

THE INSTITUTIONAL PREFERENCES OF EARLY SOCIALIST PARTIES:  
CHOOSING RULES FOR GOVERNMENT

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1. José María Maravall, *The Political Consequences of Internal Party Democracy*, (2003/190)
2. Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, *How Can Governments Be Accountable If Voters Vote Ideologically*, (2003/191)
3. Belén Barreiro, *Explaining the Electoral Performance of Incumbents in Democracies*, (2004/200)
4. Paloma Aguilar and Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, *¿Gestión o representación? Los determinantes del voto en contextos políticos complejos*, (2005/220)
5. Sonia Alonso, *Enduring Ethnicity: The Political Survival of Incumbent Ethnic Parties in Western Democracies*, (2005/221)
6. Carles Boix, *Constitutions and Democratic Breakdowns*, (2005/222)
7. Marta Fraile, *Political Knowledge and the Logic of Voting: a Comparative Study*, (2005/223)

## 1. Introduction\*

Electoral institutions bear some effect on the control of governments because they influence the manner in which governments can be made vulnerable. Whatever makes office vulnerable for incumbents makes it accessible for non-incumbents. In this chapter, I will propose an explanation of the institutional preferences of the most important newcomer group of parties to early democracies, the socialists, in terms of some of the consequences of electoral rules for government formation. I will show that what mattered for the parties was not only how many seats could be expected under different institutional arrangements. For socialist parties, electoral rules had a broader impact on their general participation strategy, including their coalition strategy and the link between electoral success and democratic responsibility in policy making. The choice of electoral rules implied a choice between forging their alliances in the electorate –so as to surpass the majoritarian threshold in the constituencies- and obtaining a potentially very variable ability to influence government, including the responsibility of full control as a result of elections, or forging their alliances in parliament, under proportional rule, and holding a relatively constant, but more restrained, influence on government. It was the parties more firmly rooted in the working class, understood in terms of unionised voters, those who were more willing to commit themselves to an institutional strategy that entailed not only a broader electoral appeal, but a more steadfast, and risky, participation in democratic government. This is the end result of an argument that begins with a simpler and wider question.

Why did different socialist parties support the choice of different electoral institutions? This will be taken as a double question. The first focuses on the intentional aspect of institutional preferences: why, in the sense of what for, did parties preferred different rules; the second centres on their origin: why did parties preferred certain anticipated outcomes of

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rules. The former question is answered if we can clarify, first, what are the consequences of rules that may be of particular importance for the parties, and, second, give evidence that their behaviour was congruent with their asserted preferences when they are so interpreted. In this sense, preferences, which are observed independently, in the public commitments of the parties, are explained by their ability to predict other kinds of behaviour. For the socialist parties, undertaking government responsibility was the last stage of a long process of mobilization, alliances, and divisions. I will show that their institutional preferences were consistent with their concern for party unity, their alliances and, ultimately, their strategy for government participation. The latter question is answered if we can causally explain the disposition of the parties regarding their path towards government, and their resulting institutional preferences. The origins will be searched in the relationship of the socialist parties to the organizations of the workers in the labour market. Social democratic parties that were supported by strong union movements did not face a severe trade-off between their increased participation strategies and the fragmentation of the workers' political movement; when unions were weak or their support was contingent, parties had to countenance the organization of viable dissenting alternatives claiming to represent the working class (Przeworski and Sprague, 1986). The first causal link is anticipatory: certain rules were preferred because they favoured a pattern of behaviour that was preferred. The second causal link explains the origins of preferences; it shows that the choice of strategies was not capricious, but rooted in the organization of the workers as a class.

Using contemporary data, Maravall shows in this volume that plurality rule makes the survival of prime ministers relatively more contingent upon economic conditions, which may be linked to performance, whereas proportional rule makes it more dependent on parliamentary politics -the support and fragmentation of the government- irrespective of the economic conditions. More in general, single member districts make governments more vulnerable to elections, all else being equal (Maravall, forthcoming). Thus, by implication, access to government responsibility is more dependent on electoral results with single member districts, whereas it hinges more on parliamentary politics under proportional representation.

This was not different in early democratic history. By supporting the choice of different electoral rules, the socialist parties were attempting to commit themselves to different participation strategies. Regardless of the electoral system, some parties were more prepared to accept full responsibility in the direction of policy, and to tie their fates to the votes obtained in elections, by themselves or together with allies. They chose, when they could, majority biased systems. Other parties betrayed greater timidity towards government, preferring the parliamentary arena to exercise a more constant, albeit limited, influence over policy; and to be able to decide, in that arena, on the timing and the degree of their commitment to direct responsibility in government, as well as on their choice of allies. Those were the proportionalists. The institutional preferences of parties were almost always revealed before the opportunities to engage in government came forth. The conjecture is that their preferences can be interpreted in the light of those particular features of their ensuing behaviour.

Preferences and rules did not always match. The institutional choices were collective choices and socialist parties often found themselves in the minority. This helps preventing circularity in the above paragraph, which, in part, describes what is the common-wisdom behaviour of parties under majority and proportional systems. We shall observe that parties preferring the same rules behaved more similarly, under different electoral systems, than parties with opposite preferences competing in similar institutional environments. This lends some support to the view of institutional choices as attempted commitments. Electoral rules were preferred because they suited different long-term mobilization and participation strategies, but those strategies, which had an independent origin, largely imposed themselves in party behaviour, at least in the short to mid term, even when the institutional constraints were less conducive to them.

The explanation would be on safer grounds if we were able to observe the behaviour of the same parties under different systems. Unfortunately, in most cases of rule change, the precedent and subsequent time periods were not comparable in terms of democratic development and neither was, therefore, the disposition of parties towards government. However, we can observe the evolution of parties in time to assess whether their behaviour was consistent with the interpretation of their institutional preferences. For this purpose, I

need a wider understanding of those preferences that goes beyond the features of institutions that directly relate to the configuration of governments.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 previews the argument. Sections 3 and 4 present an overview of the electoral reform processes in early democracies and of the position of individual parties in those processes. Section 5 discusses some of the existing literature. Section 6 introduces the main empirical regularity: union support predicts the institutional preferences of the parties. Section 7 discusses the mechanisms that explain this regularity. Section 8 and 9 offer evidence that justifies the proposed explanation; section 8 discusses some of the effects of the trade unions on party behaviour and organization that make the choice of rules predictable, whereas section 9 discusses the explanatory power of institutional preferences for government participation. Section 10 briefly concludes.

This is an entirely inductive paper. The units of analysis are parties. The sample of parties consists in every socialist party exceeding 10% of the vote in the interwar period from the sample of 22 early democracies for which data are collected in Mackie and Rose (1982). The party of Luxembourg is completely dropped for lack of adequate data, which results in a sample of 17 parties.

## **2. Preview of the argument**

Social democratic parties were shaped across three historical junctures: the decision to participate in representative (and, eventually, democratic) elections, the decision to search for allies to enlarge their electoral support and parliamentary strength, and the decision to participate in democratic government (Przeworski 1985). The three decisions can be seen as steps into full participation, and all provoked internal controversies (Przeworski and Sprague 1986, 17). Thus, behaviourally, social democratic parties distinguished themselves from other parties of the left (typically, communists) that resisted full democratic participation.

The last step was the critical one. By the late forties every social democratic party in my sample had had some governing experience, although, by that time, the experience of some parties was decades long, whereas others had spent a very limited amount of time in cabinet, even only a few months. Again, some parties had contributed all-socialist cabinets whereas others shared their responsibility in coalitions, sometimes serving in leading positions, but often in a secondary role. Hence, social democratic parties differed among themselves in the degree and manner into which they reached the final stages of democratic participation.

The branching out of social democracy started before government participation became a possibility. Searching for allies was a task that presented different dilemmas to different parties. Whether the search for allies took the form of electoral cooperation with middle-class parties under majority rule, or it was a strategy directed to attract their voters, or both, this related to different degrees of internal tension within socialist parties. Some parties were more internally divided than others, and divisions were concomitant to the difficulties at expanding their electoral support. Before the First World War, a few parties kept reasonably cohesive while cooperating with liberal forces, whereas others had difficulty in establishing alliances with non-socialist parties and in attracting votes from outside their core constituency; the latter parties were also more internally divided and, eventually, most of them suffered serious splits. After the First World War, and the attendant Russian Revolution, the dilemmas for parties revolved around government participation and electoral division of the left. The classical treatment of the issue makes it a question of class formation and class coalitions, but this is not necessary for my argument (Przeworski and Sprague 1986). The ultimate source of division among parties claiming to represent the interests of workers will be left unexplored here. It suffices to note that government participation entailed different opportunity costs for different parties. The costs can be approximately measured in terms of the votes gained by their challengers from the left.

If full participation (comprising alliances and responsibilities in the executive) imposed electoral and organizational costs in terms of schisms and potential voters lost to rivals, the trade union movement largely determined the size of such costs. This is the key to the analysis of Przeworski and Sprague of the electoral trade-offs faced by the socialist parties.

Unions determined the severity of the trade-off. They limited the success of splinters and, for the same reason, the risks of them. When strong unions sided the socialist parties, schisms were moderate to small, almost independently of whatever the party did concerning alliances and government. When unions were weak or did not clearly support the party, splinter parties succeeded, which constrained the socialist parties strategies in their pursuit of allies and opportunities to influence policy.

This chapter will show that, as a matter of empirical fact, parties in close relationship with trade unions resisted proportional representation, whereas parties related to weak trade unions endorsed it. This empirical regularity may be explained in terms of three analytically separable aspects or electoral rules: the consequences for the internal control of the party, the consequences for the pattern of alliances and for electoral growth, and the consequences for government formation.

Proportional representation incentivated internal party centralization and also internal proportionality, which suited relatively more divided parties; it also suited parties that found it harder to attract voters from different constituencies, or to find electoral allies at the grassroots level, since it transferred the coalition game to the parliamentary arena; and it offered the view of a permanent, though possibly limited, influence in policy outcomes from their position in parliament, with an “opting out” clause attached to any direct responsibility in policy making. In sum, proportional rule let the parties graduate their participation to adjust for their opportunity costs, thus flattening the edge of their trade-offs.

Majority-biased systems, in their turn, offered less incentives to the reinforcement of central party organization; they also made it a necessity, to avoid permanent underrepresentation and possible obliteration, to either enlarge the electorate beyond their initial constituency, or to find workable alliances at the constituency level; and, last, they imposed stronger variance in the influence over policy, ranging from underrepresentation to the direct responsibility in policy making.

The trade unions, by limiting divisions within the left, while reaching towards the right, potentially favoured the majoritarian route to full participation. When parties received little

support from unions at mobilizing the voters, the internal social and ideological coalition within their electorates was more fragile, and they preferred the proportionalist route to political power. Moreover, if parties could act in coordination with trade unions, they could pursue their ends through the collective action channel even when their influence in parliament was reduced. Thus, union-based parties should be less risk averse and care less for the variance of electoral results than purely political parties. This should explain the origins of the institutional preferences.

If the reasoning is correct, we should expect proportionalist parties to be relatively more divided, more politically isolated, more stagnated in their electoral growth, and more reluctant to take office. The contrary should be expected of parties that resisted, or tried to resist, proportional rule. This should explain the institutional preferences by showing that they were congruent with the constrained behaviour of parties.

I will show that proportionalist parties were more internally divided, suffered larger splits, and had a less cooperative relationship with the liberal forces, than parties supporting non proportional methods. Eventually, those constraints imposed larger opportunity costs for participation in government to proportionalist than to non-proportionalist parties, which resulted in the relative political isolation of the former. The latter could more easily pursue a supra-class strategy into participation, including frequent alliances with middle-class parties and a broader electoral appeal, with moderate to negligible losses to their left.

Government participation was the final act of the social democratic mobilization strategy. I will show that, in the inter-war period, parties that had supported majority-biased systems governed more often, started earlier, and took greater responsibility, providing more prime ministers, than proportionalist parties. Since government participation was almost inevitable under majority rule, particularly given the successful mobilization strategy of the parties that defended the permanence of such rules, preference for majority rule should anticipate the commitment of the parties. While the risk of division is part of the explanation for the institutional preferences, once the choice was made, the level of division was partly endogenous to the participation of parties. Participation costed votes lost to the left, but it costed more votes to proportionalist than to non-proportionalist parties. For non

proportionalist parties, the chief obstacle to government participation came from the right: when the parties to their right presented a common front, the social democrats alternated in government with them, usually governing for shorter periods; however, when the right was divided, non proportionalist socialists governed for very prolonged periods. Thus, it can be said that proportionalists preferred rules that allowed for self-restraint, whereas non proportionalists were restrained, when they were, mostly by the middle class parties.

The relationship among the above regularities is complex, and there may be more than one causal narrative that connects them. An appealing simplified alternative picture might be this: union-based parties formed wider electoral coalitions, and this increased their opportunities to participate in government. In this account, majoritarian electoral institutions would be preferred in order to take advantage of the electoral success. However, I argue that this is an incomplete picture. Electoral size did not determine, by itself, neither the institutional preferences nor the pattern of government participation. What the early history of socialist parties shows is moderately sized parties committing to the conquest of majorities by choosing, among other things, majority-biased systems, whereas other parties sometimes preferred proportional representation in disregard of their auspicious electoral prospects. Again, comparatively speaking, the electoral size of parties bears only a weak relationship with their level of participation in government, which is not surprising, for most parties in my sample had an average size that made them eligible for government a reasonable amount of the time.

The causal story must be constrained by the timing of events. The union-party links were established before the choice of electoral rules while, generally, the actual potential for electoral mobilization and the level of government participation is observed only after the choices were made. The pattern of alliances and divisions can be observed before and after the setting of the rules, although most serious schisms came only after that. Thus, the union movement is safely put at the causal origin, whereas the causal connection between government participation and electoral rules must be intentional. Whether the latter was subjectively anticipated or it was the inevitable consequence of previous participation choices is secondary for my argument. Yet, I should notice that unmitigated radicals were often able to anticipate correctly that the end result of electoral cooperation with the middle class and

broad electoral appeals was participation in bourgeois government, even at a time when many moderates would still take that, at least ostensibly, as a piece of verbal abuse.

The argument is not deterministic. Trade union support, or the lack of it, facilitated certain courses of action, but parties were agents with choosing capacity, however divided. They chose their long term mobilization and participation strategies under constraints. By choosing electoral institutions, they were trying to act on their institutional constraints. Parties that desired the permanence of majority-biased systems were parties that could anticipate that organizational cohesion was a relatively lesser concern, that they would be able to forge the necessary alliances to win substantial representation, and that had relatively less to fear from either temporal underrepresentation or eventual overrepresentation. But, by committing themselves to majority rule, they were also trying to eliminate any alternative course of action. When they did not succeed, they at least signalled their disposition to reach the executive as a majority -or plurality- party, and rule.

### **3. Overview of electoral reform and democratisation**

We may say that early representative regimes turned democratic when competitive elections were held with universal-male suffrage<sup>1</sup> and when the government was accountable to an elected assembly (save for the peculiarities of presidential regimes). During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century both things were often dissociated. In most cases parliamentary government preceded suffrage extension, but in some cases universal suffrage was employed to elect assemblies with very limited powers (e.g. imperial Germany or Japan). By this criterion, of the 22 representative regimes for which electoral data are collected in Mackie and Rose (1982) before 1940, 21 (all but Japan) acquired democratic status between 1848 (Switzerland) and 1931 (Spain). Five would break down in the 30s: Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain (plus Japan's involution). Table 1 summarizes the data.

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<sup>1</sup> This criterion does not satisfy a true democratic conception of equality, but it would be utterly anachronistic to say that France turned democratic only in the "second wave" (women's suffrage in 1945) and Switzerland in the "third wave" (1971).

Table 1. Democratization and electoral reform in early representatives regimes (election years)

	Parliamentary government*	Wide suffrage	Manhood suffrage	Universal suffrage	PR reform	Second PR**	Majority reform***
AUL	Westminster		1901	1903	No		1919
AUT	1919		1907	1919	1919	1920, 1923	
BEL	1831	1894	1919	1948	1900	1919	
CAN	Westminster	1900		1921	No		
DEN	1849	1848	1901	1918	1918	1920	
FIN	1907			1907	1907		
FRA	1875		1848	1945	No		1919, 1928
GER	1919		1867	1919	1919	1920	
GRC	1924		1844	1956	1926	1932, 1936	1928, 1933
ICE	1904	1908		1916	1934		
IRE	1922			1918	1922		
ITA	1848		1913	1943	1919	1921	
JPN	1946	1920	1928	1946	No		1920, 1928
LUX	1848	1902		1919	1919		
NET	1848		1918	1922	1918	1937	
NZ	Westminster		1879	1893	No		1908, 1914
NOR	1894		1900	1915	1921		1906
SPA	1931		1888	1931	No		1931, 1933
SWE	1907-1917		1911	1921	1911	1921	
SWI	1848		1848	1971	1919		
UK	Westminster	1885		1918	No		
US	Presidential	1860		1920	No		

\* Refers not to earliest experiences, when aborted, but to those that either lead to or where coincidental with democracy.

\*\* Reforms which turned the systems more proportional, except in the Netherlands (a slightly less proportional formula) and Greece (reintroduction of PR alternating with majority system).

\*\*\* In Greece refers to the reintroduction of the majority system alternating with PR. Other cases are shifts between two different majoritarian systems after 1900.

Sources: Compiled with information from Caramani (2000) for European countries, plus the clarification by Cole and Campbell (1989) for the French reform. The sources for non European countries are Graham (1962) for Australia. Hamer (1987) for New Zealand and Hayashida (1966) for Japan.

Early democracies evolved from non-democratic representative systems that employed, roughly speaking, non-proportional methods. About two thirds of the countries which were independent before 1919, and achieved democratic status before 1940, introduced proportional representation, all of them in Europe. Those institutional choices were, by and large, permanent: proportional democracies stayed proportional and majoritarian democracies

stayed majoritarian after the Second World War, and at least until the nineties. Perhaps remarkably, those countries in which the system was frequently tinkered with from the start (France and Greece, in particular) had the most frequently changing electoral rules throughout the century.

A total of 14 countries introduced proportional representation at some point. The earliest experience took place in Belgium, still without full democracy; the latest, in this period, in Iceland. In 13 cases the new systems proved fundamentally stable. In six cases the first proportional reform led to a second one deepening proportionality (often linked to further steps in democratisation). In the Netherlands, the most proportional system of all (with a single national district) proportionality was somewhat contained in the second reform. The unstable electoral system was that of Greece, where elections with proportional and majoritarian systems alternated.

The transition from non proportional to proportional electoral methods was coincidental with the first democratic elections in four cases, Austria, Finland, Germany and Luxembourg; in Sweden it was nearly coincidental with democracy, and in Ireland with full independence (which for this purpose can be equated to democracy). Apart from Sweden, Belgium is the only country in this sample to have introduced proportional representation ahead of democracy. In half of the cases the reform was delayed between two and 71 years.

Majoritarian systems were of various kinds. Single member (sometimes two member) plurality systems were originally used in Scandinavia and in the Anglophone countries. In Australia it was substituted by the alternative vote in 1918, and in New Zealand by two rounds majority in 1908 and 1911, reverting to plurality after that; in Norway, the two rounds majority method was introduced in 1906. Multimember plurality was the method used in Greece in alternation with different proportional systems. All four Scandinavian countries, plus Ireland, eventually adopted proportional methods.

Two round majority systems were the rule in the European continent: there were multimember districts in Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland; and predominantly single member districts in the rest of the countries. Two round majority systems shifted to

proportionality in all cases but France, which by the turn of the century had a tradition in alternating majoritarian systems. The only, but consequential, experiment before the Second World War was a hybrid multimember system in the 1919 and 1924 elections.

Spain and Japan form an unlikely group on their own. In both countries different systems alternated based on combinations of multimember districts with limited vote and single member districts (in Spain, sometimes with two rounds). Early democratic Spain generalized the multimember limited vote system, with a second round for candidates not reaching certain thresholds. Perhaps the only country where the pre-democratic assembly was further from the parliamentary ideal than in Japan and Spain was Finland's Estate's Diet, which, however, introduced parliamentary democracy and proportional representation in a single, self-dissolving, constitutional move.

The new proportional systems were characterised by moderate district magnitudes, particularly in the earliest reforms, save for the Netherlands and Germany, and the nearly uniform adoption of the D'Hondt formula for the allocation of seats for parties (quota methods were adopted in Ireland and the Netherlands). Systems allowing for personal vote were not uncommon, in the form of open lists (Finland, Italy, Switzerland), mixed systems with a personal vote tier (Iceland, rural constituencies in Denmark in 1918, later abolished), or single transferable vote (Ireland).

#### **4. The position of the parties and their initial electoral sizes**

There is some conspicuous regularity in the patterns of conflict and, broadly speaking, political cultures that associated to different electoral systems. Yet, this regularity may be deceiving, for the rules were reformed by collective actors, and their institutional preferences are not easily explained by political cultures or cleavage patterns. Party preferences have not

been explored in comparative perspective by the literature and, indeed, the accounts are often imprecise and fragmentary.<sup>2</sup>

The strongest regularity is this: every country where the Catholics (and, in the Netherlands, also the Protestants) had mobilized politically adopted proportional representation. This is a sufficient condition for reform. The second largest group is Scandinavia: all four countries introduced some form of proportional representation. Rokkan (1970) linked this to the rural-urban cleavage in those countries. A third, less compact “group” can be formed with countries in which proportional representation was totally (Ireland) or, at least, partially (Finland) linked to the presence of sizeable “ethnic” or “nationalist” parties. The residual case is Greece.

Socialist mobilization came close to a necessary condition for reform. Apart from Greece and Ireland, the proportional reform processes were related to the rise of socialist parties, a fact repeatedly pointed out in the literature. In nearly every country where a significant socialist party appeared, proportional representation was at least considered by some political forces. The socialists’ mobilization notwithstanding, it failed to materialise in Australia, Britain, France, New Zealand, and Spain.

As for democracies that did not introduce proportional representation, France and Spain were the only ones outside the Anglophone world (and Ireland the only one in that world to have diverged). They were also the only Catholic countries (apart from Ireland, non independent in the relevant period) where a Catholic party was absent.

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<sup>2</sup> I have found information in the following sources: Graham (1962) and Rydon (1956) for Australia; Jelavich (1987), Jenks (1974) and Schambeck (1972) for Austria; Stengers (1990) Goblet d’Alviella (1900) and Glissen (1980) for Belgium; Elklit (2002) for Denmark; Törnudd (1968) for Finland; Bonnefous (1965), Thomson (1964) and Colton (1953) for France; Sperber (1997), Suval (1985), and Berlau (1949) for Germany; Hardarson (2002) for Iceland; Gallagher (1981) and McCracken (1958) for Ireland; Noiret (1994) and Seton-Watson (1967) for Italy; Hamer (1987) and Lipson (1948) for New Zealand; Aardal (2002) for Norway; Verkade (1965) for the Netherlands; Colomer (2004b) for Spain; Lewin (1988), Verney (1957) and Rustow (1955) for Sweden; Lutz (2004) for Switzerland; and Chadwick (1996), Pugh (1980) and Butler (1963) for the United Kingdom.

The only category of parties that showed little variance in institutional preferences was the Catholic parties. In every case they contributed to the introduction of proportional representation at some point, although there was diversity in their enthusiasm: the Germans opposed it at least until 1913, and I have not found any record for their support (or opposition) in the Netherlands and Luxemburg beyond the fact that they entered the constitutional consensus that introduced it. The rest were openly in favour, and were decisive for the adoption of the new systems.

Secular conservatives (save for internal divisions) opposed proportional representation except in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, where they indeed championed reform. In Iceland and Finland they entered a consensual agreement when they could not oppose to it, as many did in Italy. Liberals tended to display the opposite preferences to secular conservatives in each country. They were seldom decisive in the collective choice, although their rejection to proportional representation was decisive in France, as it was its endorsement in Italy and, arguably, in the Netherlands. Among failed opponents, the most stubborn were the Scandinavian and the Swiss. In general, many liberal parties turned into supporters of proportional representation between the 1910s and the 1920s. Some, like the British, arrived too late to that policy.

Unlike the other large newcomer group to early democracy, the Catholics, the socialist parties had not uniform preferences. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of the sample of parties that will be subsequently analysed. Out of the 22 countries of the Mackie and Rose (1984) data set, it includes all social democratic parties that averaged at least 10% of the vote in the inter-war period, except Luxembourg, for which I do not have adequate data. (Luxembourg would be an additional entry in the PR/PR cell of table 2). The criterion leaves out Canada, Greece, Japan, and the United States.

The socialist parties opposed proportional representation or, at least, failed to defend it, in Australia, Britain, New Zealand, Spain, Belgium, Denmark, and Sweden. In the three latter cases their opposition was hopeless, and the socialists eventually accepted the accomplished facts and adapted to them. Everywhere else the socialists consistently stood for proportional

representation, and they obtained what they wanted except in France. The French socialists were actively defending proportional rule at least until the mid 1920s.

*Table 2. Institutional preferences of socialist parties and early electoral systems*

Electoral system defended	Electoral system during inter-war period (N)	
	PR	Non PR
PR	Aut, Fin, Ger, Ice, Ire, Ita, Net, Nor, Swz (9)	Fra (1)
Non PR	Bel, Den, Swe (3)	Aul, Nz, Spa, Uk (4)

Let us briefly look at the initial electoral fortunes of the socialist parties. In the first elections under proportional representation, the socialist parties that had opposed to it came third in two cases (Belgium and Sweden) and second in one case (Denmark). The socialist parties that supported the new system won the elections in three cases (Austria, Finland, and Germany) came second in five cases, and third in only two cases (Iceland and Ireland). In countries where PR was not adopted, only in Spain were the socialists the most voted party (in a very fragmented election) after having supported a non-proportional system. The opposition to PR by the British is recorded since very early, when they were still by far the third party, and the Australians won only the third election after having voted for plurality rule. Thus, as the choices were made, the relative size of socialist parties, vis-à-vis their competitors, did not to form a predictable patter in terms of the maximization of the immediate electoral advantage.

Comparing socialist parties among themselves, as Table 3 shows, there is no trace of relationship between party sizes and institutional preferences that may give any clue on the origins of such preferences. For the elections previous to electoral reforms (or failed reforms), the correlation has indeed the wrong sign. The data are limited, however, and so is their comparability, since the conditions were not uniformly democratic before the institutional reforms. For the election taking place immediately after reforms (or failed ones), the coefficient is positive, but negligible. For purposes of comparison, it may not be clear which is the correct moment of observation for parties in countries in which PR was not

adopted. The result of the first elections under new, non-proportional, electoral systems is used in the cases of France and Spain. For Australia and Britain the observations are taken at times of important votes confirming plurality rule. The correlation for all elections around 1919 is introduced for comparison, since most electoral reforms were introduced for those elections.

*Table 3. Electoral strength and institutional preferences. Correlation coefficients*

	Pre-reform elections or vote against in parliament for Aul (1901) and Uk (1923)	Post-reform or post-vote elections	Socialist vote circa 1919
Preference (PR=1)	.20 n.s. (12)	-.20 n.s. (17)	-.21 n.s. (17)

*Note:* For cases included see Appendix.

## 5. Some explanations of party institutional preferences

The focus on institutional preferences departs from the main body of existing literature on the electoral reform processes. To pick two recent examples, the role of specific actors is secondary in Blais, Dobrzynska and Indridason (2005) and in Colomer (2003). The former base their account on previous institutions and the latter on the fragmentation of the party system. Although the underlying mechanism is, for Colomer, the reaction of parties to fragmentation, there is no indication of specific preferences for specific parties. In Rokkan's (1970) classic but fragmentary remarks, actors are somewhat more prominent. For him the modal case of proportional reform arise from the interaction of socialist growth and division among the censitaire parties. Old parties feared the overrepresentation of the socialists, to which they could respond either by uniting against them or, when the "tradition of hostility and mistrust", rooted in social cleavages, prevented them from doing so, introducing proportional representation. However, he confusedly adds that socialist parties were also interested in reform, to improve their representation, which created a combination of pressure from above and below. Thus, one side feared socialist overrepresentation and socialists feared

underrepresentation, a statement that would need a convincing account on the disparity of expectations (which Rokkan does not offer) to make sense.

Boix's (1999) influential article focuses on the parties to the right of socialists and proposes a mechanism, in place of the "traditions of hostility", to explain their institutional choices. Old parties are supposed to have introduced proportional representation when, in the face of socialist electoral growth, their electoral forces were evenly divided. In this situation, fear of a socialist victory due to coordination failure on the part of non-socialist voters, Boix argues, impelled electoral reform. Cusack, Iversen and Soskice (2003) introduce a second variation to develop an argument from Rokkan's sketch. It was neither "hostility" nor electoral balance, but economic divisions other than class what prevented the unity, either by electoral realignment or by fusion of parties, of the non-socialists. They substitute a reasonable typology of economic interests for Rokkan's societal cleavages, but the real strength of their argument seems to rest in the finding (Iversen and Soskice 2002) that proportional representation eventually (after the Second World War) produced more leftist governments and more redistribution than non-proportional systems. Hence, the argument goes, the middle and upper classes, represented by assumption by the parties to the right of the socialists, would have rallied together under some majoritarian system had not economic differences other than class, that is, other than fiscal redistribution, prevented this.

I will not discuss the merits of these arguments, but I am interested in the imputation of preferences that results from them. For Cusack, Iversen and Soskice it is the policy consequences of rules that matters; if they are right, socialist parties should have always advocated proportional representation. In my reading of Boix's argument, what drives the institutional preferences of the right is the minimization of socialist representation. What might motivate the socialist parties' preferences is less clear, but if it is the maximization of their own representation then, as a rule, socialist parties should have resisted proportional representation whenever the right proposed it. In both cases, the main parties to the right should have agreed on reform when it did take place, and, at least for Cusack, Iversen and Soskice, they should have agreed on non-reform when it did not take place. But the stubborn empirical fact is that socialist parties preferences over electoral systems showed a fair amount of variance, and the pattern was not clearly related to the preferences of the other parties. As

for the parties to their right, they agreed on the best institutional strategy as often as they did not.

Referring specifically to socialist parties, it has been sometimes suggested (e.g. Rustow 1950) that socialist preference for proportional representation was rooted in a socialist belief in equality, which would translate, for this purpose, into “electoral justice”. It is true, and hardly surprising, that political arguments defending proportional representation were put in those or similar terms. Yet, although socialists advocated proportional representation more often than not, there is enough variance to make such explanation implausible. One needs not be prejudiced against irrational explanations to question whether, say, the British Labour Party was less committed to democratic ideals than the German Social Democrats; or, within those parties, whether Macmillan and Bernstein, who advocated majoritarian systems, were milder democrats than Snowden and Kautsky, who did not.

It may be true (for parties as well as for individual leaders) that ideology was related to institutional preferences in a different way, for it seems that moderates tended to have greater reservations towards proportional representation, whereas radicals appear to have been more consistent defenders of proportionality. The truth of this relationship hinges on how we define moderation or radicalism, which is not uncontroversial. The explanation, however, cannot be purely ideological. Ideology matters when it is translated into organization and political strategy, and that is where we should search for explanations. Even if radicalism were systematically related to proportionalist preferences, if I show that those preferences were no less systematically related to weak unionism, the common sense implication will be that the most fundamental term in the relationship, determining the other two, is the last one.

A nearly opposite suggestion to considerations of electoral justice is that socialist parties, as indeed any other party, may be assumed to have different preferences over electoral systems according to their interest in terms of seats maximization. Hence, smaller parties are expected to prefer proportional representation and larger ones are expected to prefer majoritarian systems. This is the natural conclusion to extract from the *micromega* principle (Colomer 2004a): smaller parties prefer the large (district magnitudes, electoral quotas, and assemblies) and larger parties prefer the small. However, it was often the most

voted parties the ones to advocate proportional representation, that is, “large” institutional alternatives, while the success of some of the parties who opposed reform was still to be seen. There was no relationship between the electoral strength of the parties and their preferences.

## **6. Institutional preferences and the trade unions**

Proportionalist parties were weakly connected to weak unions and non-proportionalist parties held stronger ties with relatively stronger unions. My conjecture is that this is the causal origin of the institutional preferences. I review the evidence in this section; the mechanisms that explain this pattern are presented in subsequent sections.

When the socialist movement was so organized that the unions (and, in the Belgian case, the cooperatives) were constituent parts of the party, the party rejected, or at least attempted to reject, proportional representation in nearly every case. This happened in Australia, Belgium, Britain, New Zealand and Sweden. The one clear exception is Ireland. However, this Irish exception is hardly relevant, since the decision to adopt PR predates the existence of the party and the union as independent organizations and, in any case, both were rather weak.

It is interesting to note that union-party relations in Norway went along this model except for the break of 1919, when the Labour Party joined the Comintern, leading to a reformist split, while the union joined the Amsterdam International. In 1923 relations would be restored and the two wings of the party (the communists remained as a separate fringe group) were brought together by the union (Esping-Andersen 1985, 67, 80). However, by that time, in 1920, proportional representation had been introduced. In the light of the comparative evidence, it seems reasonable to speculate that the Norwegian socialists would have been less favourable to proportional representation had it been proposed at a different time.

Another fairly exceptional case is Iceland. The Labour Party of Iceland was founded in 1916 as the political arm of the Federation of Labour, but the congruence between the two organizations was not enforced until 1930, since members of other parties could be affiliated to the unions. Hence, it was not strictly a case of collective membership. In the 1930 union (and party) congress it was required to union members to commit to the Labour Party platform. As a result, the communists walked out to set separate unions and a new party (Karlsson 2000; 300, 304-5).

The Danish and the Spanish parties are the only cases of non-proportionalist parties without union collective membership. Esping-Andersen (1985, 65) stresses that the system of top-level joint-representation of both organizations, institutionalised in Denmark in 1890, made the party-union relationships nearly as close as in Sweden and Norway (as long as they were good in the latter case). The Danish trade unions organization did not directly provide affiliates, but it did provide funds and leaders to the party. In the Spanish case, the socialist union and the socialist party were nearly fused at the top from 1920, after the communist split, until 1935, when it was again on the verge of scission. The union took the political direction of the movement during the 20s, adopting a reformist stance and cooperating with the dictatorship, and it had nearly absorbed the party in the eve of democratisation (Juliá 1997, 110-33)

It is difficult to obtain full and systematic comparative evidence on party-union linkages for this period. In his study of the European left, Bartolini (2000) classifies the party-union relationships as “contingent”, “interlocking”, or “subordinate”. However, I do not find this typology completely useful, among other things, because he ignores unionist collective membership in the party as a relevant feature. I assume that some degree of “interlocking relationships” must have been present in nearly every case, except perhaps in the extreme cases of “contingent” relationships, including the cases listed by Bartolini as union-to-party subordination (Austria, Finland and Germany), which, in his classification, are lumped together with the cases where he finds party-to-union subordination (the British and the Irish). Again, whether one of the organizations is more or less subordinate to the other, given “interlocking”, must have depended on their relative success.

Using Bartolini's data (supplemented with data for Australia and New Zealand), I have calculated the ratio between socialist voters and unionised workers (in leftist unions) around 1919 (see table 4). The observations at this time are comparable in that they are chosen to be previous to the electoral entry of communist parties proper and, at the same time, electorates were greatly mobilized in every country. On the other hand, this is the time slice closer to electoral reform in most cases. I assume that this ratio approximately indicates the strength of the unions in the socialist movement, at least provided that relations were not "contingent".

*Table 4. The party-union link and the institutional preferences of socialist parties*

	Preference	Ratio union to votes ca. 1919	Union members ca. 1919*	Union members interwar average	Remarks
Uk	Non PR	2.36	24.7	17.5	Collective Membership
Nz	Non PR	1.46	11.4	16.1	Collective Membership
Swe	Non PR	1.43	23.5	16.5	Collective Membership
Den	Non PR	1.05	20.5	16.6	
Aul	Non PR	1.01	23.6	23.3	Collective Membership
Bel	Non PR	0.85	27.4	23.6	Collective Membership
Spa	Non PR	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	Joint leadership and party subordination 1920-31
Ire	PR	n.a.	n.a.	7.6	Collective Membership
Swz	PR	1.25	23.3	17.9	Contingent relationships
Net	PR	0.79	15.4	8.5	
Fra	PR	0.61	8.7	10.7	Contingent relationships
Ita	PR	0.61	11.2	10.5	Contingent relationships
Aut	PR	0.58	20.0	20.4	
Ger	PR	0.47	14.7	13.5	
Nor	PR	0.47	9	9.0	Union/party relations broken 1919-1923
Fin	PR	0.11	2.8	2.9	

\* Percentage of left union members in the electorate. The ca. 1919 observation for NZ refers to 1914 and the interwar average is taken from only two observations.

Sources: Author's compilation with data from Bartolini (2000), the Australian Council of Trade Unions: <http://www.actu.asn.au/public/about/history.html>, and the Northern Amalgamated Workers Union: <http://www.awunz.org.nz/>. For the sources of the remarks see the references of the text.

The three cases classified as contingent by Bartolini are cases of proportionalist parties: France, Italy and Switzerland. Only in the latter case the union had numerical advantage over the party's electoral mobilization capacity. In the remaining cases for which Bartolini

supplies data, the ratio of unionised workers to socialist voters perfectly matched the institutional preferences of socialists. The lowest ratio of non proportionalist parties was that of Belgium, the only one below unity, but this figure does not take into account the unique mass cooperative movement which was also a constituent part of the party.

As for sheer union numerical strength within the enfranchised population, non-proportionalist parties were related to stronger unions, whereas the proportionalist parties were sided, if indeed they were, by unions whose membership was lower on average. The correlation coefficient between preferences and union strength circa 1919 is .68 ( $p < .01$ ) and the correlation with the inter-war average is .65 ( $p < .01$ ).

## **7. The effects of unions and the anticipated consequences of rules**

In this section I outline the hypothetical mechanisms that link the causal background of union support with the choice of electoral rules and with the behaviour of the parties. To explain the empirical pattern that links the trade unions with preference for electoral systems in an agent-based causal narrative, the effects of the trade unions on the socialist parties must be consistent with the intentional choices of the parties concerning the electoral institutions. Unions should contribute to shape the expectations of the parties in such a way that their preferences for electoral systems, given their foreseeable consequences, can be made predictable. Again, given the predictable consequences of rules, the fact that parties preferred them may be taken as an attempted commitment to follow the path favoured by them. Thus, on the one hand, the institutional preferences are explained by the constraints of unions on party behaviour but, on the other hand, the institutional preferences contribute to explain part of the subsequent behaviour of parties.

To understand what do parties wanted the electoral systems for, I suggest to single out three types of effects of electoral rules: the effects on the pattern of coalitions and alliances, including the prospects for electoral growth of the new parties, the consequences on party centralization, and their impact on the variability in policy influence, including the rules of

access to government. The list may not be exhaustive, and the three aspects of rules are unlikely to have had equal weight in the institutional choices of the parties. In any case, my argument holds that union support oriented the choices in the same direction on those three accounts.

In a nutshell, unions facilitated the pursuit of a supraclass electoral strategy, and the preference for majority-biased electoral rules was a signal to their commitment to that strategy on the part of some parties. This was, I believe, the main contribution of the trade unions. In addition, unions weakened the incentives for the centralization of the parties. Last, trade union support can be said to have facilitated the transition from supraclass electoral mobilization to democratic government, but, since that transition was nearly inevitable under majoritarian electoral systems, the very fact that some parties preferred majoritarian rules should lead us to expect them to be more involved in government.

In a world in which there are no natural and permanent majorities, different electoral systems favour different kinds of alliances. In multiparty contests, plurality rule may encourage pre-electoral agreements, and we find many in history, but these agreements impose an “organizational contradiction”. Plurality fosters relatively decentralized parties while, at the same time, pre-electoral pacts are unlikely to easily develop at the local level; on the contrary, they are normally approved and crafted by the central organizations, if only because they require that many local party organizations renounce their candidates. A possible development out of this situation is realignment, either by party fusion or by voters’ strategic coordination; another is electoral reform. Two ballots majority allows that electoral agreements be crafted at the local level. Again, agreements need not be pre-electoral but may be taken contingently on first-round electoral results. Coalitions may also be needed to form government, but in this case they are less constrained to match the pattern of electoral alliances than in the case of plurality, since the locus of electoral coalition is typically local, often informal, and does not require the commitment to a wide agreement on cooperation set in advance of elections. Last, it is obvious that proportional representation mostly favours post-electoral agreements directed from party headquarters.

Hence, in this connection, for parties to choose a majoritarian system, they had to be confident in their capacity to attract voters outside their main social or ideological constituency, either by realignment or by pact. Voters retain substantial control on the shape of the coalition that may potentially turn into a majority, for pacts wished by leaders need not be honoured by voters, or even by grassroots activists. Voters may be alienated into abstention, or into opposition, if they reject their constituency candidate when it belongs to a different party to their preferred one, or they may disobey their party instructions for second ballot pacts. In decentralized parties, militant activists may boycott pacts by launching or failing to withdraw candidates not endorsed by pacts, and may fail to mobilize voters into voting for candidates of other parties. Again, the control of voters over coalition politics is minimal with proportional representation, since they normally take place after the vote. Any party may substitute parliamentary coalitions for the ability to attract voters from different social groups. If the voters trust their preferred parties, they may also be better off by surrendering the coalition decision to them. Votes are given once and for the entire legislature, and voters may reason that it is better to vote for one's own party and let the party decide with whom and for how long is going to cooperate, rather than giving their vote to a pre-settled pact when this is locally represented by a candidate of a less preferred party.

The importance of the relationship with the trade unions for socialist parties has been hinted at in several ways in the literature. Without some trade union assistance, socialist electoral mobilization could hardly take off, which has been suggested as a possible explanation to the American exception (Lipset and Marks 2001). But even where mobilization took off, Przeworski and Sprague (1986) convincingly argue that the party-union relationship was the basic determinant of the strategic flexibility that allowed certain parties to appeal to non-workers voters while retaining the bulk of the workers' constituency. For Przeworski and Sprague, this also set a limit to a pure supraclass strategy. Precisely because the strategic flexibility derived from a solid collective action organization of the workers as a class, workers could not be deserted.

When the support of the unions was weak, the supraclass strategy entailed a steep electoral trade-off. In practical terms, this meant that the organization of viable leftist alternatives could only be contained at the price of relative isolation (the Austrian party is a

good example of this) or that, more commonly, even a limited amount of cooperation with middle class parties and/or the widening of the electoral appeal towards their voters incited profound conflicts and schisms (the German party is representative of this predicament, shared by many others). When strong unions consistently supported the political movement, splinters ranged from the minimal (in the Labour parties of the Anglophone countries) to the moderate (in Belgium, Denmark or Sweden).

Not surprisingly, the parties that Przeworski and Sprague (1986) estimate to have faced a more severe electoral trade-off were proportionalist parties (Finland, France and Germany), while, within their sample, the parties for which the supraclass strategy was optimal resisted proportional rule, except Norway, an exception that may be explained by the particular timing of reform (the other cases were Belgium, Denmark and Sweden).

The direct influence of electoral systems on party organization operates fundamentally through district magnitude and the ballot structure. The effects of magnitude and the number of districts on candidate selection are easily recognized. On the one hand, the larger the number of districts the more difficult to centralize the candidate selection process. On the other hand, the larger the size of the units the easier to accommodate candidates, and, under closed lists, the easier to accommodate candidates into safe positions. These connected variables have also a necessary impact on electoral and organization costs: the larger the size of the district the more efficient the centralization of campaign resources. Therefore, large and relatively few districts provide manifold incentives for party centralization. These incentives may be partially offset by the effects of open ballots, which leave room to personal votes or even to cross-party votes.<sup>3</sup>

Assuming that Przeworski and Sprague (1986) are right in their argument, it may be argued that, a strong union movement siding the socialist party provided a surrogate of party discipline and centralization, precisely because dissidents were unlikely to have much political future without union support, the more so the more the potential dissidents were moved by a class oriented ideology. At the same time, this might have turned internal

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<sup>3</sup> A detailed comparison of the effects on electoral systems on French and German parties, following those lines, can be found in Kreuzer (2001). For a review of this issue, see Maravall (this volume).

disagreements within the party much more tolerable, since independent minded leaders were less likely to enter into fissiparous strife. This side effect of union support reduced the incentive to adopt proportional representation that could stem from the concern with internal organization.

The last remarkable effect, for my argument, of majority-biased systems, is that they impose greater variance in the ability of the parties to influence policy. Parties under proportional rule may expect to have a safer representation floor. During the interwar period, the minimal percentage of seats for the twelve parties competing under proportional rule averaged 21.8%, whereas for the five parties competing under majoritarian systems it was 13% ( $p < .05$ ).<sup>4</sup> Parties under proportional rule may also expect less variability in their representation. The mean range of the seats' percentage for parties in proportional systems was 13.5 points, while it was 31.6 points for parties in non proportional systems ( $p < .05$ ).<sup>5</sup>

The unions provided an alternative channel, through collective action, for workers demands. If party and union shared their aims, the risk of political underrepresentation under majority rule was a less serious one. The socialists were in a position to influence policy via collective action even when the full control of policy rested in the hands of a non-socialist majority government. When party and union acted in coordination, alternation in government might have been a better result than the more constant, but usually more limited, influence over policy based on proportional representation in the legislature.

A crucial aspect of the variability imposed by majoritarian rules on policy influence is that those rules and, particularly, plurality rule, make rather unequivocal that winning elections entails assuming the responsibility of government. Proportional representation permits the practice of what Italians later called *conventio ad excludendum*, a convention which may be the excluded's initiative as much as it can be the excluder's. More generally, proportional representation allows for greater control over the desired degree of influence

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<sup>4</sup> Single tailed test, not assuming equal variances.

<sup>5</sup> Single tailed test, not assuming equal variances.

over policymaking, whereas plurality rule imposes either little or full capacity to direct policy.

That proportional rule permits parties to restrain their commitment to government does not mean that the parties will choose to do it, particularly, if my argument is correct, the non-proportionalist parties. Thus, in actual fact, socialists governed for longer periods under proportional representation than under majority rule, but this was largely due to the strength of non-proportionalist parties acting in systems contrary to their preference. Hence, it is not possible to determine the exact effects of rules on the behaviour of parties without controlling for their preferences.

However, it is worth pausing at a particular effect that it is detectable regardless of preferences, and it is the immediacy of commitment. The link between electoral results and government responsibility was more immediate under majority-biased systems than under proportional rule, and the more so the more serious was the responsibility assumed. During the inter-war period, different men assumed the office of prime minister 169 times (excluding Switzerland). The socialists were part of the cabinet 35 times, held the prime-ministerhip 20 times, and presided over single party socialist cabinets 10 times. Socialists were part of cabinets in which the prime minister took office as a result of elections -within three months of elections- 43% of the times (15/35) (the figure for non socialists was 27%, or 35/128). It happened 62% of the times (5/8) with majoritarian systems, and 59% (10/17) of the times with proportional systems. When the socialists themselves assumed the office of prime minister, they did it as a result of elections 83% (5/6) and 50% (7/14) of the times, respectively, with non proportional and with proportional systems; the corresponding proportion for non socialists prime ministers was 26% (38/143), with little difference by electoral systems. Finally, when socialists took office alone, this was a consequence of electoral results in every case (4/4) under majoritarian rules, and in half of the cases (3/6) under proportional ones.

Hence, if the argument is correct, strong socialist unions made it possible for socialist parties to commit to some form of majority rule rather than to proportional representation. Unions formed the basis of a flexible strategy oriented at expanding the electorate or at

committing voters into electoral alliances, without serious losses, limited the incentives for party centralization, and provided safety against the uncertainties of government based in a majority-biased system. If only for those reasons, unions causally determined institutional preferences. Unions acted as causal constraints that made the choice of the supraclass strategy, signalled by electoral institutional preferences, a non-voluntaristic choice. Once a supraclass strategy oriented to a broad electorate was adopted, the decision to participate in government under majority rule could hardly be avoided.

A party choosing a non-proportional system is expected to be a party that could count on its capacity to attract voters from different social constituencies, and, by implication, to count on not being deserted by its former voters when trying to attract others. When the party strategy was that of finding electoral partners rather than directly trying to gain their votes, it had to be able to lend and borrow voters to and from contiguous ideological groups. It is also expected, as a rule, to have had less to fear from internal divisions than a proportionalist party. Last, it had to be a party willing to risk underrepresentation in parliament, and periods of opposition while, at the same time, being ready to assume government when on the winning side. This last clause is not superfluous, since one gets the impression that what some socialists disliked most of the idea of alternation in government was the governing bits.

## **8. Alliances and divisions**

Parties backed by the trade unions and endorsing majoritarian systems were relatively more successful in the pursuit of a supraclass strategy than proportionalist parties. First, during the early period of socialist mobilization, the relations between socialist and liberal parties were supportive, including various kinds of electoral alliances, in all cases union-supported, non-proportionalist parties. Second, parties supported by the trade unions endured smaller schisms. In addition, non-proportionalist parties may be supposed to have resisted milder organized internal tensions. Presumably as a result of a successful supraclass strategy, non-proportionalist parties obtained more votes in the long term.

Australia, Britain and New Zealand, in this chronological order, were parallel and paradigmatic cases of “lib-labism”. The Labour parties emerged nearly as working class branches of the liberal movement, with liberals surrendering a number of constituencies to labour candidates in exchange for Labour restraint in others. In all three cases the Labour parties eventually overcame the liberals in the electorate, but they kept cooperating until the liberals opted for the right (Luebbert 1991, Loveday 1977, Overacker 1955, Overacker 1949). Belgium and Denmark came closest to those cases in their degree of liberal-labour cooperation. Liberal-socialist cartels were present in the first round of Belgian elections in the two elections preceding the introduction of proportional representation in 1900, and continued in four bi-annual elections between 1906 and 1912, when this strategy culminated in a common electoral platform that was rejected by the electorate (Luebbert 1991, Kossman 1918). The Danish social democrats cooperated electorally with the liberal party since 1877, changing partner to the left-liberal splinters (the Radical Party) since 1906 until the outbreak of the war. The pacts consisted in the allotment of constituencies guided by class composition criteria, and were sometimes only narrowly approved by the socialist party conference, which explains their interest in the two round system (Miller 1996, Elklit 2002). The association between Swedish socialist and liberals was only slightly less formal and continued: Branting, the socialist leader, was elected in a liberal ticket in 1896 and 1899, and in alliance with liberals in 1902; in 1902-5 the social democrats were informally allied to the liberals, avoiding mutually damaging competition; in 1908 constituencies were explicitly allotted between the parties, and voters coordination was perfectly successful. Proportional representation was introduced after that, with the significant opposition of both parties, and the electoral pacts ceased, which goes a long way into explaining why it was introduced by the party of the Right (Rustow 1950 Lewin 1988, Tingsten 1973). Events were retarded in Spain but from 1909 onwards the republican-socialist electoral cartels were also frequent in pre-democratic elections, and, crucially, it was the electoral victory of that cartel in the 1931 local elections what triggered the transition to democracy and led the cartel into a coalition government (Juliá 1997).

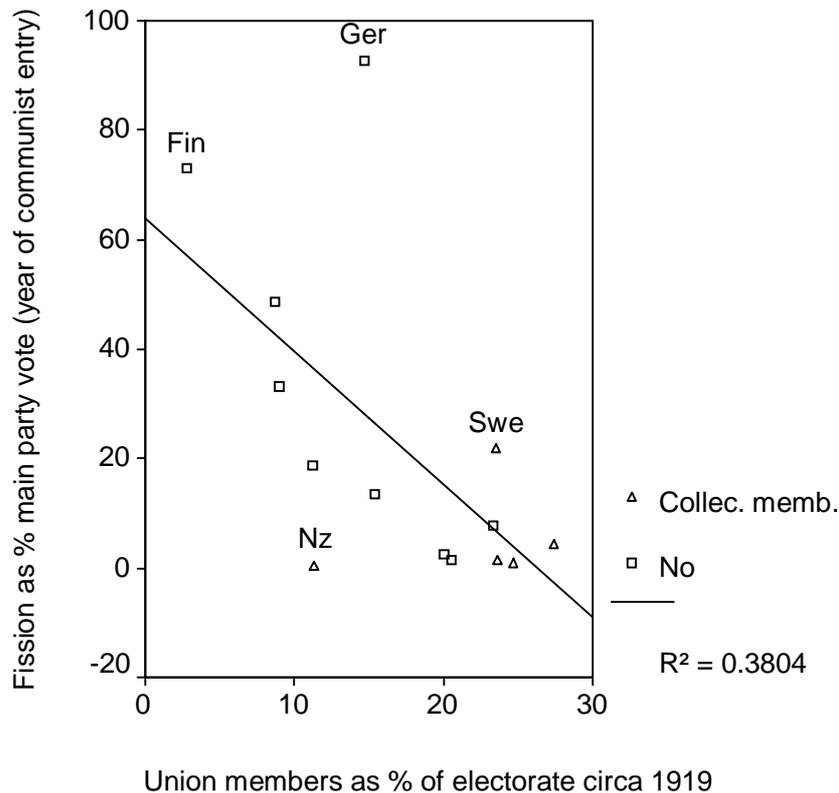
Liberal and socialist cooperation was also significant for three proportionalist parties, the French, the Dutch and the Swiss, but it was far more intermittent and informal, generally confined to the second round of elections, and always discontinued in parliament. In fact,

those three parties, and only those, went into, at least partly, self-inflicted political isolation after First World War. The Swiss case is remarkable because the party was entirely “lib-labist” until 1904. Electoral alliances were broken in 1905, later restored, and definitely suspended in 1914. Counting only the most favourable period for cooperation, between 1899 and 1911, there were 146 socialist candidates non-endorsed for 32 endorsed by the Radicals in first ballots. When their outburst of “radicalism” passed, proportional representation was already there (Luebbert 1991: 51, 224; Bartolini 2000: 85). The French informal second-round pacts between radicals and socialists were important to both, but the socialists passed resolutions against ministerial cooperation in 1905 and against any kind of formal pacts and first round support in 1919. Only when proportional representation ceased to be a realistic demand the moderates attempted a timid rapprochement, although the party rejected an invitation to form government in 1924 and 1929, accepting the Popular Front formula in 1936 (Colton 1953; Judt 1976). In the Netherlands, competition between liberals and socialists in the first round jumped from 23% of districts in 1901 to 70% in 1905. Although mutual support in the second round was frequent, the socialists rejected an invitation to join the liberal government as early as 1913, and passed a resolution against so doing in the future (Kossman 1978: 516; Verhoef 1974; Verkade 1965: 54)

For most of the other proportionalist parties, the record of early cooperation with liberal parties ranged between the poor and the non-existent. It is important to notice that cultural or institutional conditions did not determine the outcome. For example, in Norway, in stark contrast with Denmark and Sweden, the socialists self-prohibited any kind of electoral alliances already in 1906, a redundant proclamation since the liberals had consistently rejected them before that date (Luebbert 1991: 121-4). In Germany, the two-ballot system never helped the socialists, since they were never able to add any significant support to their votes in the second round. Their attempted electoral pact with the liberals *for the second round* in 1912 was a paradigmatic fiasco, boycotted as it was by liberal voters in the constituencies (and, partly, by socialist radicals as well). This was the perfect example of a pact wished by the elites of the parties but rejected by voters and grass root activists. The parties found their way into cooperation with proportional representation (Sperber 1997; Suval 1985).

The other side of a successful supraclass mobilization strategy is the containment of losses to parties competing for the representation of the workers. As a matter of fact, the level of unionisation (in leftist unions) greatly reduced the fragmentation of leftist parties. Figure 1 plots the percentage of union members on the electorate around 1919 against the size of the splinter parties, measured as a percentage of their vote over the main social democratic party vote, in the first elections entered by the communist party. For every point of increase in trade union density the size of the split was reduced an average of 2.4 points (standard error: .89).<sup>6</sup> Taking elections as units, during the entire interwar period, in 63 elections contested by communist parties and for which data on unionisation are available, the correlation coefficient with current union density in the electorate was  $-.42$  ( $p < .01$ ).

Figure 1. Socialists schisms and trade unions



<sup>6</sup> Iceland, Ireland and Spain are not included in the sample.

The same conclusion applies for the link between parties and trade unions (table 5). At the year of communist entry into electoral competition, parties without union collective membership (including Norway) endured splits that reached a mean of 28.3% as a proportion of their vote, whereas parties with collective union membership had splinters that, on average, amounted to 6.6% of their vote. The mean difference stabilized in nearly 14 points along the interwar period.

*Table 5. Union collective membership in social democratic parties and size of all splinter parties as a proportion of the main party's vote*

Collective membership	Year of communist entry	Interwar average	N
Yes	6.6%	4.3%	6
No	28.3%	20.1%	11
<i>P</i> value for difference	.12	.06	

Since qualitative evidence of internal dissension within parties may be ambiguous, we can take consummated schisms as an indicator of previous (as well as ongoing) organizational division. The organizational conflicts did not only hinder the success of electoral mobilization, they provided an incentive to party centralization and, hence, an additional reason to support proportional representation. In fact, as a rule, to the extent that socialist parties defended proportional representation, they defended large districts and closed lists. Open lists or mixed systems allowing for personal vote were arrangements imposed by non socialist parties, as documented in the literature for the cases of Denmark (where the socialists turned to demand closed lists once the majority system was abandoned), Iceland, Italy and Finland. Generally, it was the parties plagued with more severe internal divisions between moderate and radical factions those to do so. Contrary to common wisdom, it was not proportional representation that aided the communist and other socialist splinter parties; rather, it was the parties that would experience more dramatic breach those who actually preferred proportional representation.

Table 6 summarizes the data on the electoral size of communists and other socialist splinter parties in observations taken at the first elections contested by communists. The

correlation between leftist schism and institutional preferences is .46 ( $p = .056$ ), whereas the correlation between the size of splinters and the electoral system is .20 ( $p = .43$ ); the partial correlation coefficient between institutional preferences and schisms, holding the electoral system constant, is .43 ( $p = .087$ ).

*Table 6. Communist and other socialist vote as a proportion of the vote for the main socialist party, by electoral system and electoral preferences of the socialist parties (year of communist entry)*

Socialist preference	Non PR systems		PR systems		All	
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
Non PR	3.1	4	6.0	3	4.3	7
PR	48.8	1	19.1	10	21.8	11
All	12.2	5	16.1	13	20.3	18

The pattern of early divisions and cooperation with liberal parties is consistent, in general lines, with the electoral fortunes of the socialist parties in the interwar period. Parties choosing proportional representation were, *in the long run*, less successful in elections than parties preferring majoritarian systems. For the interwar period, the mean vote for non-proportionalist parties was 10.8 points higher than the mean vote for proportionalist parties ( $p < .01$ ). Holding the electoral system constant, the partial correlation coefficient between the average electoral results and the institutional preferences was .63 ( $p < .01$ ).

Thus, proportionalist parties behaved consistently with the interpretation of their institutional preferences: they had more internal problems, more divisions, and more difficulty at establishing electoral coalitions with non-socialist parties. Non-proportionalist parties, in their turn, stayed united while cooperating with non-socialist parties in the arena closest to the electorate. Those patterns of behaviour translated into different degrees of electoral success in the inter-war period but, particularly, as we shall presently see, translated into different behaviour towards government participation.

## 9. Government

Non-proportionalist parties are expected to be more ready to enter government than proportionalist parties. In a way, the institutional preferences themselves are an indication to that, since they can be seen as an expression of a participation strategy that could only lead to government. Although trade union support was the basis of the success of a supraclass strategy that benefited from a mild electoral trade-off, in this section I take the strategy, marked by the institutional preferences, to be the explanation of subsequent behaviour. By choosing rules, parties sorted themselves out, and this self-classification should be more relevant than any other criterion. The fact that we can explain some of the reasons the parties might have had to choose as they did does not render the choice meaningless.

Most opportunities to enter government came forth after the transition to democracy was completed, during the interwar period, and this is this period where the behaviour of the parties was more clearly comparable. Yet, some evidence of their different attitude towards government was given even sooner.

To the extent of my knowledge, the only non-proportionalist party to have turned down an early offer to participate in government was the Swedish party in 1911, and this rejection must be qualified. Direct participation was rejected or, better, postponed, on tactical rather than on “principled” grounds, at least by the party leader H. Branting. The party had nonetheless committed their support to the liberal cabinet already in advance of the 1911 elections, and some informal negotiations concerning its composition were conducted. By 1914 the party officially proclaimed its disposition to enter government, either in coalition with the liberals or alone if necessary (Tingsten 1973: 416-22). The rest of non-proportionalist parties did enter government as soon as their parliamentary majorities or their coalition potential permitted.

This is markedly contrasted by the experience of non-proportionalist parties. For example, when the Dutch party was offered to enter government in 1913 the rejection was followed by a party resolution self-prohibiting participation, since the leadership was afraid that the party would badly divide as a result. Indeed, the earliest governing experience had to

wait to the aftermath of the Second World War (Kossmann 1978: 509-10; Verkade. 1965: 54). When individual leaders fell into the temptation of cabinet responsibility, proportionalist parties reacted severely. For example, the Finnish party expelled a veteran party leader in 1906 for accepting a position in the Senate, the pre-democratic representative cabinet that should conduct the imminent transition towards democracy (Kirby 1979: 32). As it is well known, the earliest cabinet member of socialist affiliation in a national government was Millerand in France, but this is well known because it triggered a general ban on participation at the Amsterdam congress of the International in 1904. The French anti-ministerialists persuaded the congress. The French SFIO incorporated the resolution in its first congress in 1905 and was one of the parties most reluctant to abandon it, with the exception of the brief “sacred union of parties” during part of the First World War, rejecting the possibility of cabinet responsibility until well into the thirties (Judt 1976; Colton 1953).

Thus, on average, non-proportionalist parties entered “bourgeois” cabinets sooner. Most non-proportionalist parties (all but the Spanish and the New Zealanders) had some cabinet experience already during the First World War, and well ahead of that in the case of Australia. The only proportionalist parties to have had cabinet experience during the First World War were the French and the Finnish, but the experience was discontinued after the war. Appendix A reports the date of first cabinet positions and first prime ministers for my sample of parties.

During the interwar years, as tables 7 and 8 show, the parties choosing proportional representation participated in government for much shorter periods, if at all, than parties that had preferred majoritarian systems. They participated in government 12.2% of the time, on average, and held the prime minister position 6.8% of the time. In contrast, the figures for non-proportionalist parties were 42.1% and 26.6%. The difference was even more pronounced for the group of parties competing under proportional systems: the three parties that attempted to resist electoral reform governed 60.5% of the time, on average, and held the prime ministership nearly 40% of the time.

*Table 7. Socialist inter-war government participation by electoral system and institutional preference (percentage of months during interwar years; cases are parties)*

Socialist electoral preference	Non PR systems		PR systems		All	
	Average	N	Average	N	Average	N
Non PR	28.3	4	60.5	3	42.1	7
PR	9.1	1	12.5	9	12.2	10
All	24.4	5	24.5	12	24.5	17

*Table 8. Socialist inter-war prime minister by electoral system and institutional preference (percentage of months during interwar years; cases are parties)*

Socialist electoral preference	Non PR systems		PR Systems		All	
	Average	N	Average	N	Average	N
Non PR	16.8	4	39.8	3	26.6	7
PR	5.4	1	6.9	9	6.8	10
All	14.5	5	15.2	12	15.0	17

It might appear that non-proportionalist parties participated more often in government because, for all we know about them, they suffered smaller divisions and were more successful electorally, whereas the contrary applies to proportionalist parties. According to this, electoral preferences as such would have little or no significant effect in the explanation of government participation, which could be predicted taking into account divisions and votes, and, perhaps, actual electoral rules. However, this conclusion would be empirically wrong and theoretically blind to intentional causality.

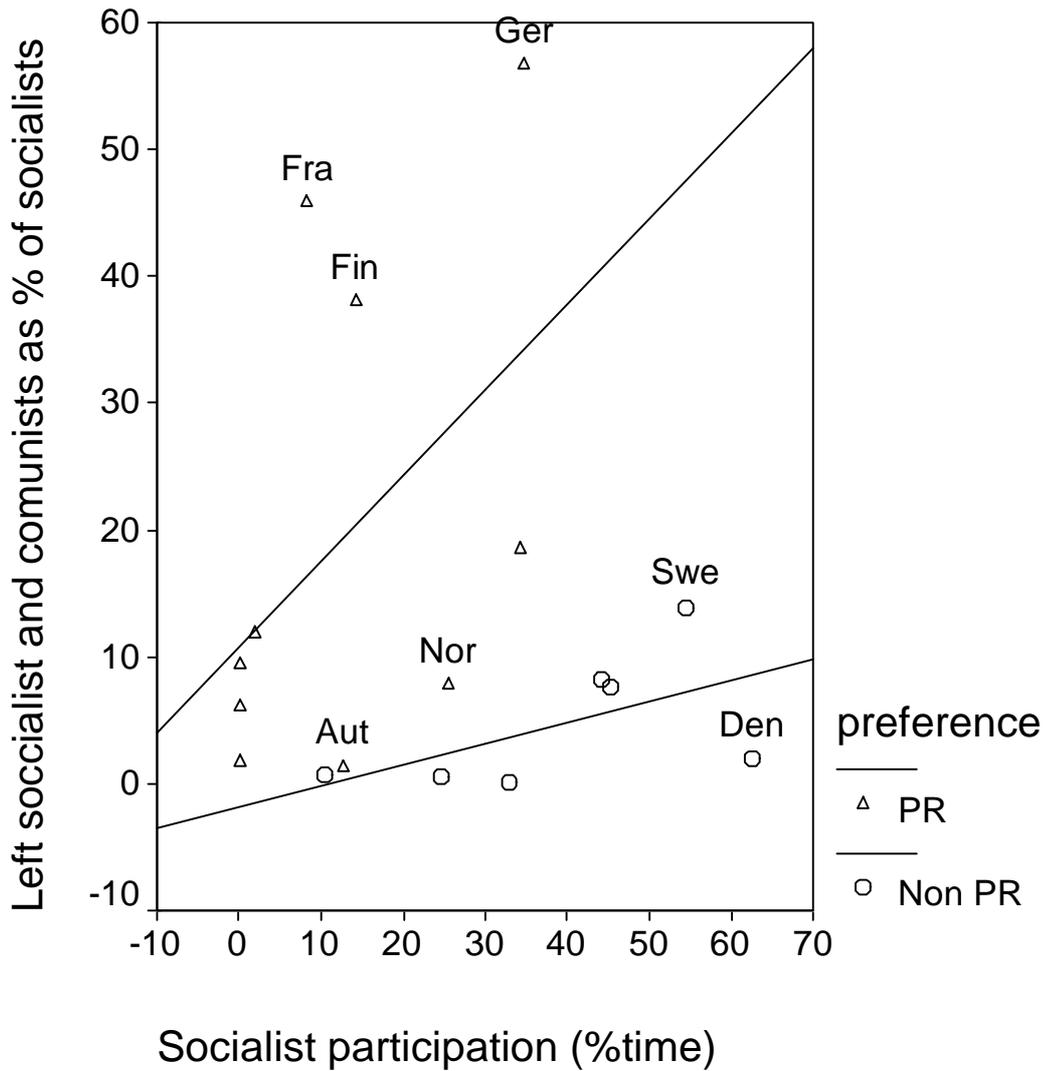
The element of choice, as opposed to sheer constraints, in the emergence of party divisions and its connection with participation can be illustrated by the opposite experiences of the Swedish and Austrian parties. The Swedish socialists expelled their radicals in 1905 (definitely in 1908, one of the few parties to do that before the Russian Revolution), supported liberal minority governments, governed themselves in minority, and endured a substantial (in the first years) loss of votes to the communist and left socialist parties; yet, they consistently grew in the electorate and eventually turned into a party able to win the vote's majority in 1940 (the only precedents had been in Australia and New Zealand) and the

longest governing socialist party in the world. By contrast, the Austrian socialists were already the largest party in the country in 1919 and one of the few European parties that managed to prevent major schisms. However, the official ideology of the party sustained that they had reached their maximal electoral mobilization capacity, and preached isolation under the doctrine of the so called “equilibrium of classes”, according to which no class could rule over the other. Of course, their vote remained stable. The Austrian socialists exited the post-war coalition with the Catholics precisely in order to prevent a communist scission, and took refuge in municipal socialism (Sully, 1985; Loewenberg, 1985). Not surprisingly, the Swedish and Austrian parties are clear outliers in the association between my measurement of party unity and institutional preference (see table at Appendix B).

Participation in government was a choice, and the style of participation was partly a pre-committed choice. Participation *costed* votes lost to leftist rivals, and hence the choice entailed a trade-off. Divisions as such did not diminish the opportunities to participation, on the contrary, we might even say that they enhanced them, since we could regard the splits as an observable price paid by socialists to make moderation credible and be accepted for government office. Moreover, the trade-off was different for different parties, and we can only ascertain it by controlling for the long-term strategies pointed by the institutional preferences of the parties.

Figure 2 displays some rough evidence of the different levels of left fragmentation associated to different levels of participation in government. Without taking into account the institutional preferences and the strategies that, I submit, are revealed with them, the relative success of radical parties shows no apparent connection with the frequency of socialist participation. However, if institutional preferences are controlled for, we must conclude that, first, the fragmentation of the left and socialist governing time were positively related and, second, participation costed more, on average, to proportionalist than to non proportionalist parties.

Figure 2. Trade-off between left division and socialist government participation



Despite the crudeness of data, it is possible to sustain that this relationship is not an artefact, since it holds regardless of the actual electoral system and of party sizes, as table 9 shows. All else being equal, the institutional preference for proportional systems cuts the time of government participation by an average of 47 points, which is the strongest effect of all. Controlling for institutional preferences, the effect of electoral strength disappears,<sup>7</sup> and the

<sup>7</sup> Electoral results are a significant determinant of government participation in an election-by-election analysis, but not in the comparison across parties.

effect of party schism is positive. Once the overall strategy is taken into account, parties that stayed united governed less.

*Table 9. Socialist participation in government in the interwar years*

Dependent Variable: Socialist participation in government (% of months)			
	Coefficient	Robust std. error	p
Constant	34.12	15.0	.059
Socialist preference (1=PR)	-46.87	9.05	.000
Electoral regime (1=PR)	25.5	6.82	.003
Communist and other left Socialist as % of main party	0.51	.14	.004
Socialist interwar average of votes	-0.28	.477	.562
$R^2 = 0.71$ ; $N=17$			
Minimal predicted value 2.06; maximal predicted value 55.80			

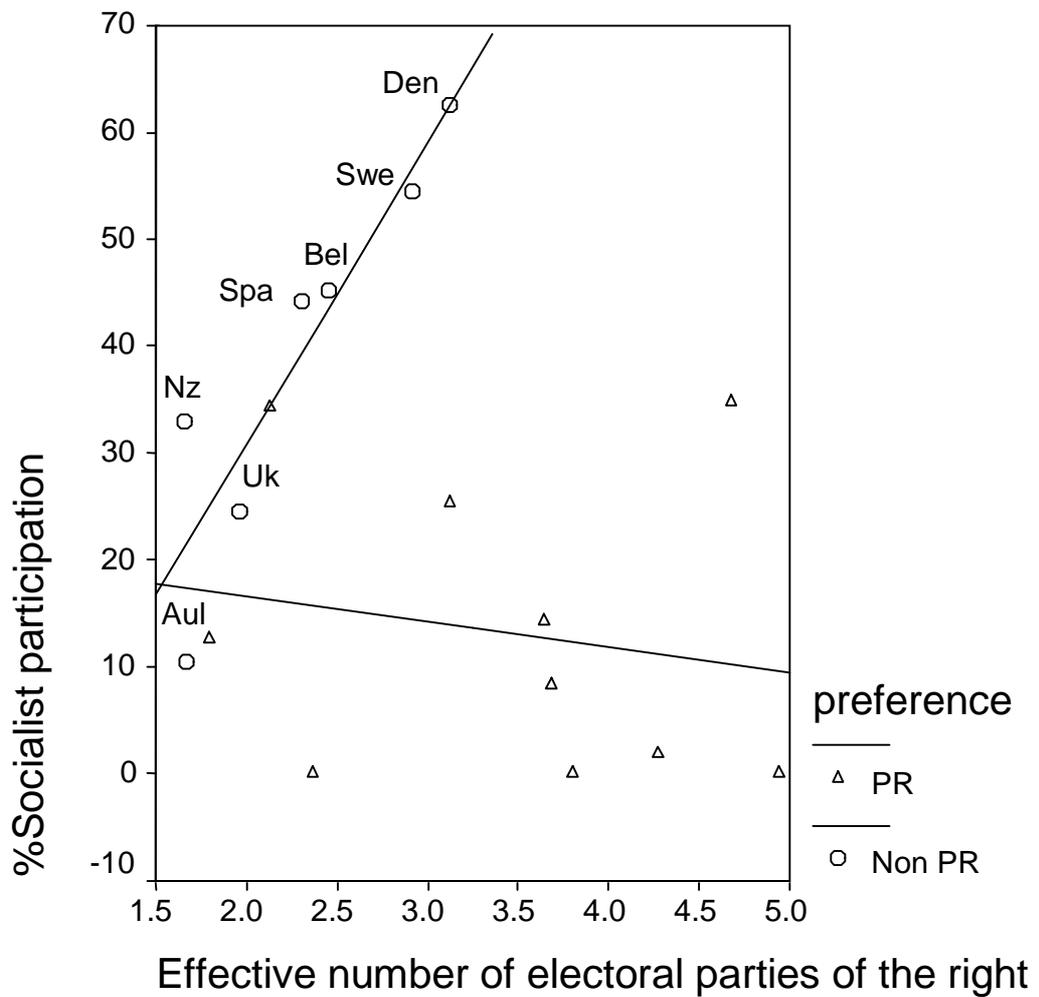
Since I have argued that the preferences of proportionalist parties may be explained by their interest in restraining and graduating their government responsibility, it may appear that the fact that parties governed more often under proportional representation, even holding their preferences constant, is a disconfirming piece of evidence. It seems as though parties had picked up the wrong institutions. However, the answer lies in the reaction of the parties of the right.

Figure 3 plots the fragmentation of the parties to the right of the social democrats and the frequency of socialist participation in government. As we can clearly see, the participation of the proportionalist parties bears no relation with the opportunities open by the fragmentation of their opponents, whereas, for non proportionalist parties, their participation hinged on the ability of the right to present a united anti-socialist front. The paucity of data does not allow for a fully reliable analysis of interactions, but I should note that controlling for the fragmentation of the right and its interaction with socialist preferences, the effect of the electoral system totally disappears in any equation predicting participation.

Thus, the results are consistent with my explanation: proportionalist parties took their own decision on when to participate, restrained by internal divisions and leftist challengers,

non proportionalist parties participated as much as their opponents to the right allowed them to do it.

Figure 3. Fragmentation of the right and socialist participation



## 10. Conclusions

The preferences of socialist parties over electoral systems in early democracies provide an interesting puzzle, since their distribution across a sample of western parties that were

involved in electoral reform defies any straightforward account of them. Only looking at particular aspects of the electoral systems, which go beyond their mechanical effects on parliamentary parties, can the socialist preferences be understood. I have suggested that the preference for majority-biased systems reflected a commitment to wide electoral mobilization and government participation, perhaps even at the cost of socialist political unity. On the other hand, a preference for proportional representation reflected greater internal tensions, a more isolated electorate and timidity towards participation in democratic government. Proportionalist parties preferred to be able to restrain their access to government, to ease the electoral and organizational costs that this entailed for them, and they generally restrained it. Non-proportionalist parties preferred to commit themselves to a strategy that would either push them into government responsibility or kept them underrepresented when failed. Those were the purposes of preferred electoral methods. The causal antecedent constraining the choice of strategy was set by the trade unions. At the time of institutional choice, it was union strength rather than party strength what could have predicted the preferences of socialist parties. The choice was made anticipating future events, although the clue to anticipate them had been the strength, and affinity to the party, of the trade unions organizations.

In a certain way, it seems that the story of party preferences over electoral systems runs parallel to the story of the fate of the most clearly reformist tendencies within the socialist movement. Indeed, the connection between reformism and institutional preferences has no less illustrious an example than Bernstein, who, besides preaching the revisionist doctrine, advocated both the permanence of the majority system and the necessity to join the liberals in government, to no avail in his party. Bernstein sometimes complained that only the union leaders saw his points.

**APPENDIX A. First entry in government by social democratic parties**

Country (non PR party)	Entry	Coalition formula	1 <sup>st</sup> Prime Minister
Earliest experiences			
France	1900	One socialist minister in Radical-led cabinet	
Australia	1904	Single party minority, also in 1908, and majority in 1910	
Parties entering cabinet during First World War or sooner			
<b>Australia</b>	1914	Single party majority	1904
France	1914	“Sacred Union” of parties	1938
<b>Great Britain</b>	1915	Junior ministers in Liberal-Conservative coalition	1924
<b>Belgium</b>	1916	All party coalition	1938
<b>Denmark</b>	1916	All party coalition	1924
Finland	1917	All party coalition	1926
<b>Sweden</b>	1917	Coalition with Liberals	1920
Parties entering cabinet only after First World War			
Austria	1919	Coalition with Catholics	1919
Germany	1919	Coalition with Catholics and Democrats	1919
Norway	1928	Single party minority	1928
<b>Spain</b>	1931	Coalition with Liberals and Republicans	1936
Iceland	1934	Coalition with Progressives	1947
<b>New Zealand</b>	1935	Single party majority	1935
Netherlands	1939	All party coalition	1948
Parties entering cabinet only after Second World War			
Switzerland	1943	All party coalition	1949
Italy	1946	All party coalition	1983
Ireland	1948	All but Fianna Fáil parties minority coalition	-

**APPENDIX B. Data**

	Preference	System	Reform or realignment		Socialist strength			Left schism as % of soc. vote	Socialists in government		
			Vote before	Vote after	Avg. vote	Avg. seats	Peak vote		% part	% pri.min	Months of interwar govt.
Aul			36.6	50	40.06	36.9	50.9	1.11	10.5	10.5	248
Aut	PR	PR	25.4	40.8	39.96	41.59	41.1	2.5	12.7	10.1	158
Bel		PR	21.9	22.5	35.17	36.96	39.4	4.06	45.3	3.5	254
Den		PR	29.5	28.7	36.74	36.62	46.1	1.37	81.9	61.6	271
Fin	PR	PR	n.a.	37	33.08	34.67	47.3	72.91	14.9	4.6	262
Fra	PR		16.8	21.2	19.94	18.25	21.2	48.76	9.1	5.4	242
Ger	PR	PR	34.8	37.9	24.51	25.09	37.9	92.59	34.7	22.2	167
Ice	PR	PR	19.2	21.7	16.86	10.01	21.7	18.63	25	0	240
Ire	PR	PR	n.a.	21.3	10.91	8.88	21.3	12.09	0	0	247
Ita	PR	PR	17.6*	32.3	28.48	26.85	32.3	18.68	0	0	39
Lux	PR	PR	n.a.	15.6	23.05	22.97	33.8	5.56	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Net	PR	PR	21.5*	30	21.92	22.5	23.8	13.64	0	0	249
Nor	PR	PR	31.6	21.3	31.73	30.42	42.5	33.15	25.4	25.4	244
Nz			26.2	34.3	33.89	33.21	55.8	0.29	33	33	285
Spa			n.a.	24.3**	n.a.	19.28	n.a.	n.a.	46	0	63
Swe		PR	14.6*	28.5	38.60	41.93	45.9	21.55	54.4	54.4	237
Swz	PR	PR	30.8	23.4	26.04	24.35	30.8	7.73	0	0	240
Uk			6.4*	22.5	31.50	23.81	37.1	0.67	23.5	23.5	268

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