Does Proportional Representation Foster Closer Congruence Between Citizens and Policy Makers?

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This article assesses the claim that proportional representation (PR) fosters a closer correspondence between the views of citizens and the positions of the government. The study uses the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems data set and compares respondents' self-placements on a Left-Right scale with placements of cabinet parties' locations in 31 election studies. The authors argue that PR has two contradictory consequences. On one hand, PR leads to more parties and more choice for voters; but these parties are less centrist, and this increases the overall distance between voters and parties. On the other hand, PR increases the likelihood of coalition governments; this pulls the government toward the center of the policy spectrum and reduces the distance between the government and voters. These two contradictory effects of PR wash out, and the net overall impact of PR on congruence is nil. The data support the authors' interpretation.

Keywords: electoral system; congruence; proportional representation

Advocates of proportional representation (PR) argue that a PR system is required to ensure close correspondence between citizens' wishes and what policy makers decide. In their view, the objective in a democracy should be to have "an elected body reflecting the main trends of opinion within the electorate" (Lakeman, 1974, p. 271). A PR system allows diverse viewpoints to be represented in the legislature and Cabinet, and this should make the government more responsive to the demands of the population (Blais, 1991).

The objective of this article is to assess the validity of the claim that proportional systems foster a more responsive government, that is, they produce

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closer correspondence between the views of citizens and the positions of those who are supposed to represent them, the legislators, and the government.

Why should we expect better congruence between citizens and policy makers in a PR system? The reasoning is that a greater variety of viewpoints will be represented in the legislature and government. The existing literature on electoral systems supports such an assertion. There is strong evidence that the number of parties in the legislature increases with the proportionality of the electoral system. Though social cleavages also matter, we find more parties in PR than in non-PR systems and more parties in systems with high district magnitude (and more proportional outcomes) than in those with small district magnitude (Cox, 1997; Katz, 1997; Lijphart, 1994).

The quality of representation, at least from a theoretical standpoint, should increase with the number of parties. An individual voter is more likely to find a party that expresses views similar to his or her own if there are 10 parties running in the election and actually represented in the legislature than if there are only 2. From the voter's perspective, many options ought to be better than few.

PR systems should thus provide voters with at least some representatives whose views are congruent with their own. The more difficult question is whether PR produces a legislature and a government whose overall positions are more congruent with the general views of voters. There may be more perspectives represented under a PR system, but in the end some views prevail in parliament or government and others do not. The question is whether the prevailing policy makers' view is more congruent with public opinion in PR systems.

Clearly, it is impossible for any government decision to be entirely congruent with voters' views if and when voters have different opinions about what should be done. The objective is rather to minimize the gap between policy makers and voters, and that objective is more likely to be achieved by moderate policy makers. As Cox (1997) points out, "Minimizing the average distance between voters' ideal positions and the government's policy requires choosing the median position" and thus "representation through enacted policy requires that policy be centrist" (p. 227).

Advocates of PR believe that it induces parties to work through a moderate compromise in the coalition-forming process and that such moderation contributes to reducing the gap between public policy and public opinion (Finer, 1975).

The question, then, is whether PR is more likely to induce governments to adopt positions that are close to those of the median voter. To address this question, we need to understand what would motivate parties to adopt

median positions in PR and in non-PR systems, or to use Cox's (1997) terminology, in more permissive and less permissive, or "weaker" and "stronger," electoral systems.

Let us start with the standard strong system with low proportionality, the single-member plurality system. Downs (1957) has shown that if there are only two parties, each party will maximize its votes by converging to the median voter. Things are different if and when there are many candidates. In such circumstances, there is no clear optimal position for the parties to take (Cox, 1997; Osborne, 1993), and "parties will strive to distinguish themselves ideologically from each other" (Downs, 1957, p. 126). Then, "if the center fails to coordinate properly, relatively extreme candidates can win," and "a party composed of such extremists can pull national policy fairly far from the national median" (Cox, 1997, p. 236). In a strong system, therefore, the government party may deviate from the median voter's position if there are more than two parties and centrist voters fail to coordinate on one of the centrist parties. As demonstrated by Cox (1997, pp. 232-233), if voters act strategically, centrist candidates will win over extremist ones. Thus, the capacity of a strong system to produce convergence to the median voter depends on the existence of a two-party system and/or on voters' willingness and ability to strategically support the strongest centrist party.

What about a permissive PR system with high proportionality and many parties? Because there are many parties and because each of them wants to distinguish itself from the others, most of them are not induced to move toward the median voter's position. PR should thus produce less centrist parties. But a centripetal process does take place at the government formation stage. Typically, no party has a majority of seats in parliament, and a coalition government must be formed. Because parties prefer to form coalitions with groups whose platforms are not too distant from theirs, centrist parties are better positioned to enter the coalition because they can look on both their Right and Left sides. Furthermore, because parties wish to maximize not only their seats but also their government portfolios and because they anticipate that their chances of being in government increase if they take a centrist position, there is an incentive, even in the pre-election stage, not to move too far from the median voter's position (Schofield, 1993). PR systems should thus produce a government that converges toward the median voter provided that centrist parties are well positioned in the coalition bargaining process.

Congruence between the median voter's position and that of the government is thus obtained through different routes in strong and permissive systems. In the former, extremist parties are prevented from winning seats by the strategic coordination of centrist voters around one centrist candidate. In the

latter, extremist parties can more easily win votes, but they are barred from entering the government by the most centrist parties. In both systems, coordination failures can happen.

The conclusion is that in PR and non-PR systems alike, there are pressures for the government to adopt positions that are close to those of the median voter and thus to minimize the distance between voters' wishes and public policy. In both systems, however, there is no guarantee of congruence. The median voter theorem assumes that voters "evaluate candidates and public policy on the basis of some small number (usually one, two, or three) of generalized issues (ideological or otherwise)" (Ordeshook, 1997, p. 260), so centrist pressures are weaker when the issues are multidimensional. Furthermore, parties or voters may fail to coordinate, and these coordination failures may allow an extremist government to form. But we see no compelling reason why one system would systematically produce more or less congruence.

In short, permissive PR systems have two contradictory consequences as far as congruence is concerned. First PR leads to more parties, and because there are more parties, each party is induced to find a distinct niche for itself rather than to converge toward the median voter. This means that parties stake out different positions, the voters have more choice, but the parties in general are less centrist. Parties move away from the center, and the overall distance between parties and voters is not minimized (Cox, 1997). We thus have the interesting paradox that by producing more diverse parties and greater choice for voters, PR weakens the overall congruence between voters and policy makers.

But PR has another positive consequence on congruence. That positive effect takes place at the government formation stage. Centrist parties are more likely to take part in government than are their more extreme counterparts for the simple reason that parties tend to form coalitions with parties that are not too far ideologically from them. There is a strong pull toward the center at the coalition formation stage. PR is therefore good for congruence because it leads to the formation of coalition governments from which extremist parties are excluded. Our model can be summarized with the five following predictions.

Hypothesis 1: PR produces less centrist parties and thus greater diversity.
Hypothesis 2: PR increases the number of parties in government.
Hypothesis 3: The greater the diversity in the party system, the larger the distance (the weaker the congruence) between the government and voters.
Hypothesis 4: The more parties in government, the smaller the distance (the stronger the congruence) between the government and voters.

Hypothesis 5: PR has no net effect on the distance (congruence) between the government and voters.

The Study

We use the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) data set. The CSES data set comprises surveys conducted in 55 elections between 1996 and 2003. This data set covers a wide range of countries and electoral systems, and it contains direct information about the distance between voters' positions and those of the governing parties.

Previous work on this question has followed two approaches. The first approach, pioneered by Powell (Huber & Powell, 1994; Powell, 2000; Powell & Vanberg, 2000), consists of comparing citizens' self-placements on a Left-Right scale with experts' assessments of party positions. The distance between a citizen's and a party's position reflects the degree of ideological incongruence. Congruence is highest when a citizen and a party are located exactly on the same point on the scale; the smaller the distance, the stronger the congruence.

This approach is based on two assumptions: that it is appropriate to ascertain congruence on a Left-Right scale and that experts and citizens interpret the scale in the same way.

The first assumption is that the Left-Right scale is a meaningful indicator of citizens' overall policy preferences. Powell's (2000) justification is that although the scale may be more problematic in some situations, it is

> not only the most widely available single measure of the preferences of citizens in different countries but seems to meet reasonably well our need to capture comparably the general stances of citizens and the general policy orientations of the parties that compete for policy-making positions. (p. 162; see also Converse & Pierce, 1986; Dalton, 1985; Huber, 1989; Inglehart & Klingemann, 1976)

We believe that this is a valid justification, and we follow the standard procedure of measuring ideological congruence with respect to Left-Right positions.

The second assumption, according to which experts and citizens' placements on the Left-Right scale can be meaningfully compared, seems to us more dubious. The citizens' and experts' surveys utilized by Powell and his colleagues (Huber & Powell, 1994; Powell, 2000; Powell & Vanberg, 2000) were conducted at different points in time. Furthermore, some surveys were

based on a 0 to 10 scale and others on a 1 to 10 scale, so that the authors had to make adjustments to make them comparable. The CSES allows a more straightforward assessment of congruence because the same respondents were asked to place themselves and the parties at the same point in time and on the same 0 to 10 scale.

The second approach is to develop measures of voter and government ideology (still on a Left-Right scale) based on party manifestos (Kim & Fording, 1998, 2002, 2003; McDonald, Mendes, & Budge, 2004). The analysis is based on the relative frequency of categories of statements that are construed as reflecting Left or Right ideology in the manifestos of the different parties.[1] Median voter ideology is estimated through a series of steps that use the overall ideology score of all the parties but also takes into account the vote received by each party.

This approach assumes, like the first, that there is a Left-Right ideological dimension in most countries. But, more importantly, it also assumes that voters vote for the party that is closest to their own position on that dimension. That assumption is dubious. Although many studies have shown that voters do make up their mind partly on the basis of parties' positions, they also indicate that party ideology is only one determinant among others, that party identification, leader evaluations, and valence issues play equally if not more important roles. To that effect, the conclusion of the latest analysis of British elections is quite telling: "The strongest predictors of party choice are partisanship and images of leaders. Perceptions of parties' issue competence and relative closeness to the main parties on a Left-Right ideological continuum are also significant, although less important" (Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, & Whiteley, 2004, p. 316).

Furthermore, the approach is in some sense circular because the same information, party ideology as reflected in party manifestos, is utilized for each of the two dimensions that are being compared: voter and government ideology. Not surprisingly, this procedure usually finds congruence. This is at least partly a result of the fact that voter and government ideology are not measured independently.[2] Finally, this approach is bound to indicate better congruence in PR systems for the simple reason that government parties typically get more votes in PR countries.[3]

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    1. The Left and Right categories have been shown to load together in a series of factor analyses (Laver & Budge, 1993).
    2. The problem is acknowledged by McDonald, Mendes, and Budge (2004, p. 23, Note 42).
    3. The reason is that in single-member countries, the government is typically made of one single party whose majority of the seats in the legislature is "manufactured" by the electoral system (Blais & Carty, 1987, 1988), whereas in proportional representation (PR) systems, the most frequent outcome is a coalition government made of two or three parties that have the support of the majority of the voters (Katz, 1997, p. 164).

For all these reasons, we believe that the first approach, pioneered by Powell (Huber & Powell, 1994; Powell, 2000; Powell & Vanberg, 2000), is preferable. Our methodology is slightly different from that of Powell. Although Powell and his associates have used experts' judgments about the party placements on the Left-Right scale, we utilize voters' evaluations. Because information about voters and parties is provided by the same source (who interprets the scale in the same fashion), our approach assures greater comparability, though this point should not be overstated because there is strong correspondence between mean citizen placement and expert placement of a party (Powell & Vanberg, 2000, p. 401). Furthermore, voters' and parties' positions are measured at the very same time and with the very same (0 to 10) scale, which is not the case in Powell's studies. In our view, then, our design improves on the approach adopted by Powell.

We use voters' median placement as the indicator of parties' true ideological positions on the Left-Right scale. We assume that voters' perceptions of party positions are affected by the parties' true positions and individual idiosyncratic factors, especially projection effects, and that these idiosyncratic effects cancel out in the aggregate. As a consequence, voters' median placement provides a good approximation of a party's true position. Our approach is the same as that adopted in the literature on spatial voting, when it is felt necessary to use an objective measure of a party's location on an issue.[4]

We focus on congruence between voters and governments in parliamentary systems, and so we exclude countries where the president plays more than a formal role. The reason is to ensure a homogenous sample in which the formation of the cabinet is the direct product of the outcome of the election (one party has a majority of the seats in the legislature) or of a deal among the legislative parties. This leaves us with a total of 21 countries and 31 election studies because we have two election studies in 10 countries. We have, excluding missing values, 48,675 respondents in our sample, with subsamples going from 944 respondents in Israel to 3,675 respondents in Belgium.

The CSES questionnaire asked respondents to place themselves on a 0 to 10 Left-Right scale and also to place up to six major parties on the same

4. Macdonald, Rabinowitz, and Listhaug (1998) state,

> Either the mean or the median provides a good estimate of the electorate's view of a party's stand on the issues. Projection effects that push or pull individual party placements along the scale tend to cancel out across respondents and make the measures quite robust. Mean placements generally accord well with expert judgments . . . and have the advantage of locating the parties on the same scale as the respondents. (p. 670)

For a similar approach, see Alvarez and Nagler (1998) and Alvarez, Nagler, and Bowler (2000). We should point out that the results are substantially the same whether one uses individual perceptions or (as we have) median placements.

scale. This allows us to locate each respondent and each party (using respondents' median placement) on the Left-Right scale.

Our main independent variable is the degree of disproportionality in the electoral system. There are four basic types of electoral systems: plurality, majority, PR, and mixed (Blais & Massicotte, 2002). There is only one instance of majority system (Australia) in the data set, and only two cases of plurality rule (Britain and Canada). The great majority of countries included in our analysis are either proportional or mixed, and many of the mixed systems are corrective, which makes them similar to PR with respect to the seat-vote ratio. The practical solution is to use a scale to ascertain the overall degree of disproportionality of the electoral system. Gallagher's (1991) least-squares index of disproportionality allows us to distinguish the most and the least proportional systems on a continuous scale going from 0 for perfectly proportional systems to 1 for perfectly nonproportional systems.[5]

$$G = \sqrt{\sum_{p=1}^{z} \frac{(\%vote_p - \%seat_p)^2}{2}}.$$

Hypothesis 1: PR Produces Less Centrist Parties and Greater Diversity

The choice of an electoral system has a major impact on the survival of small parties. Traditional rational choice theory posits that voters try to maximize their utility by voting for a party with significant chances of winning an election. They will desert small parties to support those who have a better chance of winning. Therefore, strong disproportional systems should produce fewer parties (Cox, 1997; Duverger, 1954; Katz, 1997; Lijphart, 1994; Taagepera & Soberg Shugart, 1989), and these parties should converge to the center to maximize their share of votes. More proportional systems should allow the presence of more parties, and these parties should be induced to position themselves at different locations on the political spectrum. Thus, PR should bring about less centrist parties and a wider range of options for voters.

The relationship between PR and the number of parties is well established (see the studies cited above) and will not be reexamined here. We focus on the link between PR and the propensity of parties to position themselves (or

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5. We also performed analyses with a dummy variable that equals 1 for the three countries without any element of proportionality (Australia, Britain, Canada). The substantive findings were similar.

not) toward the center and thus to converge (or not) toward a common location, a pattern that is often assumed in the literature but that has not been empirically established, as far as we can tell.

The starting point of our analysis is the median voter because parties can minimize the distance between voters and themselves by choosing the median voter's position. Table 1 shows that the median voter is exactly at the midpoint, at 5 on the 0 to 10 Left-Right scale, in every case except Germany, where the median voter is located slightly to the Left of center, and the 2003 Israel election, where the median voter is slightly to the Right.

Our first dependent variable is the centrifugal strength of the party system. The idea is to characterize how centrist parties are in a given country. We need a measure of the location of each party; for this we use voters' median placement of each party (see the appendix for a summary description of the main concepts). We then compute the average absolute distance of each party from the median voter's position (Γ_j).[6] The higher the distance, the less centrist parties are, and so our measure taps the centrifugal strength of the party system. For instance, in the 1997 Norwegian election, one party was at a distance of 0 from the median voter (position 5), two parties were at a distance of 1 (positions 4 and 6), two were at a distance of 3 (positions 2 and 8), and one was at a distance of 4 (position 1). The average party distance from the median voter is 2.

$$\Gamma_j = \sum_{p=1}^{z} \frac{|\rho_p - v|}{z} \text{ for } \forall \text{ country} \in j,$$

where the median voter's position of country j is v, and ρ_p is the median placement of party p. We observe (see Table 1) a smaller average distance, and thus more centrist parties, in Britain, Australia, and Ireland and greater distance, thus less centrist parties, in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, and Israel.

Hypothesis 1 also predicts that proportional systems offer a greater range of choice. Our indicator of diversity is the inverse of Alvarez and Nagler's (2004) party system compactness. The numerator corresponds to the relative dispersion of party locations on the Left-Right scale. Greater dispersion means greater diversity. The denominator is voters' dispersion on the same scale. This measure has the advantage of taking into account parties' vote share and the dispersion of the electorate on the Left-Right scale. A greater

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6. We have excluded parties who received less than 5% of the vote from this measure to control for artificial dispersion caused by one or two small parties.

Table 1
Values of Main Variables

Country	Year	Disproportionality (G)	Median Voter	Mean Party Distance (Γ_j)	Diversity (Π_j)	No. of Parties in Government	Cabinet Position (Ψ_j)	Cabinet Distance (Φ_j)
Great Britain	1997	0.1642	5	1.00	0.7266	1	4.0	1.9493
Canada	1997	0.1323	5	1.40	0.5431	1	5.0	1.4523
Australia	1996	0.1035	5	1.25	0.7123	1	7.0	2.1020
Poland	1997	0.0979	5	2.40	1.1054	2	7.8	2.9331
Hungary	1998	0.0770	5	2.60	1.0859	4	7.2	2.7313
Hungary	2002	0.0739	5	3.20	1.0468	2	1.4	3.7357
Ireland	2002	0.0649	5	1.25	0.3653	2	6.0	1.6764
Spain	2000	0.0604	5	1.75	0.7799	1	7.0	2.5456
Bulgaria	2001	0.0586	5	2.40	0.8817	2	5.3	1.6819
Spain	1996	0.0555	5	2.00	0.9378	1	8.0	3.7473
Portugal	2002	0.0540	5	2.00	0.6437	2	7.1	2.3944
Czech Republic	2002	0.0505	5	2.80	1.2033	3	3.4	2.3293
Poland	2001	0.0441	5	2.00	1.0753	2	0.3	4.3542
Czech Republic	1996	0.0436	5	2.67	1.1176	3	5.0	2.0503
Slovenia	1996	0.0386	5	1.40	0.5522	3	4.8	1.4436
Germany	2002	0.0375	4	1.60	0.6996	2	3.0	2.0312

Norway	1997	0.0347	5	2.00	0.7529	3	5.2	1.7004
Norway	2001	0.0301	5	1.67	0.8344	3	7.3	2.1815
New Zealand	1996	0.0288	5	2.00	0.9556	2	7.3	2.3918
Belgium	1999	0.0285	5	2.33	0.7508	4	4.7	1.6238
Germany	1998	0.0281	4	2.00	0.7409	2	3.0	1.9326
Switzerland	1999	0.0272	5	1.60	0.7216	4	5.1	1.6813
Switzerland	2002	0.0215	5	2.00	1.0035	4	5.6	1.8648
New Zealand	2002	0.0213	5	1.83	0.7002	2	4.1	2.0385
Israel	2003	0.0208	6	2.50	0.7347	3	7.3	2.6930
Israel	1996	0.0158	5	2.60	0.7932	6	7.5	3.1853
Sweden	2002	0.0122	5	1.83	0.7113	1	4.0	2.1571
Netherlands	1998	0.0110	5	1.60	0.8502	3	5.8	1.6796
Iceland	1999	0.0099	5	2.00	1.0123	2	8.7	3.3125
Sweden	1998	0.0098	5	2.60	1.1293	1	3.0	2.6342
Denmark	1998	0.0067	5	2.80	0.9635	2	3.6	2.5028

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diversity means a broader range of choice for voters relative to voters' dispersion.

$$\prod_j = \frac{\sum_{p=1}^{z} \kappa_p |\rho_p - \tau_p|}{\sigma_j} \text{ for } \forall \text{ country} \in j,$$

where ρ is party p position on the scale, κ_p is pth party's share of the vote, τ_p is the weighted mean of parties on the scale, and σ_j is the standard deviation of voters' positions. The typical situation is to have a score around 0.8 (see Table 1). Diversity is particularly low in Ireland and Canada, and it is particularly high, meaning a wider range of choice, in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Sweden. As expected, there is a strong correlation ($r = .70$) between diversity and the centrifugal strength of the party system (mean party distance from the median voter).

To find out if there is a significant relation between the degree of disproportionality and the range of choice on the one hand and the centrifugal strength of the party system, we performed ordinary least squares regressions.[7] The dependent variables are party system diversity and mean party distance from the median voter. The main independent variable is Gallagher's (1991) index of disproportionality. We also include a dummy variable for countries that have been democratic for at least 20 years at the moment of the election. We argue that in mature democracies, parties benefit from a more stable partisan structure and have a better knowledge of their optimum strategy to ensure concordance with voters' positions.[8] Consequently, old democracies should have a less diverse party system and a better congruence between parties and citizens.

The findings are presented in Table 2. Older democracies produce less centripetal party systems, and they offer less political choice; they are, on average, one fourth of a point lower on the diversity score. More importantly,

7. Because we have a small sample poorly suited for maximum-likelihood estimation and our dependent variables are relatively continuously distributed with kurtosis between 2 and 3 and skewness between 0 and 1, we consider that ordinary least squares estimation is the most appropriate option. The literature in econometrics suggests that maximum-likelihood estimation is strongly dependent on the number of observations and that estimation with fewer than 100 observations is risky (Long, 1997). We also treat for correlations of errors between observations (because of the presence of two election studies in ten countries) using the cluster option in Stata 8 SE.

8. It could also be argued that more democratic countries should exhibit the greatest range of choice, but the hypothesis cannot be tested because all the countries included in our analysis except Bulgaria had a score of 1 on Freedom House political rights.

Table 2
Disproportionality, Diversity, and
Party Distance From the Median Voter

Independent Variable	Diversity (Π_j)		Mean Party Distance (Γ_j)	
	Coefficient	Robust *SE*	Coefficient	Robust *SE*
Disproportionality	−1.5473**	0.7204	−6.5192**	1.5787
Old democracy	−0.2501**	0.0850	−0.6109**	0.2273
Constant	1.0935**	0.0957	2.7761**	0.2435
R^2	.3425		.3807	
N	31		31	

*Significant at 10%. **Significant at 5%.

diversity of choice and mean party distance from median voter are negatively correlated with the index of disproportionality, thus confirming our hypothesis that more proportional systems provide voters with a greater range of ideological options and less centrist parties than do less proportional systems. The advocates of PR are right: PR does foster greater choice through less centrist parties.

Hypothesis 2: PR Increases the Number of Parties in Government

In our model, the most crucial centripetal mechanism in a PR system occurs at the time of the formation of the cabinet. Because PR facilitates the entry and survival of many parties and because even small parties can obtain seats in the legislature, seldom does a party win a majority of the seats and can then form a single-party majority government. PR thus usually leads to the formation of coalition governments, much more frequently than in "majoritarian" systems.

The link between PR and coalition governments has been examined in previous studies (Blais & Carty, 1987; Katz, 1997; Lijphart, 1994; Persson & Tabellini, 2003).[9] The same relationship emerges in the sample of countries included in this research.

Table 1 presents the number of parties in the government that was formed after the election. Single-party governments were formed in Australia, Brit-

9. PR may also lead to the formation of single-party minority governments (Strøm, 1990). Because we have only two such cases in our data set, we are not able to determine whether such governments behave differently.

Table 3
Disproportionality and Number of Parties in Government

Independent Variable	No. of Parties in Government	
	Coefficient	Robust *SE*
Disproportionality	−13.1343**	4.6476
Old democracy	−0.3173	0.3424
Constant	3.2322**	0.3757
R^2	.1638	
N	31	

**Significant at 5%.

ain, Canada, Spain, and Sweden (two elections each).[10] More frequently, the government consisted of two or three parties. Israel emerges as an outlier, with a government made out of six parties.

Table 3 shows the link between the number of parties in government and the disproportionality index. Our old democracy dummy is not significant. Table 3 supports Hypothesis 2: More proportional systems produce more parties in government (and less proportional systems have fewer parties).

Hypotheses 3 and 4: Diversity Hinders Congruence; More Parties in Government Fosters Congruence

We now look at the outcome of the election and at the congruence between voters' views and the government's position. We ascertain congruence from the perspective of individual voters, that is, how distant the government's position is from their own. We do not have a direct measure of voters' perceptions of the ideological stance of the government, but we know where they place each of the main parties, and we know the relative weight of these parties in the government, that is, how many seats they have in the cabinet.

10. Technically, Australia had a coalition government made up of two parties, National and Liberal, which had one cabinet member, but because the alliance has been maintained during a period of 80 years, it does not fit the standard conception of a coalition (I. McAllister, personal communication, January 2005: see also Sharman, Sayers, & Miragliotta, 2002), and we thus treat that government as a single-party one. We have also performed analyses in which Australia is considered as a coalition government, and the substantive conclusions are not affected.

We measure the weighted position of the government, using parties' placement on the Left-Right scale and their share of cabinet seats.[11] This standard approach assumes that a party's relative share of cabinet seats is an indicator of its relative influence within government and that the weighted location of the parties forming the government is a valid approximation of the government's overall ideological orientation. This is the procedure followed by Powell (2000; see also Huber & Powell, 1994) and more widely in the literature on the impact of Left (or Right) parties on government spending (Blais, Blake, & Dion, 1993; Franzese, 2002; Korpi & Palme, 2003).

$$\Psi_j = \sum_{p=1}^{z} \omega_p \cdot \rho_p,$$

where ω is the relative weight in terms of cabinet seat share by party p, and ρ is the median location of party p. The government that was formed after the 1998 Danish election included 16 Social Democrats, whose median placement on the Left-Right scale was 4, and 4 Socialists, whose median placement was 2. Consequently, the weighted position of the Danish government is $| (16/20) * 4 + (4/20) * 2 | = 3.6$. We then measure the average distance, per country, between voters and the cabinet (Φ_j).

$$\Phi_j = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{|\theta_i - \psi_j|}{n} \text{ for } \forall \text{ country} \in j,$$

where θ is the voter's position, n represents the number of voters, and Ψ_j is the cabinet's position.

As Table 1 indicates, cabinets are not always centrist. Only in seven cases is the cabinet position between 4.5 and 5.5. We have two cabinets very much to the Right, Spain in 1996 and Iceland, and two cabinets very much to the Left, Hungary in 2002 and Poland in 2001. As a consequence, we sometimes observe a substantial distance between voters and cabinets, especially in those instances where the cabinet is located far from the center.

According to Hypotheses 3 and 4, the average distance between voters and governments should be higher when the party system is diverse, and it should be lower when there are more parties in government.[12] In the latter

11. In seven cases, we do not have voters' perceptions of all the parties that formed the government. Our measure of the cabinet's position thus had to exclude those parties that were not included in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems questionnaire.

12. We focus on diversity rather than on mean party distance from the median voter. The two variables are strongly correlated, and the findings are similar when we use the latter. The advan-

case, we expect the relationship to be nonlinear. Congruence should increase (and voter or government distance should decrease) when we move from one to two or three parties but congruence might be reduced (and distance might increase) with the incorporation of too many parties closer to both extremes. Table 4 shows that these two hypotheses are confirmed. The data also indicate that distance between citizens and the government is not systematically higher or lower in mature democracies.

Hypothesis 5: PR Has No Net Effect on Distance (Congruence)

The last hypothesis states that proportionality has no net effect on congruence. More precisely, PR has contradictory consequences that cancel out in the aggregate. On the one hand, PR leads to more parties and to less centrist parties, as the incentive is weaker for each party to converge toward the center. This, in turn, produces less centrist governments, which hinders overall congruence with citizens. On the other hand, PR increases the number of parties in government, and this tends to produce a more centrist government, one that is closer to citizens' positions. Our prediction is that these two opposite effects wash out and that the net impact is nil.

Table 5 tests and confirms that proposition. All in all, disproportionality has no net effect on distance between voters and the government.[13]

These findings are consistent with the theoretical perspective presented at the outset of this article. Congruence is achieved through different routes in more and less proportional systems. In the former, the bargaining that takes place at the time of government formation is crucial. In the latter, the decisive element is that it is difficult for extremist parties to win seats. In both cases, coordination failures may occur, and so there is no guarantee of congruence. The bottom line is that PR does not produce more representative governments when representativeness is defined as the minimization of the distance between the ideological locations of voters and the ideological location of the cabinet.

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tages of our diversity measure have been elegantly demonstrated by Alvarez and Nagler (2004), whose compactness is the inverse of diversity. The major advantage is that this measure of party system diversity takes into account (controls for) the amount of diversity among voters.

13. We also performed an analysis that included disproportionality, an old democracy dummy, diversity, and the number of parties in government (and its square value). Disproportionality remains not significant. We also tested the robustness of the model by dropping one country after another, and the results were not significantly affected.

Table 4
Congruence, Diversity, and Number of Parties in Government

Independent Variable	Cabinet Distance (Φ_j)	
	Coefficient	Robust *SE*
Diversity	1.8172**	0.5956
No. of parties in coalition	−0.7966**	0.2499
No. of parties in coalition^2	0.1207**	0.0357
Old democracy	−0.3315	0.3092
Constant	2.1027**	0.7395
R^2	.4448	
N	31	

*Significant at 10%. **Significant at 5%.

Table 5
Disproportionality and Congruence

Independent Variable	Cabinet Distance (Φ_j)	
	Coefficient	Robust *SE*
Disproportionality	−3.0713	2.2395
Old democracy	−0.6642	0.3898
Constant	2.9627**	0.4284
R^2	.1752	
N	31	

*Significant at 10%. **Significant at 5%.

Conclusion

We have shown that PR does contribute to a greater range of choice for voters, that is, voters can choose among parties that are more ideologically dispersed. But we have also shown that PR does not bring about a better representation of citizens' overall ideological orientations, that is, the ideological position of the government is not closer, on average, to voters' positions.

Better representation entails that the government converges toward the position of the median voter because that minimizes the total (and mean) distance between the government's and voters' positions. That goal can be

achieved in different ways, and this is why no electoral system is clearly superior on that front.

In proportional systems, voters tend to be spread all over the political spectrum, supporting small parties that survive because of their good chances of being represented in parliament. Then, centrist parties serve as lubricant in the coalition formation process, and they bring the government closer to the median voter. In less proportional systems, the government is usually a single-party government, and there is some risk that the government party will be far off from the median voter. That risk is reduced, however, by the greater incentive for all parties to be centrist. It takes more votes to win seats in strong systems, and there is stronger pressure on each party to adopt positions as close as possible to those of the median voter. Convergence toward the center occurs before the vote or at the time of the vote when voters coordinate to support the strongest centrist party, in less proportional systems, whereas it occurs mostly after the vote, when the coalition government is formed, in more proportional systems. The bottom line is that there is a push toward the center in both systems. There is no theoretical reason to suppose that the push is stronger in one system than in the other. The moment of convergence is different, but the result is the same.

Appendix
Definition of Main Concepts

Party position
   Median voters' placement of a party's position.
Mean party distance from the median voter (Γ_j)
   Mean distance between the position of each party and the position of the median voter.
Diversity (Π_j)
   Dispersion of parties' positions relative to voters' dispersion. The numerator is the weighted mean deviation of party positions. The denominator is the standard deviation of voters' positions.
Cabinet position (Ψ_j)
   Sum of government parties' positions weighted by their share of cabinet seats in government.
Cabinet distance from voters (Φ_j)
   Average absolute distance between each respondent's position and the cabinet position.

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