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PARTISAN IDEOLOGY AND ELECTORAL PRESSURES

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Abstract

Previous research has indicated that partisan ideology plays a significant role in securing votes (Adams and Somer-Topcu, 2009). However, relatively little research has examined how electoral conditions (e.g. the number of competing parties and the ideology of the median voter) affect partisan ideology. I report a series of regressions using measures of partisan and median voter ideology that indicate that 1) partisan ideological diversity does increase with multipartism, however 2) contrary to expectations, the weighted average of the ideological positions of the parties tends to collapse towards the median voter as the number of viable parties increases. 3) Parties experience significantly greater success as their own policy preferences approach those of the median voter; and 3) these effects hold regardless of the “Left” or “Right” orientation of the party in question. My findings have important implications for ideological diversity and party strategy.

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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

The Role of the Thesis

The democracies of the world are a diverse group; they differ by electoral rules, by the way they apportion seats relative to vote share (e.g. majoritarian or proportional systems), and by governing structure (parliamentary or presidential). But the difference that is most obvious to a casual observer is surely the number of parties. For example, a close examination of the American and Dutch electoral systems show all of the distinctions mentioned previously, but it only takes a glance to see that a mere two parties won anything at the national level in the 2010 American election, while nine won seats in the 2010 Dutch general election.

If the purpose of an election is to decide what policies are implemented, however, the most important feature must be the types of ideologies that are competitively represented. For example, is it any wonder that the United States is considered conservative in comparison to the rest of the developed world, when even our "leftist" party (the Democrats) is ideologically right-leaning according to the most prominent metrics of partisan ideology (Volkens et al., 2011)?

This essay seeks to examine these two electoral qualities—the number of parties and their ideology—with a particular interest in the effect of the former upon the latter. In this, I will be building primarily on the spatial theory of elections, as outlined by Cox (1990). Cox argued that various features of electoral systems created centripetal and centrifugal incentives. *Centripetal* incentives are those that push parties towards the ideological center (relative to the voting public); *centrifugal* incentives are those that push them farther towards the extremes, either of the Left or the Right.

Cox's work was theoretical, and so one of my main contributions will be to provide empirical testing for his theory. However, rather than focusing primarily on the ideological choices made by individual parties, as Cox did, this essay will examine ideology at the party-system level (i.e. looking at the overall trends towards extremism and centrism among all parties represented) in order to better grasp the effects of electoral pressures on the ideologies represented in government. Furthermore, I will examine the Left and the Right as distinct entities, in order to demonstrate that Cox's assertion that electoral pressures are non-directional. In the final empirical section of the paper, I will move beyond Cox's theory to demonstrate a relationship between ideology and partisan success, with important implications for partisan strategists.

The paper will test three Cox-derived hypotheses:

1) As the number of parties increases, the breadth of the ideological spectrum represented by those parties will also increase (i.e. more parties leads to greater ideological diversity). This is the hypothesis that most directly builds on Cox's work.
2) As the number of parties increases, the trend will be for the weighted average ideology[1] of all Left and the Right parties to move further away from the center (i.e. the "Right" and the "Left" as political forces will become less centrist).
3) Assuming that the second hypothesis is observed, the Left and the Right will be affected equally (i.e. the pressures are non-directional).

Because the data is available, I will also test a fourth hypothesis:

4) Parties that most closely approximate the position of the median voter will

[1] Later in the paper, I will refer to this as the *net ideological stance* of the parties.

tend to experience the greatest electoral success.

Normative Considerations

In a partisan democracy, elections simultaneously help to resolve two questions—who rules and what policies the new government will adopt. Although voters give their support to politicians and parties rather than to policy positions *per se*, proclamations of policy (i.e. ideological) preferences are an essential part of any election. Party manifestos and platforms are the most basic way of signaling these preferences.

In the next section of the paper I will discuss how we can think objectively about and operationalize concepts like ideology, but first I want to consider why these questions are worth answering in the first place. I contend that questions of ideology, and the effects electoral pressures can have on it, are important for three major reasons: the degree of choice and freedom that voters have the power to exercise, the representativeness of the democracy, and the risks associated with wedding power to some ideas.

In any democracy, voters will be presented with a choice of leaders. To be considered a functioning democracy, it is normally expected that the choice voters are offered is in some sense "real." The most famous formulation of this comes from Przeworski, who argued that that true democracies could be identified by regular, peaceful transitions of power between different leaders and parties (2000). But transition between nominally different parties is meaningless unless those parties actually represent different policies. In fact, a trademark of authoritarian regimes is to have several supposedly distinct parties, all of which share identical platforms.[2] Thus voters may be

[2] North Korea provides one such example. There are three recognized political parties, all of which hold seats in the national assembly. However, all parties advocate the same ideology (*Juche*) and all are joined

given the illusion of choice without the substance.

Even within democracies, the degree of choice voters have is limited by the number of parties they can choose between and the diversity of the opinions those parties represent. Again, the United States and the Netherlands provide a useful example. Voters in the US choose between two parties that can both be classified as "center-right," while in the Netherlands voters generally choose between nine parties, with an ideological range more than four times as broad as that in the US (Volkens et al., 2011). It is not unreasonable to say that Dutch voters really do exercise a greater choice than their American counterparts. A frequent complaint of disaffected American voters is that there is “no real difference” between the parties and, certainly relative to the rest of the developed world, those voters have a point.

A closely related issue is the ideal of representation. If a democracy is supposed to allow for the ideas of the people to be represented in government, then allowing all ideologies to be heard would seem to be an important goal. As with freedom of choice, this is primarily an issue of degree when considering developed countries. In the United States, the Republican Party can claim (with some accuracy) to represent business interests, religious conservatives, and foreign policy hawks, among others. On the other hand, in countries with more parties, it is common for those groups to have their own dedicated partisan representatives—respectively, “liberal conservative” parties like the Swedish Moderates or the Dutch People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), Christian Democratic parties, and (more loosely) “national conservative” parties like the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) and the Italian Lega Nord.

Of course, having a party dedicated to your particular policy preferences does not

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into a single electoral coalition.

guarantee that your preferences will actually be reflected in government—although a multiparty system might allow for more ideologically pure platforms than a bipartisan system, governments in such states are almost always formed by creating inter-party coalitions (Iversen and Soskice, 2006). In a multiparty system, voters get to choose small parties to represent them, which then have to join large coalitions; in a two-party system, the voters choose preassembled coalitions directly. It is a difference of order, not outcome, so the representation issue appears relatively moot.

The most notable exception to this is the case of small-minority or "fringe" ideologies. These political philosophies may not have a broad enough base of support to be worth courting for a coalition—or, alternatively, they may have a fairly large base, but be so unpopular with the rest of the population as to be unprofitable to consort with. The most common example of this are so-called "far-right" parties, which are often subjected to a *cordon sanitaire* where other parties refuse to form coalitions with them, even if they hold a significant number of seats; parties that have recently received this treatment include the Norwegian Progress Party and the Sweden Democrats. The *cordon sanitaire* notwithstanding, a multiparty system nevertheless provides a credible way for unpopular ideologies to gain national attention, if not influence. In some multiparty countries, there's even a history of "testimonial parties" that seek office with no intention of forming a coalition or even affecting policy, but rather to gain a platform from which to express their views (the Dutch Reformed Political Party, or SGP, is perhaps the most notable example). A two-party system, however, provides little recourse for such minority opinions. Testimonial parties are not a credible option in a bipartisan democracy. So, at least for those who hold unpopular opinions, the number of parties

may present a serious hindrance to representation in government.

So far, this section has emphasized the benefits of representation and choice, with an eye towards the advantages of multiparty systems. The other side of the issue is that greater choice and greater representation come with the risk that dangerous ideologies will gain power. This leads to a final concern: large numbers of parties and ideological diversity may serve as enablers for fringe ideas that were better kept out of the mainstream.

Obviously, concerns like those addressed in this section are subject to the personal opinions of the observer—i.e. how much choice do you think voters really need, what qualifies as a "dangerous" ideology, etc. My purpose in this essay is not to answer those questions, but to provide a framework in which to consider them. In testing Cox's theory, I find support for his idea that increasing the number of parties increases ideological diversity (thus suggesting that expanded choice and representation are actual benefits of multiparty systems), but I also find that the net trend among successful parties is greater ideological proximity to the median voter, or relative centrism. This suggests that the final concern, the rise of extremism (i.e. non-centrism), is not reflected in reality.

CHAPTER 2—EXISTING THEORIES

Duverger's Law and Hypothesis

Maurice Duverger posited that electoral systems are causally related to the number of parties in a given country; specifically, majoritarian rules tend to create two-party systems, while proportional representation (PR) leads to multipartism (1972). Duverger's thinking is conceptually important to this essay because it emphasizes the

mechanical and strategic aspects electoral systems. By changing the seat-apportionment rules in an electoral system, parties are subjected to forces that that either limit or enhance their ability to win seats—we can call these forces *mechanical* because they derive purely from the rules of the election in question (rather than from ideological or idealistic motivations). In response to these forces, parties will tend to change their behavior. This change is *strategic* because it is designed to optimize the party's electoral performance; again, it is non-ideological. The mechanical and strategic conception of elections is central to much of the literature on parties, and particularly to the theories of Gary Cox, whose importance will be the subject of the next section of this essay.

Duverger's premise is simple: parties are seeking to get elected. In a majoritarian system, that means the goal is to be the top vote getter in any given election. Since there is no benefit to coming in second (much less third or fourth), parties will have an incentive to combine as far as possible, even as they still attempt to implement their own policy preferences. In a majoritarian democracy, bipartisan systems are the best possible solution, since they ensure that few votes are wasted on second-tier parties with no hope of winning.

In a PR system, on the other hand, winning an election does not require gaining the largest vote share. For example, the most recent Dutch general election resulted in nine parties being awarded seats in the House of Representatives; the lowest performing party that still won seats received a mere 1.7% of the popular vote. Coming in second place still carries significant benefits in proportional systems, thus decreasing the incentive of parties to combine. This observation is known as Duverger's Law (that majoritarian systems lead to two parties) and Duverger's Hypothesis (that proportionality

causes many parties).

The strategic view of partisanship is important because it highlights a basic tension that all parties in competitive democracies face. On the one hand, they exist to represent certain policy preferences, which are usually generated by an intra-party elite and may be out of step with the policy preferences of most voters (Adams and Somer-Topcu, 2009). At the same time, parties exist to put candidates into office. More parties means that a greater diversity of ideological positions can be faithfully represented, and so should better serve the first goal (i.e. if every faction has its own party, ideological compromise becomes less important). However, more parties also means more competition for voters. In winner-take-all systems, having a large number of parties means that the majority of competitors will be losers: if nine parties compete in a race, eight have to lose by definition under majoritarian rules.[3]

What Duverger's Law is capturing is the fact that different electoral systems lead to different optimal strategies. Assuming that parties are rational actors, being in a PR system makes it easier for parties to get at least some candidates into office, and so increases the relative value of remaining true to your positions; a majoritarian system does the reverse (Calvo and Hellwig, 2011). This view of parties as rational actors—and the differing strategies that having few or many parties entails—makes Duverger a natural starting point for this paper. Duverger's work was a launching point for many political theorists. To understand its implications for partisan ideology, we turn to the work of one such theorist, Gary Cox.

[3] There are some examples of majoritarian systems where this would not be the case. However, for the purposes of this essay, "majoritarian" will be treated as synonymous with Single Member District Plurality voting (i.e. a system where only the top vote getter in each district wins an office), which is the system in the United States, the UK and most other majoritarian countries (Reynolds et al., 2008). Under an SMDP system, there can only be a single winner in a given race.

Gary Cox and Electoral Incentives

"Centripetal and Centrifugal Incentives in Electoral Systems" (Cox, 1990) takes a game theoretic approach to parties. Cox builds off the spatial theory of electoral politics, which argues that you can conceptualize voters and elections like points on a line. Each point represents the ideological preference of a person or party; voters will lend their support to whatever point on the line is nearest to themselves. This is called *proximity voting*.

Figure 1—Illustration of the Spatial Theory of Electoral Politics

Notice that in the illustration, each voter affiliates with the party that is closest to themselves (support is indicated by common shape). Whether the gap between the party and the voters falls to the Left or the Right is irrelevant. In this hypothetical scenario, no party fully represents the beliefs of Voter *A*, but the Left Party comes closest and so is the sole recipient of that voter's support. In this scenario, the Center Party would get the largest vote share in the election, because it is the party that comes closest to representing the beliefs of the greatest number of voters.

Although the model is simple, there is a potential problem. Notice that the fundamental assumption is that partisan success will be determined by ideological proximity. Of course, this excludes other potentially important factors, like the skill and charisma of the candidates, or the funding and organization of the party. These are commonly called *valence factors*, and are often included in more recent spatial models. Their absence here does not discredit the Cox model, but it does mean that the focus is

entirely upon one variable (ideology). In reality, of course, numerous other factors determine electoral success, so readers should bear in mind the limits of Cox's model—and, for that matter, the empirical tests that I run based on the model.

The key takeaway from Cox's theory is that, by changing their own ideological position, parties should be able to win more voters. Consider the same hypothetical scenario as *Fig. 1* if the Left Party adopted a more moderate stance.

Figure 2—Shifting the Equilibrium

In this second scenario, the Left Party has moved rightward. Although the Party has moved farther away from Voter *A* (its original constituency), *A* will continue to support the Left Party because the LP is still the closest thing to a match that *A* can find. The substantive change is that the LP is now a closer match for Voter *B* than is the Center Party. So, if a new election were held, it would be the Left, not the Center, that took the largest voter share. Notice that the model assumes full turnout: everyone will vote, no matter how far away the closest party is. So, Voter *A* will still turn out for the Left Party, even though they are now fairly far apart.

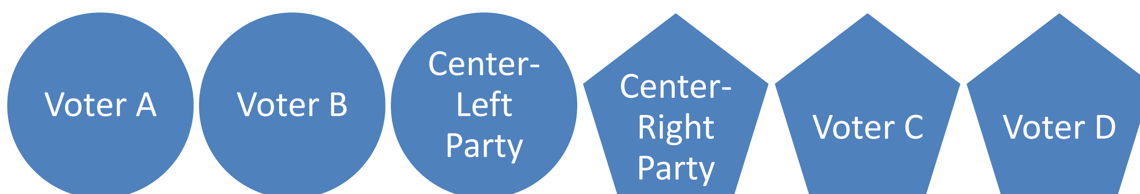
Cox hypothesized that parties are vote-maximizers. In any electoral system, the parties will try to win a greater share of popular support by shifting their positions. Party maneuvering will continue until an equilibrium position is reached (i.e. an arrangement where each party has maximized its potential share of the vote, and so no party wants to adjust its position, given where the other parties are located). One potential source of objection is that Cox's theory seems to require us to assume that parties are rather

flexible in their ideological positions, and primarily interested in increasing their vote share, rather than in representing a particular ideology.

Cox's theory is particularly relevant to this thesis because he introduced the idea that a large number of competing parties would act as an ideologically "centrifugal force"—that is to say, multipartism makes it less important for parties to cluster around the center and encourages "extremism" (i.e. non-centrist policy positions) in parties as they struggle to attract voters. It is important to note that in Cox's writing, as in this essay, the word "extremism" is *not used pejoratively*; it is simply a way of labeling a position as "non-centrist" or substantially to the Left or Right of the general population. Another important caveat is that Cox's theory does not predict the demise of centrist parties; he merely argues that multipartism allows for more non-centrist ones to form.

Understanding why Cox's theory would indicate that more parties leads to greater ideological diversity is not difficult. Remember that voters usually will not find an exact ideological match; they have to vote for the party that's closest to them. If you are a voter towards the end of the political spectrum (i.e. more left-wing than the Leftist parties, or more right-wing than the Rightist parties) you will have to cast your vote towards a party that is more Centrist than you, as was the case with Voter *A* in *Fig. 2*. If there are only two parties, then both will have an incentive to stick relatively close to the Center, since both the left-wing and right-wing sections of the population can be guaranteed to follow.

Fig. 3—Bipartisanship is Centrist



This importance of appealing to the Center is captured by Median Voter Theorem, which posits that, in a bipartisan system, the party that can win over the median voter will hold the majority of votes (since that party will automatically also receive the support of the half of the population to their Left, if it's a leftist party, or Right, if it's a rightist party). So, in a bipartisan system, both parties will try to move towards the Center of the population, since they can reliably count on the support of the more extreme voters.[4] As the number of parties increases, however, the benefit of playing to the center will be diminished. Consider what would happen if we added a third party to the scenario described in *Fig. 3*.

Fig. 4—Multipartism Leads to Dispersion

As *Fig. 4* shows, adding a strategically placed new party can cut into the vote share of one of the old centrist parties (in this case the Center-Left, but it could just as easily have been the Center-Right). As the parties try to shift for electoral advantage, we can expect to see distributions similar to those observed in *Fig. 1* and *2*, but it will never

[4] Again, notice the assumption of universal turnout. Cox's theory presumes that non-centrist voters will still come out to support the party that most closely represents them, even as the party platform drifts farther away towards the Center.

again be to the advantage of the all the parties to cluster around the Center. As the number of parties increases, so does the dispersion.

It is very important to note that this does not mean Centrist parties will be eliminated as the number of parties increases; merely that more parties will start to populate the extremes of the spectrum, while comparatively few stay near the center. As a consequence, the overall trend should be for the parties of the Left and the Right to move further towards their respective poles—i.e. Cox's theory would seem to predict that the average position of all the Right parties will drift further to the right-wing as more parties are added; the inverse should happen with the Left.

Before proceeding to the empirical analysis, it is worth noting some of the ways in which we know Cox's theory is limited—and, consequently, some of the places where we might expect empirics to fail to uphold him. As mentioned, Cox's theory makes a number of assumptions about party behavior: that it is strategic, based on maximizing votes, and essentially indifferent to whatever the original ideology of the party was. The first two assumptions seem to be generally reasonable, although, as previously discussed, there are some clear exceptions, particularly testimonial parties. The final assumption seems like the one most likely to cause problems.

Previous work has indicated that most parties have an elite, policy-making core whose preferences are largely static and unconnected to popular opinion (Adams and Somer-Topcu, 2009). Although Adams et al. did find that parties would modify their ideology in response to election defeats and victories—i.e. they found evidence of the strategic thinking Cox predicted—they also found that the parties would remain connected to the ideology of their elites, and so would not tend to engage in the sort of

dramatic, equilibrium upsetting shifts Cox theorized about.

For a less academic challenge to Cox's work, we can look at the distribution of voter profiles in multiparty democracies. Recall that Cox's theory called for parties to shift until they arrived at a point of optimal vote-share, or equilibrium, with all of the parties taking roughly equal shares of the vote. In fact, election results in multiparty democracies rarely seem to indicate equilibrium. In the Netherlands, the largest party took over 20% of the vote, while the smallest to party to win seats received less than 2%; similarly, in Sweden, the popular vote share ranged from over 30% to about 5%. These electoral systems do not appear to demonstrate Coxian equilibrium.

Another potential point of objection to Cox's theory is its non-directionality. Cox assumes that the Left and the Right will behave similarly in the face of electoral pressures. He's picturing them as mirror images of each other—reversed and on opposite sides of the spectrum, but not fundamentally different. This premise is not universally accepted. One of the most aggressive challenges to this idea came from a contemporary of Duverger's, Theodor Adorno, who argued that the Left and the Right are characterized by fundamentally different personality types (1950). In Adorno's view, these differences amounted to a kind of pathology (he was mostly concerned about the Right in this regard), and so assuming similar—or even *rational*—responses from the two sides of the political spectrum would be a dubious proposition. Although more recent research rarely echoes Adorno's belligerent, somewhat biased tone, there is significant evidence that the Left and the Right are characterized by distinct personality types that go beyond mere platforms (Gerber et al., 2010).

The point of highlighting these problems is not to discredit Cox's work; his idea

of centrifugal electoral forces and the strategic interaction of parties remains central to our understanding of how electoral systems and ideology interact. Rather, this section was meant to emphasize the need for further empirical tests of his theory. In the next section, I will discuss the how such tests can be conducted.

CHAPTER 3—EMPIRICS

Operationalizing the Abstract

In the previous sections of this essay, I discussed the theoretical connections between things like partisan ideology, the political Left and Right, and voter policy preferences. One of the most difficult parts of writing an essay on this topic is trying to devise ways to measure and quantify concepts that are so abstract.

In order to test Cox's theory, I needed the following variables: 1) the *number of competing parties*, 2) an estimate of the *ideology of those parties* (preferably cardinal, so that the relative distances between the parties can be gauged), and 3) some measure for the *ideology of the voting public*. In addition, since I wanted to look at the effect of Cox's centrifugal forces on the overall party system, rather than just on individual parties, I needed a fourth variable, the *net ideological stance* for all Left and the Right parties within a given country.

The first variable is clearly the easiest to conceptualize, but I did have to choose between two major methodologies. The simplest method is the "raw count;" i.e. simply to count the total number of parties holding seats at the national level. This method was what I used in the theoretical and normative sections of the paper—i.e. when I spoke of nine Dutch parties and two American parties, I was simply referring to how many

nationally represented parties were present in those two countries.

An alternative method is to use an *effective party count*. The idea of an effective party count (EPC) is that parties of vastly differing sizes should not be treated as equals. For example, if the Libertarians happened to win a single seat in the US House of Representatives, the raw count would declare the United States a three-party state, even though we would still functionally have a two-party system. An EPC would use a mathematical formula that takes voter support into account to provide a supposedly more accurate assessment of the number of parties. One typical formula is presented below (Laakso & Taagepara, 1979).

(1—Effective Number of Parties)

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

In this equation, *n* is the raw count of parties, and p_i^2 is the square of each party's percentage of the popular vote. Using a formula like this one, parties with limited electoral success would only fractionally contribute to the party count. So, for example, while the raw count for Dutch parties is nine, the ECP is only 6.9 (reflecting the low vote totals of the smaller competitors).

There are several advantages to the ECP. For example, it helps to minimize the effects of fluke victories by minor parties on a key variable. Moreover, the basic idea behind it—that parties of different should not be treated as equally significant—is one that I borrowed when devising a measure of net ideological stance. However, Cox's theory was based on the *total number of competitors*. In order to stay true to his theory, the raw party count will be my first variable.

Next, I needed an estimate of party ideology. Deciding what kind of measure to use for this variable was one of the most difficult decisions I had to make while writing this thesis. In order to deal with a large-*n* dataset—using the raw party count, I had 2226 party-level observations—I needed a variable that was accurate, reliable and could be quickly derived (or, better yet, that earlier researchers had already derived). As mentioned earlier, cardinality was strongly preferable, because it would allow me to judge the relative distance between the parties. Recalling *Fig. 1* and *2*, the parties do not actually have to switch their relative positions for Cox's theory to hold; in fact, we should probably expect the parties *not* to change their relative positions, since doing so would cost the shifting party all of its original support. Consider:

Figure 1—Illustration of the Spatial Theory of Electoral Politics (again)

Figure 2—Shifting the Equilibrium (again)

Figure 5—Switching Relative Positions is a Bad Idea

In the first two figures, the Left Party closes the distance between itself and the Center Party, but does not change its relative position (i.e. in both *Fig. 1* and *2* it is to the

left of the CP). This wins the Left Party the largest share of voters. If the Left Party were to continue its rightward shift, as shown in *Fig. 5*, it would lose its original constituency, and give the Center Party the largest bloc of votes.

Given the rather stringent requirements for the party ideology variable, I ultimately found a suitable measure based on textual analysis of party manifestos, in the form of the Comparative Manifesto Project dataset. Nevertheless, this method is far from the only way that political scientists have tried to describe policy positions.

When asked to distinguish between different ideologies, most people would rely on philosophical distinctions—i.e. a party could be "conservative," "liberal," etc. These distinctions do not need to be so broad, however, and some political theorists have created very elaborate and detailed classification systems. One of the preeminent authors in this regard is Cas Mudde. Mudde's work primarily focuses on the far-right, so his system could not be used to describe all political parties, but it still provides a good template for more philosophically grounded research. For example, he distinguishes among "populist" (anti-establishment, with a relatively small number of key issues), "reactionary" (anti-populist and nostalgic), "radical" (non-mainstream, but not non-violent), and "extremist" (violent) parties when describing the far-right (Mudde, 2007). These distinctions provide relatively simple, qualitative descriptions of parties that would ordinarily be lumped together. So, Mudde's work could be considered as a potentially useful ideological classification.

There are serious problems with the philosophical approach that make it unsuitable for use in this essay. First, it still deals with qualitative, not quantitative, distinctions, which makes analysis difficult—basically, theorists like Mudde are still too

abstract for my purposes. The second, related problem is that work like Mudde's depends heavily on the individual judgment of the author in question, which creates a reliability problem and makes it easy for skeptics to dismiss any conclusions drawn based on those distinctions. Finally, making distinctions like this requires an intensive review of the parties in question; given that there are hundreds of post-1945 political parties in developed countries that can be analyzed for research like this, the philosophical approach is simply too slow.

An early effort to create numerical ideological scores for political parties was to simply ask the opinions of expert researchers; as recently as the late 1990s, this system was still in limited use (Knutsen, 1998). A typical process would be to send a list of parties to several experts, asking them to rank the parties on a 1-10 Left-Right scale, and then averaging their results. The problems with this approach are obvious, and not particularly dissimilar from those Mudde's method faced: the system is slow, would be impractical for collecting data on hundreds of parties, and relies on "expert judgments" with no coding standards or reliability controls. The expert-survey method does, however, introduce the idea of using a simple, one-dimensional scale to approximate the distance between parties on a Left-Right axis.

So, the key is to find a methodology that keeps the unidimensional numerical scale, but that has reliability (i.e. rigorous coding guidelines) and the potential to quickly rank large numbers of parties. Textual analysis[5] is the solution. The idea of textual analysis is to review important documents, scanning for key words and ideas that can be classified as Right or Left; those tallies can then be added together to produce a net score (Laver et al., 2003). Some of the most notable uses of textual analysis for the purpose of

[5] Also referred to as lexical analysis.

assigning ideological values came from scholars of the judiciary (Segal et al., 1995), but the process can be applied to parties equally well. In fact, political parties are a natural target for the use of textual analysis, because they regularly produce manifestos and platforms that are designed for the specific purpose of communicating their ideas and positions to a public audience (Adams & Somer-Topcu, 2009).

Using this analysis to construct a dataset for hundreds of parties over more than half a century of elections would still be a daunting task, but fortunately other researchers have led the way. In particular, the Berlin-based Comparative Manifesto Project has compiled scores for every party in the developed world (25 countries) with representation at the national level for every election going back to 1948. Their work was the starting point for all of my research.

Since I wanted to test the effect of multipartism on the partisan system, rather than just on individual parties, I needed a way to create another, related variable to represent the net ideological stance of the parties a given system. This variable is essentially a derivation of the partisan ideological score; I just needed some way translating the unit of observation away from individual parties and up to the level of elections. One of the key concerns when making this variable is that I did not want to treat all the partisan ideological scores as equally important. While I consider minor parties to be the equals of their more popular counterparts as far as the party count variable is concerned, I did not want small, non-mainstream parties to overly impact my measure of the net ideology of a system. For example, would it be accurate to say that a country where a far-left party (e.g. Communist) won seats with 2% of the vote has a significantly more left-wing party system than a country where the Communists failed to

meet the minimum vote threshold? Just because those parties have some type of representation does not mean that they are actually a significant presence in the system (an observation that my results strongly reflect). Ultimately, I decided to use a weighted average of the partisan ideological scores collected for each election year—multiplying the ideology by the percent of the vote received, and then averaging that out across the number of parties in that election. This ensures that the contribution of small parties to the partisan ideological system can still be noted, without allowing non-centrist parties to disproportionately affect the measure.

The final variable required is a measure of voter ideology. One of the difficulties with this variable is that, for practical reasons, I needed a single number or "score" to represent the voter ideology for each country-election dyad, even though any measure of voter ideology should, in theory, be representing the views of thousands of voters. The ideological preferences of these voters may not be evenly distributed (i.e. we cannot assume a bell curve shape), so getting an "average" voter position would not be especially helpful. The most useful measure of voter ideology would be an estimate of the *median voter.* It's easiest to conceptualize why the median voter is the ideal measure if you consider a bipartisan system. Assuming, as we have been, that voters will lend their support to whatever party is nearest them, then in a two party system the winner should always be the party nearest to the median voter (*Fig. 3* may be helpful in picturing this). In the spatial theory of parties, the median voter is key because he represents the "tipping point" that the Left or the Right needs to hold in order to gain a majority of the vote share.

Data and Measurements

This essay would not have been possible without the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP), whose dataset, directly or indirectly, was the source of most of the information used in my regressions (results given in the next section). As mentioned, the CMP is an example of using textual analysis to generate standardized ideological scores for political parties. The CMP codes party platforms on hundreds of specific issues—some specific examples include support for the free market, anti-militarism, and support for the welfare state. Every issue is treated as a directional indicator. So, for example, "support for the free market" is a Right-leaning indicator; a party whose manifesto indicated they supported this value would receive a score of 1 for this value, while a non-supportive party would receive a 0. In the end, all of the Left-leaning and Right-leaning indicators are tallied separately, and the Right score is subtracted from the Left score to produce a net ideological score. In this way, in every election year from 1948 to 1998, each party in the dataset is assigned "Left-to-Right" score, which summarizes the CMP's judgment of their position on the political spectrum. These scores can range from 0 (fully Right) to 100 (fully Left).[6] Thus, the final version of the CMP contains thousands of data-points, with individual parties as the basic level of observation.

The CMP was a fantastically useful dataset, but it needed substantial work before it could provide the variables I needed to test my hypothesis. Of the four variables I needed, the CMP only directly supplied me with one (*partisan ideology*). Two of the other variables, specifically *party count* and *net ideological stance* could be derived fairly easily from the original dataset, while the fourth, *voter ideology*, had to be taken from

[6] Notice that the CMP scoring method is somewhat counterintuitive—the lower scores would fall on the left of a number, but indicate a "Right" position, and vice versa. Before beginning my analysis, I reversed the direction of the scores in order to make them easier to interpret.

another source.

Even the ideology variable was problematic. Cox's theory defined centrism and extremism "relative to the particular electorate in question, rather than to any absolute or broader standard" (Cox 1990, 913). Unfortunately, the CMP is a textbook case of an absolute standard; all parties receive their rankings based on a preset notion of what defines the Left and the Right, without regard to the country or election year. This is not *per se* a fault with the CMP; standardizing the score-assignment method provides the dataset with the kind of coding-based reliability that other measures of partisan ideology lack. However, it meant that the partisan ideology score needed to be re-centered around the voters of the countries in question.

Re-centering the partisan ideology measure required me to find the fourth variable, *voter ideology*. As discussed in the previous section, the ideal singular measure of voter ideology would be the median voter. Fortunately, a median voter measure based on the CMP had previously been derived. A pair of researchers had used the CMP's methodology to create a measure of voter ideology (Kim and Fording, 1998). Their methodology was appropriately grounded in spatial theory. Starting with the partisan ideological scores the CMP provided, Kim and Fording generated an interval on the political spectrum where they expected each party's supporters to be located. They then used the popular vote share each party received to determine the percentage of the electorate that falls into each interval. This gave them a grouped frequency distribution, from which they estimated the median position of voters using the following formula:

(2—Median Voter)

$$Median\ Voter\ Position = L + [(50 - C)/F] * W$$

Where L is the lower (i.e. most right-wing) end of the interval containing the median; C is the vote up to, but not including, the median; F is the vote share in the interval containing the median; and W is the width of the interval containing the median.

Kim and Fording had already generated an enhanced version of the CMP dataset containing the median voter variable. Working off of the enhanced dataset, I re-centered the partisan ideology score around the median voter by simply subtracting the "PartisanIdeology" variable from "MedianVoter." This gave me a new variable, "RelativePartisanIdeology," which indicated the extremity of the party in question relative to the population of its home country. Notice that "RelativePartisanIdeology" has a different range than the original "PartisanIdeology" variable: instead of going from 0-to-100 (Right-Left) it ranges from -100-to-100 (Left-Right).[7]

So, two of my four variables were accounted for, but I still needed a *party count* and a *net ideological stance*. The first is simpler to derive. The CMP provides ideological scores for every party that won seats in a national election over the year range of 1948-1998 in the 25 countries sampled. By combining the "Country" and "Date" variables, I could create a unique variable, "ElectionID," for every election. Every party already had its own unique variable, "PartyID." So, by generating counting the number of PartyID variables associated with each ElectionID, I created a new variable, "PartyCount." This served as an effective raw count of the number of competitors.

The net ideological stance variable was somewhat more difficult to generate. As

[7] In fact, it never actually reached either end of the spectrum, but it would be hypothetically possible (you would need either a perfectly left-wing public with an extreme right-wing party, or vice-versa). Also, notice that the direction of the scores is now intuitive—lower scores now indicate a "Left" alignment, higher scores indicate a "Right" alignment.

discussed in the previous section, I wanted a measure that assigned greater importance to larger parties; in short, I was looking for a weighted average of partisan ideology for each election. Deriving a weighted average is not difficult:

(3—Net Ideological Stance)

$$Net\ Ideological\ Stance = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(I * v)}{n}$$

Where *I* is the ideological score, *v* is the percentage of the popular vote and *n* is the number of parties. Simply put, all I was doing was multiplying each “RelativePartisanIdeology” score by its respective popular vote, adding the product together by election, and then dividing that by the number of parties.

There is a problem with this method—because of my rescaling of the ideology measure, Left and Right parties now have opposite signs on their ideological scores (negative for Left, positive for Right). Adding all the ideology scores in a given election together will simply result in the Left scores and the Right scores cancelling each other out. This problem was resolved by considering the Left and the Right separately. I created a dichotomous variable "RelativelyRight," which equaled one for all parties with a positive "Right-to-Left" score, and zero for those with a negative score, and a complementary variable, “RelativelyLeft.” Parties with a score of zero (indicating complete neutrality, or alignment with the median voter) were left out of this measure, since they cannot effect the Net Ideological Stance.

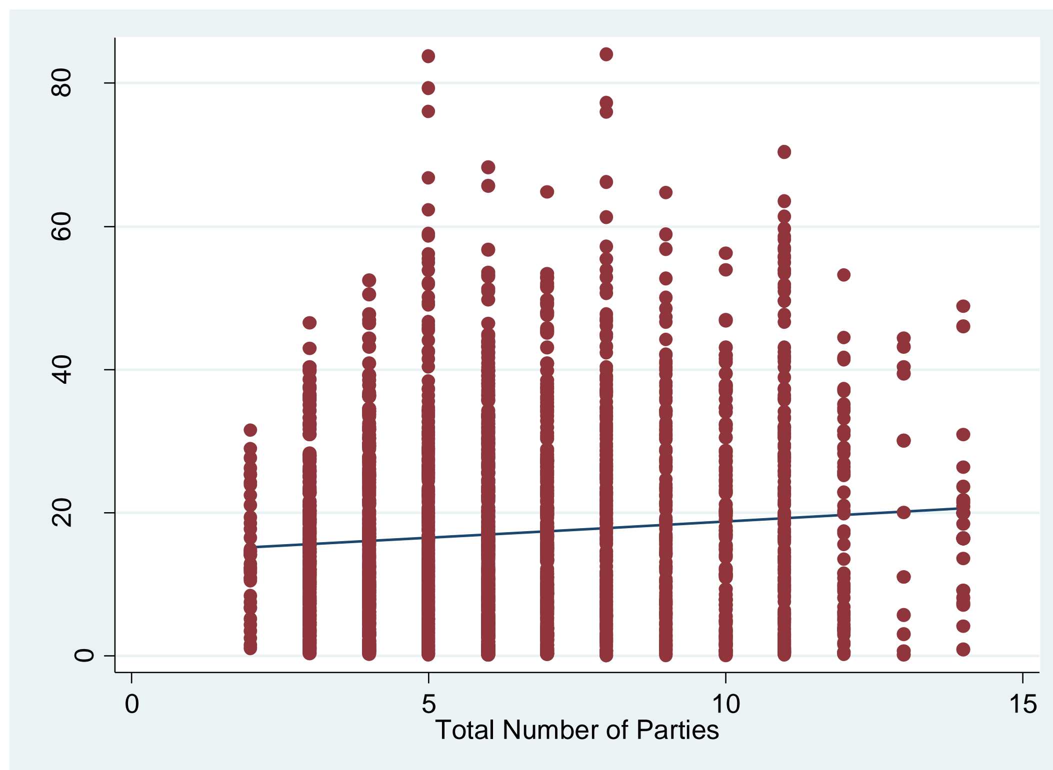
My dataset now contained all of the variables I needed in order to run a test of Cox’s theory. This was accomplished using a series of regressions detailed in the following section.

Results and Interpretation

Recall that we have three hypotheses to test from Cox: 1) more parties will lead to greater ideological diversity (*party ideology*), 2) the party system has a whole will become more extreme and less centrist as the number of parties increases (*net ideological stance*), and 3) the Left and the Right will be affected equally. I found statistically significant support for the first and third hypothesis, while finding strong evidence *against* the second hypothesis.

ELECTORAL PRESSURES AND INDIVIDUAL PARTIES

Fig. 6—Multipartism and the Distance from the Median Voter



***Notes**:* This figure depicts the regression of partisan ideological distance from the median voter (i.e. centrism and extremism) (*y*-axis) on the total number of parties (*x*-axis). The positive slope of the line of best fit indicates that there is a positive relationship between the number of parties and extremism.

Table 1: Multipartism and Individual Partisan Ideology, 1948-1998

The regression of partisan extremism (divergence from the center) on the total number of political parties

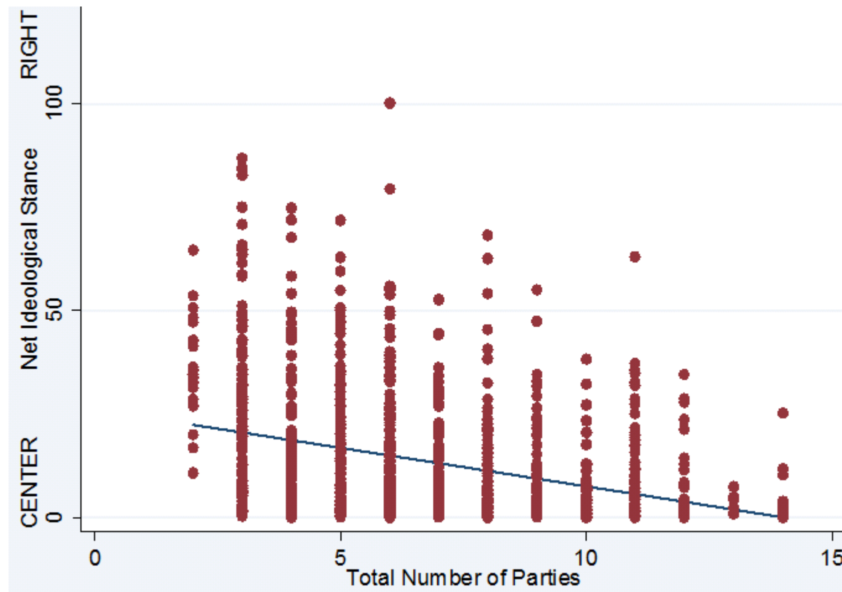
	Dependent Variable Average Unweighted Distance from the Median Voter
Independent Variable	
Total Number of Political Parties	.457
	(.107)***
R^2:	0.0079
Number of observations:	2226

**p*<.1; **p*<.01; ****p*<.001;

Notes: The cell shows the coefficient from a regression of the non-directional "Distance from Median Voter" variable with the total number of parties using robust standard errors clustered by election. The dependent variable is the absolute value of the distance between a party's ideological score and the ideology score of the median voter in a given election. "Unweighted" means that all parties were treated equally in deriving the dependent variable, and their popular vote totals were not taken into account. The positive cell value indicates an increase in the average distance from the median voter (i.e. rising extremism for individual parties). All standard errors are robust.

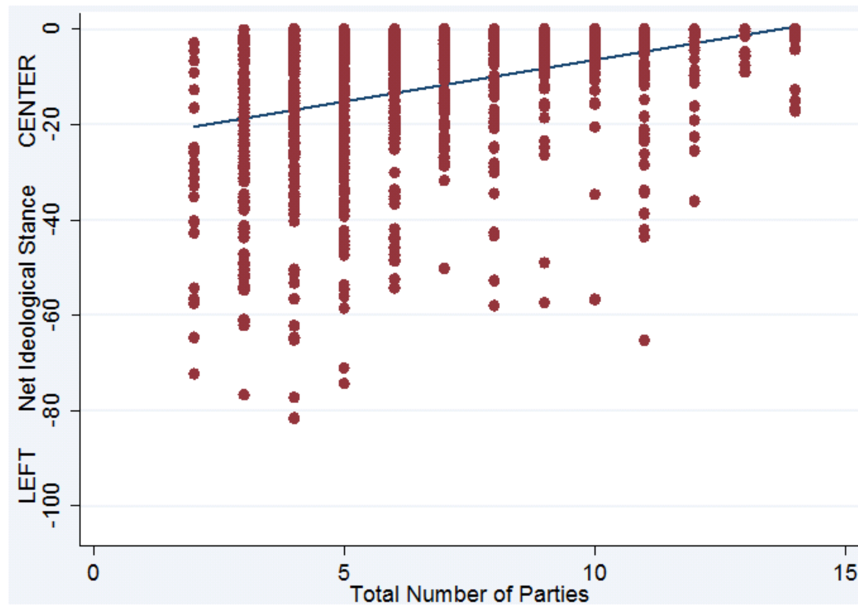
There is a statistically significant postive relationship between the distance from the median voter (i.e. partisan non-centrism) and the number of parties. This provides good empirical support for Cox's theory of multipartism as a centrifugal force. Interestingly, the party systems with between five and ten parties appeared to exhibit a larger range than those with more than ten competitors (as shown in the above graph), but this is not a significant result—only a small percentage of the elections observed featured more than ten parties.

Fig. 7—Multipartism and the Net Ideological Stance for the Right



***Notes**:* This figure depicts the regression of the net ideological stance of all right-wing parties in a given election (*y*-axis) on the total number of parties (*x*-axis). The negative slope of the line of best fit indicates the net ideological stance of the Right tends towards centrism as the number of parties increases.

Fig. 8—Multipartism and the Net Ideological Stance for the Left



***Notes**:* This figure depicts the regression of the net ideological stance of all left-wing parties in a given election (*y*-axis) on the total number of parties (*x*-axis). The positive slope of the line of best fit indicates the net ideological stance of the Left, like that of the Right, tends towards centrism as the number of parties increases.

Table 2: Multipartism and Net Partisan Ideology, 1948-1998

The regression of the net ideological stance of the Left and the Right on the total number of political parties

	Dependent Variable	
	Distance from the Median Voter (Net Ideological Stance)	
	Left	Right
Independent Variable		
Total Number of Political Parties	1.74	-1.86
	(.155)***	(.164)***
R^2:	0.1039	0.1029
Number of observations:	1112	1111

*p<.1; *p<.01; ***p<.001;

Note: The cells show coefficients from a regression of the directional "Distance from Median Voter (Net Ideological Stance)" variable with the total number of parties using robust standard errors clustered by election. The dependent variables are the distance the weighted average of all partisan ideological scores and the ideology score of the median voter in a given election, with the Left and the Right treated separately. "Weighted" means that all parties were *not* treated equally in deriving the dependent variable, and their popular vote totals were taken into account. Positive cell values indicate a rightward trend; negative cell values, a leftward trend. For both dependent variables, the cell values indicate a decrease in the average distance from the median voter (i.e. greater centrism in the net ideological stance of the parties). All standard errors are robust.

The most surprising result came when testing relationship between multipartism and the net ideological stance of the party system. Recall that the two variables used for this regression were the party count, and the weighted average of ideological scores (with the Left and the Right handled separately). The second hypothesis predicted that the net ideological stance of both the Left and the Right would drift further away from the center as the number of parties increased; in fact, the opposite occurred. The weighted average of partisan ideology actually became *more* centrist as the number of parties increased, contrary to what we would have expected from both Cox and the first regression.

So, how can the overall trend be towards greater centrism even as ideological diversity (i.e. the proliferation of non-centrist parties) increases? The key is that this regression took the popular vote of the parties into account, while the first regression held all parties as equal. Multiparty systems may be more likely to produce extremist parties,

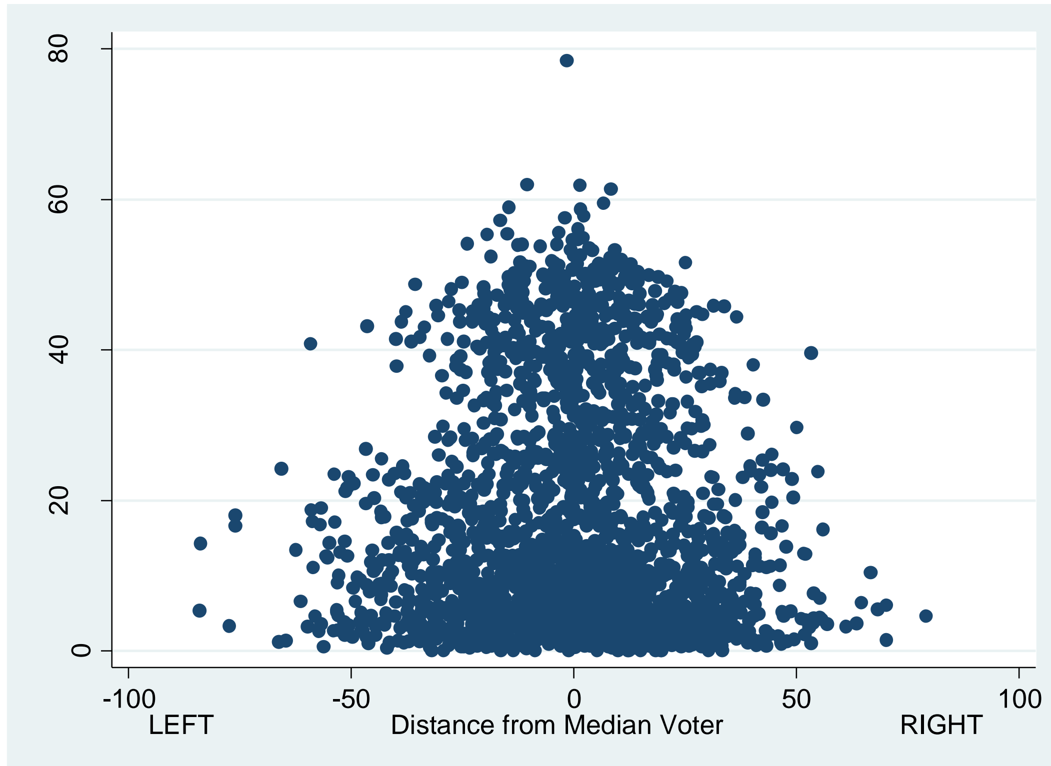
but that does not mean those parties are getting a large share of the vote.

It seems unlikely to me that this result can be explained purely as an outcome of Coxian equilibrium—taken together, these two regressions indicate that there are a large number of extremist parties (greater ideological diversity) that are receiving a small share of the vote (increased net centrism), even as centrist parties do relatively well. Spatial theory would predict that these parties could improve their lot by moving closer to the center, and so picking off more voters from the non-extremist parties. Since the data does not appear to show this activity, we might assume that these small extremist parties are more interested in representing their limited constituency than in adjusting their position to win voters. This is contrary to Cox's strategic logic, but is reminiscent of the "testimonial" function of parties discussed in the second section of this essay.

Even those these results cast doubt on the second hypothesis, they do appear to support the third (that the Left and the Right are affected equally). The net positions of both the Left and the Right tend towards the center as the number of parties increases—notice that *Fig. 7* and *8* are almost mirror images of each other. The two regressions even yielded coefficients (-1.86 for the Right, 1.74 for the Left).[8]

[8] Not that the opposite signs on these coefficients indicates that both the Left and the Right are trending towards centrism, even as they technically head in opposite directions (i.e. the Right is moving leftward, and the Left is moving rightward).

Fig. 9—Extremism and Popular Vote Share



Notes: This figure depicts the regression of the percentage of the popular vote won by a party in a given election (*y*-axis) on that party's distance from the median voter (*x*-axis). Note that centrist parties significantly outperform their extremist counterparts.

Table 3: Extremism and the Popular Vote, 1948-1998

The regression of extremism (divergence from the center) on the popular vote share of a given party

	Dependent Variable Popular Vote Share	
	Left	Right
Independent Variable		
Distance from the Median Voter	2.92	-2.10
	(.730)***	(.705)***
R^2:	0.0620	0.0414
Number of observations:	1112	1111

*p<.1; *p<.01; ***p<.001;

Note: The cells show coefficients from a regression of the directional "Distance from Median Voter" variable with the popular vote share received using robust standard errors clustered by election. The dependent variables are the distance between partisan ideological scores and the ideology score of the median voter in a given election, with the Left and the Right treated separately. For both dependent variables, the cell values indicate that increasing distance from the median voter is positively correlated with a lower vote share. All standard errors are robust.

The final hypothesis had to do with the relationship of centrism and electoral success, as measured by the popular vote. As expected (and as the counter-intuitive results I found for the second hypothesis would indicate), there is a strong positive relationship between centrism[9] and winning a higher percentage of the popular vote. Note that this regression did not distinguish between bipartisan and multiparty systems.

CHAPTER 4—CONCLUSION

In this paper, I used data from the Comparative Manifesto Project, as well as a measure of the median voter from Kim and Fording, to generate a series of regressions testing the relationship between the number of parties and various measures of partisan ideology. In general, my results indicated support for Cox's theory of centrifugal forces, with the key exception being that the net ideological position of the Left and the Right actually became more centrist as the total number of parties rose, even as total ideological diversity increased. In addition, I found support for Cox's non-directional force hypothesis (i.e. the Left and the Right are equally affected), and also showed a strong positive relationship between centrism and a higher share of the popular vote.

There are several important implications that follow from these results. First, as discussed in the normative section of this essay, one of the potential concerns about greater ideological diversity is that non-centrist parties might exercise too much control (i.e. the downside of greater choice is that there is a greater chance of voters making the wrong choice). The fact that net centrism increased with the number of parties, even as ideological diversity simultaneously increased, indicates that this is probably not a valid concern—allowing non-mainstream parties the chance to hold seats at the national level

[9] Relative to the median voter.

does not mean that they will become major parties, and voters with greater choice appear more inclined to support parties who policy preferences resemble those of the median voter. The result of my final regression, meanwhile, indicates that parties interested in electoral success (as opposed to testimonial parties) would do well to copy the position of the median voter.

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Education

The Pennsylvania State University, Schreyer Honors College — May 2012
Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and History, with Honors in Political Science
Funded almost 30% of my total expenses with merit scholarships

Experience

Student consultant, Housing and Food Services, University Park — 2011
- Duties included supervising high-school age campers during check-in to University facilities for summer camps

Member, Human Relations Commission, State College Borough Government — 2011-present
- Responsible for hearing and adjudicating complaints filed in relation to the Borough's Anti-Discrimination Ordinance

Leadership and Service

Advocacy

Candidate, Alternate Delegate to the Republican National Convention (PA-5) — 2012
Centre County Coalitions Director, Rohrer for Senate — 2012
Member, Centre County Republican Party Finance Committee — 2012
Republican nominee, State College Area (SCASD) School Board — 2011
Keynote speaker and organizer, Rally for Academic Integrity, PSU — February 12, 2010
Campaign Manager, Wendy Brown for Centre Country Republican Vice-Chair — 2010
Campaign Manager, Joe Wakeley for Mayor, State College Borough — 2009
Middle East Forum, Philadelphia, PA
- Intern; Assistant to Associate Director Raymond Ibrahim — 2009
- Volunteer Contributor, *Campus Watch*, Middle East Forum — 2009-2010

Captain (Republican), Precinct 28 (State College East Central-1) — 2009-present
Member, Centre County Republican Committee — 2009-present
Penn State Campus Liaison, Kerry Benninghoff for PA State Representative — 2008

Volunteer

Kiwanis Club of State College — 2011-present
- Member, Program Committee
- Volunteer with the pre-school readership and special education programs

Volunteer and Friend of Schlow, Schlow Centre Regional Library — 2009-present
- Assisted with the reorganization of the children's library

Media and Communications Director, Schreyer Literary Committee — 2009
Volunteer, Centre County Adult Development Center — 2008-2009
- Certified volunteer, PA Literacy Corps — 2009

Volunteer, University City Hospitality Coalition, Philadelphia, PA — 1998-present
- Provided relief services in a high-poverty urban environment

Leadership and Service (continued)

Extracurricular

Young Americans for Freedom (YAF)	
•Secretary, National Board of Governors	2010-present
•Chairman for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania	2010-2012
•Chairman, Penn State YAF	2009-present
•"Chapter of the Year," Penn State YAF	October 16, 2010
Executive Director, College Republicans, PSU	2009-2010
Student Activities Coordinator, Students for Toomey, PSU	2010
President and Founder, Wakeley for Mayor (student group), PSU	2009

Presentations

Debater, 2010 Schreyer Oxford Debate	October 18, 2010
Panelist, Student Activism session, Pennsylvania Leadership Conference, Harrisburg, PA	April 16, 2010
Speaker, "Two-Minute Activist" session, Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC 2010), Washington, D.C.	February 19, 2010
Alumni Panelist, 2009 Young Scholar Summit, Davidson Institute for Talent Development, University of Nevada-Reno	June 20, 2009
Alumni Speaker, Scholarship Awards Weekend, Washington Crossing Foundation, Bristol, PA	April 25, 2009
Panelist, first Schreyer Policy Issues Forum	October 27, 2008

Publications

"Climategate is an embarrassment," CampusReform.org	February 8, 2010
"The Situation of Post Election Iran," Middle East Forum	July 21, 2009
Seven letters to the editor in *The Centre Daily Times*	2009-2012
Twelve letters to the editor in *The Daily Collegian*	2008-2011

Merit Scholarships

Gene Bloch Memorial Award, PSU Department of Political Science	2011
Student Leadership Scholarship, Division of Student Affairs, PSU	2009, 2010 & 2011
Ronald Reagan College Leaders Scholarship, Phillips Foundation	2010
Academic Excellence Scholarship, Schreyer Honors College	2008-present
Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship, U.S. Department of Education	2008-2011
C. Melville Jr. and Kenneth Barr National Merit Scholarship, PSU	2008-2009
Independence Foundation Scholarship, Washington Crossing Foundation	2008

Honors

Member, Phi Beta Kappa Society	2011-present
Member, Golden Key International Honour Society	2009-present
Member, Phi Alpha Theta History Honor Society	2012-present
Member, Pi Sigma Alpha Political Science Honor Society	2010-present

Awards

Partisan Award for Student Leadership and Service, PSU	2012
Finalist, Rock Ethics Institute Stand Up Award, PSU	2012
Selected as one of the "20 in their 20s" top conservative activists in the nation by the Leadership Institute, Arlington, VA	August 2011