CPW October 21, 2011

Dear CPW,

First of all, thank you so much for reading this very sketchy, very first draft of what at some point might become a paper! For this CPW, I am focusing on what might become the theoretical argument of a paper and not at all on what would end up being the empirical part because I have some trouble with my data. So I apologize for the incredibly sketchy (and bad) empirical part.

This project developed from a paper I wrote for a seminar last year. At that time, I examined how intraparty organization influences if parties shift at all from one election to the next, and if so, where they shift to (to the median voter, to the median party voter, or to strong party supporters).

Right now, I am trying to make this project broader to be able to speak to a wider audience. I appreciate all of your comments, but I think my two biggest problems are:

- Framing: You can tell that this paper is put together from a variety of different bits and pieces, and I still need to work a lot on making it fit into one coherent picture. This also makes my framing difficult. As I mentioned, this paper developed out of the literature on partisan policy shifts, and now, I am trying to build it off the literature on redistributive politics. Does this link make sense at all? To which audience is such a project best addressed?

- Data: The other big problem is the data part. For the seminar paper, I used national election studies from six countries compiled in the European Voter Database. The first sketchy results (only summary statistics) that I am “presenting” here are also based on these data. However, I have big problems with missing data and a small sample size in general. I am looking more into the Eurobarometer, CSES, and Comparative Manifesto Project data right now. If you have any suggestions on how to improve on my data, I would be very grateful!

Thank you again!

Maiko
How does intraparty organization constrain parties’ abilities’ to appeal to different groups of voters?

Literature on redistributive politics has long been concerned with who is rewarded once parties are elected into government. Two directions are possible: Government parties reward core constituents (Cox/McCubbins, 1986) or swing voters (Dixit/Londregan, 1996). However, to be able to answer who is rewarded once parties are in government, we need to take one step back and look at whom parties promise to reward in their electoral platforms since parties are elected into office based on these documents.

Electoral platforms can function as a costly signal of a party’s policy intent. When passing an electoral platform, each party is faced with an inherent conflict between party leaders and party members. Party leaders are assumed to be office-seeking and consequently strive to maximize votes to be elected into or stay in government office. Thus, they seek to promise benefits to swing voters to gain additional votes. Party members, on the other hand, are assumed to be policy-seeking. They seek to enact policies that are as close to their ideal position as possible and to reward core constituents which they are part of. The credibility of the platform as a signal thus depends on the ease with which a platform can be changed which in turn depends on whose goals will prevail: the party leaders’ or the party members. This again hinges crucially on the internal organization of a party.

In inclusively organized parties, party members enjoy a high level of influence, and the party leaders depend on their support to stay in office within the party. In exclusively organized parties, in contrast, party members have little influence, and the leadership only depends on a small number of other party elites to stay in power. Consequently, party leaders in exclusively organized parties are better able to change the party’s platform to court swing voters, while party leaders in inclusively organized parties are constrained from shifting the platform toward the swing voters’ policy preferences by the party membership. Thus, which groups of voters – core constituents or swing voters – will be rewarded once parties are in government depends on how these parties are organized internally. I expect more exclusively organized parties to shift more in between election, to be closer to the swing voters’ policy preferences1 than to their core constituents, and to be more responsive to changes in swing voter preferences.

1 In the following, I assume that voters cast their votes based on the assumptions and implications of proximity voting.
In line with McGillivray (2004), I also argue that the interaction of the electoral system and the internal party organization is important since parties competing in PR systems are faced with a different dynamic of electoral competition than parties competing in majoritarian systems. I argue that, irrespective of the electoral system, party leaders seek to target swing voters to gain additional votes, while party members seek to block a shift toward the swing voters’ policy preferences. However, in PR systems party leaders face another constraint than the party membership: Rival or new parties competing on a similar ideological stance might win over their core constituents’ votes in case they shift too far away from their preferences and too close toward the swing voters. Thus, I expect the differences between inclusive and exclusive parties to be more pronounced in majoritarian systems than in PR systems.

For some first summary statistics, I use data from national election surveys from Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden compiled in the European Voter Dabase (Thomassen 2005).

**Intraparty Organization as a Constraint**

Literature on redistributive politics has focused on which groups of voters receive rewards from government. In line with Dixit and Londregan (1996), I argue that parties target swing voters who are ideologically neutral between the parties competing for government office. These voters can be persuaded to vote for a certain party in exchange for an economic reward (Dixit/Londregan, 1996).

However, to be able to channel benefits to swing voters, parties first have to be elected into office. Previous literature on redistributive politics posits that parties promise economic benefits to swing voters who subsequently vote for them solely based on these promises. From this interaction between voters and parties during election campaigns, a commitment problem arises. Swing voters do not know if parties will in fact adhere to their promises and enact policies benefiting them once elected into government office, or if they will renege. This commitment problem can be solved by modeling the interaction as being repeated infinitely. However, neither voters nor partisan candidates for office are in fact involved in this game infinitely. Thus, the interaction boils down to a finitely repeated game. In such circumstances, however, the party’s and candidates’ dominant strategy is to promise economic benefits, receive votes from swing voters, and then to defect by not rewarding the swing voters (see also Stokes, 2005). Thus, the
question is how parties can credibly commit to rewarding swing voters after the election. Modeling the interaction as repeated indefinitely as opposed to infinitely is one possibility.

Moreover, electoral platforms can function as a costly signal to swing voters communicating and recording the party’s policy intent. This platform is a costly signal because drafting and agreeing on an electoral platform as well as campaigning based on it to signal that the party will stick to its policy promises all entail a high level of costs. However, this costly signal might still not be credible for swing voters. The credibility of this signal hinges on the ease of changing an electoral platform and of possibly reneging on it. Thus, the credibility depends on the costs of re-writing a platform to cater to swing voters which in turn depends on the internal organization of the party. Moreover, the cost to party leaders of reneging on such a platform also depends on the internal organization of the party. To be able to answer the question of how intraparty organization affects the ease of changing and reneging on the electoral platform, the black box of parties internal workings has to be opened.

Parties in general and party leaders in particular are vote-maximizers, striving to get as many votes as possible to maximize their odds of entering government office (Downs, 1957: 28ff). In addition, I assume party leaders to be office-seeking as well (Strøm/Müller 1999: 5f) – seeking both government offices and intraparty offices. This means, I assume that party leaders strive to be elected into government, while at the same time they seek to stay in power within the party. To be able to gain as many votes as possible, party leaders seek to persuade swing voters to vote for them. For them to be able to in fact attract additional votes from swing voters, they have to credibly commit to rewarding swing voters rather than solely core constituents once in government. Thus, party leaders seek to change their party’s electoral platform toward the swing voters’ preferences.

However, for both the credibility and the sheer possibility of this move, the internal organization of parties plays a crucial role. Political parties are often assumed to be unitary actors, however, this is an overly simplified picture of a complex organization since parties consist of different factions and can be thought of as coalitions (Laver 1999: 8f). May (1973: 135) acknowledged the fact that parties are comprised of different groups with different preferences in his famous “Special Law of Curvilinear Disparity”: Active members of a political party have more extreme policy preferences than the party leadership and the electorate at large, which in turn leads to conflict over policies within parties (May 1973). When examining parties’ internal workings further, most research has focused on leadership and/or candidate selection. When
examining who decides on the party’s candidate, a party can be classified as ranging from inclusive to exclusive: At the inclusive extreme, the whole electorate selects the candidate, whereas at the exclusive extreme, the party leader can independently choose his or her party’s candidates (Rahat/Hazan 2001: 301). In between these two extreme poles, a variety of different selectorates can be found, ranging (from inclusive to exclusive) from party members at large, special party agencies and delegates chosen for this specific task, to “nominating committees”, and a small group of party leaders (Rahat 2007: 160ff). The differences between parties concerning the selectorates deciding on who is to be the party’s candidate are important because they “show how power is distributed within parties” (Rahat 2007: 158). I follow Rahat and Hazan (2001) in classifying parties as highly inclusive when the membership as a whole has a great level of influence in choosing the party leadership and highly exclusive if only a small number of party elites select the membership. Again, in between these extremes, there is a wide range of possible selectorates the size of which decreases as the level of exclusiveness increases.

The organizational setup of parties can also be linked to its overall goals. Strøm (1990) argues that certain institutional and organizational factors influence whether a party is policy-, office-, or vote-seeking. He further argues that parties in which decision about policies is decentralized (the members at large can decide), in which the leadership and candidates are recruited from within the party, and in which the leadership is accountable to the members at large are rather policy-seeking (Strøm 1999: 574ff). This argument can still be reconciled with my assumption that parties and party leaders are vote-seeking. Parties in general and their leadership value and seek to maximize votes instrumentally (Downs 1957: 28 ff). Politicians – in this case party leaders – seek to maximize votes to be elected into office, while party members value votes to be able to implement their preferred policies.

As a consequence of these differing preferences, parties face a conflict between the party leaders and members every time a new electoral platform is to be drafted. Party leaders strive to shift the platform toward the swing voters’ policy preference to be elected into government office. Party members, on the other hand, strive to implement their most preferred policies and to reward the party’s core constituents of which they are a part of by definition. To see these policies enacted, they seek to pull the platform toward their preferences. By May’s law of curvilinear disparity, they hold more extreme preferences than the electorate at large, and thus they object to shifting the platform toward the swing voters’ policy preferences. The severity of the conflict, however, depends on how much influence the party members have in the party’s internal
decision-making. Party members can exert influence on the party’s policy platform directly via the party conference by proposing and voting on the policies to be included in the platform (see for instance Pettitt 2007: 237 ff). In addition, party members can influence the party’s policy position by choosing the party leadership. The more dependent the leadership is on the members at large, the less leeway it has in changing the party’s platform to be close to the swing voters’ policy preferences. If a party is organized inclusively, with the party members or delegates choosing the leadership, the party leaders will not challenge the members by proposing and pushing through a policy platform that is too close to the swing voters and too far from the members because they depend on them to stay in power within the party. If, on the other hand, a party is organized exclusively, with only a small group of party elites deciding on the party leadership, the party leaders are able to shift the party’s platform closer toward the swing voters’ policy position to increase the odds of being elected into office. The more exclusively a party is organized, the less constrained and vulnerable party leaders are when drafting and, in the end, changing the party’s policy platform. Consequently, I expect parties to behave fundamentally different based on their internal organization.

Parties’ policy positions\(^2\) are not static, but change from one election to the next. The magnitude of these shifts, however, again depends on the parties’ internal organization and whether or not the conflict between the party leaders and the members can break out openly. In highly inclusive parties, the members have veto power. This power decreases as the level of organizational exclusiveness increases. In more exclusive parties, the potential conflict between the party leaders and members is subdued. The leadership can shift the party’s platform more freely, so I expect the party’s position to change more often and more drastically than in an inclusive party. In more inclusive parties, in contrast, the conflict between the leaders and the membership at large breaks out because both actors can block moves away from their most preferred policy positions. Thus, with inclusive parties having more veto players whose preferences diverge, I expect more inclusively organized parties to exhibit higher levels of stability than more exclusively organized parties (Tsebelis, 2002). This leads to my first hypothesis, the Policy Stability Hypothesis.

\textit{Hypothesis 1 (Policy Stability): The more exclusively a party is organized, the bigger the policy changes in between two elections.}

\(^2\) In the following, I use platform and policy position interchangeably.
However, not only the magnitude of policy shifts is important. I also expect parties to differ with respect to the direction of such shifts. As already explained above, party members hold more extreme policy preferences than party leaders and the electorate at large. Since party members are by definition part of the core constituents of a party, they prefer to reward the party’s core constituencies once in office. Moreover, since party members seek to maximize votes to be able to implement their most preferred policies, they strive to pull the party’s electoral platform toward their ideal point while blocking moves away from their preferences. Party leaders, on the other hand, seek to maximize votes to be elected into government office. Thus, they strive to shift the platform toward the swing voters’ policy preferences to gain more votes and thereby increase the odds of being elected into office. Whether party leaders are successful in bringing their party’s platform closer to swing voters’ preferences depends on the party’s internal organization. In highly inclusive parties, party members are able to block moves to the swing voters’ policy position and instead pull the platform toward their preferences. Party leaders will not challenge this since they depend on their party members’ continued support to stay in power within the party. In contrast, party leaders in exclusively organized parties are not dependent on the membership at large but only on a small fraction of the party members. Thus, they are better able to shift the party’s platform toward swing voters’ policy preferences thereby trying to maximize votes. By doing this, they can increase their chances of being elected into government, but at the same time, they do not jeopardize their chances of staying in power within the party. Based on this, I derive my policy distance hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 2 (Policy Distance): More exclusively organized parties exhibit a smaller distance to the swing voters’ policy preferences than to their core constituents’ preferences.**

Finally, a party’s internal organization also impacts its ability to adapt to changing voter preferences. Voters’ policy preferences are subject to change over time, however, on a national level, parties can only react to these changes when passing new electoral platforms. Research on parties’ policy positions has shown that parties change their policy positions as a response to global economic indicators and public opinion (Adams et al., 2009). Now, suppose the policy distance between the swing voters’ policy preferences and a party’s policy position increases during an electoral term. Under such circumstances, more exclusively organized parties are better able to respond to such a change in swing voter preferences because the party leadership’s preferences prevail in these parties. Therefore, the leadership can follow the swing voters by again shifting the party’s platform closer to them. The party leaders of more inclusively
organized parties, on the other hand, are constrained by the party membership. Thus, more inclusively organized parties cannot respond to changes in swing voters’ policy preferences as easily. This leads to my third hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3 (Policy Responsiveness): In case the distance between a party’s policy position and the swing voters’ position increases in between two elections, a more exclusively organized party is better able to follow the swing voters’ change in preferences by shifting its policy platform.

The Electoral System

Since parties do not operate in a vacuum, I now turn to the environment in which parties compete for office and votes – the electoral system. In line with McGillivray (2004), I argue that a country’s electoral system also effects which groups of voters will be rewarded by government parties. However, I argue that one has to take into account the interaction of the electoral system and the intraparty organization – not the interaction of the electoral system and party strength (McGillivray, 2004). Based on this different kind of interaction, I expect the differences between majoritarian and PR systems to be smaller than McGillivray (2004)\(^3\).

I argue that parties in all electoral systems seek to target swing voters to be elected to government, since the number of core constituents that potentially can be rewarded is finite. Consequently, to maximize the number of votes, parties need to win over new groups of voters while keeping their traditional core constituents. Moreover, when concerned with the electorate at large, and not specific industries, it is hard to discern if all voters that are “ideologically predisposed” (McGillivray, 2004: 26) have turned out or not. In such a case, it might be cheaper to persuade those who will turn out, but are ideologically neutral, to vote for a particular party than to convince possibly predisposed voters to turn out at all. Thus, although Dixit and Londregan’s argument that parties target swing voters was originally developed in a context of majority voting and two competing parties, it can be applied to PR systems as well.

In PR systems, however, the parties’ strategies are more intricate than in majoritarian systems since such electoral systems typically lead to multiparty systems (Duverger, 1954). Although the leadership still seeks to shift the platform toward swing voters to maximize the party’s vote, and consequently, its seat share, they are aware of the fact that by shifting the

\(^3\) McGillivray (2004: 61) argues that in PR systems with strong parties, government parties reward industries their core constituencies, while in majoritarian systems with strong parties, they reward industries in “marginal districts”.
platform too far away from their constituents, they risk losing their core constituents to a rival party competing on a similar position of the ideological spectrum. Moreover, in PR systems “with multi-member districts”, new parties entering the electoral competition tend to be more successful than in majoritarian systems “with single-member districts” (Harmel/Robertson, 1985). Therefore, party leaders also have to take into account the possibility that a new party might enter the electoral competition and gain the votes of their core constituents if they shift away too far from those core constituents’ preferences thereby opening a “gap in the market” that could be closed by a new party (Laver, 1997: 122). Thus, party leaders in multiparty systems have to strike a delicate balance between moving their party’s platform closer to swing voters and not moving too far away from their core constituents. So, not only the internal organization of a party constrains shifts toward swing voters, but also factors such as the existence of a (possible) rival party to the opposite side of the intended shift. Consequently, I expect exclusive parties as well as inclusive parties to behave differently in majoritarian and PR systems. The magnitude of shifts, the distance to different groups of voters, and the responsiveness to changes in voter preferences depends on both the electoral system in play and the internal organization of parties. Based on this, I expect the differences between inclusively and exclusively organized parties to be more pronounced in majoritarian electoral systems. Moreover, I expect the magnitude of shifts, the distance to different groups of voters, and the responsiveness to changes in voter preferences to be greater in majoritarian than in PR electoral systems.

_Hypothesis 4a (Electoral System): The differences between exclusive and inclusive parties are bigger in majoritarian electoral systems than in PR systems._

_Hypothesis 4b (Electoral System): The magnitude of shifts, the distance to swing voters and core constituents, and the responsiveness to changes in voter preferences is greater in majoritarian electoral systems than in PR systems._

Data

The preliminary descriptive statistical results that are provided in the following are based on data from the European Voter Database (Thomassen 2005). I am not providing analyses beyond simple summary statistics because, at the moment, I am exploring new data sources since I am faced with serious missing data problems when using these data. In particular, I am looking into data from the Comparative Manifesto Project, survey data from the Eurobarometer, and survey data from the CSES data.
Richard Katz and Peter Mair’s (1992) seminal work “Party Organization: A Data Handbook on Party Organizations in Western Democracies, 1960-1990” presents a comprehensive source on intraparty organizational data. Mainly drawing on this source, McElwain and Giencke (2009) created a dataset on party leader selection from which I obtain data on the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of parties’ leadership selection processes. The data on voters’, members’, and parties’ policy positions are obtained from national election studies conducted in Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden, which have been compiled in the European Voter Database (Thomassen 2005). These election studies contain several trend variables from which I construct measures of the left-right placement of the respondents as well as their positioning of the parties competing in the elections (on the same left-right scale). Moreover, the studies provide data on the respondents’ eventual party identification and his or her vote in the current election. My analysis will cover parties’ policy positions and policy shifts from 1960 to 2001 and will be restricted to the general left-right scale. Where necessary, all scales were rescaled to range from one to ten. I obtain the left-right position of the electorate’s median voters, as well as the policy positions of parties. In addition, for each election in each country, I can obtain the position of parties’ core supporters (responded indicated party identification for the respective party) as well as the position of the electorate’s swing voter (respondent indicated not to identify with a specific party). With these variables, I am also able to test May’s Law of Curvilinear Disparity.

As controls for a full-fledged analysis, I will use data on the closeness of the last election, whether or not the specific party enters the election as a government or an opposition party, and the size of the party. The closeness of the last election should influence all party leaders in the same way. The closer the last election, the greater is the incentive to shift to swing voters to gain more votes. Finally, I expect the government status to influence the incentive to shift to swing voters. Party leaders of parties already in government might have less incentive to shift to the swing voters’ policy preferences since they already have been successful at the last election, while opposition party leaders should have greater incentive to shift to swing voters. This logic, however, interacts with the margin by which the government party (parties) was elected into government.
Preliminary Summary Statistics

I now turn to some preliminary summary statistics using data from the European Voter Database (Thomassen 2005). First, these data present a great possibility to assess if core constituents and party members have in fact more extreme policy preferences than the electorate at large as stated in May’s Law of Curvilinear Disparity. Table 1 shows the distribution of different leadership selection methods, while Table 2 reports if the core constituents’ policy preferences are more extreme than the median voter and swing voters’ preferences. It turns out that May’s Law of curvilinear disparity is supported by this first crude test.

Table 1: Leader selection methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One-man-one-vote</th>
<th>Party Delegates</th>
<th>Party Executive</th>
<th>Party MPs</th>
<th>Party Notables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: May’s Law of Curvilinear Disparity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One-man-one-vote</th>
<th>Party Delegates</th>
<th>Party Executive</th>
<th>Party MPs</th>
<th>Party Notables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More extreme preferences</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less extreme preferences</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, I turn to the magnitude of policy shifts in between elections as well as the distance of parties’ policy position to their core constituents’ and swing voters’ preferences. The preliminary summary statistics lend some support to the hypothesis that more exclusively organized parties exhibit greater policy shifts in between two elections. The hypothesis that more exclusively organized parties are closer to the swing voters’ policy preferences than to their core constituents’, on the other hand, is not supported. Lastly, I report summary statistics for the Responsiveness Hypothesis, which is not supported on these grounds.
Table 3: Magnitude of policy shift in between elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One-man-one-vote</th>
<th>Party Delegates</th>
<th>Party Executive</th>
<th>Party MPs</th>
<th>Party Notables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean magnitude of policy shift</td>
<td>0.262</td>
<td>0.406</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.902</td>
<td>0.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. deviation</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td>0.392</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.192</td>
<td>0.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Relative distance to swing voters and core constituents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One-man-one-vote</th>
<th>Party Delegates</th>
<th>Party Executive</th>
<th>Party MPs</th>
<th>Party Notables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative distance</td>
<td>1.259</td>
<td>-1.177</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-1.080</td>
<td>-2.388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(negative: closer to core supporters)</td>
<td>0.229</td>
<td>1.096</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.016</td>
<td>0.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. deviation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Responsiveness to changing swing voter preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One-man-one-vote</th>
<th>Party Delegates</th>
<th>Party Executive</th>
<th>Party MPs</th>
<th>Party Notables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.404</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(negative: less responsive)</td>
<td>0.323</td>
<td>0.491</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.477</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. deviation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since in my sample, the only country using a majoritarian electoral system with single-member districts is Great Britain, I am not reporting even summary statistics for the hypotheses derived above differentiated by electoral system.
References


