A structuring theory of electoral politics

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ABSTRACT

Why are party systems in modern democracies so remarkably stable? We theorize patterns of electoral competition as the outcome of a struggle between entropy and structure. Forces of entropy entail idiosyncratic voting behavior guided by subjective evaluations, while forces of structure entail coordinated behavior emerging from objective aspects of party preference. Our model locates determinants of voting behavior on a continuum spanning subjective and objective concerns. Entropy is endemic but elections for nationwide executive office periodically prime objective concerns, reinstating structure in party systems. We showcase the mechanism in an analysis of data from elections to the European Parliament since 1989. Because these elections occur at various points in the electoral cycles of EU member countries, they provide pseudo-random assignment of structuring behavior. We thus trace structure in party support to the cyclical pulse of national elections. Institutional settings governing these behaviors are studied in individual cases.

The origin of structure in electoral politics has traditionally been seen in social cleavages and their "frozen" reflections in party systems (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Party organization has undergone numerous changes since (e.g. Kirchheimer 1966; Panebianco 1988; Katz and Mair 1995) and the social basis of traditional cleavages has long been in decline (e.g. Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984; Franklin, Mackie and Valen 1992). Despite these broad transformations, however, fundamental party-system change mostly failed to appear. Volatility has been limited and perhaps does not even exceed values found before the alleged "unfreezing" of the political landscape (Shamir 1984; Dassonneville and Hooghe 2011). Even today, party systems curiously remain dominated by a manageable number of players (Lijphart 2012, 60ff.). Exceptions are not too hard to find, but they barely do more than prove the rule of party-system stability. In fact, more fragmented system types such as Sartori's (1976) "polarized pluralism" have largely disappeared from the political landscape (Mair 1997), new parties do emerge but are mostly short-lived (Bolleyer and Bytzek 2013), and even new democracies often exceed expectations of party-system consolidation (Toole 2000).

The persistence of order in party systems after the decline of traditional cleavage politics suggests the need for a more general explanation. We theorize patterns of electoral competition as the outcome of a struggle between forces of entropy and structure. Forces of entropy entail idiosyncratic voting behavior – behavior guided by *subjective* evaluations of the competing candidates or parties. The aggregate outcome of such behavior can be observed in party-system inflation as diverse subjective evaluations lead voters to support numerous different parties. In contrast, forces of structure entail coordinated behavior leading to a smaller number of parties. By coordination we mean the evolution of a shared focus on the same set of parties, which restrains their overall number. Of course voters in mass societies do not actually coordinate their choices, so coordinated behavior has to emerge indirectly from increased salience of *objective*

aspects of party preference – aspects that distinguish the focal set.

Our model locates the key determinants of voting behavior on a *continuum* running between the extreme points of subjective and objective concerns. The closer a variable to the objective pole, the more potential for structuring it holds owing to its ability to impose the same motivation on different individuals. An objective variable is characterized by two formal qualities: collectivity (many citizens share the same attribute) and exhaustiveness (all citizens are covered). Such forces can originate from voters or parties. On the voters' side, socio-demographic characteristics play a prime role to the degree that they still capture politically relevant differences. On the parties' side, the most powerful of these forces is exerted by party size, which defines a party's attractiveness for instrumentally-motivated support.

In contrast, the closer a variable to the subjective pole, the greater is its potential to create entropy by reducing structure in the system. Subjective forces typically reflect evaluations of policy and parties' issue competence. The entropic potential of such variables will be realized to the degree that individuals' views differ. As complex societies create numerous cross-cutting reasons for disagreement, significant entropy can be expected by default (cf. Simmel 1908; Beck 1992). However, to the degree that individual issue preferences happen to correspond (or are systematically harmonized), even highly subjective concerns can yield structure in party systems.

Two prominent concepts populate the center of the subjective/objective continuum: partisanship and ideology. As explained below, these variables combine subjective evaluations with objective references and therefore produce mixed, status-quo-preserving, effects on voting.

The subjective/objective continuum locates all important variables of electoral research in a single, exogenously defined dimension. Our aim is to demonstrate how this dimension governs party systems through the three pathways just theorized: structuring through objective concerns and shared subjective concerns, entropy through idiosyncratic subjective concerns. Tracing these

relationships empirically, however, is easier said than done. After all we assume that party systems reflect an *equilibrium* of countervailing forces of entropy and structure. To discern such an equilibrium empirically, we need to know what happens when it is disturbed.

Opportunities for such a demonstration are more pervasive than one might think, though often "hidden in plain sight." In fact, the equilibrium of subjective and objective forces is highly contingent and should really only describe one point in time: election day. Elections for nationwide executive office direct voters' attention toward the instrumental consideration of who will form the government. This focus primes party size, the main objective ingredient of party preference. Moreover, national election campaigns call upon loyalties associated with social differences, the other important objective ingredient. From an analytical perspective, election day thus reflects a highly special episode in the struggle between subjective and objective forces. It is the time of maximum structure and minimum entropy. Indeed we surmise that structure in party systems derives from motivations evoked by elections for nationwide executive office.

Some systems have equilibria that are more readily disturbed than others, however, and we must consider the extent of exposure to forces of entropy, which is least when there are least opportunities to support parties that would disturb the equilibrium. In the pure two-party case there are no such opportunities, but opportunities increase as party-system inflation yields more options for voters. Equilibrium thus requires stronger effects of structuring forces the further a system stands from the two-party pole. Pedersen (1979) showed how more parties increase the entropy associated with electoral volatility. We extend his logic to entropy more generally.

Our strategy of modeling the dynamics of structure and entropy contrasts elections for nationwide executive office with less important electoral contests. In Europe, the latter are known as "second-order elections" (SOEs) with distinctive characteristics (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Conveniently, elections to the European Parliament (EP) are SOEs that come with a

pseudo-random assignment mechanism for structuring behavior, namely the location of these elections in the national electoral cycles of EU member states. So our primary analysis employs survey data collected on the occasion of these Europe-wide ballots since 1989.

Cyclical variation is not the only opportunity to observe the forces of entropy and structure at work. Another opportunity, often yielding more tangible evidence, arises from change in the institutional basis for political competition. If coordinated behavior emanates from elections for nationwide executive office, any reform of the electoral system that weakens the link between the act of voting and the choice of executive should promote entropy at the expense of structure. We illustrate such a development in a case study of Israel when that country introduced a second ballot in 1996 to directly elect its Prime Minister. The result was a parliament so void of party structure that it was unable to sustain viable governing coalitions. The opposite outcome prominently occurs in the United States, whose party system shows no sign of entropy despite the strict separation of powers. This highlights how the forces of entropy are effectively eliminated in two-party systems, and we give special attention to the US as our prototype of a country whose two-party structure is largely self-sustaining.

The next section places our independent variables in the subjective/objective continuum. Then we theorize the continuum's dynamic implications and present our survey analysis of the European Election Studies (EES). A closer look at our two informative cases (Israel and the US) guides the generalization of the analysis to varying party-system formats. Conclusions follow.

The subjective/objective continuum

Figure 1 maps the subjective/objective continuum of electoral forces. Let us begin with demographic variables, which are located toward the objective pole on the right. Rokkan (1970), in his arguably most influential account of electoral stability, saw structure as manifesting itself

in terms of a stable party system based on longstanding social cleavages between voters. While we argued above that the decline of these particular alignments leaves us in need of a more general theory, it would be too much to assume that the influence of social factors has vanished entirely (Enyedi 2008). Moreover, the initial configuration of a party system will frequently have been defined by social cleavages in the manner that Rokkan described, and may have evolved through the impact of new cleavages (e.g. Deegan-Krause 2007; Kriesi et al. 2008). What is important for our argument is that such cleavages not only define individual properties but objectively describe significant groups in society; they thus possess structuring potential.

[Figure 1 about here]

Only one variable is placed even closer to the objective pole: party size. Measured as seat share in the national legislature, which in parliamentary democracies elects the executive, party size is an instrumental constant across the electorate. As Downs (1957, 147) notes, voters need to anticipate the likely weights that different parties would have in the national legislature following elections to that institution, in case lack of legislative weight would render a party powerless to implement its policies. An implication of this conjecture is that voters should generally favor parties that are expected to receive strong electoral support. So, other things being equal, voters will prefer to support larger parties (Eijk and Franklin 1996; Kedar 2012). The reason lies in instrumental behavior. Voters support large parties because of their higher capacity to form the government and implement their promises (Austen-Smith and Banks 1988; Bargsted and Kedar 2009; Karp and Hobolt 2010). So size for parties is like size for snowballs: the bigger they are the bigger they get. We see this motivation as largely responsible for reducing the number of parties in established democracies to manageable proportions.[1] It is only due to simultaneously

[1] A possible, complementary, extension of this argument is that citizens have a preference for stable majority government *as such* and vote accordingly (e.g. LeDuc 1977).

operating forces of entropy that the snowball effect often comes to a halt before completion.

The structuring effect of objective concerns, be they attributes of voters or parties, gains additional momentum from habits formed on the basis of coordinated behavior. Over the last decade evidence has accumulated that voting is path dependent. Past behavior has been shown to affect present turnout (Plutzer 2002; Gerber, Green and Shachar 2003; Franklin 2004; Dinas 2012) as well as candidate evaluation, party preference, and vote choice (Shachar 2003; Mullainathan and Washington 2009; Bølstad, Dinas and Riera 2013; Dinas 2014). To the degree that past behavior was affected by objective forces, habit then encapsulates party-system structure from electoral contests long vanished from the public mind. Ironically, a very personal trait such as habit thus helps mediate (and even amplify) the impact of objective forces.

On the subjective side of the continuum, we find issue concerns (policy positions and issue competence). A vast social-psychological literature shows how political preferences are rooted in numerous personal influences originating from socialization, experience, memory, beliefs and information (cf. Druckman and Lupia 2000). In fact, issue preferences are so entirely subjective that even classical rational choice theory – often seen as the epitome of objective generalization – acknowledges that a voter may be best described by "the complexity of his motives" (Downs 1957, 7). While simplifying these motives per assumption often yields valuable models, real-world subjectivity of issue preferences and competence ascription is the prime source of party-system inflation. In the extreme case, each citizen believes that s/he knows best what the nation needs and how to achieve this. The number of parties would then equal the number of voters. Of course this scenario is hypothetical, but it indicates the direction taken by forces of entropy.

We have deliberately expressed subjective/objective as a continuum rather than as a binary distinction. The reason is that some variables, most prominently partisanship and ideology, combine aspects of both poles. Partisanship (in Europe, feeling close to a party) is fundamentally

subjective because it expresses an individual's political *identity* (Campbell et al. 1960). However, it is also objective in nature because the reference point of party identification is socially shared. Identifying with a party means that the individual derives identity from a social source; as other individuals do the same, their identities will coordinate their behavior. Identification thus bridges the divide between individual and collective attributes, harboring potential for both entropy and structure. To the degree that both potentials are realized, they will cancel and jointly result in a status-quo-preserving effect: neither toward inflation nor toward deflation of the party system.

Partisanship shares objective traits for another reason: it serves as "electoral memory," reifying the habits mentioned above. A tradition of dynamic modeling, revived in recent years by growing interest in causal analysis, demonstrates how party ID is itself affected by vote choice (e.g. Franklin and Jackson 1983; Jennings and Markus 1984; Meredith 2009; Bølstad, Dinas and Riera 2013; Dinas 2014). Any motivation that led an individual to support a certain party in the past will thus be "conserved" in party ID. To the degree that these motivations had objective sources such as party size or socio-demographic characteristics, past party-system structure travels through time to coordinate present behavior via partisanship.

Ideology resembles party ID in that it combines subjective and objective traits. Ideologies are socially shared ways of interpreting the political world. Following Downs (1957), ideology is often considered a structuring force absorbing distinct issues into a single spatial dimension (in Europe, left-right). The critical variable for voting, however, is ideological proximity of an individual to a party, and individuals differ both with regard to their own positions and their perceptions of party platforms. As Fuchs and Klingemann (1989) argue, the left-right dimension is so prevalent precisely because it combines *generalization* and *limitation* of political content. In our terminology, ideology thus contains both subjective (=socially generalized) and objective (=socially limited) references, with a tendency toward the former as compared to partisanship.

Research design

Notwithstanding our generalized exposition of the subjective/objective continuum, we do not assume a quasi "natural" equilibrium of structure and entropy. Quite the contrary, central to our theory is the expectation that any equilibrium needs to be updated by, and does not exist independently of, regular electoral contests. This notion is consistent with the theory of "second-order elections" (SOEs), a term coined by Reif and Schmitt (1980) to denote elections at which nationwide executive power is not at stake, in contrast to "first-order elections" (FOEs), which serve to determine the political complexion of the national executive. The comparative literature on SOEs is rife with accounts of the specifics of these ballots – primarily low turnout, poor performance of governing parties, and gains by small parties (for an overview see Marsh and Mikhaylov 2010). Our research focuses on these peculiarities and subjects them to a simple shift of perspective. We expect structure in party support to derive from behavior associated with FOEs. SOEs display the complementary result: the loss of party-system structure when FOE behavior is limited or absent. Thus, while our approach is inspired by SOE theory, we use SOEs rather as a "laboratory" (Eijk and Franklin 1996) to study fundamental electoral processes.

Importantly for our research design, first-order/second-order is not a binary split. There are degrees of first-order-ness such that some elections partake more of this phenomenon than others (Eijk, Franklin and Marsh 1996; Marsh and Mikhaylov 2010). SOE theory sees a major source of such variation in dynamic spillover from FOEs over the course of the national electoral cycle (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Reif 1984). For a time following an FOE the theory expects first-order concerns to have been primed by the recent campaign whose appeals will only gradually be forgotten. At the other end of the cycle, as the next FOE approaches, political leaders should take any opportunity to call on first-order concerns, reminding voters of their importance in a context

where their relevance is increasingly obvious. The low point to which structuring behavior falls in the middle of each cycle thus depends on the length of time elapsed since the previous FOE, up to the point at which the onset of another FOE once again injects first-order concerns.

Cyclical dynamics are particularly evident at elections to the European Parliament (EP), which display behavior whose difference from FOE patterns in EU member countries depends on the timing of the EP election in relation to the national election cycles (e.g. Eijk and Franklin 1996; Hix and Marsh 2007; Weber 2011). Our primary analysis will employ survey data collected on the occasion of EP elections since 1989. We will model structure and entropy at these points in time as a function of temporal proximity to national elections.

Of critical importance for our research design is the fact that, in these data, position in the electoral cycle is pseudo-random (cf. Górecki 2013). Since we expect the system to be in dynamic equilibrium we need to know what gave rise to the current equilibrium at each point at which it is measured. Because EP elections occur exactly every five years but national elections occur on different cycles, EP elections fall at different points in these cycles – both when we compare one country with another or with itself from one EP election to another (see Appendix). We can thus use position in the electoral cycle at the time when our interviews are conducted to provide pseudo-random assignment of first-order-ness in each case. Random assignment of re-equilibrating shocks assure us that the forces maintaining equilibrium are endogenously generated. Moreover, since the behavioral differences we document depend on proximity to national elections, the possibility of bias arising from unmeasured concomitants is eliminated.[2]

A potential concern is manipulation of election timing by national governments, but such behavior is relatively rare in EU democracies. Moreover, if early first-order elections do occur,

[2] Note that first-order-ness is a measure in its own right, not an instrument for unmeasured motivations. So the question of meeting an exclusion restriction does not arise.

they are most unlikely to have been triggered by the second-order EP cycle and thus conveniently update the mechanism of pseudo-random assignment by "resetting" the country's cycle position.

We have a number of hypotheses that we test via the pseudo-random design. Most basically, we expect that the equilibrium of entropy and structure, rather than settling down at a stable level, is pulsating at the rhythms of national electoral cycles. Downsean logic suggests that the "snowball" effect that makes large parties grow picks up momentum when executive power looms large, i.e. in temporal proximity to FOEs. The same should be true of the effect of socio-demographic characteristics, the other important objective ingredient of party preference. Calls on loyalties and interests associated with identifiable groups will be more potent when executive power is at stake. This is consistent with "enlightened preferences" theory, which argues that campaigns help voters connect their predispositions to the available choices (Gelman and King 1993; for a European view see Andersen, Tilley and Heath 2005).[3] Part of this connection is certainly mediated by ideology or partisanship (e.g. Evans and de Graaf 2013). But unlike these more subjective variables, socio-demographic characteristics themselves are fully objective and thus make for reliable and easily defined campaign targets.

For subjective forces, we expect exactly the opposite pattern. They should matter least in temporal proximity to FOEs and most during the national midterm. First-order contexts are assumed to motivate people to give less weight to issue concerns and focus instead on who will be the government. Second-order contexts, however, let various idiosyncratic considerations off the leash. Telling examples come from the US tradition of viewing midterm Congressional elections as "referendums" on presidential performance (Tufte 1975) or as subject to "balancing"

[3] Indeed, enlightened preferences theory provides another way of viewing our expectation that first-order structuring extends into the electoral cycle *on both sides* of an FOE.

(Fiorina 1992; Alesina and Rosenthal 1995).[4] These examples involve most directly the policies of executives and their opponents (indicated in our data by the party judged best able to deal with the country's most important problem – clearly a subjective matter). Such performance and issue concerns should be relatively greatest at midterm and play a relatively lesser role around FOEs.

The same should be true of an issue unique to the European context, attitudes toward European integration. We break this out as a separate issue because of arguments in the literature that this issue attains importance in EP elections because these elections are about Europe (e.g. Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley 2009). We maintain that all issues attain importance at EP elections because these elections are SOEs – and we will demonstrate that the specific issue of European integration gains no more importance than other issues do, while it almost vanishes in FOEs (cf. Weber 2009). Thus, even while grounded on SOE theory, our model also addresses the possibility that EP elections are uniquely about Europe.

For variables located in the middle of the subjective/objective continuum, we expect a stable effect across the electoral cycle. These forces, primarily partisanship and ideology, would certainly be subject to first-order activation but they are also highly persistent, serving to fill any vacuum during midterm – reason why Converse (1966) defined a vote based on long-term partisanship as a "normal vote," and influential "surge and decline" theory sees such normal votes as characteristic of US midterm elections (A. Campbell 1960; J. Campbell 1993). Our elaboration of SOE theory has a different linchpin in characterizing the vote by the degree of structure it evinces, but this coincides with surge and decline to the extent that structure is preserved in habit (as argued above). A similar argument applies to ideology, which has always

[4] The idea that voters more centrist than the politicians they elect try to ensure centrist policies by voting at midterm to balance the outcome of the previous presidential election. For comparative perspectives, see Carrubba and Timpone (2005), Kedar (2005; 2006) and Marsh (2007).

been closer to partisanship in Europe than in the US (Campbell and Valen 1961) and proves able to incorporate changes in the issue basis of party competition (De Vries, Hakhverdian and Lancee 2013). Conceptually speaking, both ideological proximity and partisanship involve *closeness*, and closeness is what connects people to parties on a long-term basis.

In what follows, a first analysis will show how the direction and magnitude of effects of these independent variables accord with expectations. An elaboration of this analysis will then test our expectation that different equilibria call for greater or lesser structuring effects, depending on how far a party system sits from the two-party pole. See Appendix for supportive material.

Data and method

Our data derive from sample surveys fielded following EP elections in 27 countries from 1989 to 2009, 92 elections in all (see Appendix). The data were extensively preprocessed, with multiple imputation of missing values using *Amelia II* (Honaker, King and Blackwell 2007) and data stacking so that the unit of analysis becomes a respondent's party assessment (Eijk et al. 2006).[5]

The dependent variable in the stacked file is a measure of party support generally known as "propensities to vote" (PTVs). It is derived from the question "How likely is it that you will ever vote for each of the following parties?" – a question that has been extensively validated as tapping Downsean electoral utility (ibid.). Once stacked, PTVs should be viewed not as measures of support for specific parties, but as measures of party support as a generic concept – a step up the ladder of abstraction. This view is essential when we study party support across different party systems and avoids the problem encountered, even in single countries, of inability to speak of party support in general terms. So, even though EP elections provide the occasions for asking

[5] Several electoral contexts had values for one or another required variable entirely missing. Such values were imputed in the stacked dataset if all other required variables were measured.

it, they are not what the PTV question is about.

Importantly, the question asks about matters of fact at every point in the cycle, not counterfactuals like the hypothetical "election held tomorrow."

Independent variables include those found substantively important in past pan-European electoral research (e.g. Brug, Eijk and Franklin 2007). They were generally transformed into measures of affinity between individuals and parties (e.g. proximity scores – see Appendix for details). The exceptions are party size and electoral cycle. The former was measured by the proportion of seats a party had won in the preceding FOE. The latter is a continuous variable running from 0 at the time of an FOE to 1 at the next such election. Each context has a value on this variable for the pseudo-random point in the country's cycle when an EP election was held.[6] We then interact each independent variable with the cycle term and the same term squared. The interaction with Cycle describes the initial trend of a variable's effect after an FOE; the interaction with Cycle-squared describes the trend as the following FOE approaches. Conveniently, when the coefficient on Cycle is equal to the (oppositely-signed) coefficient on Cycle-squared, the extremum of the curve is exactly at the mathematical midpoint of the cycle.[7]

Our findings derive from a hierarchical mixed-effects model in which 681,200 respondent-party pairs are nested within 88,700 respondents within 92 electoral contexts.[8] Since the

[6] No election is coded exactly 0 because, if an FOE is held on the same day as the EP election, that context is coded 1 on Cycle (a full cycle has elapsed since the previous FOE). This applies to nine contexts (five of which involve Luxembourg, see Appendix), which allow us to demonstrate that the cycle curves are not mere inter-election phenomena; they extend into first-order territory.

[7] Interactions with higher-order polynomials of Cycle did not yield additional insights.

[8] Note that random respondent intercepts enforce a focus on within-individual comparison, much as conditional logit does in the estimation of discrete choice models.

interactions we specify between predictors of party preference and position in the electoral cycle might not exhaust the possible cross-level interactions in these data, we also include random coefficients at the context level. This may be overkill. Many of the random slopes fitted in this manner would not prove statistically significant if we modeled them using explicit interactions with country and/or year dummies. Yet the coefficients of interest do attain at least marginal significance even in this most conservative of models.[9]

Findings

Table App-3 in the Appendix shows the estimates. The dependent variable, propensity to vote for a party, is measured on an eleven-point scale. To ease interpretation, all independent variables were rescaled to a range of 0-1, where 1 designates the highest observed value and 0 the lowest.

The first model of interest has just the six substantive independent variables and random intercepts. This roughly amounts to the *standard model* from earlier research (e.g. Eijk and Franklin 1996). All effects are highly significant and R^2 is 0.5. Moreover, the coefficients conform to expectations about determinants of party support. Attitudes toward European integration have the weakest effect and partisanship the strongest. Overall, the standard model is sound and strong. The same applies to the next, *contextual model*, which features random slopes by electoral context. Finally, in the *cyclical model* – the model that yields our findings – we add for each of the six independent variables interactions with the two cycle terms. Figure 2 displays the combined marginal effects of all constitutive and interaction terms for each variable.

[9] Our model contains no party level, so party size is implicitly an effect at the lowest level. An additional level would have overloaded an already complex model. However, in a simpler model estimated for only one year, party size had a stronger and more highly significant effect when an explicit party level was defined, so our simplification of the hierarchical structure is conservative.

[Figure 2 about here]

We start with the contrast between party size and social structure on the one hand and issue competence on the other. Recall that we expected the effects of party size to be strongest when a national election is close, and to decline toward midterm. That is what we see. Size*Cycle is strongly negative, implying a decline toward midterm, whereas Size*Cycle-squared is strongly positive, implying an increase as the following FOEs approach (shown in the left pane of Figure 2).[10] The same is true for social structure, though with smaller coefficients. This variable also has most effect when an FOE is close and least effect at midterm.

The reverse effects are found for issue competence. This variable when multiplied by Cycle and Cycle-squared indicates that respondents' preferences move toward the party they consider best for their most important issue as the cycle moves toward midterm (shown in the right pane of Figure 2). It should come as no surprise that the same is true for EU proximity. This effect also increases toward midterm and then declines again as FOEs approach. So those who see greater attention to EU affairs at EP elections are not wrong. But there is no reason to suppose that this is because the issue concerns the EU. The importance of *all* issues increases toward midterm, when the structuring considerations that would have muffled their effects are absent.

Left-right proximity behaves somewhat in the manner of issues in that its effect is strongest at

[10] The cyclical effect of party size is clearly asymmetric. This is at least partly because size does not measure the current state of affairs but the state of affairs at the time of the preceding FOE. This means that size "ages." Unlike other variables that are continuously updated, its functionality as an indicator decreases through time. Once we jointly consider the instrumental effect and its decrease over time, we arrive at the picture displayed in Figure 2: A strong effect at the start, a weak effect at midterm and an in-between effect at the end. We may additionally be seeing evidence of a long-term decline in the coherence of European party systems (see below).

midterm, but this trend is muted and indeed nowhere close to statistical significance. The influence of partisanship, moreover, is virtually constant through the whole cycle. Both effects confirm our expectation that these variables connect people to parties, with their strengths (each has among the most powerful of all effects right across the cycle) providing the robustness that prevents party systems from falling into immediate disarray once FOEs are past.

The Appendix includes a check on whether subjective and mixed variables are *themselves* more structured at certain points in the cycle, i.e. whether citizens' evaluations become more intersubjectively shared at certain times. We find that subjective variables are more structured around FOEs, so that their effects are more potent in imparting structure at such times. They are also more potent at imparting entropy at midterm. The overall implications of our model are thus reinforced. Only EU proximity does not fluctuate in these terms, having no structure to impart at any point in the cycle, for reasons discussed in the Appendix.

Political systems and structure

So far we have focused on the behavioral mechanisms of electoral structuring, but a complete model needs to reflect the fact that all political behavior takes place in institutional settings. In particular, the electoral system channels entropy and structure and thus affects the equilibrium of these forces, as does the size of the party system. To demonstrate the role of electoral institutions and party-system structure, and to motivate a subsequent generalization of our model, we turn to a quasi-experimental case where the source of cyclical structuring was abruptly removed.

In 1996, Israel introduced an electoral system with two ballots, one to be cast for a party in the normal (PR) way and one for the person preferred for Prime Minister. The argument by members of the Israeli political establishment, who enacted this reform against objections by some in the political science community, was that it would give the Prime Minister more

authority. In fact, it cut the link between votes for parties and the selection of the executive, largely freeing Israeli voters from the instrumental considerations normally associated with FOEs by allowing them to "split their tickets," just as voters may do in US elections. The reform fell into the fertile ground of a low 1.5% electoral threshold, and the result (shown in Table 1) was an explosion in the votes for minor parties and a reduced size of larger parties (those that would take the lead in forming a coalition government) including the Prime Minister's own party, to the point where this party was no longer the one with the most seats in parliament (Brichta 2001). So Benjamin Netanyahu, the elected Prime Minister, found himself leading a party that was unable to dominate parliament or even a set of coalition partners. Negotiations in the eight-party government became difficult, and the crisis resulted in early elections in 1999. The next directly elected Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, had to resign after only two years in office. This was followed by the first stand-alone executive election in 2001, won by Ariel Sharon, the second Prime Minister not in control of the largest parliamentary party. To secure legislative support for his administration, Sharon had to form a "national unity government." In 2003, after three elections under the new system, the old system was restored, and Israeli citizens again started voting in a manner supporting viable governing coalitions (Arian and Shamir 2004).

[Table 1 about here]

The Israeli example illustrates clearly the structuring influence of first-order elections, motivating support for parties that are viable contenders for government office. Absent that behavior, party-system structure quickly dissipated. Once first-order conditions were reinstated, more structured behavior immediately became apparent.[11] The rapid movement of the Israeli party system toward disorder when first-order conditions were deactivated, and back toward

[11] But structure was never completely restored in Israel, suggesting that the two processes are not equally rapid; we will return to this below.

order when they were reinstated, provides a test of our conjectures that is ordinarily lacking.

The institutional cause for disorder in the Israeli party system was the decoupling of legislative and executive elections. Of course this is no unparalleled condition. One of the oldest democracies, the United States, has always held separate elections for the two branches, and that country's party system is remarkably stable. Our theory sheds light on the seeming contradiction. As a systemic feature, structure is highly path-dependent: it constrains its own potential for change. Multiparty systems such as Israel's offer greater opportunities for idiosyncratic behavior and amplify the aggregate consequences of such behavior. In a two-party system such as the US, however, idiosyncratic behavior cannot have such consequences because it evens out in aggregate.[12] Moreover, limited choice options increase the sheer statistical likelihood that individuals repeatedly vote for the same party, thus developing a habit of voting for that party (as discussed above). For these reasons, two-party systems are so highly structured that any forces, objective or subjective, can only reproduce that structure (we return to this below).

To appreciate the twist that our argument takes in two-party systems, note that executive power – the driving force of our theory – is not at stake at *any* Congressional election, neither midterm nor on-year. However, the latter see spillover from the presidential arena in the same way as EP elections in Europe see spillover from first-order national elections. Spillover in the US is so strong that it gives on-year Congressional elections, formally SOEs because national executive power is not at stake, a character resembling FOEs in parliamentary systems (Franklin and Weber 2010). These so-called "coattail" effects of presidential races occur worldwide in elections with only two viable candidates (Golder 2006). In the US, even if obvious coattail effects have apparently declined in recent years (e.g. Jacobson 2012), the electoral focus on just

[12] Cf. Hirschman's (1970, 26ff.) theorem that competition stabilizes market structures, rather than exposing them to stress, if consumers switch back and forth between limited suppliers.

two candidates has been shown to evolve as the presidential campaign progresses (Erikson and Wlezien 2012).[13] This is the process through which subjective forces and the idiosyncratic behavior they produce yield to a shared, objectified belief in who are the viable candidates. As a result, two-party structure is reinforced.

Spillover from FOEs provides a general lower bound to the degree of entropy in party systems. Even in the Israeli case, the move toward disorder would not have continued indefinitely. The very existence of direct elections for Prime Minister would have provided spillover that injected some structure into the Israeli party system. But it would have been much less than seen when instrumental considerations are directly at work. In the US, by contrast, the minimal requirements for structure created by the lack of third-party Congressional contenders leaves no need for any stronger force than coattails, which maintain far more structure than we see in the Israeli case even under their restored single-ballot electoral system.

Generalizing the model

The Israeli and US cases provide stylized end-points for party-system size that suggest more general expectations. The closer a country is to the two-party pole the fewer opportunities there are for minor party voting to de-structure the system and the more it should be able to rely on

[13] Importantly, the vanishing of coattails concerns only the extent to which differences between the individual top two candidates are reflected in Congressional elections. The systemic process that restricts the electorate's focus to these two candidates in the first place is a larger matter. It manifests itself in the fact that at on-year Congressional elections, even the party losing the Presidency still wins seats in districts where incumbents are advantaged, and/or where the losing presidential candidate is preferred (Franklin 1971). Third-party strategies are particularly unpromising under these circumstances.

limited alternatives and deterrence of entry to maintain its equilibrium. Vice versa, the further a country stands towards the multiparty pole, the stronger must be the effects of cyclical structuring if equilibrium is to be maintained in the face of the greater entropic potential of such a system. To test these expectations, we now return to our European analysis.

The measure we use to locate elections between the two poles is the combined seat share of the largest two parties in the national parliament. We label this measure "two-party dominance" (TPD). It is almost normally distributed and ranges from 0.26 to 1.0, the latter representing the strictly two-party system of Malta. We reran the contextual model in Table App-3 for each of the two structuring forces displayed in Figure 2 – party size and social structure. Full interactions of each variable with TPD and the electoral cycle were added, so that we estimated the following equation (for the case of party size):[14]

$$\begin{aligned} PTV = {} & \alpha + \beta_1 Cycle + \beta_2 Cycle^2 + \beta_3 Size + \beta_4 Cycle \times Size + \beta_5 Cycle^2 \times Size + \\ & \beta_6 TPD + \beta_7 Cycle \times TPD + \beta_8 Cycle^2 \times TPD + \beta_9 Size \times TPD + \\ & \beta_{10} Cycle \times Size \times TPD + \beta_{11} Cycle^2 \times Size \times TPD + Controls + \varepsilon \end{aligned} \qquad \text{(eq. 1)}$$

Figure 3 displays the results (a regression table App-5 is in the Appendix). We depict the threeway interactions by drawing separate curves of each variable's marginal effect for values of TPD increasing in steps of 0.05. The results confirm our expectations: The effect of party size (left pane) is highly cyclical for low values of TPD. As TPD grows, the curve becomes less pronounced until it becomes a straight line for TPD=1.0, the pure two-party case. Moreover, for higher values of TPD the size effect is not only less cyclical but also weaker overall (the curves fall nearer to the zero-point). These two findings together support the argument that party size is progressively squeezed out of the vote function as electoral competition is increasingly

[14] The correlation of TPD (a context-level measure) and party size (a party-level measure) is a mere 0.167, so that multicollinearity is not a concern.

dominated by two large parties equally able to govern.

[Figure 3 about here]

The pattern for social structure (right pane of Figure 3) is very similar to that of party size in that the effect is more cyclical for lower values of TPD. At midterm the curves meet, indicating that social structure characterizes party preferences independently of the shape of the party system – until FOEs draw near, which is when multiparty systems reactivate group loyalties. The curve for two-party systems (TPD=1.0) even shows a somewhat concave shape.[15]

Discussion

Established democracies live in a state of balance between structure and entropy. As with all systems, entropy is endemic. Things move from order to disorder. Arresting or reversing that movement is not automatic. It takes some structuring force. In democratic political life we have shown the force to be provided by elections at which nationwide executive power is at stake. This is the time when objective factors have their strongest impact on party preferences and subjective factors are most strongly harmonized between individuals.

Our generalized model suggests that the forces of structure are strongest where most needed: at elections with low two-party dominance. The less coordinated electoral behavior is in general, the more recurring coordination is needed to ensure effective coalition formation and governance. In the absence of "frozen" reflections of a traditional cleavage system, maintenance of electoral structure is provided by dynamic cyclical updates that give to multiparty systems a

[15] We resists the temptation to interpret the reversed cycle theoretically because this finding is largely based on extrapolation – after all, there is only one case of TPD=1 in our data (Malta 2009). The extrapolation is certainly based on a strong interaction in the data at large, but estimating the *exact* function for TPD=1 is beyond our means.

functional equivalent to the self-sustaining structure of two-party systems. The reason why the 1996 electoral reform in Israel had such dramatic consequences was because it left a multiparty system void of its necessary structuring force. Vice versa, our exploration of the role of party-system size suggests that two-party dominance – a highly objective expression of structure in its own right – maintains itself by eliminating opportunities for the forces of entropy. The US system, far from being exceptional, thus operates precisely as structuring theory would predict.

The self-referential nature of electoral structure resolves the question of why different countries can sustain different equilibria despite all of them holding FOEs, the ultimate source of structure. It might be tempting to evoke the image of "structure-induced equilibrium" (Shepsle 1979), but the association is largely verbal. In the terminology of the seasoned agency-structure debate, we see electoral structure as ultimately driven by agency, but it also feeds back into its own generation process to constrain agency and foster the puzzling degree of party-system stability that motivated our analysis.

A necessary condition of structural feedback in two-party systems is the deterrence of new party entry. In the US, Duverger's Law of two-party dominance under plurality rule works particularly well for various reasons, including legal barriers, a centralized federal system, intra-party divisions, and an open policy agenda (Bowler, Grofman and Blais 2009). But our theory also suggests a more fundamental reason: the focus on who will control the executive is maximized in two-party systems. It has long been taken for granted that only major party contenders for US presidential office have any real chance of electoral success, as the presidential "prize" overwhelms other considerations (e.g. Rossiter 1956). Votes for minor parties are deterred, and political entrepreneurs join forces to become viable contenders. In fact, the cycle of support for major parties seems to have come to an end long ago, with the elimination of minor party representation in Congress.

So the lack of evident de-structuring forces in the US does not imply that the underlying process is not operating. Rather, motivations linked to party capacity only become visible when the forces of entropy leak to the surface, appearing as seeming idiosyncrasies like the "midterm loss" – the regularity with which the President's party loses seats in midterm Congressional elections compared to previous Congressional elections that coincided with presidential elections. This phenomenon shows how, even in a two-party system, subjective forces gain ground at midterm, but their aggregate implications are restricted to a toothless net effect.

Our findings place conventional wisdom regarding midterm elections in a new light. In a widely cited article, Erikson (1988) argued that neither surge-and-decline nor a negative referendum on presidential performance were compatible with the historical data. What did fit the data was a "presidential penalty" at midterm (a finding supportive of the later idea of "balancing"). The argument in our paper suggests that this midterm penalty might be better seen in terms of its presidential year counterpart, as a "presidential boost." This boost is ultimately due to the greater salience of the presidential office in terms of capacity to govern.

Our findings also have implications of special relevance to EP elections. Many consequences flow from the fact that these elections have no real focus, such as would be provided if executive office were at stake. In addition to low turnout, government parties generally lose votes, and this is often taken as evidence of voter disenchantment. Our findings show that the loss of support for government parties is part and parcel of a larger shift away from the more structured party support at FOEs to the less structured support at EP elections. With a lesser role for instrumental concerns and a greater role for issue preferences, voters make their choices quite rationally for parties that they prefer in one way or another – parties that, however, have some strike against them that reduces their support in FOEs. These findings might seem to confirm another dictum of SOE theory: that, at EP elections, voters vote with the heart rather than with the head.

Actually that dictum would appear to be not quite true. At midterm voters are just as rational as at other times. Consistent with arguments for balancing behavior, midterm voters are neither casting their ballots at random nor on a whim. Indeed, at such times their votes conform more closely to the highly rational Downsean model of issue voting (Downs 1957) than they do when concerns over who will be the government overrides specific issue concerns.

In Europe, the random element injected into parliamentary systems by the conduct of EP elections appears to reduce the extent to which structure is restored with the approach of FOEs each time around the cycle. The (largely qualitative) evidence in Eijk and Franklin's *Choosing Europe* (1996) is complemented by the quantitative evidence found in our Figure 2, which shows an asymmetry between the strength of structuring and entropic effects such that, on the downswing, effects of party size are reduced by more (and effects of issues are increased by more) than is the case for the reverse processes on the upswing (though the asymmetry for party size may be less than appears, as argued in footnote 10). Structure appears to be hard-won but easily lost, a lesson that should weigh on our minds as we consider the damage being done by the manner in which EP elections are conducted (cf. Franklin and Hobolt 2011).

More generally, our findings suggest a need for care by those who would attempt to "fine-tune" their democratic institutions. An additional ballot at election time, as in Israel, an additional election with its concomitant opportunity for learning to take place, as with mayoral elections in several countries, the injection of opportunities for direct democracy, with their lack of concomitant party mediation, all can have unintended consequences for the subtle balance we have documented between the forces of entropy and those of structure. These considerations provide a new lens through which to view such topics as speed of party-system consolidation in new democracies (and the eventual equilibrium number of parties there), or the number of ballots employed in mixed electoral systems.

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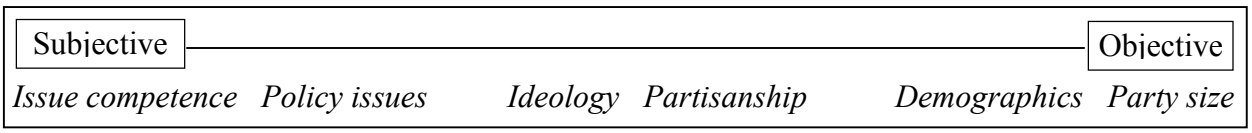

Figure 1 Conceptual placement of predictors of party preference

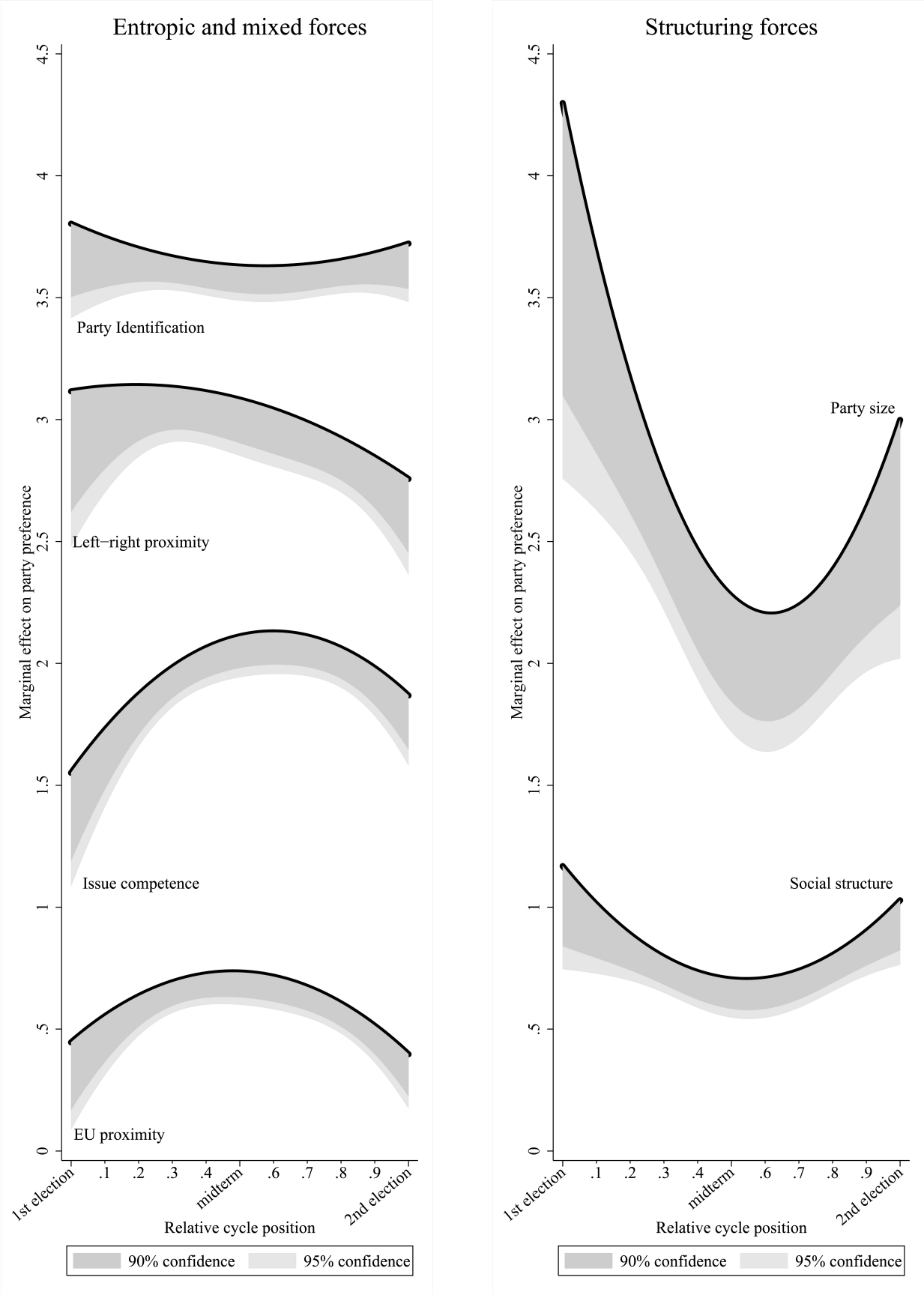

Figure 2 Marginal effects of structuring, entropic and mixed forces through the cycle

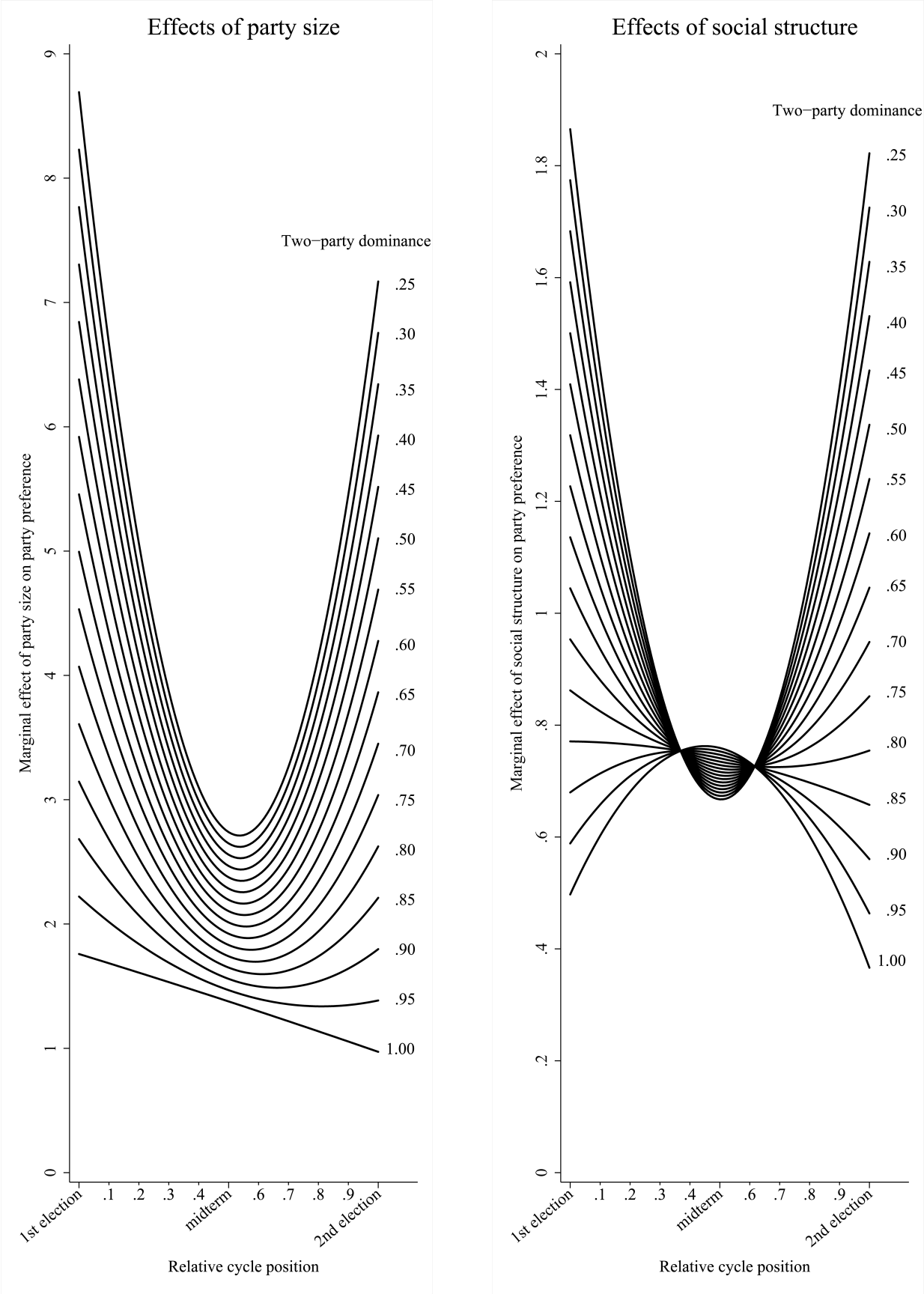

Figure 3 Marginal effects of party size and social structure conditioned by two-party dominance

Table 1 Elections in Israel, 1992-2003

	Likud		Labor		Effective Number of Parl. Parties	Prime Minister	Coalition members
	Votes (%)	Seats (%)	Votes (%)	Seats (%)			
1992	24.9	26.7	34.7	36.7	4.4	Labor	3
1996	**25.1**	**26.7**	**26.8**	**28.3**	**5.6**	**Likud: 50.5%**	**8**
1999	**14.1**	**15.8**	**20.2**	**21.7**	**8.7**	**Labor: 56.1%**	**7**
2001	———	———	***no legislative election***	———	———	**Likud: 62.4%**	**12**
2003	29.4	31.7	14.5	15.8	6.2	Likud	3

Boldfaced results relate to elections held under the reformed electoral system.

Online Appendix For "A structuring theory of electoral politics"

1) Countries, dates, sample sizes and position in national electoral cycles

Table App-1 Countries, survey years, positions in national electoral cycles, and sample sizes

Countries (0-0.52)	Year	Cycle	Interviews	Countries (0.53-1)	Year	Cycle	Interviews
Netherlands	1994	0.025	968	Hungary	2004	0.534	1,198
Finland	1999	0.056	501	Finland	2009	0.543	998
Spain	2004	0.060	1,208	Estonia	2009	0.564	1,003
Greece	2004	0.074	481	Germany	2004	0.574	593
Italy	1994	0.097	984	Cyprus	2004	0.610	500
Romania	2009	0.127	991	Italy	1999	0.620	3,708
Lithuania	2009	0.151	989	Germany	1989	0.620	1,170
Austria	2009	0.171	993	Italy	2004	0.627	1,553
Slovenia	2009	0.175	987	Belgium-Flanders	2009	0.660	519
Germany	1999	0.176	1,000	Belgium-Wallonia	2009	0.660	448
Sweden	1999	0.181	505	Latvia	2009	0.667	999
France	1989	0.210	981	Portugal	1994	0.671	948
Greece	1994	0.224	937	Poland	2004	0.677	960
Netherlands	1999	0.272	1,001	Sweden	2009	0.677	1,002
Italy	2009	0.285	963	Netherlands	2009	0.714	998
France	1994	0.287	981	Belgium-Flanders	1994	0.728	560
Finland	2004	0.309	899	Belgium-Wallonia	1994	0.728	397
Spain	2009	0.310	996	Slovakia	2009	0.744	1,003
Malta	2009	0.310	991	Czech Republic	2009	0.754	1,002
Estonia	2004	0.319	1,604	Cyprus	2009	0.760	992
Denmark	1999	0.338	1,001	Portugal	2004	0.762	958
Ireland	1994	0.339	930	Greece	1999	0.765	500
Netherlands	2004	0.361	1,586	Great Britain	2004	0.770	1,498
Spain	1994	0.368	942	Hungary	2009	0.785	1,003
Belgium-Flanders	1989	0.381	539	Denmark	2004	0.793	1,317
Belgium-Wallonia	1989	0.381	457	Spain	1999	0.812	1,000
Denmark	2009	0.390	999	Great Britain	2009	0.816	978
France	2009	0.393	986	Greece	2009	0.837	986
France	2004	0.397	1,406	Spain	1989	0.889	916
Austria	2004	0.401	1,000	Germany	1994	0.909	2,082
France	1999	0.401	1,020	Portugal	1999	0.917	500
Poland	2009	0.405	992	Slovenia	2004	0.921	998
Ireland	1999	0.406	503	Germany	2009	0.922	992
Ireland	2004	0.412	1,133	Denmark	1994	0.925	979
Italy	1989	0.416	957	Netherlands	1989	0.931	948
Great Britain	1989	0.417	909	Portugal	2009	0.932	994
Latvia	2004	0.420	1,000	Bulgaria	2009	0.979	985
Denmark	1989	0.424	948	Belgium-Flanders	1999	1.000	274
Great Britain	1994	0.428	1,018	Belgium-Wallonia	1999	1.000	226
Sweden	2004	0.433	2,100	Greece	1989	1.000	940
Portugal	1989	0.453	956	Ireland	1989	1.000	916
Slovakia	2004	0.460	1,063	Luxembourg	1989	1.000	289
Czech Republic	2004	0.501	889	Luxembourg	1994	1.000	488
Austria	1999	0.502	501	Luxembourg	1999	1.000	301
Ireland	2009	0.508	978	Luxembourg	2004	1.000	1,335
Great Britain	1999	0.514	977	Luxembourg	2009	1.000	996

On each of the occasions listed in Table App-1 an average of some 1,000 respondents were interviewed in each of the countries that were, at the time, members of the European Union (EU) – European Community until 1993 – except for 2004 when no survey was fielded in Malta. This amounted to 12 countries in 1989 and 1994, 15 in 1999, 24 in 2004 (only 21 yielding usable data since all party variables were omitted in Belgium, Lithuania and Sweden), and 27 in 2009. Northern Irish respondents were excluded, being too few to do justice to their separate party system; Belgium was divided into two electoral contexts since Flanders and Wallonia have different party systems. So we investigate 92 electoral contexts, as listed. Note that Table App-1 contains not only countries and dates but also the position in the national electoral cycles of each country that each EP election occurred.

As this table also shows, in our data 11 countries are represented five times, 2 countries four times, 3 countries three times, 8 countries twice, and 4 countries once. One country, Luxembourg, also has elections exactly every five years. For a single country to be synchronized in this way is not incompatible with random assignment. What might be of more concern is that Luxembourg holds national and EP elections concurrently, so that citizens participate in the EP ballot who would not have done so on separate days. However, our dependent variable (as explained in the Data section of the text) is the propensity of *ever voting* for a party, not reported EP vote, so that concurrent elections do not introduce conceptual difficulties (see also footnote 6 in the main text).

2) Measures of affinity between respondents and parties

Where we had self-assessed respondent locations and respondent judgments about party locations (as we did for left-right ideology and European integration, each on eleven-point scales) we computed Euclidean distances between individuals and parties and stacked the corresponding proximities. Where we had indicators specific to particular parties (as for party identification and issue competence, coded 1 for the closest or most competent) we could stack the binary indicators. Where we had no such measures (as for social structure) we used joint correspondence analysis (JCA, essentially factor analysis for categorical data) to derive a single factor incorporating demographic variables to the degree that they load on one latent dimension. Voter-party pairs were then assigned what was essentially a factor score (see following section for details).

3) Measurement of objective and subjective concerns: the case of social structure

As explained in the main text, our objective in this paper is to observe the effects of first-order-ness on the objective and subjective bases for party support. In the vocabulary of discrete choice modeling, objective bases for party support are either choice-specific (if they relate to objective party characteristics) or individual-specific (if they relate to objective voter characteristics). Subjective concerns originate as individual-specific, but they involve party-specific features (for example giving rise to a measure of proximity), as described in the main text.

It might be thought that the same would be the case for social structure and, indeed, a common method of operationalizing social structure to predict party support across countries is to use y-hats from a party-by-party analysis predicting the dependent variable.[16] But, as an alternative, social structure can be measured in quasi-objective terms if we derive a latent variable that is a one-dimensional summary of the multi-dimensional space in which the demographic variables it summarizes are located. Such a latent variable could be derived using factor analysis but, with most of the social structure variables being categorical, a more appropriate technique is Joint Correspondence Analysis (JCA), which produces scores for each case along a "principal axis," analogous to a factor.[17] If the support scores for different parties are arrayed in the same multidimensional space as the hierarchy axis, they will either be orthogonal to that axis or they will be related to it, positively or negatively. To the extent that support for a party is related, either positively or negatively, to the social hierarchy axis, scores on the hierarchy axis will contribute to determining the extent of support for that party.

Figure App-1 seeks to represent support for two different political parties, along with position on the social hierarchy axis, in a three-dimensional space. The Figure uses conventions from dimensional analysis in which arrows are related to the extent that they move in the same direction (indeed, conventionally the correlation between two arrows is given by the cosine of the angle between them). The origin for this space is in the centre of the depicted box. The social hierarchy axis is represented as running through this origin from a point on the lower left front wall to a point on the upper right back wall of the box. It runs through the origin because, as a JCA axis (just like a set of factor scores), it has a negative as well as a positive pole. The two party support arrows both start at the origin. They have no negative poles, because PTVs measure the likelihood of ever voting for a party, which cannot be less than zero. PTV1 runs from the origin to the right front wall while PTV2 runs from the origin to the bottom front wall. Though each arrow is depicted in a different dimension, the two party support arrows subtend non-zero angles with the hierarchy axis. The angles are labeled by curved lines whose lengths depict the sizes of the angles (20° and 60°). PTV1 is more strongly correlated with social hierarchy because its line subtends a smaller angle with the social hierarchy arrow than does PTV2. Moreover, PTV1 is positively related to social hierarchy (the two arrows are moving in the same general direction) while PTV2 is negatively related.

Since those relationships are non-zero, social structure has the opportunity to affect support for those two parties, as it does for any other parties whose support dimensions are not orthogonal to the hierarchy axis. A measure that contains no choice-specific component does in this way have the opportunity to influence the extent to which different parties receive support.

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[16]Van der Eijk, Cees, and Mark N. Franklin, eds. 1996. *Choosing Europe? The European Electorate and National Politics in the Face of Union*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

[17]Greenacre, Michael. 2006. "From Simple to Multiple Correspondence Analysis." In *Correspondence Analysis and Related Methods*, ed. Michael Greenacre and Joerg Blasius. Boca Raton: Chapman & Hall/CRC, p. 41-76.

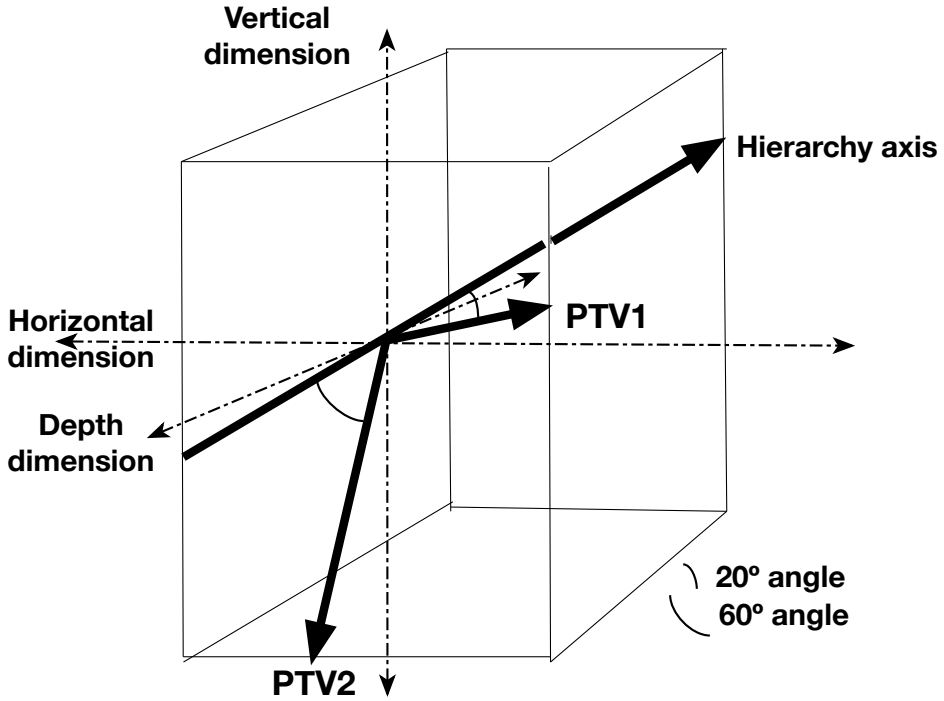

Figure App-1 Extent of correspondence between support for two parties and social hierarchy

The first dimension of our JCA analysis reflects a clear pattern of social hierarchy: The characteristics that load on one side are young, male, upper/middle class, educated, urban, not religious, working/ studying, unionized. Their opposites load on the other end. This axis explains 23.8 percent of the inertia in the variables that it summarizes (approximately the same percentage of the summarized variance[18]). The proportions of the common variance contributed by each of the summarized variables are shown in Table App-2 (which sums the effects of each variable's different categories whose individual contributions are of no particular interest). The largest contribution is that of region, actually the country-year elsewhere described as the electoral context. We expect the structure of social characteristics to vary over space and time, and failing to take account of these differences would result in misestimating the effects of social structure (reason why region is conventionally viewed as a social structural variable). In practice, 89 percent of the variance between contexts is explained by country, so the largest proportion of these differences are due to country differences in social structure. Still, these differences, while large, contribute less than a third to the common variance. Religiosity contributes more as do class and education taken together.

[18]Greenacre, Michael. 2010. *Correspondence Analysis in Practice*. Boca Raton: Chapman & Hall/CRC, p. 148.

Table App-2 Contribution of social structure variables to common variance

Social structural variable	Specific contribution	Group contribution
Age	0.028	
Gender	0.008	
Personal characteristics		0.036
Occupational class	0.024	
Work category*	0.088	
Trade union membership	0.086	
Traditional social class		0.198
Education	0.118	0.118
Religion	0.233	
Church attendance	0.108	
Religiosity		0.341
Urban/rural	0.012	
Region (country-year)	0.291	
Geography		0.303
Total**	0.996	0.996

* Student / unemployed / housewife / retired.
** Total is less than 1.0 because of rounding.

From the JCA analysis, values for each respondent can be assigned (predicted) on a basis that effectively amounts to an estimate of each respondent's coordinate on the axis. Because the orientation of the JCA factor is arbitrary in relation to party orientations on the social structure dimension, those values are then given signs consistent with the polarity of each party's support in relation to the axis. More precisely, we re-oriented the factor based on separate regressions that sought to predict support (PTV) for each party from respondents' JCA coordinates (along with the other five independent variables of the standard model in Table App-3). For those parties for which the coefficient of the JCA factor turned out positive, the coordinates were left unchanged; if it turned out negative, the coordinates were multiplied by -1, ensuring a positive effect of social structure on PTVs for all parties. Just as, for example, ideological proximity is always positive no matter whether a party is right, center or left, our JCA procedure constructs an equivalent variable from a large demographic vector. In this way, an entirely objective measure of social hierarchy becomes an independent variable in our main analysis, as called for by our theoretical expectations.

Importantly, the measure of hierarchy cannot explain structural specifics of the social basis of politics in individual countries, and it should not be evaluated against this criterion. Its comprehensive design rather follows our interest in cyclical dynamics. A generalized summary measure allows us to model short-term change in the effect of social structure independently of time-invariant differences between contexts.

4) Supplementary Findings yielding Figure 2 in the text

Table App-3 Hierarchical models of party support through the electoral cycle

Dependent: Party support (PTV)	*Empty model*		*Standard model*		*Contextual model*		*Cyclical model*	
Coefficients of fixed effects (with one-tailed p-values in parentheses)								
	Coef.	p-value	Coef.	p-value	Coef.	p-value	Coef.	p-value
Party size			2.23	(0.000)	2.65	(0.000)	4.30	(0.000)
Social structure			0.71	(0.000)	0.82	(0.000)	1.17	(0.000)
Partisanship			3.71	(0.000)	3.67	(0.000)	3.80	(0.000)
Left-right proximity			2.97	(0.000)	3.01	(0.000)	3.12	(0.000)
Issue competence			2.08	(0.000)	2.00	(0.000)	1.55	(0.000)
EU proximity			0.74	(0.000)	0.63	(0.000)	0.45	(0.020)
Cycle							0.53	(0.349)
Cycle-squared							0.01	(0.498)
Party size*Cycle							-6.79	(0.034)
Party size*Cycle-squared							5.49	(0.045)
Social structure*Cycle							-1.72	(0.049)
Social structure*Cycle-squared							1.58	(0.040)
Partisanship*Cycle							-0.62	(0.253)
Partisanship*Cycle-squared							0.54	(0.252)
Left-right proximity*Cycle							0.22	(0.442)
Left-right proximity*Cycle-squared							-0.58	(0.330)
Issue competence*Cycle							1.92	(0.043)
Issue competence*Cycle-squared							-1.61	(0.048)
EU proximity*Cycle							1.19	(0.085)
EU proximity*Cycle-squared							-1.24	(0.050)
Constant	3.67	(0.000)	0.03	(0.268)	-0.01	(0.894)	-0.31	(0.184)
Standard deviations of random effects (with standard errors in parentheses)								
Level 3 (context, N=92)	s.d.	s.e.	s.d.	s.e.	s.d.	s.e.	s.d.	s.e
Intercept	0.43	(0.032)	0.35	(0.026)	0.84	(0.064)	0.82	(0.063)
Slope: Party size					2.31	(0.180)	2.27	(0.177)
Slope: Social structure					0.61	(0.051)	0.59	(0.050)
Slope: Partisanship					0.56	(0.044)	0.56	(0.044)
Slope: Left-right proximity					0.94	(0.071)	0.94	(0.070)
Slope: Issue competence					0.69	(0.053)	0.68	(0.052)
Slope: EU proximity					0.52	(0.041)	0.51	(0.041)
Intra-class correlation	0.021		0.021		0.604		0.596	
Level 2 (respondent, N=88,700)								
Intercept	0.55	(0.007)	0.91	(0.005)	0.92	(0.005)	0.92	(0.005)
Intra-class correlation	0.034		0.144		0.061		0.063	
Level 1 (response, N=681,200)								
Residual	2.91	(0.003)	2.20	(0.002)	2.15	(0.002)	2.15	(0.002)
R-squared (overall)	0.106		0.503		0.526		0.526	
Log likelihood	-1,704,383		-1,539,457		-1,527,092		-1,527,083	

5) Supplementary findings regarding the structuring of subjective and mixed concerns

The findings derived from Table App-3 cover two of the three pathways discussed in the main text: structuring through objective concerns and entropy through subjective concerns. These two have in common that they describe *direct* effects of independent variables on party preferences. They do not explore the third pathway of our model: indirect structuring through shared subjective concerns. Even highly subjective variables can impart structure on party systems if they themselves are structured, i.e. if different individuals' subjective evaluations happen to agree. Although this will never reach the level of structure comprised by objective variables, the entropic potential of a subjective variable can be curbed by harmonization of its values.

To understand the procedure we use to model harmonization of subjective variables, remember that the unit of our analysis is the respondent-party stack. A row in our dataset reflects a certain respondent's evaluation of a certain party. As a measure of harmonization we can therefore use the variance in a subjective variable that is explained by stack (i.e. by party). If, for example, all respondents believed that Party A is the most competent, stack would explain 100% of the variance. In contrast, if each party in a system received an equal share of positive evaluations, stack would explain 0% variance.[19]

For each of the 92 electoral contexts, we ran four ANOVAs, in turn using each of the four subjective or mixed variables as dependent and stack as independent. The R-squared values of these ANOVAs were saved and regressed as dependent variable on Cycle and Cycle-squared. Figure App-2 displays the resulting curves (regression output is in Table App-4).

Three variables (issue competence, party ID, left-right proximity) show less structure at midterm and more at FOE time. The differences are sizeable, with a loss of structure at midterm of about 40%. This implies that these three variables cause less entropy in party preferences at FOE time than at midterm. For issue competence, which has the strongest direct effect on party preferences at midterm (as shown in Figure 2), this implies that the variable matters most when it has least structure to convey. In FOEs, vice versa, the variable's salience is not only suppressed, but its very values are streamlined by the national campaign. The same is true for the more objective variables party ID and left-right proximity, for which even a relatively stable direct effect on party preferences (Figure 2) implies more entropy at midterm because the variables themselves contain less structure at that time (Figure App-2).

For the fourth subjective variable, attitudes toward European integration, Figure App-2 shows no significant trend, and the general level of structure is very low. Parties apparently do not engage with this issue in FOEs, or they may even strive to contain it. Comparing the curves of left-right and EU proximity in Figure App-2 confirms findings from earlier research. A similar, convex cycle describes voter knowledge of left-right party positions, but not of positions toward European integration, which even features a concave cycle.[20] Clearly, EU proximity is not primed by national campaigns and parties do not maneuver through space to maximize it. While none of the subjective variables is a campaign champion (as implied by Figure 2), most of them gain structure at FOE time (as implied by Figure App-2) – apart from European integration, which is void of structure whatsoever.

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[19]We also tested for cyclical trends in the general *level* of independent variables. No such patterns were found. This means that the findings in Table App-3 are not due to a composition effect in the *number* of people expressing partisanship or ascribing competence.

[20]Weber, Till. 2007. "Campaign Effects and Second-Order Cycles: A Top-Down Approach to European Parliament Elections." *European Union Politics* 8(4): 509-36.

Table App-4 Estimation results for the effects displayed in Figure App-2 (below)

Dependent:	ANOVA R-squared of party identification	ANOVA R-squared of issue competence	ANOVA R-squared of left-right proximity	ANOVA R-squared of EU proximity
Cycle	-0.144	-0.248	-0.155	-0.040
	(0.042)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.188)
Cycle-squared	0.126	0.220	0.163	0.032
	(0.025)	(0.016)	(0.005)	(0.179)
Constant	0.109	0.142	0.093	0.034
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.008)
p>F	0.039	0.038	0.013	0.323
R-squared	0.065	0.090	0.091	0.008

OLS coefficients with p-values in parentheses.
N=92. p-values clustered by country (N=28).

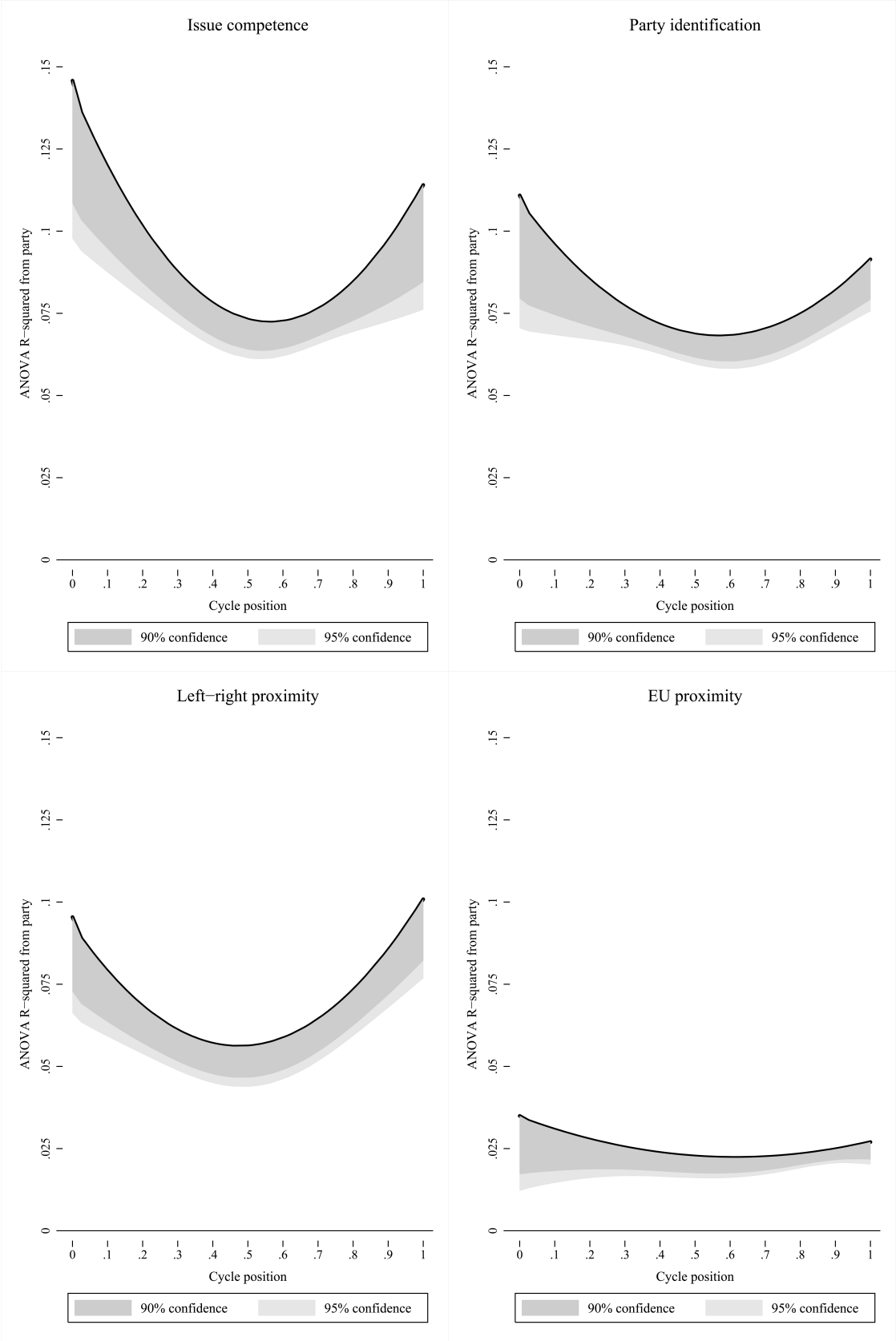

Figure App-2 Structure of subjective variables through the cycle, as measured by the R-squared in context-by-context ANOVAs of each variable on party dummies

Table App-5 Estimation results for the effects displayed in Figure 3

Dependent: Party Support (PTV)	*For party size*		*For social structure*	
Coefficients of fixed effects (with one-tailed p-values in parentheses)				
	Coef.	p-value	Coef.	p-value
Party size	11.01	(0.001)	2.64	(0.000)
Social structure	0.76	(0.000)	2.33	(0.007)
Cycle	3.83	(0.171)	1.32	(0.388)
Cycle-squared	-2.46	(0.237)	-0.06	(0.494)
Two-party dominance (TPD)	1.17	(0.219)	0.34	(0.424)
Cycle*TPD	-4.69	(0.204)	-1.13	(0.436)
Cycle-squared*TPD	3.36	(0.237)	0.01	(0.500)
Party size*TPD	-9.25	(0.014)		
Cycle*Party size	-29.50	(0.015)		
Cycle-squared*Party size	27.74	(0.023)		
Cycle*Party size*TPD	28.79	(0.044)		
Cycle-squared*Party size*TPD	-27.81	(0.050)		
Social structure*TPD			-1.84	(0.097)
Cycle*Social structure			-6.75	(0.034)
Cycle-squared*Social structure			6.74	(0.019)
Cycle* Social structure*TPD			7.94	(0.077)
Cycle-squared*Social structure*TPD			-8.07	(0.051)
Partisanship	3.68	(0.000)	3.67	(0.000)
Left-right proximity	3.06	(0.000)	3.01	(0.000)
Issue competence	2.04	(0.000)	2.00	(0.000)
EU proximity	0.64	(0.000)	0.63	(0.000)
Constant	-1.13	(0.142)	-0.54	(0.325)
Standard deviations of random effects (with standard errors in parentheses)				
Level 3 (context, N=92)	s.d.	s.e.	s.d.	s.e.
Intercept	0.77	(0.071)	0.82	(0.063)
Slope for Party size			2.31	(0.180)
Slope for Social structure	0.66	(0.054)	0.57	(0.047)
Slope for Partisanship	0.58	(0.042)	0.56	(0.044)
Slope for Left-right proximity	0.93	(0.074)	0.94	(0.071)
Slope for Issue competence	0.67	(0.056)	0.69	(0.053)
Slope for EU proximity	0.54	(0.042)	0.52	(0.041)
Level 2 (respondent, N=88,700)				
Intercept	0.92	(0.028)	0.92	(0.005)
Level 1 (party stack, N=681,200)				
Residual	2.16	(0.021)	2.15	(0.002)
Log likelihood	-1530468		-1527085	

Note: The first model has robust standard errors clustered by context to compensate for the random slope of party size, which had to be omitted as the interaction of size, cycle and TPD, none of which is an individual-level variable, would impede estimation. The cross-level interactions of the controls are also omitted as they are fully absorbed by their random slopes.