia 1996 | Democratic Party of Retired | OTH | 13 | 4.30 | . | . | | 3.13 |
| Spain 1996 | Izquierda Unida | COM | 31 | 10.60 | .62 | 2.28 | 2.72 | 5.56 |
| Spain 1996 | Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol | SOCIAL | 126 | 37.50 | .62 | 4.02 | .98 | 5.56 |
| Spain 1996 | Partido Popular | CONS | 106 | 38.90 | .57 | 7.84 | 2.84 | 5.56 |
| Spain 1996 | Convergencia i Unio de Catalunya | REGIO | 31 | 4.60 | .49 | 5.76 | .76 | 5.56 |
| Spain 1996 | Partido Nacionalista Vasco | REGIO | 31 | 1.30 | .42 | 5.47 | .47 | 5.56 |
| Spain 2000 | Izquierda Unida | COM | 31 | 5.46 | .62 | 2.25 | 2.75 | 4.86 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Spain 2000 | Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol | SOCIAL | 126 | 34.08 | .70 | 3.7 | 1.3 | 4.86 |
| Spain 2000 | Partido Popular | CONS | 106 | 44.54 | .58 | 7.11 | 2.11 | 4.86 |
| Spain 2000 | Convergencia i Unio | REGIO | 31 | 4.20 | .47 | 5.9 | .9 | 4.86 |
| Spain 2000 | Partido Nacionalista Vasco | REGIO | 31 | 1.53 | .31 | 5.54 | .54 | 4.86 |
| Spain 2004 | Izquierda Unida | COM | 31 | 5.00 | .66 | 2.98 | 2.02 | 6.03 |
| Spain 2004 | Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol | SOCIAL | 126 | 42.60 | .59 | 4.24 | .76 | 6.03 |
| Spain 2004 | Partido Popular | CONS | 106 | 37.70 | .60 | 9.01 | 4.01 | 6.03 |
| Spain 2004 | Convergencia i Unio | REGIO | 31 | 3.20 | .41 | 5.63 | .63 | 6.03 |
| Sweden 1998 | Left Party | SOCIAL | 89 | 11.99 | .75 | 1.24 | 3.76 | 7.78 |
| Sweden 1998 | Social Democratic Party | SOCDEM | 117 | 36.38 | .54 | 3.48 | 1.52 | 7.78 |
| Sweden 1998 | People's Party Liberals | LIB | 104 | 4.71 | .65 | 6.4 | 1.4 | 7.78 |
| Sweden 1998 | Moderate Party | CH DEM | 102 | 22.90 | .80 | 9.02 | 4.02 | 7.78 |
| Sweden 1998 | Christian Democrats | CH DEM | 42 | 11.76 | .54 | 6.97 | 1.97 | 7.78 |
| Sweden 1998 | Centre Party | AGRA | 91 | 5.12 | .73 | 5.43 | .43 | 7.78 |
| Sweden 2002 | Left Party | SOCIAL | 89 | 8.39 | .71 | 1.44 | 3.56 | 7.25 |
| Sweden 2002 | Social Democratic Party | SOCDEM | 117 | 39.85 | .57 | 3.76 | 1.24 | 7.25 |
| Sweden 2002 | People's Party Liberals | LIB | 104 | 13.39 | .67 | 6.28 | 1.28 | 7.25 |
| Sweden 2002 | Christian Democrats | CH DEM | 42 | 9.15 | .58 | 7.08 | 2.08 | 7.25 |
| Sweden 2002 | Moderate Party | CONS | 102 | 15.26 | .74 | 8.69 | 3.69 | 7.25 |
| Sweden 2002 | Centre Party | AGRA | 91 | 6.19 | .74 | 5.68 | .68 | 7.25 |
| Switzerland 1999 | Greens Party | ECO | 23 | 4.96 | .52 | 3.02 | 1.98 | 4.58 |
| Switzerland 1999 | Social Democrats | SOCDEM | 118 | 22.56 | .48 | 3.29 | 1.71 | 4.58 |
| Switzerland 1999 | Freethinking Democrats | LIB | 112 | 19.90 | .55 | 6.16 | 1.16 | 4.58 |
| Switzerland 1999 | People's Party | R LIB | 69 | 22.50 | .50 | 7.6 | 2.6 | 4.58 |
| Switzerland 1999 | Liberal Party (Parti Suisse de la | R LIB | . | 2.25 | . | . | | 4.58 |
| Switzerland 1999 | Christian Democrats | CH DEM | 94 | 15.80 | .60 | 5.54 | .54 | 4.58 |
| Taiwan 1996 | Democratic Progressive Party | L LIB | 20 | 29.85 | .46 | 6.58 | 1.58 | 2.12 |
| Taiwan 1996 | Nationalist Party | R LIB | 112 | 49.68 | .33 | 4.46 | .54 | 2.12 |
| Taiwan 1996 | Chinese New Party | NAT | 13 | 13.67 | .38 | 5.66 | .66 | 2.12 |
| Taiwan 2001 | Kuomintang | R LIB | 112 | 31.30 | .48 | 5.79 | .79 | 1.34 |
| Taiwan 2001 | New Party | NAT | 13 | 2.90 | .31 | 5.07 | .07 | 1.34 |
| Taiwan 2001 | Peoples First Party | . | 6 | 20.30 | .39 | 5.03 | .03 | 1.34 |
| Taiwan 2001 | Taiwan Solidarity Union | . | 5 | 8.50 | .30 | 4.45 | .55 | 1.34 |
| Taiwan 2001 | Democratic Progressive | . | 20 | 36.60 | .33 | 4.99 | .01 | 1.34 |
| USA 1996 | Democratic Party | L LIB | 178 | 49.20 | . | . | . | . |
| USA 1996 | Republican Party | R LIB | 150 | 40.70 | . | . | . | . |
| USA 1996 | Reform Party | IND | 14 | 8.40 | . | . | . | . |
| USA 2004 | Democratic Party | L LIB | 178 | 47.40 | .29 | 4.09 | .91 | 2.59 |
| USA 2004 | Republican Party | R LIB | 150 | 49.90 | .37 | 6.68 | 1.68 | 2.59 |
| USA 2004 | Reform Party | IND | 14 | . | .55 | 4.24 | .76 | 2.59 |

*Comment:* See comment in table 1, appendix I for details.

# Article 2

# Political Parties and Perceptual Agreement

# Political Parties and Perceptual Agreement

## - The influence of party related factors on voters' perceptions in proportional electoral systems[66]

### Abstract

A normative ideal of political representation is that governmental policy should reflect the will of a majority of the voters. The responsible party model emphasizes a number of conditions that must be fulfilled in order to achieve meaningful representation. The model presumes that parties will present stable and divergent policy programs – that is, prospective mandates - during election campaigns, thereby giving voters meaningful electoral choices. An underlying assumption that can be deduced from the responsible party model is that an electorate with clear and shared perceptions of the party space is an important prerequisite for successful political representation. This article is focused on how the extent of agreement in voters' perceptions of parties' policy positions is affected by 1) the behavior of the parties in terms of the degree of stability and divergence in their policy positions and 2) by various party characteristics such as the electoral size, the age and the labels of the parties. The study is based on data from election studies in Norway, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands with 26 parties covered in 35 elections. The results show that both the degree of stability and divergence in parties left-right positions are of considerable importance for the perceptual agreement among voters, while electoral size

of parties has a negative effect. In contrast to the vast literature on voting behavior that emphasizes the role of well-informed and knowledgeable voters as an important ingredient in effective policy representation, this article shows that responsible parties that present stable and divergent policy positions are needed as well.

*Key words:* elections, political representation, perceptual agreement, left-right ideology, political parties

## Introduction

In the best of worlds, elections constitute a linkage between citizens and their representatives, where the latter are seen as delegates for the former in order to act on their behalf and according to their will. During elections voters have the opportunity to give their mandate to the candidate(s) that most closely represents the voters' views. This step is an intrinsic part of representative democracies and also forms the heart of the responsible party model (RPM) (APSA 1950; Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). Political parties are central in the RPM because of their function as mediators between public preferences and policy outcomes. This ideal of political representation can, however, only be reached to the extent that the voters adequately perceive the policy positions of the contesting parties. Perceptual agreement (PA) is an important prerequisite in this respect. Without agreement among voters as to what the parties stand for, the choices made by individuals according to their policy preferences would altogether be indistinguishable from random noise. Agreement about party policies allows the collective outcome of an election to be intelligible and will thereby affect the extent to which voters are meaningfully represented in a political system (Granberg and Holmberg 1988; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b).

Not much is known about the causes of PA. Previous research has, however, concluded that voters' perceptions of party positions are influenced generally by different individual qualities such as ideological predisposition (Granberg and Holmberg 1988) and cognitive capabilities (van der Brug 1997) as well as the salience of the issues at hand (Oscarsson 1998; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b; van der Brug 1997). But what about the role of political parties in the formation of voter perceptions? This question is significant given that political parties are a central part of European democratic systems as bearers of continuity, values and ideologies (Dalton 1985; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Katz and Mair 1995). From studies on voting behavior we know that different aspects related to political par-

ties are influential on the vote-choices of individual voters. For example, the left-right position, the breadth of agenda and the electoral size of the parties certainly affect voters' evaluations (Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004). One question is, if party related features are influential on individual vote-choices, to what extent do they also affect voters' perceptions of the parties' policy positions?

Literature on political parties suggests that behavioral and characteristic related features of parties are two kinds of variables that theoretically could be relevant in explaining PA among voters. As indicated by the name of the RPM, an essential part of the electoral process is that responsible parties present voters with a meaningful set of electoral choices by offering stable and divergent policy programs/positions (APSA 1950). Party behavior in this respect can be expected to affect PA among voters. Turning to the characteristic aspect of parties, the first variable derives from Kircheimer's theory of the catch-all parties, which typically are big parties with vague ideologies (Kirchheimer 1990). A second characteristic variable of parties is the labels that are attached to them, such as socialist, liberal or center etc, as it has been suggested that these may work as party policy short-cuts for voters (Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, and Tanenbaum 2001; Snyder 2002). The third variable that can be expected to influence PA is the age of a party, since the position of older and more established political parties may be readily known to voters due to prolonged exposure to those policies (van der Brug, Franklin, Popescu, and Toka 2008).

The purpose with this article is to explore how behavioral and characteristic features of political parties are affecting the quality of voters' perceptions, *i.e.* PA among voters on parties' policy positions. Observations for this study consist of time series data from election studies in Norway, Sweden, Germany and The Netherlands which have been pooled into one dataset of 26 parties covered in 8 elections.

The article continues with a discussion of the importance of PA, followed by a theoretical section concerning the background of the explanatory variables discussed above. Next is a section covering the data and the design together with the operationalizations used in the study, followed by a section on the results. The article ends with a discussion of the results and a summary.

## The importance of perceptual agreement

The RPM emphasizes a number of conditions that must be fulfilled in order to achieve the normative ideals of political representation, namely the reflection of the will of a majority of the voters in public policy. The model

presumes that during election campaigns parties will present stable and divergent policy programs – prospective mandates - in order to give the voters meaningful electoral choices. Voters are supposed to make a comparative evaluation of the competing policy programs and, by voting for the party or candidate whose program is most congruent with their preferences, they will directly influence government policies (APSA 1950; Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). An underlying assumption that can be deduced from the RPM is that an electorate with clear and shared perceptions of the policy space is an important prerequisite for successful political representation.

An important determinant of the quality of the outcome of an election is thus the extent to which voters are informed about the policy alternatives, since it is more likely that well informed voters will make decisions that properly reflect their attitudes toward public policies. A range of studies within the field of political representation, this one included, focus on citizens' abilities to perceive political messages from elites, *i.e.* how well policy alternatives and issue positions are being communicated to citizens. An electorate with clear and shared perceptions of the party space has repeatedly been identified as one important prerequisite for successful political representation (Converse 1975; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; van der Brug 1997).[67]

According to Anthony Downs (1957) there are three different factors that influence a voters evaluation of a party's or a candidate's policy position: 1) the position that emerges from the election manifesto, speeches or from other kinds of performances; 2) policy positions that were continued or introduced in earlier elections; and 3) expected future performance based on past and current evidence (see also Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987). When direct information about a candidate or a party's policy position is hard to obtain, voters will use information short-cuts such as ideology or past positions in an attempt to estimate the current or future position (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Downs 1957; Fiorina 1981; Key 1966; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Popkin 1991).[68] Ideology, thus, is

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[67] The concept of perception in this context refers to the cognitions or beliefs voters have about different political phenomena. An individual's perceptions may be articulated as: 'party A is opposed to death penalties' or: 'party B is a left wing feminist party'. The main difference between attitudes and perceptions is that while the former builds on evaluative judgements the latter does not (Granberg and Holmberg 1988).

[68] The past record may also be an important cue for how reliable a specific party or a candidate actually is as a provider of information. A voter can reduce the information costs by separating out reliable speakers from those who are not (Lupia and McCubbins 1998)

an important cognitive cue that voters can use to substitute for detailed information about party policies. In Downs' theory voters are assumed to make implicit use of a spatial image, such as the left-right dimension, when perceiving political actors, issues or ideologies (Adams 2001; Downs 1957).[69] The advantage of the left-right spectrum is that it summarizes a large number of underlying ideological issues (Downs 1957; Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; van der Brug 1997; 1999a).[70] Furthermore, the left-right dimension is considered as one of the most universal and salient issue-dimensions within several political systems (Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987; Jones 2004; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999).

How can voting decisions based on ideology lead to meaningful representation? The answer is that it depends on the extent to which the perceived positions of the parties actually reflect the true policy positions (van der Brug 1999a). Earlier studies have shown that when evaluated as a statistical average, voters' perceptions of parties largely reflect the positions evident in manifestos, as well as surveys among members of the parliament and roll-calls (Pennings and Kleinnijenhuis 2001; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b; van der Brug 1998; 2001). That the overall perception among voters tends to reflect some kind of 'true' position is encouraging but it does not necessarily tell us everything about the distribution of perceptions among the voters – that is, whether or not there is PA.

Persuaded by the findings by the authors above, the present study will focus on the issue of agreement among voters about the policy positions of parties. If elections are to function as vehicles for meaningful representation and aggregation of preferences, a vast majority of the voters must perceive a party's election platform in a similar manner (Downs 1957; Stokes 1963). Vague or blurred ideological positions or party profiles could yield distorted perceptions which in turn may obstruct formation of informed and cohesive public opinions (Holmberg 1974; Holmberg, Westerståhl, and

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[69] An objection can be raised against treating ideology as a valuable information short-cut for parties' policies in that not all parties necessarily have an ideology (Bäck and Möller 2003). This is especially true for more recently arisen parties that mobilize around certain issues rather than ideology (Mair 1997). However, Swedish election studies have shown that the left-right dimension tends to reproduce itself so that it lasts over time and encompasses parties that usually do not fit in the ideological left-right dimension. (Oscarsson 1998).

[70] There is most likely a reciprocal relationship between parties left-right positions and how voters perceive them, as voters use their perception of parties left-right positions to assess party positions on concrete issues and the other way around; concrete issues affect how they are perceived in terms of left-right (van der Brug 1997).

Branzén 1977). PA is important in this respect, as it affects the extent to which voters are adequately represented in a political system (Granberg and Holmberg 1988; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b).

PA among voters on parties' ideological left-right positions can thus work as a guarantor for successful political communication and representation within a political system.


## Determinants behind perceptual agreement

### *The behavior of parties*

As mentioned earlier, the RPM emphasizes the importance of parties that hold stable and divergent policy positions so that voters are given meaningful electoral choices. Weakly divergent policy positions should thus impede the process of information acquisition by voters since it may be difficult to discriminate between parties. This in turn may affect the degree of PA among voters. Instability in a party's policy position may, for the same reason, be another factor that may obstruct the PA among voters, especially since voters evaluate a party's policy position based on information about current, past and expected performance (compare Downs 1957). In both cases, more stability and divergence are expected to facilitate an increase in PA among individual voters.

### *Party characteristics*

Whereas the RPM highlights the behavior of political parties, other theories are more focused on various characteristics and attributes of the parties. According to Kirchheimer's theory of the catch-all party, this type of party has its' large size and an often a vague ideological position as distinctive features (Dittrich 1983; Kirchheimer 1990). Inspired by Kirchheimer's work, it is reasonable to expect that bigger parties will in general be less ideologically distinctive compared to smaller parties such as interest based or regional ones, everything else being equal. In order to gather a large national electoral base, a party needs to bring together groups of voters with sometimes diverse interests. This is best done by downplaying ideological differences and promoting issues that are less likely to meet resistance in the electorate. Hence, if bigger parties might be less distinctive in their ideological positions, a party's electoral size may have implications for the clarity of voters' perceptions of the policies. Party size should thus have a negative effect on the degree PA.

Secondly, political parties are also more or less attached to different po-

sitions on a political spectrum (Budge 1994; Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987) and PA has been proven to vary considerably between different party families (Dahlberg, Berlin, and Oscarsson 2005; Dahlberg and Oscarsson 2006). An explanation of this phenomenon might be that parties that are closely attached to the left-right dimension often have names such as 'social democrats', 'liberals' or 'conservatives' which serve as signals of position on the left-right continuum (Budge *et al.* 2001). It has been suggested that these labels sometimes work as cues for voters when acquiring information about parties' policies (Downs 1957; Snyder 2002), which may promote higher PA.

A third characteristic factor that can be expected to influence the perceptions of voters is the age of a party. All things being equal, it should be easier to apprehend or at the very least, to know something about the position of an old established party than a younger one. Newer parties are also more likely to adjust their policies and ideological profiles, which in turn may be confusing for the voters (van der Brug, Franklin, Popescu, and Toka 2008). Party age should thus have a positive impact on PA.

We now have five main factors to model, two factors related to party behavior: stability and divergence; and three characteristic associated factors: party label, size and age of a party. Country dummy variables will also be included as control variables for other possible but unspecified country specific differences.

## Data and research design

Studying the effect of stability in party positions on the perceptions among voters requires time-series data and it is difficult to obtain such observations from a single country. In Sweden, for example, electoral studies have been carried out since 1956 but questions about parties' left-right positions (for all parties) were only included after 1979. In order to obtain efficient estimates, time-series data from four countries – Norway, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands – have been pooled into one data-set with 26 parties covered in 35 elections from the mid-seventies onwards. In practice this means 26 parties in an average of eight elections in each country which gives an effective N of 187 parties.[71]

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[71] The data, which is based on national election studies, was gathered from the European Voter Project database and can be obtained from the Central Archive for Empirical Social Research (ZA) at the University of Cologne with the study number 3911. In the case of the elections of

A frequent problem associated with comparative studies is the variation in the questions asked in different national election surveys. When it comes to the left-right dimension, this is a minor problem since the question usually goes: "*Where would you place party x on a left-right scale stretching from y to z?*" The advantage of survey questions like this is that we do not need to consider what the left-right dimension actually means in each country, even if it differs to some extent between countries depending on history, traditions, culture, etc.

More problematic, however, is the fact that the rating scales of the answers varied in length between seven and eleven points.[72] The difficulty of comparing the results from a ten-point scale with those of an eleven-point scale may not be severe but this is less obviously the case in comparisons of data captured on a seven point and eleven point scales respectively. Granberg and Holmberg (1988) confronted this problem in their study of voters in Sweden and USA and argued that comparisons between scales based on seven and eleven points respectively can be made. They based this conclusion on an analysis of the results from studies by the Swedish institute SIFO (Research International), and by SCB (Statistics Sweden) in which the only respective difference was the use of seven-point and eleven-point scales. Differences due to the scales proved to be minor and had small variations

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2002 and 2003 in the Netherlands, complementary data for the post-1998 elections not included in the European Voter database has been gleaned from Irwin (2005). Data for Norway in 2001 and Sweden 2002 comes from the Swedish National Data Service (SND), http://www.snd.gu.se. Data for Germany in 2002 has been taken from the CSES-project and can be downloaded from http://www.umich.edu/~cses. The data for the 1977 election in the Netherlands is extrapolated from the previous and the past parliamentary election studies and is taken from the Continuous Survey, wave 11, which can be found in (van der Eijk and Niemöller 1983). Data on left-right positions is missing for Germany in the elections of 1980 and 1994 and, as in the above mentioned Dutch case, an extrapolation was therefore made based on the previous and the past parliamentary election studies. The European voter data set does include data on left-right positions over time for Great Britain. However, since there are rather few cases (3 parties in 6 elections) and the fact that Great Britain is the only country having an electoral system using a plurality (FPTP) formula, there is a risk that Great Britain would become an 'outlier' and affect the results to a disproportionate extent. Great Britain has therefore been left out of the analysis.

[72] In Norway a 7-point scale was used for the election studies from 1973 until 1977 when a 9-point scale was introduced. From 1985 until 1997, 10-point scales were used and again replaced by an 11-point scale in 2001. The Netherlands used a 7-point scale from 1971 until 1981 when it was replaced by a 10-point scale. For the election study of 2002 an 11-point scale was temporarily used. Sweden and Germany have used an 11-point scale in all election studies. To make sure there are no stronger relationships between the scales used and the degrees of PA (*i.e.* shorter scales means less alternatives which may yield higher PA), a Pearson's r correlation was run and yielded a coefficient of .22. Obviously, there is a weak relationship between the variables but interestingly enough in the 'wrong direction' in the sense that longer scales tend to coincide with higher degrees of PA.

(Granberg and Holmberg 1988). Van der Eijk and Niemöller (1983) reached a similar conclusion when comparing data from the Dutch parliamentary elections.

The variation in PA in the present study (Table 3 in appendix II) indicates that the degree of PA in each of the four countries has a fairly similar distribution. With this in mind, the comparisons upon which this study rests appear as both feasible and reliable. However, the fact that scales of different lengths were used for measuring the left-right positions of the parties could imply that the homoscedasticity assumption for ordinary least squares (OLS) does not hold. Fortunately, both heteroscedacticity and other contemporaneously correlated errors in time-series cross-section analyses can be accounted for by using panel corrected standard errors (PCSE) (Beck and Katz 1995).[73] According to Beck (2001), OLS with PCSE is also more efficient than panel weighted least squares when the time-series are short.[74]

There are a number of important differences between the countries represented in this study – some of the more obvious being the degree of proportionality in the electoral systems, the effective number of parliamentary parties and the issue-dimensionality. These variables are all proven to affect PA indirectly among voters (Dahlberg, Berlin, and Oscarsson 2005; Dahlberg and Oscarsson 2006) and should ideally be taken into consideration. However, due to the tiny variation in these variables in this particular data

[73] In contrast to simple heteroscedasticity, panel heteroscedasticity assumes that the error variance is constant within a unit, in this case a country. This assumption is thus violated in the cases of Norway and the Netherlands where different left-right scales were used over the years. However, in these instances the variation between the countries is held to be more severe for the Gauss Markov assumptions than the within-country variance (see Beck 2001 for a further discussion).

[74] Another problem to be dealt with is the fact that both a Durbin Watson test and a Correlogram indicate the presence of a first order autoregressive process. However, since the dependent variable in this study is the aggregated agreement among voters, and since the respondents in all the election studies are – more or less – recruited independently it does not make any theoretical sense to include a lagged dependent variable in the model in order to avoid autocorrelation. The commonly used Least Square Dummy Variable (LSDV)-model, with a lagged dependent variable as well as a full set of country dummies will also provide biased estimates when used with short panels (Lindgren 2006). The autocorrelation has therefore been corrected for by a Prais Winsten transformation, where the autoregressive terms have been excluded instead of included in the model as with the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable (Beck and Katz 1996). The autoregressive correction is based on the assumption that the errors are commonly serially correlated instead of unit-specifically serially correlated. According to Beck and Katz (1995), this type of correction is more reliable and efficient in TSCS-data. Instead of using the time-series to make the model dynamic, it is here partly considered as stationary where the time aspect as such is of less interest.

set no certain conclusions can be made concerning their effect on PA. The variables have therefore been replaced with country dummy-variables in order to control for the influence of country specific differences and to mitigate the problem of omitted variables.[75]

## Operationalizations

As discussed earlier, political representation can only be meaningful if voters share a clear view of the content or meaning of the proposed mandates. One way to estimate the agreement of voter perceptions is to use a measure of dispersion. A problem then is that the left-right position of parties is not measured on continuous scales but on ordered rating scales. For this reason, this study uses a measurement on PA constructed by Cees van der Eijk (2001). This coefficient builds on the distribution of voters' placements of parties on ordered rating scales, such as the left-right scale. The focus in this study is, therefore, not on perceptions among individual voters on parties' policy positions as such but on perceptions for the electorate as a whole. The coefficient is bound between -1 and +1 and it reaches its minimum of -1 when half the sample places the party on one extreme and the other half of the sample places it on the opposite extreme – which is the same as maximum disagreement or a total deviation from a unimodal distribution. On the other hand, when all respondents place the party in the same category, the coefficient attains +1, which is the same as maximum agreement or perfect unimodality. A uniform distribution yields an agreement value of 0.

The first explanatory variable is the degree of *stability* in the parties' policy positions. The most straight forward way to measure the degree of stability is either to rely on a simple measure of the difference between a party's current and its past policy position or an average measure based on

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[75] The main alternative to this so called fixed effect model is the random effects approach, which builds on the assumption that the unit effects are uncorrelated with all independent variables in the model. In practice however, this assumption is, hard to meet (Wooldrige 2003). As the differences within the countries can be expected to be less severe than the differences between the countries, the analysis will only include country dummy variables and not time-dummies due to the decreasing number of case In contrast to simple heteroscedasticity, panel heteroscedasticity assumes that the error variance is constant within a unit, in this case a country. This assumption is thus violated in the cases of Norway and the Netherlands where different left-right scales were used over the years. However, in these instances the variation between the countries is held to be more severe for the Gauss Markov assumptions than the within-country variance (see Beck 2001 for a further discussion).

earlier policy positions, as perceived by the voters in each election. However, these kinds of measures are not optimal since they do not take the direction of change into consideration.[76] For example, if a party from one election to the other shifts from position 1 to, say, 2 on the scale and then in the third election moves back  to position 1, this is a shift of two scale steps in total. However, a party moving from position 1 to 2, and then in the third election from position 2 to 3, is also moving two steps in total. At least from an ideological point of view, the second party must, without doubt, be considered less stable in its policy position than the first party, which returns to a position. For this reason a measure based on cumulative values for a party's current position has been chosen.[77] The measure for stability used in this article is hence constructed as the square root of the value of a party's current minus its previous median policy position and the current position minus the median policy position immediately before its previous  position, such that:

$$\Delta p_{jk} = \sqrt{(p_{ti} - p_{ti-1})^2 + (p_{ti} - p_{ti-2})^2}$$

where $\Delta p_{jk}$ is stability for party $j$ in country $k$. The variable has then been reversed so that it actually captures stability instead of volatility.

Turning to the second variable, *divergence*, this variable has been constructed as the weighted average distance for a party to all other parties in

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[76] To achieve an acceptable number of cases, the time period cannot be set to more than three elections in total. Selecting three time units for the construction of the stability measures is also justified by a Fisher's F-test demonstrating no significant difference between models based on three as opposed to four time units.

[77] The most straight forward way to measure stability in a party's policy position is to rely on a party's earlier policy positions. To obtain a valid measure of change, four different measures with twelve different variations were constructed and tested on Swedish election data from 1979 to 2002, collected by Statistics Sweden (SCB) and administered by Swedish National Data Service (SND). The four measures consisted of one cumulative measure, one average measure, one measure based on average positions of the party family and one measure based on the deviation from a party's own average position. For practical reasons the two latter measures were dropped since a) it is difficult to compare party ideologies between countries and b) an average position for older parties does not make sense. Average measures are not optimal anyhow since they do not take the direction into consideration. For this reason, two measures of a party's current position based on cumulative values were chosen based. Since the two measures had a similar effect on perceptual agreement (-.41 and -.37, Pearson's r) and also were highly correlated (r .92), which one to use was an arbitrary decision. Separate analyses were run with each of the measures but results showed there were only small differences in the effect.

each country in an election year. The weights are based on the percentages of votes received by the parties in order to avoid small extremist parties without any 'real' influence on the political arena affecting the average distance between the main alternatives. The divergence of party *i* can formally be expressed as:

$$d_i = \frac{\sum_{j \neq i} s_j |p_i - p_j|}{\sum_{j \neq i} s_j}$$

where pi is the left-right position of party i, based on the interpolated median, pj the corresponding measure for party j, and sj the vote-share of party j. When weighting the distances in this way, one does not have to divide by the number of parties because when weighting them by the proportion of votes, it is already a weighted average. One should, however, correct for the fact that the total size of the other parties differs across parties and countries.

The operationalizations of the remaining three independent variables are less complicated. The party label variable is coded as a dummy variable where parties classified as belonging to either (former) communistic-, social democratic-, liberal- or conservative party families have been coded one due to their attachment to the left-right dimension and all other unattached parties as zero (Ware 1996). The classification of parties has been taken from Budge et.al. (2001) and the categories are as follows: 1. Ecology Parties, 2. (Former) Communist Parties, 3. Social Democratic Parties, 4. Liberal Parties, 5. Christian Democratic (and other religious parties), 6. Conservative Parties, 7 National Parties, 8 Agrarian Parties, 9. Ethnic and Regional Parties, 10. Special Interest Parties.[78] The size of a party in each election is represented by the percentage of votes received, while the age of a party is the number of years since it was first represented in the national parliament.

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[78] The number of observations in each group in the European voter data is 71 in category 0 and 114 in category 1.

## Analysis

Table 1 presents five different regression models. The first model represents the control variables and the second model contains the variables related to the party characteristics. The third model is simply a combined model of both control variables and party characteristic related factors. In the fourth model the two explanatory variables related to party behavior are introduced and in the fifth model, the effect of the five main variables on perceptual agreement is tested with the control variables included. Starting with the control variables, the first model can be used as a benchmark against which to judge the amount of explained variance derived from the other models.

**Table 1.** Determinants of perceptual agreement. OLS-regression, panel corrected standard errors (PCSE) and PW-corrected autocorrelation (AR1).

| Perceptual agreement ($e^2$) | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Party behavioral features* | | | | | |
| Stability (ln) | - | - | - | .017** | .014** |
| | | | | (.005) | (.005) |
| Divergence ($e^2$) | - | - | - | .049*** | .033* |
| | | | | (.009) | (.015) |
| *Party characteristic features* | | | | | |
| Party label | - | -.018 | -.002 | - | .016 |
| | | (.026) | (.032) | | (.032) |
| Party size | - | -.003*** | -.003*** | - | -.003** |
| | | (.001) | (.001) | | (.001) |
| Age of party (ln) | - | .250*** | .173** | - | .162 |
| | | (.071) | (.088) | | (.088) |
| *Country dummy variables[79]* | | | | | |
| Sweden | .147*** | - | .128*** | - | .106*** |
| | (.027) | | (.041) | | (.027) |
| Norway | .062 | - | .044 | - | .036 |
| | (.038) | | (.052) | | (.038) |
| Netherlands | .017 | - | .010 | - | .028 |
| | (.029) | | (.041) | | (.036) |
| Constant | .319*** | -.394* | -.186 | .257*** | -.233 |
| | (.029) | (.228) | (.279) | (.028) | (.269) |
| P: | .524 | .544 | .602 | .523 | .549 |
| N (pairwise): | 135/23 | 135/23 | 135/23 | 135/23 | 135/23 |
| $R^2$ | .495 | .449 | .544 | .482 | .577 |

*Comment:* * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$ & *** $p<.001$ (2-tailed). The N-values indicate the number of parties and number of elections (observations per election by country: minimum: 3, average: 7,2, maximum: 11). Panel corrected standard errors within parentheses. For variable descriptives, see table 4 in appendix II.

Even if the control variables not are of primary concern, it is interesting to get a glimpse of their effects in the first model. Two out of three control variables in the first model are significant and account for 49,5 percent of the explained variance in PA among voters; or rather the square of PA to be correct since the dependent variable, PA, here has been squared due to its skewed distribution.[80]

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[79] The effect of belonging to Germany is captured by the intercept.

[80] As the OLS-regression assumes linearity, the F-tests and t-tools assume a constant error variance. Hence, these methods work best with symmetric, roughly normal data distributions.

According to model 2, two of the party characteristic factors have a significant effect on PA, namely the size (-.003***) and the age (.250***) of a party. This accords with the expectation that PA will decrease with increasing electoral size of a party whilst it will increase with the age of a party, as longer term exposure assists with voters' comprehension of the party's left-right positions. Altogether the variables account for approximately 45 percent of the explained variance.

In the third model, where both the control and the party characteristic related variables are included, the amount of explained variance has increased to 54 percent. The effects of both the size and the age of a party are still significant but the influence of party age on PA has decreased slightly. Party labels have an insignificant impact and this may indicate that for voters the brand names of the parties do not function as efficient information short-cuts after all. Obviously, a party label as a cognitive heuristic cannot compensate entirely for an absence of information; in this case substantial knowledge about a party's left-right position. However, the insignificant result may arise from the small variation evident in party labels coming from just four west European countries. Further research is needed in order to say anything certain about this effect.[81]

In model 4, which examines the effect on PA caused by the two variables related to party behavior, under control for each other, both stability

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Thus, it is often better to analyze transformed data values rather than raw data when variables are skewed. Different (log/power) transformations are often useful for correcting problems with skewed data, outliers, and unequal variation. There are different tools at hand for transforming a variable where the most common procedures are: y=ex, √e ln(e) or lg(e). Which transformation is used is often of less importance, since this is rather a matter of scale selection. The effect, then, is that the log function squeezes the large values in the data together and stretches the small values apart, while squaring a variable does the opposite (Hamilton 1992; Sydsaeter 1995).

[81] If the same model is run on Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) data with the only difference being that stability not is included in the model since the CSES modules does not provide temporal data, the party labels do have a rather strong significant positive effect on PA (.039***). One reason behind this result could be that the number of parties in the CSES dataset is 296 instead of 135 as in the European voter dataset. The insignificant effect of party labels should thus be noted with caution. On the other hand, this study shows that stability in party positions also is important and, with that variable excluded from the analysis, we are actually testing two different models on two different data sets. Nevertheless, this exception aside, the results based on the CSES-data are highly similar to those from the European Voter-data used in this study, which strengthens the reliability of the findings in this study. (CSES module 1 and 2, were collected respectively during 1996-2001 and 2001-2004 in post election surveys in 32 countries. The dataset covers a total of 63 elections with 396 political parties and 56 067 respondents. The data can be retrieved from CSES Secretariat, http://www.cses.org, Centre for Political Studies. Institute for Social Research. The University of Michigan. The data can also be downloaded from: http://www.umich.edu/~cses.)

(.017**) and divergence (.049***) respectively yield a positive and significant effect on the squared agreement among voters. These two factors alone explain about 48 percent of the variance in PA, which is a difference of three percentage points compared to model 2. This do, however, indicates that stability and divergence in policy positions are important factors the agreement among voters.

Turning to the final model 5, where all variables are included, the effect of stability (.014**) and divergence (.033*) on PA has decreased slightly compared to the fourth model.[82] The amount of explained variance has also increased by approximately ten percentage points to 58 percent. Among the characteristic related variables the effect of party size (-.003**) is similar compared to the effect in model 2 whilst the effect of party age now is insignificant. It is worth mentioning that the effect of the only significant context control variable in the fifth model, namely Sweden, has decreased by approximately 28 percent compared to its effect in the first model.[83] This highlights the overall importance of the party related variables for explaining variation in PA: policy divergence and stability have the most explanatory power for the degrees of PA among voters followed by the electoral size of a party.[84] The rather strong effect of stability and divergence on PA is illustrated in figure 1.

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[82] In order to test for the saliency of the left-right dimension in respective elections, the regressions were conducted including a measure of left-right taken from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). The saliency of the left-right dimension did not affect the results to any great extent besides that the stability measure in model 4 became insignificant on the .01 level. The results in the other models were not affected at all and the effect of saliency by itself was not significant in any of the models. The CMP data, which is a thematic content analysis of election manifestos, is coded by placing every sentence or quasi-sentence into one of 56 categories. The sentences are then summarized and the frequencies counted as the proportion of the total amount of coded sentences where the scores are obtained and put into the CMP-dataset. In order to create a measure for left-right saliency in each country, all the left-right related categories were expressed as a proportion of the total amount of sentences for all parties in respective election. The left-right classification of the categories is made by the CMP and is stipulated on both theoretical grounds and by factor analysis (see Budge et al. 2001).

[83] Variables controlling for the effect of party government position and coalition collaborations have also been tested for. The effects were not significantly different from zero and they did not affect the models as such, why they were excluded from the final analysis.

[84] Since the RPM highlights the importance of stable and divergent party policy positions an interaction term based on these two variables was included in initial models but this neither had any significant impact on PA nor did it influence the effect of the other variables. In terms of size, age and label there are no theoretical reason to model any interactions between these variables.

**Figure 1.** A 3-dimensional scatter plot illustrating the effect of divergence and stability on perceptual agreement.
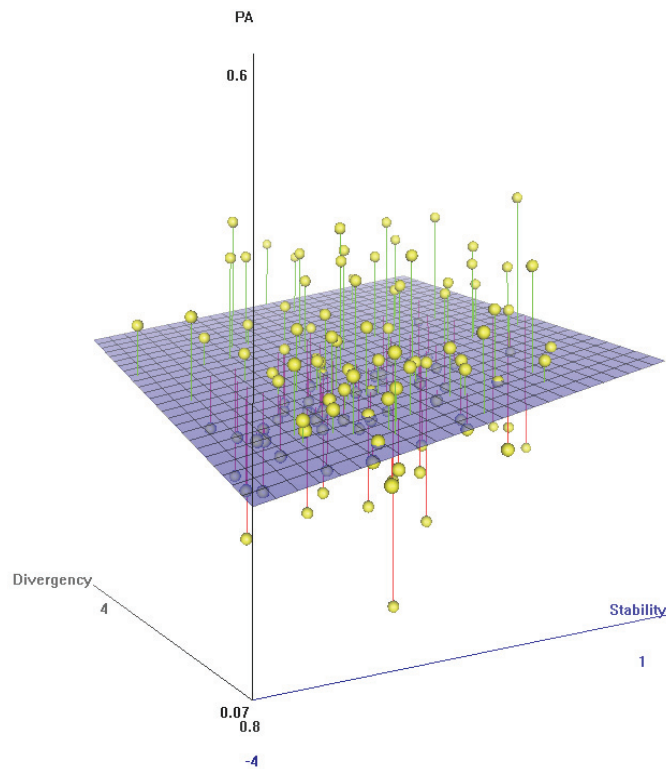
The scatter plot in figure 1 clearly illustrates the positive correlation between stability and divergence in parties' left-right positions and voters' PA.

A frequent problem in social science is that variables seldom are measured on similar scales, a fact that makes interpretations more difficult, not least when using the square or the natural logarithms of the variables. But most of all, it makes it more difficult to compare the substantial effect of the different independent variables on PA. A simple procedure to mitigate the problem of dissimilar measurement scales between variables and data sources is to examine what effect the total change in the independent vari-

153

ables has on the dependent variable. These effects can then be interpreted as the average effect in the square of PA caused by each independent variable, under control for all other variables included in the model, when moving from the lowest to the highest theoretical value of each specific variable (see table 2).[85]

**Table 2.** The average change in the squared perceptual agreement when the explanatory factors undergo a change from their lowest to their highest values.

| Perceptual agreement (e²) | Model 1 ΔPA² | Model 2 ΔPA² | Model 3 ΔPA² | Model 4 ΔPA² | Model 5 ΔPA² |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Party behavioral features* | | | | | |
| Stability (ln) | - | - | - | .170** | .140** |
| Divergence (e²) | - | - | - | .490*** | .330* |
| *Party characteristic features* | | | | | |
| Party label | - | -.018 | -.002 | - | .016 |
| Party size | - | -.123*** | -.123*** | - | -.123** |
| Age of party (ln) | - | 5.000*** | 3.460** | - | 3.240 |
| *Country dummy variables* | | | | | |
| Sweden | .158** | | .137*** | | .106*** |
| Norway | .059** | | .038 | | .036 |
| Netherlands | -.028 | | -.021 | | .028 |

*Comment: * p<.05, ** p<.01 & *** p<.001 (2-tailed).*

The largest significant effect on the square of PA is caused by the divergence in a party's left-right position (.330*) followed by stability (.140**). This result is in line with the theoretical expectations derived from the RPM that the more there is stability and divergence in parties' policies, the greater the degree of agreement among voters. Since stable and divergent policy positions among the parties have this rather large influence on voters' PA they are important ingredients for effective representation. Given that voters can compensate for an information shortage by using the parties' ideological positions as cognitive cues and shortcuts (Downs 1957;

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[85] An alternative, and probably more often used, procedure is to display standardized beta coefficients. However, standardizations give at best an approximation of the relative weight of the independent variables, all other variables held constant, when explaining the variation in the dependent variable (Andrews, Morgan, Klem, and Sonquist 1973).

Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Popkin 1991), a less polarized party system in terms of left-right ideology may have severe consequences for the formation of public opinion and the aggregation of preference.

Shifting attention to the remaining variable in Table 2, it becomes clear that the total negative effect of party size on PA (-.123**) is not that small after all when compared to the total effect of the two behavioral variables. It appears that greater electoral support for a party means less agreement among voters on its policy position, a result that is concordant with the idea of 'catch-all' parties appealing to a bigger swathe of the electorate, by expressing less ideological commitment (Kirchheimer 1990).[86]

## Summary and conclusions

According to the RPM, an important prerequisite for effective political representation is that voters have clear and common perceptions of the main political alternatives offered during an election campaign. This study has aimed to evaluate the role of different features of political parties in the creation of shared perceptions among voters of the parties' policy positions. General conclusions in the literature about voters' perceptions of party positions include ideological predisposition (Granberg and Holmberg 1988) and cognitive capabilities (Granberg and Holmberg 1988; van der Brug 1997) and the salience of different issues (Oscarsson 1998; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b; van der Brug 1997). The present study has shown that features related to the political parties also significantly affect voters' perceptions and that it is the behavior rather than the characteristics of the parties that are most important in the formation of PA within the electorate.

Both stability and divergence in policy are two behavioral traits of parties that have considerable importance in explaining the variation in voters' PA. In particular, divergence in a party's ideological position from that of others appears to have a decisive impact on PA among voters. An interpretation of these results is that it simply becomes easier to obtain perspective on the parties when their positions are more stable and divergent vis-à-vis

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[86] Nevertheless, since bigger parties are by definition more electorally successful (given an operationalization of size in terms of share of votes) it is counter-intuitive that more successful parties also may facilitate weaker perceptual agreement, given the likelihood of incumbency and the resources, and opportunities to communicate policy agendas. Conclusively, parties may succeed due to a perceptual disagreement they are able to construct within their electorates but this question is beyond the scope of this article.

one another because this reduces the information costs. As outlined by the RPM, parties with stable and divergent policy positions are desirable normatively and an important condition for effective representation of the electorate.

Among the characteristic related features of parties, the only significant effect on PA was found in the size of a party, where greater electoral size correlates with lower PA among voters. Set against the theory of the 'catch-all' party, this result demonstrates that bigger parties indeed strategically downplay their ideological profiles so as to appeal to a broader spectrum of the electorate than is the case with more interest based parties. From a normative point of view, however, the tendency for big parties to become vague regarding policy is less desirable for the ideal of political representation.

In contrast to the vast literature on voting behavior that emphasizes the importance of well-informed and knowledgeable voters (Bartels 1996; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Converse 1964), the research presented here shows that the presentation of stable and divergent policy positions by responsible political parties is also a crucial ingredient for effective and democratic representation.

## Appendix I

Dutch Parties Covered 1971-2003: PvdA (Labour Party); D'66. (Democrats'66); VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy); CDA (Christian Democratic Appeal); KVP (Catholic People's Party) 1971-1977; ARP (Anti-Revolutionary Party) 1971-1977; CHU (Christian Historical Union) 1971-1977. Eleven elections in total.

Swedish Parties Covered 1979-2002: MP (Green Ecology Party) 1988-2002; V (Left Party); S (Social Democratic Labour Party); FP (Liberal People's Party); KD (Christian Democratic Party) 1991-2002; M (Moderate Coalition Party); C (Agrarian Party). Eight elections in total.

Norwegian Parties Covered 1973-2001: SV (Socialist Left Party); DNA (Norwegian Labour Party); V. (Liberal Party); Krf. (Christian People's Party); H (Conservative Party); SP (Centre Party); FrP. (Progress Party). Ten elections in total.

German Parties Covered 1976-2002: SPD (Social Democratic Party), 1976-2002; FDP (Free Democratic Party) 1976-2002; CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Union/ Christian Social Union) 1976-2002 (here treated as one party); (Green Party) 1983-2002 (Greens/Alliance 90) 1990-2002; PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) 1990-2002. Eight elections in total.

# Appendix II

**Table 3.** Variations in PA by country

| PA | Obs | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Germany | 34 | .56 | .07 | .27 | .68 |
| Norway | 49 | .69 | .07 | .55 | .83 |
| Sweden | 56 | .60 | .12 | -.06 | .77 |
| The Netherlands | 48 | .55 | .08 | .35 | .71 |

**Table 4.** Variable description

| Variable | Obs | Mean | Std, Dev, | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stability | 153 | -.88 | 1.17 | -3.91 | 1.44 |
| Divergence | 211 | 2.11 | .70 | .54 | 4.47 |
| Party label | 211 | .66 | .47 | .00 | 1 |
| Party size | 211 | .42 | .17 | .11 | .70 |
| Party age | 211 | 4.23 | .59 | 2.83 | 5.11 |

# Article 3

# Misperceptions and Effective Representation

# Misperceptions and Effective Representation

## -The simultaneous effect of electoral systems, political parties and individual characteristics on voters' perceptions of party positions - a multilevel approach

## Abstract

In the terms of the responsible party model, parties are assumed to formulate prospective policy programs and voters are assumed to vote for the party whose program most closely matches their preferences. In this context, elections are reckoned as a process of mandate giving where once in government, parties will strive to realize their policy programs. Voters' perceptions of party positions are essential in this view since they affect the extent to which voters are meaningfully represented in a political system: common and accurate perceptions are the prerequisites for effective policy representation. However, according to Heider (1946) people strive to maintain cognitive balance and as a consequence, individuals tend to conceptually 'push and pull' candidates or parties which they like or dislike (also known as 'assimilation and contrast effects' or 'wishful thinking'). The tendency to 'push and pull' candidates or parties has in earlier studies also been shown to be affected by a voter's own ideological beliefs (Granberg 1992; Granberg 1993).

Past research on perception among voters has, however, mainly focused on the impact of internal features among voters on the perceptual process with less emphasis on the impact and characteristics of external stimuli. A relevant question regarding external factors is if and to what extent the electoral and the political context also matters for voters' perceptions. The focal point in this study is how individual characteristics and various contextual factors related to the political parties and the political systems

might effect voters' perceptions. Analysis of data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, modules 1 and 2, on individual voters and various system characteristics from election surveys in 29 countries will shed some light on this area of research.

The results show that individual factors such as the left-right positions of individuals, education and gender are important factors behind voters' perceptual deviation (*i.e.* the difference between an individual's placement of parties and the median placement position of a party by all voters). However, the strongest impact on perceptual deviation comes from the degree of divergence in a party's left-right position together with party size, party labels and the degree of competition within a system. In general, it seems that the ideological affiliation among voters is less important for the tendency to 'push and pull' parties than was believed from earlier research. 'Wishful thinking' instead seems to occur when the policy positions of parties are blurred due to either positions being shared by several parties, large party sizes, absent brand cues to party positions or a low degree of competitiveness with in a system.

*Key words:* political perceptions, electoral systems, political representation, left-right ideology, party competition.

## Introduction

In the history of modern representative democracy one of the key elements has been government by the consent of the people rather than government by the people such as in Athenian direct democracy (Manin 1997; Schattschneider 1960). Consent by the governed is a central component in the mandate model of representative democracy, also known as the responsible party model (RPM). In this model parties are assumed to present prospective policy programs during elections as the basis of the choices voters must make. Voters are assumed to vote for the party whose policy program is closest to their own views. From this perspective, elections are seen as a process of mandate giving. When in government, parties will then strive for realizing these policy mandates. Elections should thus function as a mechanism for generating agreement between the opinions of the voters and their elected representatives (APSA 1950; Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996;

Thomassen 1999).[87]

Since the degree of accuracy and agreement in voters' perceptions affects the extent to which voters are meaningfully represented in a representative democracy, it is essential that voters' indeed have accurate and shared perceptions of parties' policy positions. Without such agreement or accuracy, the individual choices of voters will be indistinguishable from random noise. Agreement and accuracy about parties' policies makes the collective outcome of such choices meaningful and, as such, both affect the quality of representation (Granberg and Holmberg 1988; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b).

Much research has been undertaken on the impact of individual-level characteristics on voting behavior and party choice such as socio-economic status, education and party identification (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Fiorina 1981; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004). Factors such as political knowledge, left-right self placement and whether a voter likes or dislikes a specific party has been proven to be influential when it comes to political perceptions (Granberg 1993; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Popkin 1991). Perceptions among voters with higher levels of political knowledge often are both more accurate and more in agreement (van der Brug 1997). However, according to Heider (1946), people are prone to maintain cognitive balance, and when placing parties or candidates on various scales, individuals in general will tend to place parties or candidates that they like close to them selves while those that are disliked will be pushed away. This tendency will give rise to perceptual distortions. The tendency to 'push and pull' candidates or parties - also known as assimilation and contrast effects or simply 'wishful thinking' occur due to ego involvement and one's affective orientation toward parties or candidates (Granberg 1993; Granberg and Holmberg 1988). A relevant question that, according to Granberg (1993), remains unanswered is whether the perceptual process is determined mainly by external stimulus or by internal features. In literature on social psychology in general and on perceptions in particular, the focus is divided among subjects (those who perceive), objects (what is being perceived) and finally the context that envelopes the subjects

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[87] The consent of the governed is, however, also a central part of the accountability model of representative democracy. Just as in the mandate model, the voters' preferences are expected to influence how they evaluate the policy programs of the parties and are central in the accountability model of voting. The main difference between the two models is that while the mandate model is prospective, the accountability model is retrospective in the sense that voters are assumed to evaluate the parties on their past record rather than their programs for the future (Holmberg 2006).

and the objects. The order of focus of prior research on these topics has been firstly the characteristics of the subjects, secondly the objects and thirdly, and to a far more limited extent, the context.

The present article aims to take a more comprehensive grip of the issue and make a simultaneous analysis of the impact on perceptual deviations (*i.e.* the deviation between individual's placement of parties and the median party position made by all voters) of what prior research informs us are the most important characteristics related to the subjects (the individual voters), the objects (the political parties) and the context (in which the former two interact).

This study has two consequent aims. First, is an investigation of how different factors related to both individuals and the political and institutional context are affecting the perceptions among voters, or more specifically, the perceptual deviations among voters. For example, it is well known today that proportional electoral systems tend to promote stronger and more ideologically committed parties while majoritarian systems are more candidate centered (Holmberg 2006; Sartori 1997). Given these differences and that voters are assumed to orientate themselves in the policy space according to the ideological positions occupied by the political parties, the accuracy and agreement in voters' perceptions of parties' positions could be expected to be higher for voters within proportional electoral systems. Other studies suggest that various party characteristics such as party labels (centre-left etc.) (Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, and Tanenbaum 2001; Snyder 2002), divergence in ideological positions (Dahlberg 2009; Dahlberg and Oscarsson 2006) and electoral size (Cox 1997; van der Eijk, Franklin, and van der Brug 1999) also affect perceptions among voters and thereby, voting behavior. Consequently we know that internal features among individuals are important for the clarity in voters' perceptions, but what about the effect of externally related factors? Are different contextual factors associated with the political parties and is the political and the electoral system also affecting voters' perceptions by facilitating or motivate voters when apprehending political information?

Secondly, we know from prior research that we can expect a significant negative impact on the quality of voters' perceptions due to affective variables, such as party sympathy, *i.e.* whether a voter likes or dislikes a specific party, or the ideological distance between a voter and parties. We also know that the adoption of proportional or majority formulas creates incentives for rational vote-seeking politicians to use bonding or bridging strategies, by emphasizing either programmatic or particularistic benefits during the election campaigns (Farrell 1997; Norris 2004). It can thereby be expected that the political context will influence the affective attachment to ideologies or parties displayed by individual voters which in turn will result in decreasing or increasing levels of wishful thinking, *i.e.* a tendency to

'push and pull' parties. Hypothetically, different institutional arrangements can thus, be expected to exaggerate or mitigate the effect of different affective factors on individuals (*i.e.* party sympathy or the ideological distance between voters and parties) which in turn may affect voters' perceptual deviations (PD).

In conclusion, this article addresses two research questions:

1. How important are factors related to the political parties and the institutional context compared to individual characteristics in the generation of voters' perceptual deviations?
2. To what extent are differences between individual voters regarding 'wishful thinking' being exaggerated or mitigated by contextual differences?

The study will be carried out by combining data on individual characteristics with various contextual explanations that can be expected to influence voters' perceptions of party positions, using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) modules 1 and 2 on both individual voters and various system characteristics from election surveys in 29 countries. The article first discusses some of the basic requirements in the RPM for effective representation and the importance of left-right ideology as a cue for voters when acquiring information. Next follows a theoretical discussion and a literature overview and then a discussion of data and methodological considerations. The empirical part of the article is divided into two sections, in which the first focuses on the relative strength of each variable on voters' PD and which group/level of variables exerts the greatest impact on PD. In the second part the aim is to investigate whether the effect of the affective variables related to individuals on PD are interacting with the political context.

## Effective representation

From a normative point of view, the responsible party model has been criticized often as a populist theory missing essential democratic values such as a division of powers and checks and balances. From an empirical perspective the model is often said to be unrealistic. However, the merit of the model is that it helps to study the actors and the process of political representation in a systematic manner. The founding assumptions of the model can then be used as benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of particular aspects of a system of political representation (Thomassen 1999).

165

The model can be summarized as:

1. There must be at least two competing parties with different policy programs.
2. The political parties need to be internally cohesive with sufficient party discipline so as to be capable of implementing their policy programs.
3. Voters are expected to vote rationally which implies to vote for the party whose program is closest to a voter's own preferences.
   a) Voters need to have policy preferences.
   b) They are aware of the main differences between the policy positions of the different parties.
   c) Their perceptions of the parties' policy positions are adequate and accurate (APSA 1950; Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Thomassen and Schmitt 1997; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999).

Turning to the first element in the model, two or more parties are represented in most parliamentary democracies through out the world (Dalton 1985; Granberg 1985; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Katz and Mair 1995). There are signs of a tendency for parties becoming more candidate centered in recent years but it nonetheless, still is the political parties rather than individual candidates that are the main actors in parliaments, especially in a European context (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000).[88]

Concerning the second element, the RPM has gained empirical support in a study by Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge where they investigated the relationship between election manifestos and enacted policies. Based on ten western countries on a period of 40 years, the results show a clear positive relationship between what politicians say that they will do and what actually transpires. The authors conclude that to a large extent, parties keep their election pledges and that parties are the central actors in repre-

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[88] Unless stated to the contrary, the analyses in this article will therefore focus on the perceptions of party positions rather than of individual candidates. The knowledge about party positions is, of course, only one type of political information that voters can base their decisions on. However, the theoretical implications of this study are equally applicable for candidates.

sentative political systems (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994). These results gain support also in research on parties' specific election promises. Parties are found to act on most of their election promises in most systems investigated (Mansergh and Thomson 2007; Naurin (forthcoming 2009); Royed 1996).

In relation to the third element, earlier studies have indicated that voters in the main do have preferences and that they vote according to them. To be motivated by policy is, however, not enough by itself. Policy voting according to the proximity principle (here understood as the subjective agreement between a voter's self-placement on a left-right scale or on other alternative dimensions and the position of the party voted for (see Downs 1957), will only produce meaningful representation if the voters are accurately informed about the political alternatives and that they correctly perceive the parties' positions (Converse 1975a; Converse 1975b; van der Eijk, Franklin, and van der Brug 1999).

Many scholars have argued that in general, voters do not display a large amount of information on matters of political or societal character (Bartels 1996; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Carpini and Keeter 1996; Converse 1964; Gordon and Segura 1997; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Page and Shapiro 1992; Petersson *et al*. 1998). Some authors have argued that due to cognitive limitations and in order to save on information costs, voters tend to orientate them selves in the policy space on the basis of ideological predispositions and by using different cues as information short-cuts. Political cue theory emphasizes cognitive information processing and inference where people develop schemas as cognitive short cuts in making sense of a complex reality. A schema in turn is a more or less integrated set of beliefs and implicit rules concerning stimuli. Political parties work in this context as anchors, serving cues to voters who are forming political perceptions. In this situation the schemas often are strong and well developed (Granberg 1993; Lupia 1998; Popkin 1991). Cognitive cues can be used to infer details that lie beyond the actual information that is given. Cues therefore are cost-saving and thus it is rational for voters to them to inform themselves about general political differences between parties (Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich 1984; Granberg and Holmberg 1988).

The idea that voters use ideologies in order to inform and orient themselves in the party space corresponds well to the spatial theory of voting introduced by Anthony Downs (1957). In the western countries, left-right ideology of the voter is also the single most important predictor behind

party choice (van der Eijk, Franklin and van der Brug 1999; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004). Nevertheless, a prerequisite for obtaining any meaningful representation is that voters have adequate and accurate perceptions concerning the parties' policy positions.[89] If there is neither agreement nor accuracy in voters' perceptions, it does not matter how rational the voters are behaving or how many election pledges governing parties fulfill: Effective representation in terms of policies will still be beyond our grasp.

## Party positions as cognitive cues

As mentioned earlier, party positions often serve as anchors and at least two kinds of party positions can be distinguished by voters: ideological positions and positions on concrete issues. Ideological positions on a left-right dimension have been shown to effectively summarize party policies in general and with respect to specific issues and priorities. Voters who use left-right ideologies as cues to assess parties' stand points may thus acquire adequate perceptions even when direct information concerning the positions is missing (Downs 1957; Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; Thomassen 1999; van der Brug 1997).

Research has shown that cues have validity and often are highly accurate. It has been proven in several studies that the aggregated mean or median position when voters place parties or candidates on various scales tends to be reasonably accurate when compared to alternative sources of the same measure (Granberg 1993; Page 1978; Pennings and Kleinnijenhuis 2001; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b; van der Brug 1997; 1998; 2001). In a study made by Wouter van der Brug (2001) the perceptions of voters in the Netherlands were evaluated against alternative indicators of parties' policy positions such as manifestos, surveys among the member of the parliament and roll-calls. The results showed that across six different issues, voters' perceptions of party positions were accurate in general, even for the least informed group of voters. A study made by van der Brug and van der Eijk concerning the European parliament election in 1994 also confirms these results. The research compared the perceptions of voters with the perceptions of the members of the European parliament of the party policy positions. The results showed that voters' perceptions were moder-

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[89] Political perception refers to the process by which people develop impressions of the characteristics and positions of political candidates, parties, and institutions (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Granberg 1993).

ately to strongly correlated with the parties' 'true' positions. Furthermore, the accuracy was considerably higher for left-right positions compared to other policy dimensions (van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b).

Several studies have shown that not just accuracy but also agreement among voter perceptions are considerably higher on left-right positions of parties compared to other issue positions or priorities. The salience of an issue also plays an important role as a promoter of perceptual agreement and perceptual accuracy (Converse and Presser 1986; Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999b). Voters widely use and similarly comprehend the left-right dimension as a cognitive map to order parties, particularly in Western Europe (Brug 1999b). Clearly, the left-right dimension is not the only or most salient issue-dimension in many countries but it is one of the few comparable measurements for belief systems available and, as seen, it is also considered as one of the most widespread and salient issue-dimensions in several political systems (Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987; Jones 2004; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Knutsen 1995; Knutsen 1999; Thomassen 1999; Warwick 2002; Bobbio 1996; Dalton 1984; van der Eijk, Franklin, and al. 1996).[90]

Given that the mean and/or the median left-right position to a large extent correctly describes a party's 'true' position, the distribution of voter's placement of the parties on the same dimension is of interest when examining the issue of perceptual adequacy or accuracy. Reasonably, we can expect variation in voter placements of a party on a left-right scale, due to perceptual distortions and the fact that ideologies are abstract and may variably mean different things for different voters. A vaguely defined or blurred ideological position or party profile facilitates perceptive distortions, which in turn may obstruct the emergence and formation of public opinions (Holmberg, Westerståhl, and Branzén 1977). Vague or ambiguous party positions may also invite much higher degrees of wishful thinking among the voters as "*it is easier to see what you want to see if what you look at is a bit fuzzy and far away*" (Holmberg 1999b:236-237).

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[90] As an example of the salience of the left-right dimension among the countries included in this study, appendix I presents the eta-values between left-right self placement and party choice.

## Perceptual deviations among individual voters - a proxy for perceptual agreement

Perceptual agreement has been considered as a necessary, although not a sufficient, condition for the electoral process to function successfully as a channel of communication and an aggregation of political preferences between the citizens and the elite. Results from earlier studies have shown that perceptual agreement among voters on parties left-right positions varies between countries, between different party families and for different clusters of parties depending on where they group on the left-right dimension (Dahlberg and Oscarsson 2006). Other studies have shown that perceptual agreement among voters is affected indirectly by the electoral context such as the degree of unidimensionality and proportionality within an electoral system and directly by the degree of divergence and polarization in a party system (see article 1; see also Dahlberg 2005). It has also been proven that the agreement among voters on parties' policy positions tend to be influenced by the behavior of individual parties such as their degree of stability and the divergence between the parties' policy positions. A party's electoral size also seems to have a negative relationship with the amount of agreement between voters (Dahlberg 2009).

A high degree of PA among voters does not necessarily mean the existence of a high degree of perceptual accuracy. A problem related to establishing perceptual accuracy is to find valid indicators of a party's true position. This is especially a problem in comparative research. However, if as pointed out by earlier research (See Granberg 1993; Page 1978; van der Brug 1997; 1998; 1999b) we are convinced that the mean and the median position of a party mostly depicts a party's 'true' policy position, then the degree of perceptual agreement is of interest as well, because it describes the adequacy of the perceptions of the parties' policy positions of a vast number of voters.

Perceptual agreement is mostly operationalized as a measure of dispersion (see Granberg & Holmberg 1988; van der Brug 1997; 1999b) and therefore it does not inform on the perceptions of individual voters. This limitation can be overcome by focusing on the deviation between the median position of the parties - based on the results from the placement of the parties on a left-right scale for the whole electorate - and the placement of parties made by individual voters. By focusing on the deviation among individual voters, we can investigate how different individual related factors might give rise to misperceptions among voters concerning the parties' left-right positions. Consequently, the focal point of the present study is not perceptual accuracy or perceptual agreement *per se* but rather on the deviations between the placements of parties on a left-right scale made by indi-

vidual voters, and the median placement of the same parties. Perceptual deviation (PD) is the term used from hereon for this measure The dependent variable will thus work as a proxy for perceptual agreement (and to some extent also perceptual accuracy) on an individual level.


## Prior research and theoretical expectations

### Causes of misperceptions among individual voters

Education and age often are stressed as important factors behind voting behavior in general and political knowledge or sophistication in particular since "*everything which is known is known not according to its own power but rather according to the capacity of the knower*"(Boethius 2002:100 (524)). The extent of voter knowledge affects which information is used when becoming informed about political matters. It has been suggested that highly educated voters rely on a wider range of sources of information than do less educated voters. However, more education does not necessarily mean more factual knowledge as educated voters also are sampling information and using various cues. The main difference between voters with different levels of education lies instead in that highly educated voters use the cues more efficiently (Popkin 1991).

Political knowledge is also a factor that has proven to affect the perceptions among voters (van der Brug 1997). However, political knowledge is not obtained exclusively through the content of education. Empirical results show that in the main, older people know more about politics than do those younger (Milner 2002; Popkin 1991). This could be interpreted as a process of socializing where a voter with time spent in a society becomes more familiar with election procedures, parties and politicians. A comparative study of the effects of education, age and gender on political information made by Sören Holmberg and Henrik Oscarsson (2004), indicates that older educated men in general tend to be best informed about political matters.[91] The perceptions of the parties' left-right positions could thus be expected to be more accurate among such groups of voters.

However, political ideologies also have both an affective and a cognitive

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[91] In the literature of voting behavior it has often been stressed that political interest is an important determinant of the degree of political sophistication among voters (Zaller 1992). Unfortunately, there is no question evaluating political interest of voters included in the datasets. Therefore, education will serve as a proxy for political knowledge or sophistication.

component. Most voters can relate cognitively to parties in terms of left and right and many can identify simultaneously their own ideological predisposition on the same dimension, which is the affective part.[92] According to Heider's (1946) balance theory, people are motivated principally to maintain cognitive balance. Cognitive balance is the tendency for individuals to impose order and structure on the world in a psychological processing of events. Arising from this, when placing parties or candidates on various scales individuals will tend to place parties or candidates that they like closer to themselves while those that are disliked will be pushed away. This tendency to 'push and pull' candidates or parties according to likes or dislikes is known in social judgment theory as contrast effects and is a form of perceptual distortion. This phenomenon – which also is referred to as 'wishful thinking' - is a less formal way to deal with cognitive imbalances. A direct consequence of wishful thinking is a subjective interaction between self placement and party or candidate placements, which constitutes the perceptual distortions. Displacement theory hence emphasizes assimilation and contrast and proposes that perceptual distortions occur due to ego involvement and one's affective orientation toward parties or candidates (Granberg 1993; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Popkin 1991). Earlier

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[92] Prior researchers have asserted that an individuals' self-placement on the left–right dimension is constituted by three major components, namely the ideological, the partisan and the social. The ideological component refers to the link between an individual's left–right self-placement and his/her attitude toward the major value conflicts in western democratic systems such as socioeconomic, religious, or the new politics (Ingelhart and Klingemann 1976; Knutsen 1995; 1997). The partisan component implies that a voter may primarily identify him/herself with a specific party instead of an ideological position. In such a case a voter might derive an ideological label for themselves from the party with which they identify. Strictly speaking, the labelling then is not necessarily related to their own issue orientations (Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Ingelhart and Klingemann 1976; Knutsen 1997). Finally, the social component refers to the citizens' social identities and their locations in the social structure in relation to their left–right orientation (Freire 2006; Ingelhart and Klingemann 1976). According to Klingemann's and Ingelhart's study (1976), the party component has the strongest impact on voters' left-right self-placement, followed by the ideological component. This means that for a large number of voters the left-right terminology has a major component based on party identification instead of issues or value orientations. However, Knutsen (1997) in a more comprehensive study showed that the impact of the party component on voters' left-right self-placement is not as big as Klingemann and Ingelhart suggested. Moreover, Knutsen also found empirically that if a voter's value orientation is set prior to party choice, it is value orientation rather than party choice that has the greatest impact on individuals left-right self-placement in most countries included in his study. A study by van der Eijk and Niemöller also shows that voters' ideological orientations to a large extent are more or less independent of their social positions, at least in the case of the Netherlands (van der Eijk and Niemöller 1992).

studies of voter perceptions have produced results showing that there also is a u-shaped relationship between voter self placement and the perceived distance of parties in which voters with more extreme self placements tend to perceive greater distances between the parties than do centrally located voters (Granberg 1993). Despite the large field of research on perceptions and misperceptions among individual voters, there still is not much is known about various contextual influences on voters' perceptions.

## Conceptual explanations behind perceptual deviations

Interest in comparative research on voting behavior has exploded during the last ten years and rational choice institutionalism has been breaking new ground. The advantage of rational choice theories in general is that they focus on motivations among individuals, while the sociologically rooted models of voting behavior often concentrate more on contextual explanations and group characteristics (Johnson, Shively, and Stein 2002).[93] According to rational choice institutionalism, formal or informal institutions create an incentive based structure for bounded rationality (Downs 1957; Gordon and Segura 1997; Norris 2004). The outcome is thus dependent on a combination of individual preferences and the rules that govern the game, where the latter are assumed to be exogenous to individual behavior (Johnson 2002). Individuals are hence expected to be interacting with the contexts.[94]

How can contextual factors related to political parties, party systems and electoral systems affect individual behavior? A vast field of research focuses on various motivational and facilitative determinants behind voting behavior (see Franklin 1996; Franklin, van der Eijk, and Oppenhuis 1996 for a further discussion).[95] Research has shown that voters are motivated or

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[93] The word rational is here used in the same manner as Downs where a voter is acting rationally when s/he is comparing different policy alternatives given the information that is available and voting for the party or candidate that most closely resembles the voter's preferences (Downs 1957).

[94] To assume exogeneity is not unproblematic. As an example, it can be discussed whether it is the proportional formula itself that tends to create more fragmented party systems or do divided societies prefer proportional rather than more majoritarian systems (Johnson 2002; Norris 2004).

[95] In this respect Franklin makes a division between instrumental motivation, resources and mobilization instead of facilitative and motivational factors. Among the factors behind instrumental motivation we have contextual explanations such as the degree of proportionality in the electoral system. Resources are referred to as mainly being individual characteristics

173

facilitated by a number of individual characteristics such as party identification, education, age and sex (Campbell, *et al.* 1960; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004). We also know that voters are affected by various party characteristics such as party size (van der Eijk, Franklin, and van der Brug 1999), party age (van der Brug, Franklin, Popescu, and Toka 2008) and ideological affiliation (Snyder 2002).

Other studies have shown that different electoral systems affect both parties and the party systems (Duverger 1954; Lijphart 1994b; Rae 1967; Sartori 1976) but they may also result in different motivations for voters (Gordon and Segura 1997; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Holmberg 2006). For example, proportional systems are known for producing multiparty systems with cohesive ideologically committed parties and tend to motivate prospective voting according to the RPM. Majority systems on the other hand, are known to produce more stable two-party systems where votes tend to be retrospectively based according to the accountability model (Granberg and Holmberg 1988). Aside of Granberg and Holmberg's pioneering work, studies on how different contextual factors may affect individual voters are rare. Studies that have investigated the effect of electoral systems on individual voters have mostly focused on effects on electoral turn out (Bingham Powell 1986; van der Eijk, Franklin, and al. 1996), satisfaction with the democratic system (Farrell and McAllister 2006; Norris 2004) or party choice (van der Eijk, Franklin, and van der Brug 1999). Less is known about the effect of different contextual factors on voters' perceptions of party positions.

Different institutional or contextual factors can be expected to have motivational or/and facilitative effects on the perceptions of individual voters. Motivational factors will thus induce voters to obtain information from certain directions about the political parties while a facilitative factor will simplify this process. Both motivational and facilitative factors can then be expected to affect the voters' perceptions of the party positions in form of decreasing perceptual deviations.

This section will concentrate on contextual factors that are expected to have either motivational or facilitative consequences for perceptual deviation among voters. Hypothetically, we believe that factors derived from different organizational levels such as systems, parties and individuals will have a direct impact on voters' perceptual deviation and further, that the

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such as education or age. Mobilization in turn is referred to as factors related to the electoral campaign such as saliency of different issues etc. (Franklin 1996). The data on which the present study is based unfortunately does not allow us to include any variables relating to mobilization, which is why only facilitative and motivational factors will be used. Facilitative factors thus refer to the same category of variables as does the term resources.

174

effect of the individually related factors might be interacting with the political context.

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical relationship between these three classes of independent variables and their expected impact on PD.

**Figure 1.** The theoretical relationship between individual, party and system-related factors and voters' perceptual deviation.
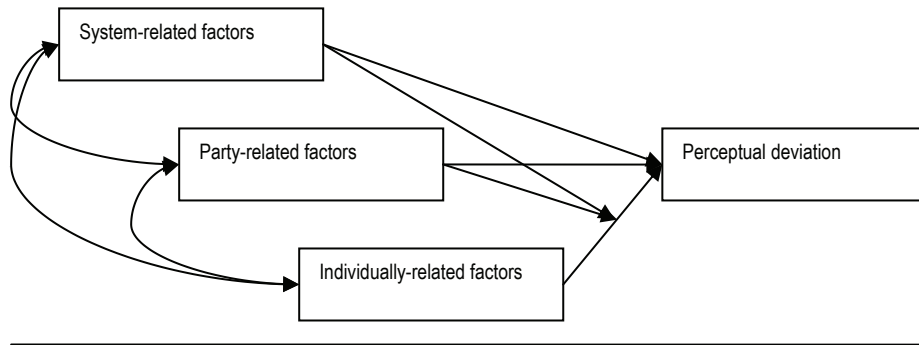
## The institutional context - electoral systems and party systems

A common notion within the literature is that the adoption of either pro-portional- or more majoritarian formulas creates different sets of incentives that structures rational vote-seeking politicians to either emphasize pro-grammatic or particularistic benefits during the election campaigns (Farrell 1997; Norris 2004). The idea is that the degree of proportionality or the size of voting districts affects the degree of national competitiveness, which often has dramatic consequences for how parties organize. Large propor-tional districts tend to correlate with more centralized party organization, which in turn should induce more programmatically orientated parties (Bingham Powell 1986; Farrell 1996). In this context, one can talk about the deployment of bridging or bonding strategies whereby party leaders and candidates respectively appeal to either a majority of the voters by downplaying ideological differences or specific groups of voters by empha-sizing ideological differences and positions (Norris 2004).

Proportional systems with a strong focus on cohesive parties thus may correspond better with representation according to the RPM, where voters vote prospectively for parties according to their policy preferences. More majoritarian systems on the other hand, may contribute to greater strains of government accountability and retrospective voting as these systems tend to emphasize single candidates and strong governments (Holmberg 2006; Sartori 1997). Chin and Taylor-Robinson (2004) have investigated the ef-fect of electoral rules on voting behavior and showed that voters indeed are sensitive to different incentive structures produced by differences in the electoral systems. The results from an experimental study showed that, de-pending on the electoral rules, respondents sought different kinds of infor-mation. In single member districts, respondents tended to acquire informa-tion about candidates rather than parties while the opposite was true for proportional systems (Chin and Taylor-Robinson 2004). This leads to the expectation that the degree of perceptual deviation among voters when placing parties on an ideological left-right scale, will be lower among voters in more proportional political systems since there we can expect a greater focus on political parties and ideologies (among both voters and politi-cians).

According to Jacques Thomassen (1999), the effectiveness of the respon-sible party model is also dependent on the dimensionality within a political system. Unidimensional belief systems are desired characteristics of repre-sentative democracies since political representation may be difficult to ob-tain if idiosyncratic sets of policy preferences motivate the decisions of vot-ers. A simple and unidimensional political system however, is not sufficient

by itself. According to Thomassen, it also needs to resemble a left-right dimension. Ideology here constitutes a channel of communication between citizens and their elected representatives, where the left-right positions of parties work as efficient cognitive cues for voters in search of information (see also Dahlberg and Oscarsson 2006).

Political parties are among the key carriers of continuity, values and ideologies in a representative system (Dalton 1985; Hoffman 2005; Katz and Mair 1995). Political parties, rather than single candidates, are also the main actors in most modern representative systems (Dalton 1985; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Katz and Mair 1995). If voters are to be represented satisfactorily, a 'breadth of alternatives' is also an important aspect. It has for example been argued that an increase in the number of parties leads to a more diverse representation of values (John M. Carey quoted from Hoffman 2005), minority groups (Lijphart 1999) and women (Norris 2004). Predictably, a situation of increased political options should increase the motivation of voters to seek information about political parties. A high degree of party system fragmentation should also encourage the parties to differentiate themselves as much as possible from the competitors in an attempt to mobilize their electoral support (Downs 1957). The effective number of competing parties thus may be an important causal force behind the deviations in voters' perceptions and thereby also a prerequisite for effective representation. A greater diversity of choices, can thus be expected to elicit a greater motivation from voters and at the same time, it will place pressure on the parties to profile themselves more clearly in terms of ideology. However, if the number of parties becomes so high that no single party is likely to attain a majority of the votes and if a large number of smaller parties make up the legislature, then the voters may feel anyhow that they are unrepresented (Hoffman 2005); more alternatives then will simply raise the information cost. Circumstantially, less can be more while more can be too much (see Downs 1957 for a further discussion). Hypothetically, the number of parties will have an effect on perceptual deviation among voters, but empirically it remains a question as to exactly how. One theoretical answer is that fewer parties facilitate whilst more of them serve to motivate.

Earlier studies have shown that intense competition by parties for the 'same' voters, will affect voters' desire to participate (Franklin, van der Eijk, and Oppenhuis 1996). It is expected that party leaders will face incentives to mobilize their voters in situations where voters are likely to distribute support among a variety of parties. This in turn can be expected to both motivate voters and to facilitate their acquiring political information. Looking at leadership, a high degree of competition will influence leading politicians to lean towards bonding ('us from them') strategies. In this respect ideological undertones and statements might be of great importance

177

in an attempt to motivate voters to go to the polls and support their party. The use of bonding strategies thus may imply that voters become more affectively linked to the political parties, which will increase the assimilation and contrast effects, and thereby the PD as well. However, from a voter perspective a high degree of competition among parties may also work to facilitate a decrease in voters' perceptual deviation. If a high degree of party competition means that the parties are trying to position themselves as clearly as possible from their competitors, then voters may find it easier to perceive accurately the positions of parties within these contexts.

## *The party related context*

Another criteria asserted by the RPM is that the parties should maintain divergent policy positions in order to give meaningful electoral choices to the voters. For example, the directional theory of voting assumes that voters mostly are unable to perceive slight differences in the positions held by the parties on different issues. It is expected that parties with well separated views or holding an extreme position in an issue dimension will hold an advantage over parties with conformist and/or centrist positions because they can convey their messages more persistently and with a high visibility (Gilljam 1997; Macdonald, Listhaug, and Rabinowitz 1991; Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989; Westholm 1997). As such, there is a better chance of the voters correctly apprehending the party's policy position.

Prior research established that the electoral size of a party may be a decisive factor in settling a voter's choice party (Cox 1997; Holmberg 2004; van der Eijk, Franklin, and van der Brug 1999). It has also been suggested that larger parties present different affective features, often adopting a more "catch-all" or vague ideological posture (Dittrich 1983; Kirchheimer 1990). If bigger parties tend be less distinctive in their ideological positions, a party's electoral size can be expected to have implications for the clarity of voters' perceptions.

We also know that parties are more or less attached to different ideological dimensions (Budge 1994; Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987). Since the present article focuses upon the left-right dimension it may be a good idea to include a variable for different party families in the analysis, so that parties or countries that are less attached to this dimension not are discriminated against. It is reasonable that left-right proximity voting would be promoted in systems where many of the parties have ideologies that are directly connected to the left-right dimension. Parties of those sort often have brand names such as 'social democrat', 'liberal' or 'conservative' that unambiguously signal their position on the continuum (Budge *et al.* 2001). It has been demonstrated that these labels sometimes works as cues for vot-

ers when acquiring information about policies or left-right positions (Snyder 2002; Zechmeister 2006) and ideological affiliation thus may guide the voters, thereby promoting a lower PD.

Considering the role of left-right ideology as a guide, one might object that the content of dimension has become more heterogeneous during the last decades in, at least, several West European countries (Knutsen 1995).[96] With greater complexity, it cannot be taken for granted that newer parties, perhaps less attached to the traditional left-right dimension, are being correctly characterized by voters in terms of the left-right scale. The survival of the left-right dimension over the centuries however, is due to its strength as an overarching 'super issue', capable of incorporating many dimensions of political conflict (Holmberg 2009; Knutsen 1995; Thomassen 1999; van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005). As noted, knowledge about a party's left-right position can be used as a pointer to the party's stances on other issues as well. Of course, a party's position on a specific issue could inform inversely about the position on the left-right dimension but the left-right schema works best as a complexity reducing mechanism for understanding and interpreting different political matters.

The left-right grammar has an important orientation function for individuals and a communicative function for the political system overall (Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Knutsen 1995). Since the substantial content of the left-right dimension is set in steadily development, newer parties may not be discriminated as such. However, it is still reasonable to expect that voters in general, may find it easier to place parties on a left-right scale where the brand names reveal their positions on the same scale.

Another factor that may assist voters' decision making is the age of a party since logically it will be easier to know the position of a long established party due to the greater exposure time. Newer parties also are more likely to repeatedly adjust or change their policies and ideological profiles as they attempt to carve a political niche. Such frequent changes in policies, identity and location will likely be somewhat confusing for voters (Brug 2008). Party age can, hence, be thought of as a proxy for stability of ideological positions.

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[96] Sweden is in this aspect an exception where the content of the left-right dimension in all essentials not have changed since the mid 70's and onwards (Oscarsson 2008).

## Theoretical summary and hypotheses

The theoretical considerations allow the derivation of a total of 13 variables relating to the right hand-side of the equation (summarized in table 1). As mentioned, these variables - expected to influence the perceptions among individual voters - can be divided into the two broad and partially overlapping classes of facilitative- and motivational factors, in turn split into contextual and individual factors.

**Table 1.** Motivational and facilitative contextual factors.

| | Motivational factors | Facilitative factors | Affective factors |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Contextual factors** | | | |
| *System related factors* | | | |
| | Degree of proportionality (Effective number of parties) | Left-right dimensionality (Effective number of parties) | |
| | (Competition) | (Competition) | |
| *Party related factors* | | | |
| | | Ideological party family | |
| | | Party age | |
| | | Divergence | |
| | | Party size | |
| **Individual characsteristics** | | | |
| *Individually related factors* | | | |
| | | Education | Party sympathy |
| | | Age | Ideological distance |
| *Control* | | Gender | |

*Comment:* Variables within parentheses are to some extent overlapping and cannot fully be regarded as being either facilitative or motivational.

Starting with the system related variables, the degree of proportionality and the effective number of parties are two variables that have a motivational impact on voters when acquiring information. Hypothetically, proportionality affects which kind of information that is acquired (information about parties or candidates) and the sense of 'wasted votes' while the number of parties affects the sense of 'inclusiveness' among voters. Left-right dimensionality and the degree of competition on the other hand, are expected to have a facilitative effect on voters. The least common denominator in this respect is 'simplicity' in the party space. It will be easier for voters to perceive the parties' policy positions in a highly competitive, strongly unidimensional left-right oriented party system. However, these categories overlap to some extent and the degree of competition within a system can also

be a motivational factor because, from a voter perspective, it may indicate the degree of excitement in an election, which is an aspect that has been proven to motivate voters to go to the polls (Holmberg 2004) and it will also influence leading politicians towards bonding strategies.

Considering the variables related to the political parties, it can be expected that voters will find it easier to perceive the position of an old and established party of small or medium electoral size and which present divergent policy positions and have a brand name that signals a position on the left-right continuum. All these four variables are thus more facilitative rather than motivational in effect on voters' perceptions. It might be objected that party size could also be a motivational factor since size has a proven role in tactical/instrumental voting (Thomassen 1999). However, whilst this may be true when it comes to party choice, it does not necessarily need to have anything to do with perceptions in general and voting for 'the winner' is not the same as adequately perceiving a party's position.

The individually related variables of age and education are viewed as having a facilitative effect since education often means more political knowledge.[97]  The same can be said about age, since older voters often have higher degrees of political knowledge or rather, are more familiar with the political system. Whether factors such as party sympathy and the ideological distance between a voter's self-placement and the placement of parties on the left-right continuum, should be considered facilitative or motivational in character however, is not clear-cut. Since these two components are best described as cognitive factors that are either clearly motivational or facilitative, I prefer to label them as affective factors that may influence a voter's perception of the parties' policy positions, which in turn may affect perceptual deviations.

To recapitulate, the goals of the study are twofold:

1) Research has shown that most individually related variables do have an effect on voters' perceptions in general but it is not well understood how or to what extent different contextually related variables affect the perceptions among individual. The aim here is to investigate the effect of contextually related variables on perceptual deviations and to examine which factors or groups of factors related to either individuals, parties or the electoral/political systems exert the greatest influence on voters' perceptual deviation. We also want to know which mechanisms are mainly at hand: do the greatest effects emerge from the facilitative or from the motivationally

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[97] It can be questioned whether education is the actual source of political knowledge, however, education is one of few voter characteristics that can be measured and used for country comparative studies, which is why education often functions as a proxy for different levels of political sophistication.

related variables?

2) The effect of party sympathy and the distance between a voter's ideological self-placement and the placement of the parties are two factors that can be described best as affective, (and normatively less attractive), features that research has shown to have direct negative effect on voters' perceptual accuracy and agreement. If the existence of adequate and common perceptions of parties' policy positions by the voters is a part of the normative ideal of representative democracy, then it might be interesting to pay further attention to the variables on the individual level that might exert a negative impact on voters' PD. A question then is to what extent the context, *i.e.* characteristics related to the parties or the systems and interactions with it, actually affect individual behavior? Can different contextually related factors explain differences among voters regarding the tendency to yield into wishful thinking?

We can frame a number of hypotheses in examining these questions. Firstly, according to Norris (2004), politicians tend to use bonding or bridging strategies depending on the institutional structure. If use of bonding strategies implies that politicians are more ideologically committed and polarized in image, this might also mean that voters will be more motivated and in turn, more affectively related to the political parties. The latter may then increase the effect of the ideological distance and party sympathy variables on voters' PD. Thus, the tendency to wishful thinking can hypothetically, be intensified as a direct consequence of the institutional settings.

Secondly, an alternative hypothesis that follows Holmberg's argument, is that wishful thinking appears when voters are looking for objects, *i.e.* parties that are a bit fuzzy and far away (Holmberg 1999). Accordingly, facilitative contextual factors may decrease the effect of the affectively related variables ideological distance and party sympathy on voters' PD. Consequently, a clear and simple party space should decrease the tendency to wishful thinking.

The main difference between these two hypotheses is the direction of the interaction terms between ideological distance and party sympathy and any of the facilitative or motivational related context variables. An increasing effect supports the motivational hypothesis and a decreasing effect supports the simplicity/facilitative hypothesis. These hypotheses, thus, are different sides of the same coin.

In conclusion:

a) Motivational contextual factors will increase the effect of the affectively related variables on PD through bonding and bridging.

b) Facilitative contextual factors will decrease the effect of the affectively related variables on PD by 'clearing the mist'.

## Empirical operationalizations

The central variable in this study, perceptual deviation, (PD) is based on a well known question where the respondents were asked to place the parties on an eleven-point left-right scale reaching from 0-10. The CSES-question read: "*In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place party A on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?*"[98] The variable is operationalized as the absolute deviation between an individual's placements of the parties and the median position of the parties on the left-right scale. In some sense one could consider this variable as an individual level measure of the degree of accuracy among voters. However, accuracy implies some kind of objective measure of the parties' 'true' policy positions, which as mentioned seldom is available in comparative research. Even though earlier studies have shown that the median or the mean position among voters mostly correctly describes the parties 'true' positions (Granberg 1993; Page 1978; van der Brug 1997; 1998; 1999b; 2001), it cannot be asserted that the voters' collective perceptions always are correct. Thus, the dependent variable is defined here as the perceptual deviation between individuals' placement of the parties and the median placement of the parties made by all voters as a collective. Hence, large deviations are bad whilst small deviations are good for effective representation.

*Operationalizations of individually related variables*
*Party sympathy* is a variable ranging from 0 to 10 based on a question about party evaluation among voters. The question read: "*I'd like to know what you think about each of our political parties. After I read the name of a political party, please rate it on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that party and 10 means that you strongly like that party*".
*Ideological distance* is coded as the absolute deviation between an individual's placement of parties on an eleven point left-right scale in each country and the individual's self-placement on the same scale. *Age* is coded as one of 7 intervals such as: (-22, 23-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-70, 71-) see Holmberg and Oscarsson (2004) for a similar categorization. *Gender* is coded as a dummy where 0 is women and 1 is indicating men. *Education* is based on the original variable in the CSES-modules and contains of eight categories which are labeled as: 1 "none", 2 "incomplete primary", 3

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[98] In the Netherlands, a ten-point scale 1-10 was used instead of an eleven-point scale for the elections of 2002 and 2003.

"primary completed", 4 "incomplete secondary", 5 "secondary completed", 6 "post-secondary", 7 "university undergrad incomplete", 8 "university undergrad - completed".

*Operationalizations of party related variables*
*Ideological party family* enter as a dummy variable in the model where communist, socialist, social democratic, left, liberal and right liberal, and conservative parties, which all are party families that reasonably belongs to the traditional left-right distinction (Ware 1996), have been coded as one and all other party families as zero.[99] In order to compare the effect of older versus newer parties the variable *party age* is coded as a dummy. The division is based on the percentile values where 0 indicates all parties up to the 25:th percentile, covering parties of 0 to 17 years of age, while all other parties are coded as 1.[100] The *size of a party* is simply the vote shares (percentages) for each party. Turning to *divergence* this variable has been measured as the distances to all other parties, weighted by the size of each of the other parties (in proportions of votes). The divergence measure can more formally be expressed as:

$$d_i = \frac{\sum_{j \neq i} s_j \left| p_i - p_j \right|}{\sum_{j \neq i} s_j}$$

where $p_i$ is the left-right position of party $i$, based on the interpolated median, $p_j$ the corresponding measure for party $j$, and $s_j$ the vote-share of party $j$. When weighting the distances in this way, one does not have to divide by the number of parties because when weighting them by the proportion of votes, it is already a weighted average. One should, however, correct for the fact that the total size of the other parties differs across par-

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[99] The party families, as defined by the collaborators of the CSES project, are: 01 Ecology Parties, 02 Communist Parties, 03 Socialist Parties, 04 Social Democratic Parties, 05 Left Liberal parties, 06 Liberal Parties, 07 Right Liberal Parties, 08 Christian Democratic Parties, 09 Conservative Parties, 10 National Parties, 11 Agrarian Parties, 12 Ethnic Parties, 13 Regional Parties, 14 Religious Parties, 15 Independent Parties and 16 Other.
[100] The reason for recoding this variable into a dummy-variable is that we are mainly interested in comparing the differences between newer versus older parties. At the same time as one cannot expect the relationship between party age and PD to be linear, *i.e.* that PD will be decreasing for every step of party age since there, reasonably, not are any major differences between a party established in 1917 and a party established in 1882.

ties and countries.

*Operationalizations of system related variables*
A multiple unidimensional unfolding procedure has been conducted in order to obtain a measure for the degree of unidimensionality. The unfolding procedure tries all possible orderings of the parties and selects the unfolding model that best fits the data.[101] The measure of fit for the unfolding model, the coefficient of scalability (Loevinger's H), varies from 0 to 1 and tells us to what extent voters' preference orderings of parties are in agreement with a perfect unfolding model. For any given set of party preferences, there is often more than one plausible solution to the unidimensional unfolding problem. The guiding principle in this iterative search is that each unfolding scale should, if possible, include all main parties. The revealed unidimensional scale should hence be common to as a large proportion of voters as possible. Plausible models where all the large parties are included have thus been selected over models with better fit where any of the relevant parties are left out. For the unfolding analysis an evaluative measure has been used where the respondents were asked to rate the parties in terms of "*like-dislike party a-i*" which is an eleven degree scale, varying from 0-10.

However, The unfolding procedure itself does not tell anything about the content of the dimension as it only produces an ordering of parties along a dimension (a so called qualitative j-scale), *i.e.* the ordering that fit best to the original like-dislike data. One way to solve this problem is to validate the ordering of the parties in the unfolded j-scale with external data, such as the respondents' mean placements of the parties along a left-right scale. The higher correlation between the j-scale ordering of parties and an order based on the parties mean left-right positions, the higher is the probability that left-right ideology actually is the latent principle that produced the structure of political preferences in the first place. For this purpose Spearman's rank correlation coefficient has been used (Spearman's Rho). A simple measure on the degree of *left-right unidimensionality* within a polity has then been created by multiplying Loevingers's H coefficients with the Spearman's rank correlation coefficients.

In an attempt to limit the empirical model a measure for *disproportionality* will be used as a summarized measure on the differences between different electoral systems. The district magnitude, the electoral threshold, the

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[101] An H coefficient smaller than .30 indicates that the structure in the data is insufficient for the justification of using individual items as indicators of a single latent dimension (van Schuur and Post 1990). Mudfold is distributed by ProGAMMA, P.O. Box 841, 9700 AV Groeningen, The Netherlands.

assembly size and the electoral formula do all influences the degree of pro-portionality within a political system. Proportionality is higher in large dis-tricts with low thresholds and large assemblies using the Hare formula and together, these four factors explain about two thirds of the variance in pro-portionality (Lijphart 1994a). The degree of proportionality, or rather dis-proportionality, in a political system is hence calculated according to Gal-lagher's least-square index (Gallagher 1991) such as:

$$LSq = \sqrt{(\tfrac{1}{2}\sum_{i=1}^{n} v_i - s_i)^2}$$

Where $v$ is the vote-share and $s$ is the seat-share for party$_i$ .[102]

The number of parties is measured as *the effective number of parliamen-tary parties* for each country, calculated by the vote-shares using the index of Laakso and Taagepera, also known as Herfindahl's index of concentra-tion (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) as that:

$$H = \sum_{i=1}^{n} p_i^2$$

where $p_i$ is the population proportion for group $i$ of votes and where $1/H$ then is the effective number of parties.

*Competition* is an additive index based on the questions "*like-dislike party a-i*". If a voter has given a party a score of 6 or higher the variable is coded as 1 and 0 otherwise. The variables are then added together into one single variable with a maximum value of 9 in the case where a voter prefers all parties. The variable is supposed to be a proxy for the degree of com-petitiveness within a political system, *i.e.* the degree of how much parties must compete for the same votes. If a voter likes several parties it can be expected that s/he also may consider voting for some of these parties.

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[102] The reason for using this method instead of the index of Rae or Loosemore and Haneby is that while the former tend to understate the disproportionality in systems with a large amount of small parties the latter tend to exaggerate the disporportionality in such systems. Gallagher's index weights the deviations by their own values, which makes it registering a few large deviations more strongly than several small changes. In this sense Gallagher's index takes the middle course between Rae and Loosemore and Haneby (Anckar 2002; Lijphart 1994b).

## Data and research design

The analysis is, as mentioned, based on data from Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) module 1 and 2, which were collected in 1996-2001 and 2001-2004 respectively, in post election surveys in 32 countries. The dataset is covering totally 63 elections with 396 political parties and 56 067 respondents represented (for more information, see appendix I).[103] Countries where relevant data on left-right positions is missing has, for obvious reasons, been excluded from the analysis. All "don't know" answers have been coded as missing since we do not have enough information to treat them as an incorrect answer. Also countries that are not reckoned to be free according to the Freedom House index, such as Russia, Ukraine and Hong-Kong, have been left out.[104] In total 29 unique countries in 48 elections are included in this study.

The most straight forward way to study the impact of different contextually related variables on voters' perceptual deviations is to do single country comparisons. However, since we are interested in the effect of various contextual features on perceptual deviation the data has to be pooled into one single data set. An OLS-regression with individual voters as the unit of analysis will thus not make it possible to investigate the effect of different party characteristics on voters' perceptual deviations. Therefore a procedure of 'stacking' the data set (see Franklin, van der Eijk, and Oppenhuis 1996) has been performed. The data has thereby been converted into a set with a new unit of analyses that is party-voter dyads, where it in each polity will be as many party-voter dyads as there are respondents times the number of parties.

However, as we are dealing with variables on different levels (*i.e.* contextual variables related to electoral systems/party systems and characteristics of different parties versus voter characteristics), one needs to regard the contextual dependency. In country comparative studies on individual voters the voters are clustered within countries and individuals from the same country do often share common experiences, which make them more similar compared to voters from other countries.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in various multilevel methods among political scientists since multilevel models capture this kind of country variation by reparameterizing the intercepts and the coefficients

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[103] The data can be received from CSES Secretariat, www.cses.org, Centre for Political Studies. Institute for Social Research. The University of Michigan. The data can also be downloaded from: www.umich.edu/~cses.

[104] 'Freedom in the world 2006. 'Selected data from freedom house's annual global survey of political rights and civil liberties'. www.freedomhouse.org.

of ordinary regression models into country level equations. Hence, multi-level models allow us to test how well models explain not only variation among individuals as in ordinary regression but also country differences, both in the dependent variables and in the effects of individual-level variables. (Hox 2002; Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2005; Snijders 1999).

Nevertheless, multilevel models are far from the final solution to the problems connected to nested data structures. The main problem with most statistical multilevel models is that they are based on the assumption that data on all levels are drawn from a successive sampling from each level of a hierarchical population (Hox 2002; Kreft and De Leeuw 1998). This criterion is seldom met in comparative political science. However, with the kind of data used in this study, the 'pros' exceeds the 'cons' for using a multi-level regression model instead of the more traditional OLS regression model. The main argument is that ordinary regressions tend to give biased estimates and underestimated standard errors for clustered data at the individual level in situations where the 'intra-class correlation' is positive (*i.e.* where cases from a specific context are more similar to each other than to cases from other contexts). Ordinary regression assumes that all cases from one context are unique and independent, which they in reality seldom are. Especially not in the case with 'stacked' data matrixes where the observations not only are 'similar' but also 'duplicates' of each other. This leads to an underestimation of standard errors due to an overestimation of the extent of independent information contained in the data. Multilevel models, on the other hand, incorporates contextual dependencies into its very design and will therefore provide more accurate coefficients, standard errors and significance tests (Hox 2002; Snijders 1999). By controlling for the election waves (*i.e.* repeated cross section observations for some countries) we neither need to consider the fact that the design of the CSES study implies that some countries are represented up to three times while other countries only are represented once.[105]

A common procedure in comparative studies of voters in different countries is to let the intercept varies between countries, a so called random intercept model with fixed coefficients. Thereby the dependency between countries is taken into account. However, a stacked data set such as in this study, does imply that there also is a dependency among specific individu-

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[105] Since the analyses sets out to investigate the impact of contextually related factors on voters' perceptual deviations such a design would, without the inclusion of any weights or by not controlling for the election waves, in practice implies that the computer treats them as individual and unique country observations. This in turn may result in an overestimation of the significance of the effects of the system related variables, especially since most countries that do appear several times in the data are West European countries with proportional multiparty systems.

als since they appear as many times as there are parties in each country. I argue that this form of dependency among specific individuals is a more severe violation of the statistical assumptions than the contextual dependency. For this reason the intercepts are set to vary both among individuals and countries.

The analyses in this article is hence made as three-level models with party-voter dyads at the first level, individual voters at the second level while the system related variables are being treated as level three variables. An objection against this design could be that the variables theoretically are referred to as being located at four different levels (systems, parties, voters and voter/party dyads) and that the empirical models therefore should be designed accordingly. The system related variables are (practically) constants in each country while the party related variables are varying to some extent. However, individuals are nested with countries and in this data also with each other due to the stacked data matrix (*i.e.* each voter appears as many times as there are parties in each country). To also assume that they are nested with parties is, however, a more doubtful assumption that does not resembles the classical example of multilevel data-structures such as students nested with classes, nested with schools, nested in regions etc. For this reason, only the within individuals and within country similarities are taken into consideration.


## Results

The first column in table 2 shows the bivariate effect of each variable on voters' perceptual deviation (PD) followed by seven different regression models. The 1:st regression model reveals the effect of the individually related variables on voters' perceptual deviation. The 2:nd model includes the party related variables showing the effect of the individually related variables under control for the party related variables. The 3:rd model shows the effect of the individually related and system related variables on PD. The 4:th model only contains the effect of the party related variables while the 5:th model shows the effect of both party- and system related variables on voters' PD. The 6:th model shows the independent effect of the system related variables on PD while the last and 7:th model is the full model where all variables from all levels are included.

By comparing the effects for different groups of variables that also are referring to different levels with each other, as in these seven models, we will not only have the opportunity to compare the effects of different variables and sets of variables on PD, but we will also have the opportunity to compare the amount of explained variance between the models. Thereby we can investigate which of these groups of variables that explains most of the variance in PD.

**Tabel 2.** Seven multilevel regression models of the effect of individually- party- and system related factors on perceptual deviations among individual voters (three levels; ML estimation).

| Perceptual deviation (ln) | Bivariate | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 | Model 6 | Model 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Fixed part** | | | | | | | | |
| *Individually related factors* | | | | | | | | |
| Party sympathy | .023 | | | | | | | .001 |
| Ideological distance | .057 | .056*** | .060*** | .056*** | | | | .061*** |
| Age | .013 | .000 | -.001 | -.001 | | | | -.001 |
| Gender | -.080 | -.076*** | -.075*** | -.076*** | | | | -.075*** |
| Education | -.058 | -.058*** | -.058*** | -.058*** | | | | -.058*** |
| *Party related factors* | | | | | | | | |
| Party age | .013 | | .007 | | .013 | .012 | | .007 |
| Ideological family | -.038 | | -.037*** | | -.036*** | -.037*** | | -.038*** |
| Vote share | .001 | | .012*** | | .007*** | .007*** | | .012*** |
| Divergence | -.027 | | -.288*** | | -.198*** | -.198*** | | -.288*** |
| *System related factors* | | | | | | | | |
| Left-right unidimensionality | -.009 | | | -.010 | | -.011 | -.012 | -.009 |
| Disproportionality | .012 | | | .009 | | .012 | .011 | .010 |
| Effective # of parties | .005 | | | .023 | | .022 | .024 | .021 |
| Competition | -.011 | | | -.008** | | -.013*** | -.013*** | -.006* |
| *Control variables* | | | | | | | | |
| Election=2 | -.036 | -.029 | -.009 | -.007 | -.022 | .005 | -.008 | .012 |
| Election=3 | .290 | .240 | .298 | .279 | .334 | .374* | .335 | .332 |
| Constant | +.007 | .200*** | .257*** | .135 | .083 | .026 | -.05 | .185 |

**Random part**

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Std. dev. Intercept, lev. 3 | +.249*** | .250*** | .237*** | .242*** | .244*** | .232*** | .236*** | .228*** |
| Std. dev. Intercept, lev. 2 | +.392*** | .361*** | .360*** | .361*** | .392*** | .392*** | .392*** | .361*** |
| Std. dev. Residual, lev. 1 | +1.050*** | 1.045*** | 1.043*** | 1.046*** | 1.048*** | 1.048*** | 1.050*** | 1.043*** |
| log likelihood | - | -309858.2 | -309321.7 | -309851.9 | -311659.1 | -311645.2 | -311901.3 | -309317.3 |
| N: (countries) | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 |
| N: (individuals) | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 |
| N: (voter/party dyads) | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 |

*Comment:* * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001. In total 29 unique countries in 48 elections from 1996-2004 are represented in the data. Data comes from the CSES module 1 and 2 collected between 1996-2003. + shows the intercept and the intercept standard deviations for the base-models where no independent variables are included in the models. Level 3 in the random part refers to the country units, level 2 to individuals and level 1 to voter-party dyads. Since some countries are represented in up to three elections in the data set, dummy variables for the election waves has been included as controls. The data is unweighted.

The first model shows that the distance between a voter's self-placement and the position of the parties (ideological distance) has a strong positive and significant effect on voters' perceptual deviations (.056***), just as expected from Granberg's (1993) study. Among the significant negative effects we find gender (-.076***) and education (-.058***), which means that more educated male voters tend to deviate less from the median position compared to less educated female voters.[106] The results from the 1:st model concerning the individually related variables do not change much in the 2:nd model that includes the party characteristics. The electoral size of a party has the greatest positive impact on PD (.012***) among the party related variables, which means greater perceptual deviations in the case of bigger parties. A tendency for voters to struggle to apprehend the positions of bigger parties is well in line with the expectations from the 'catch-all' party theory (Kirchheimer 1990). We find divergence in party positions (-.288***) and ideological family belonging (-.037***) among the factors that are negatively related to PD. Divergent policy positions among the parties seems to facilitate impact on voters' perceptions of the parties' policy positions. The significant impact of a party's ideological family membership indicates that voters seem to find it easier to perceive the positions of parties that belong to party families that are more closely attached to the left-right dimension. It was expected theoretically that parties that are closely attached to the left-right dimension would have brand names that signal their position on the continuum (Budge *et al*. 2001), and that these labels may work as cues for voters when acquiring information about parties' left-right positions (Snyder 2002; Zechmeister 2006).

Turning to the 3:rd model where the system related variables also are included, the effect of the individually related variables are considerably robust. Among the system related variables only one yields a significant effect on voters' perceptual deviation, namely the degree of competition within a party system, which seems to have a negative effect on voters' PD (-.008***). In the 4:th model, where only the party related characteristics are included, the effects are highly similar to those in the 2:nd model where the individually related variables also were included together with the party related variables. The main difference is that the effects of party size and of divergence in a party's left-right position are decreasing (from .012*** to .007**) and (from .288*** to .198**) respectively, the effect of ideological family is considerably robust. In the 5:th model that investigated the impact

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[106] An alternative variable for age (age*age) has also been tested in all the models in case of any curve-linear relationships between age and PD but without any significant effect.

of the party related variables are under control for the system related variables and vice versa, the effect of party size, ideological family and divergence is almost identical with that in the former model. The effects are also highly similar among the system related factors compared to the effects in the 3:rd model. In the 6:th model where only the system related variables are included the results resemble the effects that were found in the 3:rd model, except for a slight increase in the effect of competition. It would seems that it is the degree of competition within a system that has the greatest significant impact on voters' PD (-.013***).

All variables from all levels are included in the regression in the final model. In general, the results from the earlier models are robust and with few exceptions, the same variables from all groups and levels still have a significant effect on PD. The effect of the individually related variables, under control for party and system related variables, are almost the same through all four models. The distance between a voter's self-placement and the position of the parties has the strongest positive effect on voters' PD (.061***).[107] Among the negative effects on voters' PD, gender and education are still significant with coefficients of (-.075***) and (-.058***), almost the same as in the 1:st model.[108] Among the party related variables, the effects are effectively the same when comparing the 4:th where only the party related variables were included, and preceding models. In the final and full model, the effect of party size and divergence in a party's left-right position is (.012***) and (-.288***) respectively and ideological family is

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[107] In table 2, the variable of ideological distance is operationalized as the perceived distance between a voter and each party. The 7:th model was, however, also run with a different operationalization of ideological distance such as the actual distance, which is the distance between a voter and the parties' median positions. In the model the effect of the actual distance (-.013***) was somewhat lower than the perceived distance (-.066***), which is an interesting result in it self which supports Granbergs findings on assimilation and contrast effects (Granberg 1993).

[108] It has in earlier research been suggested that people who are strong partisans tend to spread the parties more widely than non-partisans in their placements of the parties (Granberg 1993). A variable for party identification has therefore been included in all models but it did not have a significant impact on PD and it did not affect the other variables included in the models as well, why it was excluded from the analysis. The main theoretical reason for not including it from the very beginning is that I find the concept of party identification to be a bit dubious. What is it in identification that affects a voter's placement of parties? Most likely a party identified voter likes the party he/she identify with more than other parties and he/she is probably ideologically more close to that party as well. The fact that party identification not has any impact on the models does also support this argument. It should also be mentioned that sector employment also has been included in the models but with similar results as party identification.

(-.038\*\*\*). Regarding the system related variables the results are also considerably robust. The degree of competition within a system still has a significant impact on voters' PD (-.006\*), but is somewhat lower compared to the effect of competition in the other three models where the system related variables were included.[109]

   In conclusion, the effect of the significant individually related variables (ideological distance, gender and education) is robust in all four models. The effect of the party related variables (party size, ideological family and divergence) is also relatively stable in all the models as is the effect of the system related variables, where the degree of competition also yields a highly similar result in all four models.[110] Clearly, the distance between a voter's self-placement and the position of the parties together with the parties' electoral size tends to generate greater perceptual deviations among voters. On the other hand, the perceptual deviations tend to be lower among highly educated men and for parties belonging to left-right related party families as well as for divergent policy positions in competitive party systems.

### Which factors have the greatest impact on voters' perceptual deviations?

The effects cannot yet be compared with each other since the variables are measured at different scales, something that makes the interpretation of the substantial effects of different variables on PD more difficult. A simple procedure to mitigate this problem is to compare the effect in the dependent variable caused by a certain amount of change in the independent variables.

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[109] In order to control for whether the effect of too many effective number of parties may have a negative impact on PD, a dummy-variable was included in all the models. The variable was coded as 0 if the number of parties goes from < 3.73 and 1 if the number of parties goes from 3.73 <. The number 3.73 is the mean effective number of parties among the countries. However, the variable only had a small insignificant effect and it did not improve the model as such, why it was excluded from the analysis.

[110] According to Franklin *et al.* different compositions of the electorates may also affect the behavior among voters. The idea is that people tend to interact with their social context, *i.e.* the character of the society they live in, so that individuals in certain contexts are more alike than individuals from other contexts. These factors are mainly aggregated versions of different individual level variables such as education and age (Franklin, van der Eijk, and Oppenhuis 1996). All models were therefore run with compositional individual level variables, age and education, included but none of the variables did have significant impact on PD in any of the models and they did not affect the other variables included in the model either and was therefore excluded.

The effects can then be interpreted as the average effect in PD caused by each variable when moving from its lowest to highest value, under control for all other variables included in the model.[111] However, in this study the dependent variable PD was transformed by the natural logarithm due to its skewed distribution, which also makes it more difficult to grasp the substantial effect of each variable on PD.[112] An advantage of the natural logarithm is that it is the inverse of the exponential function. By transforming the effects from the full model by the exponential, the effects can almost be directly translated into the substantial changes in voters' PD, in terms of the average change in PD caused by a certain variable. The reason for this is that the anti-logs of the means from the logged data are the geometric means, which when data is positively skewed, are invariably less than the arithmetic mean. However, the geometric mean is often a good estimate of the median in the original data and if the log-transformation makes the original data symmetric, which approximately is the case in this study (see appendix II), then the population mean and median are the same as in the logarithmized-scale, and vice versa. Nevertheless, the difference between logs is the log of the ratio. This implies that the effects should not be thought of as an increase or a decrease in the dependent variable caused by an independent variable, such as in ordinary regression. Instead the anti-logarithms indicates how much the geometric mean in PD is changed by a certain change in an independent variable in terms of 'times as much'. For example, the geometric mean or the median of PD is approximately changing x-times as much when moving from the lowest to the highest value of a certain variable (see Dallal 2000).

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[111] An alternative, and probably more often used, procedure is to display standardized beta coefficients. However, standardizations gives at best an approximation of the relative weight of the independent variables, all other variables held constant, when explaining the variation in the dependent variable (Andrews, Morgan, Klem, and Sonquist 1973).

[112] As the OLS-regression assumes linearity, the f-tests and t-tools assume a constant error variance. Hence, these methods work best with symmetric, roughly normal data distributions. Thus, it is often better to analyze transformed data values rather than raw data when variables are skewed. Different (log/power) transformations are often useful for correcting problems with skewed data, outliers, and unequal variation. There are different tools at hand for transforming a variable where the most common procedures are: $y=ex$, $\sqrt{e}$ $ln(e)$ or $lg(e)$. Which transformation that is being used is often of less importance since this rather is a matter of scale selection. The effect then is that the log function squeezes the large values in the data together and stretches the small values apart, while squaring a variable does the opposite. As the dependent variable, PD, has a rather skewed distribution (see appendix II), it has been transformed by the natural logarithm (Hamilton 1992; Sydsaeter 1995).

**Table 3.** The average effect caused of each variable on PD, under control for all other variables, in the seventh model, when moving from the lowest to the highest theoretical value of each variable.

| Variabel | Min | Max | Length of scale | b | Total change | Total change exp() |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individually related factors | | | | | | |
| Like-dislike (0-1) | 0 | 1 | 1 | .001 | .001 | 1.001 |
| Left-right distance | 0 | 10 | 10 | .061 | .549 | 1.732*** |
| Age | 1 | 7 | 6 | -.001 | -.006 | -1.006 |
| Gender | 0 | 1 | 1 | -.075 | -.075 | -1.078*** |
| Education | 1 | 8 | 7 | -.058 | -.406 | -1.501*** |
| Party related factors | | | | | | |
| Party age (0-1) | 0 | 1 | 1 | .007 | .007 | 1.007 |
| Ideological family (0-1) | 0 | 1 | 1 | -.038 | -.038 | -1.039*** |
| Vote share | 0 | 50 | 49 | .012 | .588 | 1.800*** |
| Divergency | 0 | 3 | 3 | -.288 | -.864 | -2.373*** |
| System related factors | | | | | | |
| Left-right rho | 0 | 10 | 9 | -.009 | -.090 | -1.094 |
| Disproportionality | 0 | 25 | 24 | .010 | .240 | 1.271 |
| Effective # of parties | 1 | 9 | 8 | .021 | .168 | 1.183 |
| Competition | 0 | 9 | 9 | -.006 | -.048 | -1.049* |
| Intercept | - | - | - | .185 | - | 1.203 |

*Comment:* * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001.  The coefficients are taken from the full model in the eight column in table 2.

Turning to the effect of the individually related variables in table 3, it is clearly the perceived ideological distance between a voter's own position and the position of the parties that has the largest influence on voters' PD (1.732***). Translated into real changes in PD, this effect implies that when moving from the lowest to the highest theoretical value of this variable, the predicted geometric mean or median change (in the distance between a voter's placement of a party and the median position for a specific party) is increasing 1.732 times as much compared to the effect of a party with shortest distance; that is almost one unit on the scale stretching from zero to eleven. This result strengthens the belief that 'push and pull' effects grow stronger with an increase in perceived distance between a voter and a specific party, no matter the kind of party or political system. Among the negative effects on PD, education exerts the greatest impact (-1.501***), which means that geometric mean distance value decreases -1.501 times when moving the lowest to the highest value of this variable. This translates to approximately .3 steps on the scale compared to the base model, where the geometric mean and median in PD is 1.203. Just as expected, the predicted levels of PD decrease when education increases or when moving

from women to men (-1.078***). Besides that the effect of age is not being significant, the results resemble those of Holmberg and Oscarsson (2004) to the effect that the degrees of political knowledge or sophistication in general is higher among educated men, which in turn should generate lower degrees of PD. The most interesting result is thus the effect of ideological distance between voters and parties. As earlier discussed, ideologies have both a cognitive and an affective part. A consequence of the latter is that voters tend to strive for cognitive balance, placing parties they like closer to their own position and 'pushing' parties they don't like further away than they are in reality. These results reported here thus support earlier findings in this field.

Among the party related factors it is divergence in a party's left-right position that has the greatest significant negative influence on voters PD (-2.373***), while the electoral size of a party has the strongest positive impact (1.800***). This means that the distance on average is decreasing approximately 2.4 times as much when moving from the lowest to the highest value of the variable divergence and increasing approximately 1.8 times as much when moving from the smallest to the biggest party. Compared to the base model, where the geometric mean and median in PD is 1.203, these effects can then be thought of as a decrease in the distance between a voter's party placement and the median placement by approximately 1.4 steps on the scale due to divergence and an increase of approximately .8 due to party size.

Obviously, Kircheimer's idea of vague ideologies as characteristic of big 'catch all' parties gains empirical support since the predicted values in PD tend to covary with the size of a party. It is reasonable that bigger parties have more diverse interests and interest groups to consider and this is why they downplay the role of ideologies and promote broader issues that appeal to wider spectrum of voters. The most important aspect among parties is thus the degree of divergence in their positions. The more divergent a party is in its left-right position the lower is the predicted value of PD among voters. It appears that voters find it easier to perceive the positions of parties that have some positional distance to their competition.

Turning to the system related variables it is only the degree of competition that has a significant effect on voters' PD, (-1.049*). Briefly, the distance between voters' placement of the parties and the median positions on average decreases 1.049 times when moving from the least to the most competitive system, which in turn means just a very slight decrease by approximately .05 scale step. Even though the effect is rather small, more competitive party systems do seem to encourage party representatives to profile a party's position more clearly in terms of ideology. It will reasona-

bly also become more important to emphasize the differences between the parties in competitive systems where voters are more likely to find several parties attractive.

Table 3 shows clearly that the system related variables had the lowest effect on voters' PD while the party, and the individually related variables exerted the greatest impact. Three out of four of the party- related variables were significantly different from zero, while three out of five of the individually related variables had a significant impact. Therefore the party related variables – specifically the degrees of divergence in a party's position followed by party size and then the individually related variables – seem to be of greatest importance for voters' PD.

The amount of explained variance and the intercept variation can be particularly useful in an attempt to more formally compare the models. The estimates in table 2, showing the random part of the equations, reveal a significant intercept variation in all seven models at all three levels of analysis. Approximately 63 percent of the variation through all models is related to factors at the voter-party dyad level followed by individual level factors at 23 percent of the variation. However, there is also a significant intercept variation across countries of around 14 percent that should not be ignored. Since all three levels contribute significantly to the variation in PD, a three level multilevel model is necessary in order to avoid biased coefficients and standard errors that are too small (Hox 2002; Snijders 1999).[113]

A comparison between model 1, where the individually related variables are included, and the empty base model (indicated by a + in the first column in table 2) indicates a drop in intercept standard deviation from (.392***) to (.361***) between voters at level 2. The explained level 2 variation is, however, relatively low in all models (which often is the case in comparative studies on individual voting behavior (see fc Eijk 1996; Holmberg 2004; Norris 2004) and reaches its highest value - on average about 15 percent - in the models where the individually related factors are included. This result is not surprising since the individually related variables are the only variables that really should add something to the within-country variance. This effect does, however, indicate that the individually

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[113] The fact that the estimated random intercept standard deviation in general are considerably higher for the random intercept within and among individuals compared to the random intercept between the countries, strengthens our concerns about that the dependency among specific individuals are more sever for the violation of the regression assumptions than the dependency between individuals in each country.

related variables are important in explaining variation across individuals.[114]

Considering the rather modest amount of between-country variance explained at level 3, the results indicate that the intercept standard deviation decreases somewhat when the party and the system related variables are included in the 4:th and the 6:th models (.244*** and .236*** respectively) compared to the results in the base model (.249***). These values translate to an $R^2$ of 4 and 10 percent respectively. The intercept standard deviation decreases even further when the party related variables are included together with the system related variables in model 5 (.232***). The lowest significant intercept standard deviation is, however, to be found in the 7:th model (.228***), which equals an $R^2$ of 16 percent.

A comparison between the 7:th and the 3:rd models indicate that the party related variables account for an increase in the amount of explained variance in the average PD between the countries of approximately 10 percentage points, while a comparison between the 7:th and the 2:nd models indicate that the system related variables contribute to an increase in the amount of explained variance of approximately 7 percentage points.

The contextually related variables connected to the parties thereby seem to be of somewhat greater importance, compared to the system related factors, when it comes to explaining the between country differences in the average PD among voters. In model 6 the system related variables do however, contribute to the amount of explained between country variance with an $R^2$ of around 10 percent. Nevertheless, a significant residual country variation is evident in the intercepts through all models, in spite of the inclusion of the contextually related variables, which indicates that more research is needed concerning the impact of system related factors on voters' PD.[115]

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[114] The amount of explained variance is an approximation and is calculated as (unrestricted error – restricted error) / unrestricted error), where the unrestricted errors refers to the base-model where no independent variables are included (see Kreft and De Leeuw 1998).

[115] On the other hand, a more skeptical interpretation of the results could hold that the system related factors suffer in terms of operationalizations compared to the other two classes of variables included in the study.

### Potential differences in the effects of the individual variables of affective character on voters' perceptual deviation

The second research question of this article aims to investigate to what extent the context, *i.e.* characteristics related to the parties or the systems, affect or interact with individual behavior in shaping PD by introducing a set of interaction terms. Previous research pointed out that we can expect a significant relationship between party sympathy and ideological distance on PD. The results so far have, however, not given any empirical support for an effect of voter sympathy on a voter's PD but we have found an important and significant effect of the ideological distance between voters and the parties on voters' PD.[116] The remaining question then is whether there are any substantial and significant differences in the effect of this variable among voters in different countries due to differences in the political systems. This is especially relevant since at least three of the contextually related factors had a decreasing direct and significant impact on the perceptual deviations, both among individuals and between countries. Can the contextually related factors such as the degree of competition within a system, regarded mostly as facilitative but to some extent also motivational, increase or decrease the effect on voters' PD of the affectively related variable ideological distance?

A first and prerequisite step to an answer, is to start by looking at the country variation in the effect of ideological distance on voters' PD. Is there any variation between the countries included in the study and can any potential differences possibly be explained by the contextually related factors within the respective political systems?

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[116] A possible explanation behind the insignificant effect of whether a voter likes or dislikes a specific party on PD might be that the variables like-dislike and ideological distance are highly related to each other in the sense that voters also tend to like parties that are closer to themselves and vice versa.

**Figure 2.** The predicted effect of ideological distance on PD (random intercepts and random intercepts and slopes (empirical bayes))
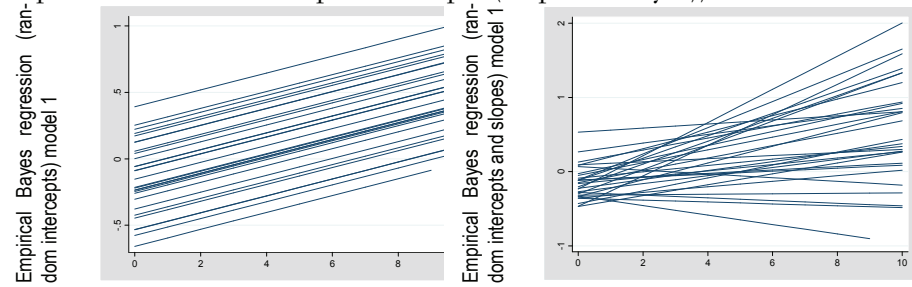


*Comment:* The graphs are based on the bivariate predicted effects of ideological distance on voter' PD.

Figure 2 illustrates the country specific variation in both intercepts and slopes in the effect on voters' PD of the distance between a voter's self-placement and placement of the parties along a left-right scale (figure 2 is based on the first model in table 4 and illustrates the relationship between ideological distance and PD). Both the regression coefficient and the slope and intercept variation is significantly different from zero). Clearly, there are not only great variations in the intercepts between the countries, but also in the effect of ideological distance on PD. This is especially true for higher values of ideological distance, where the direction and magnitude of the effects differ between countries. Whether these differences can be explained by a cross-level interaction between ideological distance and the degree of competition or any of the other contextually party related variables, such as divergence, labels or size is a remaining empirical question.

According to the hypotheses presented in the earlier theoretical section, proportional electoral systems tend to promote more centralized party organizations that are more programmatically and ideologically oriented. In more disproportional or majority systems, on the other hand, the parties are expected to be more 'all embracing' and downplay ideological conflicts and focus more on particularistic policies or issues that are less likely to meet resistance in the electorate, since they need to appeal to the 'whole' electorate (Norris 2004). A similar logic applies to more vs. less competitive party systems. The more a system is competitive, the more the party leaders will be motivated to profile their party by emphasizing the differences with competing parties in an attempt to mobilize voters (Franklin, van der Eijk, and Oppenhuis 1996). In this way, ideological undertones and statements might be of great importance when distinguishing 'us from them'. Reasonably, if ideologically committed and centralized party organization, where party representatives are using bonding rather than bridging strategies, is an important attribute of more competitive political systems. Then the voters could be expected to develop stronger and more affective attachments to the parties in terms of ideology, which in turn should in-

crease the affective effect of the ideological distance between voters and parties.

On the other hand, following Holmberg's argument, wishful thinking appears when voters are looking at parties that are a bit fuzzy and unclear (Holmberg 1999). If party representatives in more competitive systems are eager to demarcate their party as clearly as possible from others, then the levels of wishful thinking, due to an affective impact of ideological distance between parties and voters, should decrease among voters. The degree of competition thus could work alternatively as a facilitative contextual factor that might have a decreasing impact on the effect of the affectively related variable ideological distance on voters' PD. For the same reason we could expect the remaining contextually party related variables to have a similar impact on the effect of ideological distance on PD. If parties holds divergent policy positions, have labels that signals theirs positions on the left-right continuum or are of small or medium electoral size, this should facilitate voters when absorbing information about the parties and hence, bring clarity in their perceptions of the parties' policy positions.

Table 4 reports an extended multilevel model where not only the intercepts (as in table 2) but also the effects of the individually related variable ideological distance are set to vary. The 1:st model (which equals the last model in table 2 excepting that the slopes, also are set to vary for the variable ideological distance) serves as a baseline model.

**Table 4.** Multilevel regression model of perceptual deviations among individual voters in 29 countries (three levels, unstandardized coefficients (MLE)).

| Perceptual deviation (ln) | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 | Model 6 | Model 7 | Model 8 | Model 9 | Model 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Fixed part** | | | | | | | | | | |
| *Individually related factors* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Party sympathy | .002* | .003* | .004*** | .005*** | .002* | .005*** | .002* | .003* | .003* | .006*** |
| Ideological distance | .070*** | .090*** | .112*** | .132*** | .070*** | .132*** | .064*** | .076*** | .070*** | .137*** |
| Age | -.002 | -.002 | -.003 | -.003 | -.002 | -.003 | -.002 | -.002 | -.002 | -.003 |
| Gender | -.077*** | -.078*** | -.079*** | -.080*** | -.077*** | -.080*** | -.077*** | -.077*** | -.077*** | -.080*** |
| Education | -.059*** | -.059*** | -.059*** | -.059*** | -.059*** | -.059*** | -.059*** | -.059*** | -.059*** | -.059*** |
| *Party related factors* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Party age | .015 | .014 | .010 | .009 | .015 | .009 | .014 | .014 | .014 | .009 |
| Ideological family | -.038*** | -.038*** | -.038*** | -.038*** | -.038*** | -.039*** | -.057*** | -.038*** | -.058*** | -.062*** |
| Vote share | .011*** | .011*** | .011*** | .011*** | .012*** | .011*** | .011*** | .012*** | .012*** | -.004*** |
| Divergence | -.280*** | -.276*** | -.135*** | -.135*** | -.245*** | -.103*** | -.278*** | -.274*** | -.275*** | .201*** |
| *System related factors* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Left-right unidimensionality | -.011 | -.011 | -.012 | -.012 | -.011 | -.012 | -.011 | -.011 | -.011 | -.012 |
| Disproportionality | .009 | .010 | .009 | .009 | .010 | .009 | .009 | .009 | .009 | .009 |
| Effective # of parties | .035 | .030 | .047 | .041 | .036 | .042 | .036 | .037 | .038 | .041 |
| Competition | -.006* | .021*** | -.003 | .023*** | .010* | .038*** | -.006* | -.005* | -.005* | .037*** |
| *Cross-level interactions* | | | | | | | | | | |
| LR distance*competition | - | -.010*** | - | -.010*** | - | -.010*** | - | - | - | -.009*** |
| LR distance*divergence | - | - | -.043*** | -.043*** | - | -.043*** | - | - | - | -.149*** |
| Divergence*competition | - | - | - | - | -.018*** | -.018*** | - | - | - | -.017*** |

*Article 3 – Misperceptions and Effective Representation*

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LR distance*Ideo. family | - | - | - | - | - | - | .007** | - | .007** | .011*** |
| LR distance*Vote share | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | -.000*** | -.000*** | .005*** |
| *Control variables* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Election=2 | .066 | .059 | .064 | .059 | .064 | .060 | .065 | .065 | .067 | .038 |
| Election=3 | .459** | .461** | .429* | .431* | .458** | .429* | .463* | .458** | .462** | .380* |
| Intercept (grand mean) | 0.118 | 0.08 | -0.048 | -0.086 | 0.082 | -0.122 | 0.129 | 0.094 | 0.105 | -0.134 |
| **Random part** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Std. dev. slopes (lr-dist), lev.3 | .069*** | .067*** | .069*** | .066*** | .069*** | .066*** | .068*** | .069*** | .069*** | .053*** |
| Std. dev. Intercept, lev. 3 | .232*** | .230*** | .228*** | .226*** | .233*** | .227*** | .233*** | .233*** | .233*** | .219*** |
| Std. dev. Intercept, lev. 2 | .355*** | .355*** | .356*** | .356*** | .355*** | .357*** | .356*** | .355*** | .356*** | .357*** |
| Std. dev. Residual, lev. 1 | 1.035*** | 1.035*** | 1.033*** | 1.033*** | 1.034*** | 1.033*** | 1.035*** | 1.035*** | 1.035*** | 1.030*** |
| log likelihood | -307761 | -307702 | -307481 | -307420 | -307749 | -307407 | -307758 | -307752 | -307749 | -306856 |
| N: (countries) | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 |
| N: (individuals) | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 | 37 760 |
| N: (voter-party dyads) | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 | 205 284 |

*Comment:* * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$. In total 29 unique countries in 48 elections from 1996-2004 are represented in the data. Data come from the CSES. The data is unweighted. Level 3 in the random part refers to the country units, level 2 to individuals and level 1 to voter-party dyads. Since some countries are represented in up to three elections in the data set, dummy variables for the election waves has been included as controls.

The 2:nd model reveals a significant and additional effect of ideological distance that seems to depend on the degree of competition. This interaction effect indicates that the effect of ideological distance decreases with (-.010***) for every additional unit in the degree of competition. When looking at the constitutive effect of the interaction term, we also find that the effect of ideological distance increases to (.090***) when the degree of competition is held at zero. This is an interesting finding, even though the effect is rather small. According to the motivational hypothesis, parties should be more likely to employ 'bonding-strategies' in more competitive systems, which is why the affective attachment between parties and voters should increase. This in turn was expected to increase the effect of ideological distance on voters' PD. It seems instead that the effect of ideological distance on voters' PD is weaker in more competitive political systems and this supports the simplicity hypothesis. Hence, a higher degree of competition translates to clearer party positions which facilitate comprehension and thus decrease wishful thinking among voters.

In the 3:rd model a second interaction term is included between ideological distance and divergence in a party's left-right position. The result shows that there is a rather strong additional effect of divergence on PD (-.043***), which means that the effect of ideological distance on PD is decreasing with -.043 for every unit-increase of divergence. This effect is particularly robust even in the 4:th model where the first interaction between ideological distance and competition is included. The results so far point to the fact that the effect of ideological distance on PD seems to be dependent on clarity or salience in the parties' policy positions. Wishful thinking declines when it is easier for voters to apprehend or perceive the positions of the parties. Factors that may mitigate assimilation and contrast effects among voters are from a normative point of view desirable, since less perceptual distortion amongst voters implies a more effective and meaningful representation.

An interaction term between divergence and competition appears to be necessary to attempt to further examine whether or not the mitigating effect of competition on the impact of ideological distance on voters' PD depends on an increasing clarity in the parties' left-right positions. According to the Downsian theorem (Downs 1957) the degree of competition should influence parties to take more divergent policy positions, at least in multi-party systems, which in turn has been shown to have the strongest positive

impact on voters' PD.[117] Especially since the effect of divergence, theoretically, may depend on the degree of competition and since competition alone, under control for this effect, seems to have a negative effect on PD. The 5:th model includes an interaction term between divergence and the degree of competition. The result confirms the suspicions regarding the interactive effect between competition and divergence since the effect of divergence on PD is decreases with (-.018***) for every unit increase of competition. Even in this model the fixed effect of competition on voters' PD is negative.

In the 6:th model, all three interactions between divergence and competition and ideological distance vs. divergence and competition are included. The interaction between ideological distance and divergence and the effect of ideological distance and competition thus is considerably robust in all the models. Obviously the effect of ideological distance on PD decreases with more divergent party positions and in more competitive systems, at the same time as the effect of divergence, under control for all other variables, has an additional impact on PD for every unit-increase of competition.[118]

Interactions between ideological distance and party size and ideological family membership are included in the next three models. The effects are small but significant throughout, and the effect of ideological distance and ideological family in the ninth model, under control for all other variables, have a significant effect on PD (.007**). This result indicates that there is a slight increase in the effect of ideological distance on PD when moving from a party that is not directly attached to or associated with the left-right dimension. This finding somewhat weakens the support for the hypothesis that party labels sometimes can serve as cues for the voters, and make the party positions more easily apprehensible and, hence, reducing the inclination to wishful thinking. An alternative interpretation in this respect is instead that more ideologically related labels, may exaggerate the inclination to wishful thinking among voters.

In the final model, both the fixed effects of ideological distance (.137***) and competition (.037***) have an increasing positive impact on

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[117] For this reason different combinations and triple interactions of competition, divergence and the effective number of parties has also been tested for but without any substantial effects. An interaction between competition and the effective number of parties were also regressed on the degree of divergence among parties but there were no effects of this model that supported the Downsian theorem.

[118] A triple interaction term based on LR-distance*divergence*competition was also tested for but it did only yield a small and insignificant effect on PD.

voters' PD. However, we also find a small but significant additional interaction effect of ideological distance and competition (-.009***) under control for all other variables included in the model. Obviously, competition and ideological distance exerts an independent influence on PD as such, but for every increase in competition, the positive effect of ideological distance decreases. This strengthens our view that the affective part of ideological distance increases in less competitive systems as under such circumstances the parties are expected to downplay the differences between themselves and the competing parties. This in turn makes it harder for voters to discern the parties policy positions which heightens the elements of 'wishful thinking' *i.e.* the tendency to 'push and pull' parties depending on the distance between a voter's self-placement and the placement of parties. In more competitive systems, on the other hand, the parties are more inclined to profile themselves more clearly in terms of ideology and other policy positions. Moreover we find that the effect of ideological distance on PD decreases with (-.149***)[119] for every unit increase in divergence and that it increases with (.005***) for every unit decrease in party size (since this variable is measured as the percentages of votes, an effect of .005 is rather big).

Recalling that the random intercepts and slopes capture the variation in the individually related variable ideological distance across countries, the estimated standard deviation of the intercepts for each country successively decreases from (.232***) in the first model to (.219***) in the last model. This indicates that there is some contextual variation in the effect of ideological distance on voters' PD and that the magnitude of the intercept variation decreases when all variables are taken into account. When it comes to the estimated variation in the impact of ideological distance, the standard deviation of the ideological distance coefficient has decreased from (.069***) in the first model to (.053***) in the last model. The differences are small but significantly different from zero. The fact that the country specific intercept variation and the estimated variation in the impact of ideological distance on PD are both change to some extent across the models indicates that the macro variables in fact, are able to explain some of the differences between the countries included in the analysis.

A particularly large indirect impact of divergence on PD is of great interest. But what does this interaction effect really mean? Figure 3 illustrates the interaction effect of ideological distance and divergence by plotting the

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[119] The interpretation of this effect should be made cautiously since the estimated variance inflation factor reaches 15.54 for this variable in the full model (see appendix II).

predicted effects of ideological distance on PD for different values of divergence when all other variables are held at their mean. Clearly, the effect of ideological distance on PD decreases for higher values of divergence.

**Figure 3.** Effect-plot of the effect of ideological distance on voters' perceptual deviation for different values of divergence in the parties' left-right positions (mle)



Ideological distance*Divergence effect plot
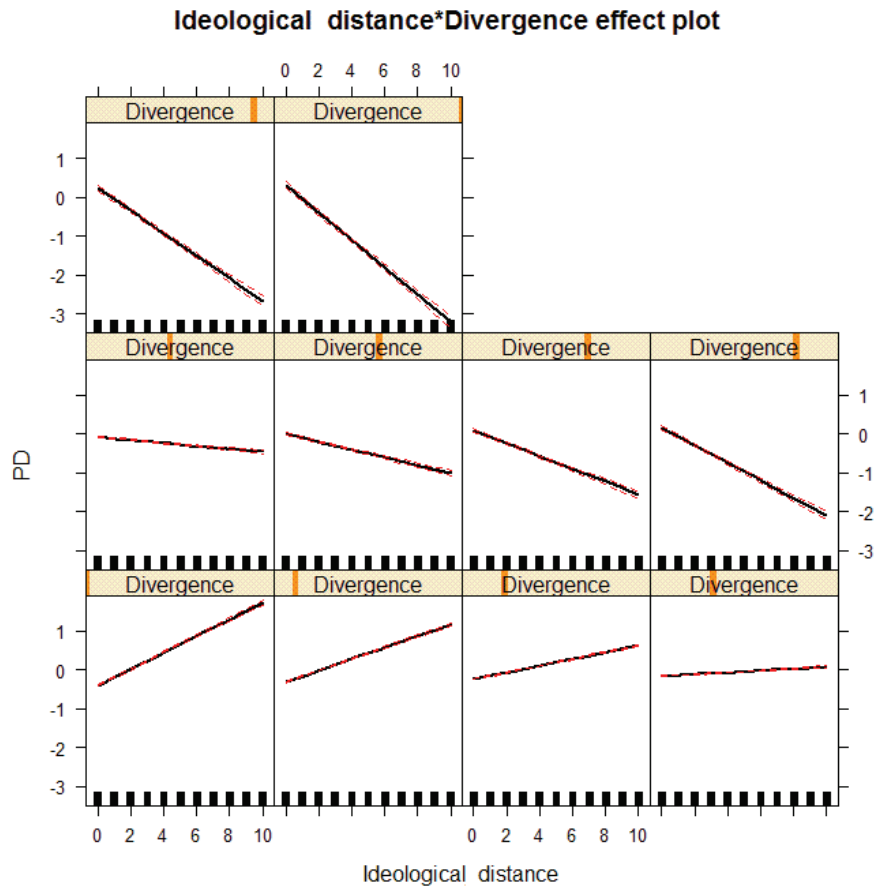
*Comment:* The effect-plot of the effect of ideological distance on voters' perceptual deviation for different values of divergence in the parties' left-right positions has been made with R version 2.7.2 using the "lattice" and "grid" packages (R-Development Core Team 2005).

In a theoretical circumstance of no divergence among parties' ideological positions, the predicted effect of ideological distance on PD increased dramatically (which can be seen in the diagram to the lower left), while the

209

opposite holds when there is maximum divergence in the party positions (which can be seen in the box in the upper right corner). It is debatable whether assimilation or contrast effects or simply selective exposure (you collect information about parties you like) produce the effect of the ideological distance on voters' PD. Nevertheless, the results in this study show that facilitative factors and characteristics related mainly to parties, can mitigate the effect of wishful thinking on voters' PD

## Summary and conclusion

This study took the responsible party model, a normative theory of representative democracy with focus on political parties and voting behavior, as its theoretical point of departure. The ultimate goal of the research was to investigate the circumstances under which efficient policy representation, in terms of low levels of perceptual deviation among voters, can exist. The immediate aims of the study were twofold: firstly, to explore which variables drawn from the theoretical literature on voters, parties and political systems that had the greatest impact on voters' PD; secondly, to try to explain the country specific differences in PD caused by different affectively related, and normatively obscure, features among voters and to examine if these individually related variables were interacting with the context and how.

Analytical results reported above clearly show that the system related variables had the smallest effect on voters' PD while the party and the individually related variables exerted the greatest impact. Only degree of competition out of four variables among the system related variables was significantly different from zero, whilst ideological distance, education and age among the five individually related variables had a significant impact. Among the party related factors, ideological party family/party labels, divergence and electoral size of the four variables were significantly divided from zero. Overall, the party related variables followed by the individually related variables seem to be of the greatest importance for voters' PD, and the degrees of divergence in a party's position had the greatest total effect.

The results only give empirical support to just one of the solely motivational factors, namely the ideological distance between a voter's self-placement and the placement of parties. It appears that perceptions of the parties' positions seems to be more blurred the greater the distance. A row of facilitative factors however, mitigate this effect. Education and gender correlated with higher degrees of PD among the individually related factors. Among the party related factors, an increase in electoral size tended to

render more distorted perceptions of parties, a result that is well in line with our expectations about big 'catch-all' parties.

Divergence had, as mentioned, the greatest effect in promoting PD and the relationship of party labels to the left-right dimension was, to some extent, another. On the system level, the degree of competition tended to yield higher degrees of PD among voters. These factors have a facilitative rather than motivational character in common. An objection could be that there is a reciprocal relationship between the degree of competition and PD which qualifies competition as a motivational factor as well. This is true in the sense that voters may be more motivated through an increasing mobilization due to greater party competition. On the other hand, parties are expected to profile themselves most clearly when the competition is high and they are competing for the same votes. The results also showed that the degree of divergence among parties tends to increase along with the amount of competition. Divergence was in turn the factor that had the greatest independent impact on voters' PD. For this reason, competition seems to be more of a facilitative than a motivational factor behind voters' PD.

As mentioned, the perceived ideological distance between a voter and a party had a negative impact on PD among the individually related variables. It is noteworthy that the effect of ideological distance on PD decreased as system competitiveness rose. A sensible explanation of this result is that the parties are expected to clarify the differences between themselves when the competition is high.

Voters in general do not seem to maintain the affective relationships with political parties as was believed from earlier research. It seems instead, as if 'push and pull' effects occur when the policy positions of the parties are blurred because either a policy position is shared by several parties, a party is big, the party does not provide a cue to its expected position by its brand name or a low degree of competitiveness within a system. Misperceptions it would seem, are to a large extent the product of a complex and indistinct party space. According to Heider (1946), voters wish to maintain cognitive balance and so desire structure and clarity in the party space; something that in turn inclines them to wishful thinking when the party positions are unclear.

In conclusion, all contexts related factors having a significant impact on PD were connected mainly to the political parties. These variables were also facilitative rather than motivational in character and appeared to mitigate the degrees of wishful thinking exhibited among voters. It is not too far fetched to conclude that the responsibility for establishing an effective system of representation in terms of policy to a large extent lies with the political parties. Misperceptions among voters seem to occur when principally when party positions are blurred and unclear.

## Appendix I

Figure 1 shows the unlogaritimized mean value of perceptual deviation among voters in each of the countries included in the study (the unlogaritimized mean value of PD for all countries together is 1.635).

**Figure 1.** Mean perceptual deviation among all specific countries included in the study.
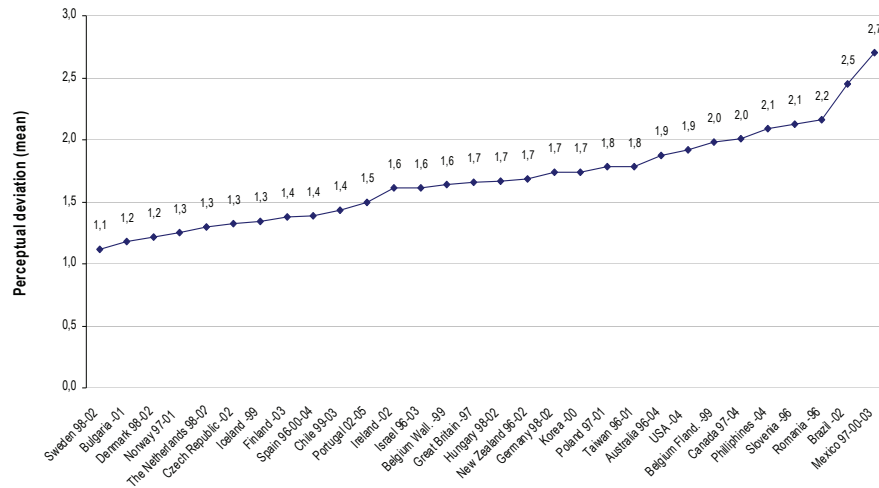
**Table 1**: Type of election system, Effective threshold, Disproportionality, Effective number of parties, Wing party ideological distance (WPD), Weighted perceptual agreement (WPA)[120] and correlation between Left-right self-placements and Party choice (Eta, Cramer's V).

| Election year | Country | Election system (CSES) | Effective threshold | Disproportionality | Effective # of parties | Dimensionality | Polarization (WPD) | Perceptual agreement (WPA) | Competition | Eta |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2001 | Bulgaria | List PR | 4 | 6.5 | 2.40 | .38 | 7.10 | .61 | 1.90 | .82 |
| 1998 | Sweden | List PR | 4 | 1 | 4.29 | .59 | 7.78 | .65 | 2.15 | .77 |
| 1996 | Czech Republic | List PR | 5 | 9 | 4.15 | .56 | 8.33 | .62 | 2.03 | .76 |
| 2003 | Israel | List PR | 1.5 | 2.0 | 4.18 | .68 | 6.48 | .50 | 2.05 | .76 |
| 2003 | The Netherlands | List PR | 2.6 | 2.5d | 3.19 | .55e | 3.75 | .63 | . | .74 |
| 2002 | Sweden | List PR | 4 | 1.2 | 4.24 | .52a | 7.25 | .64 | 2.50 | .73 |
| 2000 | Hong Kong | Prop | . | . | . | .45 | 2.34 | .58 | . | .72 |
| 2002 | The Netherlands | List PR | 2.3 | 2.7c | 3.17 | .47e | 3.60 | .61 | 3.84 | .72 |
| 2001 | Norway | List PR | 4 | 2.3 | 5.55 | .39 | 5.32 | .61 | 2.64 | .71 |
| 1999 | Iceland | List PR | 16 | 1.2 | 3.45 | . | 6.01 | .65 | 1.89 | .70 |
| 2000 | Spain | List PR | 9.7 | 5.1 | 2.48 | .43 | 4.86 | .59 | 1.09 | .70 |
| 1996 | Israel | List PR | 1.5 | 1.9 | 5.61 | .68 | 5.95 | .50 | 1.83 | .69 |
| 1998 | Denmark | List PR | 2 | 1.9 | 4.54 | .39 | 6.12 | .68 | 2.14 | .69 |
| 2003 | Iceland | List PR | 16 | 1.9 | . | . | . | . | . | .68 |
| 2002 | Hungary | Qvasi-Maj Mixed | 26h | 25.1 | 2.66 | .82 | 6.23 | .59 | 2.23 | .67 |
| 2003 | Chile | List PR | 25 | 2.4 | 5.00f | . | 5.26 | .27 | 2.00 | .67 |
| 1997 | Lithuania | Semi-Prop | 5 | 14.6g | 3.32 | .57 | 3.71 | .52 | . | .66 |
| 1999 | Switzerland | List PR | 8.6 | 3.1 | 5.16 | . | 4.58 | .53 | . | .66 |
| 2001 | Poland | List PR | 5 | 5.4 | 3.73 | .38 | 6.75 | .59 | 1.87 | .66 |
| 1997 | Norway | List PR | 4 | 3.7 | 4.36 | .39 | 5.89 | .59 | 2.28 | .65 |
| 1998 | Ukraine | Semi-Prop | 4 | 8.9g | 6.07 | .39 | 5.52 | .42 | .93 | .65 |
| 1996 | New Zealand | Quasi-Prop Mixed | 5 | 4.5 | 3.76 | .44 | 5.35 | .53 | 2.14 | .64 |
| 2001 | Denmark | List PR | 2 | .8 | 5.19 | .55b | 6.66 | .63 | 2.66 | .63 |
| 2003 | Finland | List PR | 5.23 | 3.0 | 4.78 | .38 | 5.12 | .54 | 2.72 | .63 |
| 1998 | The Netherlands | List PR | .7 | 1.1 | 4.82 | .4 | 4.38 | .62 | 3.10 | .59 |
| 1999 | Russia | Semi-Prop | 5h | 5.8g | 5.51f | .52 | 6.21 | .41 | . | .57 |
| 2002 | New Zealand | Quasi-Prop Mixed | 5 | 1.9 | 3.83 | .47 | 4.64 | .39 | 2.24 | .57 |
| 1996 | Spain | List PR | 9.7 | 5.6 | 2.72 | .43 | 5.56 | .62 | 1.16 | .52 |
| 1997 | Great Britain | Majority | 37.5 | 16.8 | 2.12 | .54 | 3.20 | .45 | 1.34 | .52 |
| 1998 | Hungary | Qvasi-Maj Mixed | 26h | 22.4 | 3.45 | .82 | 4.98 | .45 | 1.98 | .51 |

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[120] The parties, for which the perceptual agreement has been calculated, have been weighted according to the election results (percentages).

| Year | Country | Electoral System | | | | | | | | |
|------|---------|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2004 | Australia | Majority (Alt Vote) | 37.5 | 7.9 | 2.31 | . | 2.63 | .26 | 1.10 | .50 |
| 1996 | Slovenia | Semi-Prop | 3 | 2.5g | 5.53 | .43 | 3.13 | .35 | 1.63 | .49 |
| 1998 | Germany | Qvasi-Prop Mixed | 5 | 3.1 | 3.31 | .51 | 4.23 | .51 | 2.00 | .49 |
| 2004 | Korea | Qvasi-Maj Mixed | 32 | 12.1 | . | .39 | . | . | . | .48 |
| 2001 | Belarus | Majority | . | . | 3.76 | .6 | 2.63 | .26 | . | .44 |
| 1997 | Canada | Majority | 37.5 | 13.2 | 2.98 | .37 | 2.60 | .37 | 1.32 | .41 |
| 1996 | Australia | Majority (Alt Vote) | 37.5 | 11.6 | 2.62 | .45 | 2.66 | .42 | 1.85 | .40 |
| 1996 | Japan | Qvasi-Maj Mixed | 25.1 | 13.2 | 2.94 | .54 | 5.19 | .49 | . | .40 |
| 2002 | Portugal | List PR | 6.6 | 5.0 | 2.62 | .52 | 6.00 | .59 | 1.39 | .40 |
| 2004 | USA | Majority | 37.5 | 2.5 | 2.11f | . | 2.59 | .34 | 1.07 | .40 |
| 1999 | Belgium Flanders | List PR | 8.8 | 2.6 | 9.05 | .44 | 3.44 | .37 | 2.16 | .39 |
| 2001 | Great Britain | Majority | 37.5 | 16.8 | 2.74 | .44 | .12 | .60 | . | .36 |
| 1997 | Poland | List PR | 5 | 1.7 | 13.56 | .51 | 6.49 | .58 | 1.97 | .32 |
| 2002 | Ireland | STV | 14.9 | 6.4 | 3.30 | .34 | 3.38 | .49 | 2.36 | .32 |
| 1996 | USA | Majority | 37.5 | 3.2 | 2.00 | . | . | . | . | .31 |
| 2002 | Czech Republic | List PR | 5 | 5.1 | 3.92 | .64e | 7.47 | .65 | 1.92 | .30 |
| 1997 | Mexico | Quasi-Maj Mixed | 22.7 | 8.4 | 2.86f | .50 | 3.34 | .03 | 1.65 | .29 |
| 2000 | Peru | List PR | . | 6.08c | 13.97c | .44 | 3.14 | .17 | | .27 |
| 1998 | Hong Kong | Prop | . | . | . | .45 | 1.93 | .44 | . | .26 |
| 2001 | Taiwan | Qvasi-Maj Mixed | 11.3 | 3.6 | 3.53 | . | 1.34 | .39 | 1.45 | .17 |
| 1996 | Romania | List PR | 3 | 5.81g | 4.30f | .36 | 2.94 | .29 | 2.53 | .16 |
| 2004 | Hong Kong | Prop | . | 3.1 | 2.73 | . | 3.56 | .36 | 1.25 | .13 |
| 2000 | Korea | Qvasi-Maj Mixed | 32 | 14.5g | 3.32f | .41 | 2.35 | .42 | 1.14 | .11 |
| 1996 | Taiwan | Qvasi-Maj Mixed | 11.3 | 5.6 | 2.54 | .49 | 2.12 | .38 | .74 | .09 |
| 1999 | Belgium Wallonia | List PR | 8.8 | 2.6 | 9.05 | .39 | 3.88 | .51 | 1.35 | .08 |
| 2001 | Peru | List PR | . | 14.57c | 6.64c | .44 | 2.35 | .11 | | .07 |
| 2000 | Mexico | Quasi-Maj Mixed | 22.7 | 8.4 | 2.55f | .50 | 3.97 | .09 | 1.99 | .01 |
| 1998 | Czech Republic | List PR | 5 | 7.1 | 3.49 | . | 7.47 | .64 | . | . |
| 1999 | Chile | List PR | 25 | 5.9 | 2.33f | . | 5.35 | .56 | 2.01 | . |
| 2001 | Thailand | Majority | 37.5 | 3.3 | 4.32 | .38 | . | . | . | . |
| 2002 | Brazil | List PR | 3.75 | 3.3 | 4.97 | . | 2.72 | .18 | 2.11 | . |
| 2002 | France | Two-Round System | 37.5 | 17.7 | 4.82 | .50 | 5.43 | .42 | . | . |
| 2002 | Germany | Qvasi-Prop Mixed | 5 | 3.1 | 3.42 | .52e | 5.36 | .61 | 2.14 | . |

*Comment:* Data on Electoral Systems are from the CSES macro dataset module 1 and 2 and can be found at: www.cses.org. Data for Netherlands in 2002 and 2003 is from G.A. Irwin, J.J.M. van Holsteyn and J.M. den Ridder (2005), Dutch Parliamentary Election study 2002-2003, Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers/NIWI-Steinmetz Archive/SKON. Only respondents that assigned a 'like-dislike' to all parties are included in the unfolding analyses. Since a dichotomous unfolding model (MUDFOLD) was employed, cut-points for 'picked' party had to be selected. A party was considered 'picked' by a respondent if the party scored 6-10 on the eleven-point like-dislike-scale. This range of evaluative response had to be adjusted to find better j-scales: a) range 5-10, b) range 4-1. There are a number of possible reasons why a stimuli (party) may not be unfoldable, such as if the stimuli is too popular or too unpopular, if a stimuli is very close to another stimuli, or if a stimuli does not fit the scale (the responses to the stimuli was guided by a completely other principle, or ideology, than all other stimuli). *Unweighted PA-measures. 1) Left-right self placement is here measured on a 10-point scale instead of a 11-point scale as normally used in the CSES dataset.c: Data comes from www.electionguide.org. d: Data comes from www.electionworld.org. e: data is taken from Dahlberg and Oscarsson (2006) f: data is taken from Golder, M. 2004. Democratic Electoral Systems around the World, 1946-200. New York University (Forth coming in Electoral Systems) g: Data comes from www.aceproject.org. h: Data is taken from Dawisha, K. and Deets, S. (2006) "Political Learning in Postcommunist Elections," East European Politics and Society, 20:3, forthcoming.

## Appendix II

**Figure 6.** The distribution of the dependent variable perceptual deviation, the original and the logarithmized versions.
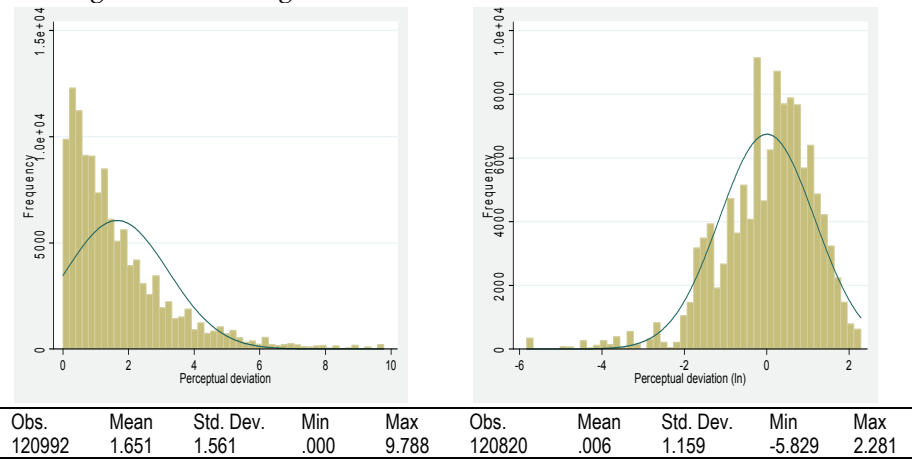


| Obs. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max | Obs. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
|------|------|-----------|------|-------|--------|------|-----------|--------|-------|
| 120992 | 1.651 | 1.561 | .000 | 9.788 | 120820 | .006 | 1.159 | -5.829 | 2.281 |

**Table 6.** Variance inflation test of model 10 in table 5.

| Individually related factors | | Party related factors | |
|------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------------|-------|
| Party sympathy | 1.64 | Party age | 1.08 |
| Ideological distance | 10.80 | Ideological family | 2.42 |
| Age | 1.05 | Vote share | 7.91 |
| Gender | 1.00 | Divergence | 10.23 |
| Education | 1.07 | | - |
| System related factors | | Interactions | |
| Left-right unidimensionality | 1.25 | Ideological distance*competition | 5.26 |
| Disproportionality | 1.43 | Divergence*competition | 5.32 |
| Effective # of parties | 1.55 | Ideological distance*divergence | 15.54 |
| Competition | 4.85 | Ideological distance*Ideological family | 6.41 |
| | - | Ideological distance*Vote share | 11.03 |
| Mean VIF | 4.99 | | 4.99 |

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