

Electoral Coordination, Legislative Cohesion, and the Rise of the modern Mass Party: The Limits of Majoritarian Representation in Germany, 1890-1918.

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Abstract:

Explanations for the introduction of proportional representation (PR) in the first quarter of the 20th century focus primarily on parties' expected losses of seats. We challenge this and the underlying assumption that parties can be treated as unitary actors. Instead, we argue that absolute majority rule (MR) in place in most Western European countries before the switch to PR did not threaten bourgeois parties' electoral success, but rather their party unity. Widespread pre-electoral coordination among non-socialist party representatives together with party leaders' sparse disciplinary means translated into low legislative cohesion within their parliamentary groups. In contrast, socialist parties, as mass parties, entered parliament predominantly on the basis of own majorities and therefore displayed both a sustained parliamentary presence and high cohesion. For leaders of non-socialist parties, PR thus promised a step towards the organizational transformation of their parties towards the modern mass party. Using data on district-level electoral alliances and roll call votes, we show our argument to hold for the German case in the period 1890-1918. Additional evidence for France and Italy corroborates our argument.

1. Introduction

Parties are ubiquitous in the study of contemporary elections: party manifestos are used for gauging their political positions, party organizations are analyzed in electoral campaigning, and party labels are decisive for voters. Consequently, the study of electoral systems treats parties as the actors of interest: they are seen as profiting or not from the system in place in terms of their seat share. In line with this, explanations of electoral reform follow what

Kenneth Benoit (2004: 373) has labeled the “seat maximizing model of electoral change”. This is especially pronounced in explanations of the switch from plurality and majority electoral to proportional representation (PR) in most European countries at the beginning of the 20th century – a core puzzle in the literature on electoral systems (cf. Ahmed 2010; Benoit 2004; Boix 1999, 2010; Colomer 2005; Cusack et al. 2007, 2010, Renwick 2010, 2011; Rokkan 1970). In this article we first argue that these explanations rest on two assumptions: 1) parties competing against each other in every district, and, 2) “parties” even being conceivable as actors in terms of being able to effect the necessary legislation on electoral reform in parliament.

We challenge these two assumptions. As concerns electoral competition, the punishing effects of plurality and majority electoral systems at the national level on the second-largest party (viz. the Cube rule, see Calvo 2009; Manow 2011) provide incentives for parties to form electoral alliances: supporting other parties’ candidates in some districts in return for their support elsewhere. To the extent that parties succeed in pre-electoral coordination under these systems, PR just does not entail the effects ascribed to it in previous accounts.

The second assumption, of parties-as-actors, envisages parliamentary groups as representing political organizations as mass parties in the sense of Katz and Mair (1995). But this type of organization, where parliamentarians are mere delegates of the party leadership rather than autonomous agents, has become typical of European parties only after World War I. The bourgeois parties of the 19th and early 20th centuries have rather been characterized as elite parties, i.e. as “basically committees of (...) people” (Katz and Mair 1995: 9). Explaining the introduction of PR as a collective legislative choice of (mass) parties then entails ignorance

towards the incentives of these “people” – i.e. members of parliament (MPs) that made that choice. Yet, elite party MPs were “unconstrained” in this choice in the sense of not being under the direction of party leaders, and their incentives may or may not have pointed towards PR (Leemann and Mares 2014). With a view to electoral systems, this concerns the intra-party rather than cross-party distribution of mandates, namely higher or lower positions of individual candidates on party lists under PR vs. running in more or less promising districts under plurality and majoritarian representation. The capacity to set up party lists under PR necessarily rests at a higher (regional or national) organizational level than the decision on who runs in (local) single-member districts. So the shift to PR is bound to entail a centralization of the control over re-election chances. Ultimately then, the seat-maximization logic of previous accounts of electoral reform risks taking only account of those actors that also favored this latter shift, namely: party leaders of elite parties. But party leaders were only in control over the introduction of PR as a legislative process to the extent that they were in control of their MPs. At this point we have come full circle: if PR as a legislative choice taken under a parliamentary procedure runs counter to the incentives of legislators and if legislators are autonomous in their choices, PR will not be introduced. An account that ignores their incentives by assumption is then bound to be mistaken.

In the remainder of this article, we first address the accounts of the introduction of PR that take a mandate-maximizing perspective (Section 2). We empirically address our claim that pre-electoral coordination rendered the seat-maximizing logic of electoral reform futile using data on pre-electoral alliances in the elections to the German Reichstag in the period 1890-1918. These elections were held under top-two runoff majoritarian representation (MR), the typical electoral system in place many European countries before the introduction of PR

(Section 3). We then provide an argument on the legislative rather than electoral disadvantages MR had for leaders of elite parties with a view to their lack of control over backbenchers and ensuing low intra-party cohesion (Section 4). Again, we provide evidence on our empirical claims, contrasting individual-level parliamentary behavior of members of parliament (MPs) of elite parties against behavior of MPs of mass parties in roll call votes (RCVs) held in the Reichstag (Section 5). As a core empirical implication of our argument on intra-party variables as accounting for the introduction of PR we expect attempts at PR introduction to either not happening or to fail as long as the parliamentary majority rests with elite party MPs. We illustrate this with a case study on electoral reform in the Reichstag in 1917/18 that has attracted attention recently (Leemann and Mares 2014) (section 6). We then briefly address the French and Italian electoral reforms of 1919 and show that they were also driven by leaders' incentive to transform elite parties into mass parties (Section 7). A short summary concludes (Section 8).

2. Accounts of electoral competition before PR revisited

The literature on electoral reform usually casts its explanations in a “cui bono?” terminology. The “bono” refers to plain mandate-maximization, the “cui” to parties as actors who expect to either win or lose seats from electoral reform (Rokkan 1970; Ahmed 2010; Benoit 2004; Calvo 2009; Colomer 2005; Renwick 2010, 2011). With a view to the introduction of PR in Europe in the early 20th century, these parties are the various bourgeois parties (Liberals, Conservatives, Agrarians). Each of them represented a smaller vote-share than their main ideological rival: a unified socialist party. With a view to electoral competition under plurality or majority electoral systems in single-mandate districts this “socialist threat” (Boix 1999,

2010: 410) pointed towards the unified left finally surpassing each individual bourgeois party at the district level and, thus, parliamentary extinction of the latter (Rokkan 1970). The introduction of PR then is conceived of as a project of the bourgeois parties, set to counter gains of mandates of socialist parties. This “fragmentation argument” assumes 1) parties as the (unitary) actors, and 2) these actors as competing for individual mandates against each other in each and every district. We first address the latter “cross-party” assumption and then turn to the former “intra-party” assumption.

The cross-party assumption treats electoral competition in a veiled but close analogy to market competition: parties/firms, being interested in maximization of mandates/income, present their candidates/product to voters/customers. The electoral system either defines the existence of many “small markets” (the districts) where “within-district income” is either one or zero mandates per party and the mandate-total as the sum of within-district income returns the “party income” under plurality and majority representation. Or there exists, under PR, one large market, where party income directly ensues from respective nationwide vote-shares. Under either system, a party/firm ceases to exist if it is not able to generate enough mandates/income. If competition is universal in small markets systems, the fate of each party depends on the number of districts where it turned out as the frontrunner of all parties running (Cox 1997). For competition to indeed be universal, each party must present its candidates everywhere. The market analogy however also delivers an alternative: cartelization, i.e. pre-electoral alliances. Since it is sufficient even under majority representation (MR) to attract only half of the voters in order to gain the mandate, such an alliance does not need to include all competitors in every district. Since there are many districts, cartel parties can adapt the composition of alliances to local voter demand:

presenting the candidates of one of them in some districts and the candidates of others in others. The formation of these alliances is especially attractive for parties that are also small with a view to their national-level vote-share since it allows participants to swap votes in some districts for votes in others, rendering the set-up of candidatures at least more efficient in terms of mandates than running everywhere. Specifically, bourgeois parties could form alliances in districts where they faced a strong socialist (catholic, ethnic, etc.) competitor. Pre-electoral alliances would then provide a means for safeguarding parliamentary representation to each alliance member irrespective of its nation-wide vote-share, because there is no nation-wide electorate but only a number of local electorates. So there would be no need to revamp the electoral system as a whole. Indeed, since the distribution of mandate-totals tends to follow the Cube rule under single-mandate district systems (Calvo 2009; Manow 2011), pre-electoral alliances can even serve to depress the nation-wide seat-share of a “large and unified” competitor well below its nation-wide vote-share – again due to there being no nation-wide electorate.

If the combination of these two incentives – survival of small parties and curtailing the seat-share of a large party – prompts successful pre-electoral alliance formation in terms of generating at least as much “party income” under plurality or majority representation as a (parliamentary) majority of parties can expect from mandate allocation under PR (e.g., with a view to their recent nation-wide vote-share), then maximization of seat-totals under the fragmentation argument cannot account as an incentive for its introduction, because there is zero “bono” from it.

3. Electoral competition under MR

The degree to which our argument above accounts for the behavior of small parties under plurality and majority systems in terms of actually forging pre-electoral alliances is an empirical question. With a view to the historical situation preceding the introduction of PR it concerns district-level representatives of the (small) bourgeois parties. If we observe pre-electoral alliances among them, and if their MPs are at least frequently elected within an alliance, and if the number and complexity of these alliances grows in line with growth of vote-shares of the left, and if the seat-share of the left is lower than its vote-share under the electoral system preceding PR even under universal suffrage, then we consider this as evidence in support of our argument, at least in terms of complementing previous accounts.

Historically, PR has been introduced in most European countries in the years 1918-1922, often in conjunction with independence and/or direct universal suffrage (see table 1). We are interested in the extent to which pre-electoral alliances helped bourgeois parties to secure parliamentary representation even under the socialist threat being manifest (rather than latent – there is no point in forging an anti-socialist alliance with a view to the fragmentation argument then). So we are interested in countries with a strong and unified socialist party, and with universal (male) suffrage in place even before PR was introduced. There are also two variants of “small markets” systems: plurality and majority representation. We focus on MR since this is the system where it is less obvious that alliances are useful as a means of bourgeois pre-electoral coordination (Boix 1999). There are four countries that fit this scheme: Austria, Germany, Greece, and the Netherlands. Of these, only Germany featured MR with universal male suffrage before PR was introduced, a high socialist nation-wide vote-share (34.8 percent for the socialist SPD in the 1912 elections, the final elections under MR), and also a high value of bourgeois party

fragmentation (effective number of parties at 6.02 in 1912, Boix 1999: 623). Germany thus lends itself to the analysis of pre-electoral alliances and their role for small parties as a substitute for electoral reform.

*** Table 1 about here ***

In the following sections we use data on our main variables for the case of Germany during the period 1890-1918. We paid explicit attention to being “comprehensive” in assembling this data in the sense of both detail (e.g. all alliances of all parties), breadth (all elections in all districts), and accuracy of coding (two rounds of double-blind coding and subsequent cross-checking of results) so as to meet well-substantiated demands on validity and reliability of historical evidence (Kreuzer 2010).¹ We believe our evidence points to a core dilemma of MR in times of “nationalized politics”. Comparable data on other countries would, of course, enhance the applicability of our approach – but we address the very similar French and Italian cases with some more detail below.

¹ We use three major sources (minor sources are referenced in the text): Reichstag protocols and annexes to protocols on RCV results and parliamentary group membership, publications of the Imperial Statistical Office on Reichstag election results, and the more recent two-volume Handbook of Reichstag Elections, 1890-1918 (Reibel 2007) on electoral alliances. We additionally cross-checked all MP-related results with BIORAB-Kaiserreich, a database on German MPs (<http://biosop.zhsf.uni-koeln.de/ParlamentarierPortal/biorabkr.htm>).

Our findings on Germany show that electoral alliances in Reichstag-elections were rather common already in 1890 and virtually ubiquitous by 1907. Additionally, most alliances were in place already in the first round (Figure 1).

*** Figure 1 about here ***

But was it indeed primarily the bourgeois camp that made use of them and which groups belonged to it anyway? We define as these parties those which had candidates whose campaigns profited disproportionately from a practice typical of Reichstag elections: government support. The Conservatives (DtKP), Moderate-conservatives (DRP) and the National-liberals (NLP) generally benefitted most from these activities (Arsenschek 2003; Schonhardt-Bailey 1998; Mares 2015). As far as concessions regarding policy choices were concerned, this support could also cover the catholic Center (Z) and the Left-liberals (DFP).

We then calculated national-level vote-shares, and shares of district-level alliances in support of candidates for these five parties and the SPD as percentages of all district-level alliances. Shares are depicted in figure 2. It is immediate from figure 2, that the SPD and the Center were practically crowded out in terms of alliances by the other four main parties. With a view to the Center, this is line with its reliance on the catholic population that was in turn concentrated in roughly one third of all districts where it however represented a majority of the population (the "Center tower"). There were however only very few districts, where the Center could "add" sufficiently many votes from possible allied parties as to gain a mandate outside the Center tower. As concerns the SPD this is however due to the bourgeois parties ganging up. With a total of 397 districts and six elections, the SPD could

have contested 2382 district-elections. It presented a candidate in 2289 of these. SPD candidates received at least 25 percent of the district-vote in 955 district-elections. In 880 of these was there an alliance. So wherever the SPD ran with at least a chance of at least participating in the run-off, it faced an alliance 92% of the time. Taking account of the 21 instances of pro-SPD first-round-alliances, this alliance was directed against the SPD in 98% of the related district-elections. With a view to figure 2, this is not to say that the bourgeois parties used pre-electoral alliances exclusively against the SPD – because the formation of alliances served as the default pre-electoral behavior from the late 1890s at the latest.

*** Figure 2 about here ***

Consequently, the average shares of districts where individual bourgeois parties even presented candidates meandered around only 40 percent for each of them (on this, and the following, see table 2), and even this number is due to bourgeois parties competing against each other in varying alliances – in districts where the SPD and the Center did themselves not garner substantial vote-shares. This number also varied with the number of parties in support of individual in district-level alliances, with the center-rightist bourgeois parties (NLP, DRP) attracting support of at least one additional party on average. As concerns alliances of successful candidates, bourgeois MPs were supported by 1.3-2.5 other parties, on average. Did this help bourgeois parties to counter the “socialist threat”? At least if we take national-level vote-shares and shares of Reichstag mandates as indicators, the answer is: Yes. The SPD, as the strongest party in the whole period under study, failed to transform its vote-shares into even more impressive shares of mandates, as the “fragmentation argument” would have it. What is more: for the SPD the ratio of transformation of its

average vote-share (27.6 percent) into its average seat-share (15.5) is considerably lower (0.56) than 1, i.e. as it could have been under PR. Even if we account for the bourgeois parties being favored by the district structure, where rural areas were over-represented in terms of mandates, this ratio is only at 0.86. If anything then, our findings point towards fragmented parties profiting from MR with a view to countering the socialist threat. These findings support our contention that electoral reform was not the only means of a fragmented bourgeois camp to escape parliamentary demise. In other words: the fragmentation argument does not imply a necessary condition for the introduction of PR – neither theoretically nor empirically. We now turn the question as to whether it implies a sufficient condition for the eventual adoption of PR.

*** Table 2 about here ***

There was a downside to electoral success via pre-electoral coordination. In parliament, MPs not only represented their own parties, but often also a multitude of other parties (and/or of other than the major parties). This was especially pronounced for the bourgeois MPs: more than 75 percent of them had been elected with the support of at least one other party, and still more than 30 percent of at least three others (see figure 3). Even the SPD and Center MPs were not excluded from these ties, as a considerable minority of their MPs had received electoral support from other parties in run-offs against bourgeois candidates. In terms of legislation these multiple, district-level-specific allegiances were bound to render individual MP behavior precarious. In an electoral system where re-nomination and re-election were decided on at the district level, MPs had every incentive in terms of securing their mandates of catering to the interest of their district-level supporters. To the extent that they owed

their mandates to the support of more than one district-level party, this was bound to have repercussions on parliamentary party unity: it must have been at risk whenever a bill was not in line with the policy goals of each and every party in his electoral support. Given that the bourgeois MPs typically had several of these this points towards the fragmentation argument still providing an incentive for the introduction of PR, at least from the point of view of MPs interested in party unity, i.e. party leaders. But the argument then concerns legislative rather than the electoral arena. And we are now going to argue that this incentive does not qualify as a necessary condition, at least not for the bourgeois parties of the time.

*** Figure 3 about here ***

4. Party organization and MP behavior under MR

Contemporaries were well aware of the differences that the two organizational types of the mass party and the elite party make. Robert Michels's "iron law oligarchy" is a critique of the organization of socialist parties, rather than of bourgeois parties like the NLP, that had to accept that "only granting liberty of individual economic principles [to party members – XYZ] served as a means of holding the core of the party together" (Michel 1957[1925]: 21, own translation). In the 1910s and early 1920s when PR was introduced in most countries, the organizational transformation of bourgeois parties into mass parties, i.e. into unified corporate actors (Katz and Mair 1995), was barely complete. So the question as to whether the logic of democratic delegation would rest on collective instead of individual accountability that is crucial for contemporary party democracy (Carey 2007, 2009) was far from an answer.

In this enduring process of transformation, the introduction of PR favored party leaders over their (local-level) rank and file, for the very reason brought forward under the fragmentation argument: the fusion of “small” electoral markets into “large” multi-member markets. As PR requires the set-up of party lists, this meant that whoever was in control of the respective party-administrative layer was also in control of (re-)election chances of candidates and MPs. A simple consequence follows: we have to break down parties as analytical units into at least two distinct kinds of actors – party leaders and the (local-level) party rank and file. Party leaders even of the bourgeois parties had been in control of these layers of party organizations for decades (Stillich 1908, Neumann 1932, Nipperdey 1961). But in elite parties, this did not provide any means of coercion with a view to MPs (see Nipperdey 1961; Nohlen and Stöver 2010; Colomer 2007; Duverger 1958 [1951]). Under the two round/two ballot systems in place before PR where party lists simply did not exist, chances at (re-)election hinged upon resources not necessarily related to parties, such as publicity, logistical support, or money. With some degree of party organization in place since the 1850s, candidates usually subscribed to some party label. But neither was this mandatory, nor universal nor were local-level notables necessarily running a campaign under their individual party label (see above). It was often more promising for them to make deals over endorsing another party’s candidate in return for programmatic concessions or to swap endorsements across districts or elections (Reibel 2011). Candidates themselves had an obvious incentive to accept these endorsements – if not for resources then for the elimination of potential rivals.

These deals were, by their very nature, directed at individual candidates in individual districts. Consequently, they often reflected purely local circumstances (Reibel 2007). MPs

were therefore often tied to a multitude of locally-minted behavioral constraints rather than partisan trustees representing a clear-cut party stance on national issues (cf. Andeweg and Thomassen 2005; Pitkin 1967). They thus translated the socio-economic structure of their district into political representation at the national level (Nipperdey 1993), and in case of conflict, local interests trumped considerations of party unity (cf. Carey 2007).

The introduction of PR with its multi-member districts, comprising whole provinces or even the country in its entirety, then necessarily privileged party leaders over the (local-level) party rank and file with a view to control over MPs (on the legislative impact of PR, cf. Carey and Shugart 1995). So while it is at least unclear whether the switch to PR caused a change in the cross-party repartition of mandates, it meant a relocation of power away from the party base, a step in the transformation of European political organizations from elite to mass parties. We thus argue that the question as to whether PR should be introduced was also a question of the distribution of power between leaders and rank-and-file within the bourgeois (elite) parties of the time, and a contested one as it meant a change in the balance of intra-party power. The parties-as-actors assumption may thus result not only in an incomplete theoretical account of the introduction of PR – it is also bound to ignore the significance PR had beyond the electoral arena.

The idiosyncratic character of district-level electoral organization, including pre-electoral coordination, therefore ran against party leaders' attempts to form cohesive policy positions as their response to a general trend of the time: the "nationalization of politics" (Caramani 2004) due to the rise of the regulatory nation-state and the full "politicization" of society. But under MR there was little party leaders could do, since nomination, pre-electoral

coordination with other parties and campaigning were all the business of local committees. The tension between local-level cross-party coordination in the electoral arena and national-level intra-party cohesion in the legislative arena was bound to harm the latter; except for one party: the Social Democrats.

The SPD was different because the Berlin party leadership had essentially monopolized the nomination process from early on (Matthias and Pikart 1966; Nipperdey 1961). Moreover, pre-electoral alliances were much less destined to be a source of internal interest heterogeneity, simply because they concerned only few MPs (see figure 3). Thus, the SPD was unique when it came to candidate nomination, electoral coordination and, consequently, MP control in the hands of party leaders. It was a mass party, as observed by Michels.

The interest of elite party leaders in legislative cohesion, however, presupposed exactly the centrally coordinated candidate selection process that was hampered by the many, often ephemeral district nomination committees of the “party on the ground” (Katz and Mair 1995). This made a switch to PR promising. In contrast, an explanation of the adoption of PR that stresses small parties’ interest in a higher degree of proportionality, in conjunction “with less resistance by the major parties since they already face the necessity of forming coalitions” (Blais et al. 2005: 185) in our view is insufficient: it ignores the substantial *positive* interest that even leaders of major parties had in abandoning the single-member district systems.

At this point, our account is close to the argument brought forward by Cusack et al. (2010) on party leaderships as mainly representing economic interest groups and on electoral reform being a means to represent these interests more efficiently. But there is one difference: Cusack et al. assume that party leaders were free to choose among a set of options that would improve interest representation (2010: 397), with PR being the most attractive option. So PR ensued. Our individual-level account of electoral reform however claims that MR was bound to prevail, because elite party leaders were just not capable of coercing MPs into abolishing the very electoral system these MPs relied upon in terms of their electoral fate² – even if this frustrated the pursuit of any coherent national-level policy.

5. The Legislative Arena under MR

We now turn to testing the empirical validity of this double claim of (backbench) MPs indeed digressing from the party line as envisaged by elite party leaders and, thus of party unity being far from perfect for elite parties. We again employ data on the German Imperial Reichstag, this time on the 536 RCVs taken in the pre-war Wilhelmine era, 1890-1914. Our dataset covers individual-level results of all RCVs held in this period, covering all 1.406 MPs over a 24-year period. Results thus provide immediate testimony on individual-level legislative behavior with a view to the extent to which party leaders managed to achieve coherence within their party groups.

² Interest groups themselves might have held a (financial) threat vis-à-vis party leaders, but they had no such potential vis-à-vis individual candidates (Anderson 2000: 384).

We start at the level of individual MPs. Our cross-party argument expects an MP to be less willing to toe the party line if he was elected within an alliance. Our intra-party argument predicts backbenchers to generally be less willing to go with the party line than party leaders.

We first coded the “party line” for each party group in each RCV according to the vote taken by the majority of its respective MPs. We then compared this with the votes of individual MPs. If an MP voted differently than prescribed by the party line, the vote was coded as a “defection.” We then defined our variable on electoral coalitions, as a dummy variable indicating whether an MP was elected within an alliance (1) or not (0).

With a view to the extent of party leaders being capable of tying MPs to the party line, we defined as “party leaders” all MPs that were chairman of a party and/or chairman of a parliamentary party group at the time the respective RCV was held. Information on this is provided in Huber (1991) and Fricke et al. (1983), and we coded each MP that is mentioned there in either capacity as a party leader (1), and all other MPs as “backbenchers” (0) in a dummy variable.

If party leaders managed to uphold the party line, variation in this dummy variable must be insignificantly related to defection. We expect this to apply solely to the SPD. If we see that backbenchers were significantly more likely to defect than party leaders, we infer that party leaders did not succeed in transforming “their” MPs into a coherent voting bloc. We hypothesize that such an outcome was a function of a lack of organizational means at the behest of elite party leaders. So we assembled a further dummy variable, indicating a

member of any parliamentary group other than the SPD, and an interaction variable that takes value one for party leaders of Non-SPD factions and zero for all other MPs.

We expect MPs of elite parties to be generally more inclined to defect from the party line than SPD MPs. But we also expect this inclination to vary across elite parties, since the organizational transformation from elite parties into mass parties cannot be assumed to have proceeded at the same pace for every elite party. So we also coded the parliamentary group each MP belonged to. We also control for the electoral success of MPs-as-candidates via the vote-share they obtained in their districts. In order to account for the transformation of elite parties into mass parties as an enduring process, we also include a variable on the legislative period, running from 11 (for the 11th legislative period, 1890-93) to 16.

We then set up three logit models on defections in RCVs. In order to avoid bias caused by clusters of RCVs on identical issues, we only use data on the first division held in each floor session. We also only analyze voting behavior of MPs who were elected in general elections. Possible idiosyncrasies in voting behavior on part of individual MPs are addressed by estimating standard errors clustered along each MP's votes. Results are summarized in table 3.

*** Table 3 about here ***

Results of Model I point towards a strong effect of elite party leadership against proneness to defect. Non-SPD backbenchers, in turn, are considerably more likely to defect from the party line than their socialist colleagues, irrespective of their specific party group. Predicted probabilities of defection for ideal-types of party leaders without and backbenchers within

district-level alliances are close to zero for party leaders, but considerably higher for backbenchers of elite parties: up to ten percent for backbenchers that owed their mandate to an alliance. Though we observe a trend towards lower probabilities over time, levels are generally higher for bourgeois parties than for the SPD. For the SPD, predicted probabilities however remain very close to zero, irrespective of MPs being party leaders and/or alliance support. Models II and III that treating SPD and elite party MPs as separate populations corroborate these findings.

We then assessed the effects of individual behavior in terms of MPs voting for or against the party line on the aggregate of party groups, as measured by Rice scores (Rice 1925). The thrust of elite party parliamentary groups was considerably weakened, as can be seen from mean scores on RCVs for the six legislative terms under study (see figure 5). Sizes of circles are adapted to reflect the share of mandates held by each parliamentary group in the respective term. Only the SPD managed to attain party unity proper. While Rice scores for the left liberals were still between 0.9 and 0.95, scores for the other elite parties and the Center and NLP in particular, hardly ever exceed even 0.9.

*** Figure 5 about here ***

So, there was a problem for elite party leaders with a view to their competition with the SPD. However, it was not a problem of transforming votes into mandates but one of transforming mandates into legislative thrust.

6. The non-adoption of PR

To the extent that the introduction of PR promised to serve the problem of party leaders in terms of getting in control of backbench MP behavior, this promise would rest on conferring them control over composition of their party lists. This was at least what MPs expected from the introduction of PR in 1917/18, when electoral reform was attempted in the Reichstag for the first time since the late 1860s. Bourgeois MPs expected the introduction of PR, in the words of conservative backbencher Hermann Kreth, to result in “the individual representative bowing to the all-mighty will of party leadership. We can just as well stay home then. The Bureau [of the Reichstag] attests party leaderships the number of votes they each can dispense, and party leaders then sit together here, put their ballots into the box, and that’s that” (StB 310: 3514A, own translation). National liberal backbenchers chimed in (MP List-Esslingen, StB 310: 3516D). For MPs, proportional representation would have one central consequence: “Party leaderships will massively gain in power and influence” (MP Veit, StB 311: 4332, own translation).

Still, a reform bill on PR “in large districts” was adopted in July 1918, and, following Leemann and Mares (2014), it even entailed the “adoption of PR” in Germany. A closer look at the bill however reveals that “large districts” did not mean “introduction of multi-member districts throughout the country” but additional mandates for the largest districts in terms of population. MR remained unchanged for 361 districts. 21 further districts received one or two additional mandates that were to be distributed using the d’Hondt formula. Carey and Hix however conceive of two- and three-member-districts as an “own category because the electoral systems literature includes skepticism regarding the dynamics of partisan competition at these particular low magnitudes” (Carey and Hix (2011: 393). PR in the sense of giving at least four parties a chance at gaining at least one mandate was to be adopted

only for five districts: the cities of Bochum (4 mandates), Leipzig (4), Hamburg (5), Berlin (10), and the Teltow county (comprising the suburbs of Berlin, 7 mandates). The expected effects of this reform on parties in terms of gains in mandates had been carefully analyzed by the government and presented to MPs as part of the parliamentary process (Reichsleitung 1918). The government even provided a summary of results along the new district structure. This allows us to gauge the effects of this reform on the distribution of mandates across parties by a simulation of the repartition of mandates according to this district structure for the 1912 elections (see table 4).

There were two winners from this reform according to our simulation: the SPD, and bourgeois backbenchers. The SPD received 22 additional mandates, implying a 2.2-percent increase of its share of Reichstag mandates. Its votes-to-seats ratio increasing considerably from 0.8 to 0.85 was primarily due to a considerable reduction in district malapportionment with a view to difference in district population. However, since malapportionment had also affected those bourgeois parties with strong urban constituencies (the liberal DFP and NLP), the SPD gains were partially offset in relative terms. The SPD made its gains as additional mandates to its mandates in those districts that it had held even under MR. So for the SPD, its party lists in the multi-member districts were indeed bound to play a role for intra-party competition. The gains of bourgeois parties however mirrored the SPD dominance in many urban districts: 18 of the 22 mandates that the DFP, NLP, and Z gained, came as single mandates. Only in two districts did they gain two rather than one mandate. So for all practical purposes, as single name sufficed on the bourgeois party lists in 385 of the 387 districts. And these single names could be agreed on at the very same local level that

candidates had been agreed on ever since 1867. In other words: bourgeois backbenchers were just not affected by this reform.

	SPD	DFP	NLP	DRP	DtKP	Z
1912 results						
Vote-share	34.8	11.9	13.5	3.3	8.2	16.3
Mandate-share	27.7	10.3	11.3	3.5	10.3	22.7
Simulation						
Mandate-share	29.9	10.9	12.2	3.2	9.3	21.8
Mandates gained	22	7	9	0	0	6
Mandates in multi-member districts	52	8	9	0	0	9
Mandates in PR districts	23	4	2	0	0	1
Districts with >1 mandate	13	1	0	0	0	1

PR was finally introduced by decree of the Council of the People's Deputies, a committee composed of the leaderships of the socialist parties in power following the revolution, in November 1918, and in the absence of parliamentary control (Miller 1978: 105f.). Once it was introduced however, bourgeois party leaders acted swiftly (Liebe 1956: 35, Hartenstein 1962: 59ff.). Less than a quarter of the 123 conservative and national-liberal MPs of the 1912-18 legislative period were put on the list of the DNVP and DVP (the successors of DRP, DtKP, and NLP) in the elections of January 1919 (see table 5). Those that were, however, populated the top ranks on their party lists. Consequently, despite the defeat of the bourgeois parties in 1919, more than 60 percent of their incumbents actually running also received a mandate (as compared to eight percent of newcomers). This meant a return rate of 13 percent, by far the lowest rate ever for any major party parties in the whole period 1890-1919 and unprecedented in contemporary elections under PR in Germany (Manow 2007). But on the other hand, with MPs like Count Posadowsky-Wehner, Gustav Stresemann, and, from 1920, Count Westarp, the bourgeois party leadership had survived. And now it was in control of party lists. This made sure that PR as an electoral system was "eternal" (in the words of Oscar Hergt, the DNVP chairman; cited from Liebe 1956: 24),

Tellingly, of all Reichstag roll call votes in the period 1890-1933 there were three that enjoyed unanimous support – one of them being the vote on the introduction of PR with an additional nation-wide layer of party lists in April 1920.

*** Table 5 around here***

7. The adoption of PR in Europe

Even though frontbenchers favored PR, attempts at its introduction must have been as futile as they were in Germany as long as the elite party as an organizational type prevailed for the members of the parliamentary majority because of backbenchers favoring the present system as a guarantee for their individual legislative autonomy. Only once party leaderships gain control of “their” backbenchers do we then expect this majority to adopt PR. Our account thus departs from previous studies also in that the actual reforms are explained as a consequence of intra-party rather than cross-party developments. However, under regular parliamentary procedure, backbenchers necessarily had their say (also) over changes in the electoral system. So our account leads us to expect no introduction of PR as long as legislative politics is played the parliamentary way. But once it is not played liked this, for example, during or after revolutions, in times of executive dominance, or during the pre-constitutional time following state formation, we expect party leaders acting swiftly. This also fits the introduction of PR in Europe at a time and in places where these windows of opportunity were open. The intra-party problem of leaders gaining control over MP behavior was not specific to Germany. Bourgeois parties struggling for party unity and socialist parties

confronted for the first time with fragmentation on their side of the political spectrum were to be found in practically all European countries post-1918.

In France, for example, unstable and underdeveloped party organization, the dominance of local affairs over national political issues and the ensuing lack of parliamentary voting discipline was an enduring problem for party leaders (Nohlen 2010: 644 ff.; Maier 1975 [1988]: 95; cf. Mezdeg and Nohlen 1969: 470 ff.). Already in the last quarter of the 19th century, Leon Gambetta had complained that, “in the chamber elected by single-member constituencies France was reflected as in a 'broken looking-glass'” (Campbell 1965: 75). Shortly before the turn of the century, his plan to restore the multi-member constituencies of the 1871 electoral law was blocked in the French Senate, “partly because, regardless of party, senators were among the local notabilities whose influence might be reduced, and partly because many senators shared the dislike of many Republican deputies for Gambetta, ... who most strongly favored the change and hoped it would promote the rise of a strong and united party” (ibid.). A second attempt was made in 1919, again “the movement in favor of PR aimed at bringing an end to governmental instability and the underdevelopment of party organization” (Nohlen 2010: 648). “Organization” was of importance, since under the old electoral system no party, apart from the Socialists, had been able to impose voting discipline on its MPs. The non-socialist parties “represented little more than electoral bureaus for getting together slates and channeling finances” (Maier 1975 [1988]: 95). In fact, the description of the way the electoral system worked in France would have largely fitted Germany: “elections were a purely local affair (...) [the system] favored the independence of representatives from central party organs (...)” (Nohlen 2010: 644).

Similarly, in Italy, bourgeois party leaders realized that their old ways of campaigning and forging parliamentary majorities based on ever shifting, patronage-oriented coalitions (*trasformismo*) could not survive in the new era of mass-politics after the post-WWI suffrage expansion (Maier 1975 [1988]: 124; Roberts 1979: 134). At the same time, PR critics complained about the resulting transfer of power from individual MPs to party leaderships (see the overview in Noiret 1994, ch. 1). The introduction of PR in Italy in 1919 was welcomed by all parties, and among bourgeois parties the dominant expectation was that PR, was to shift “weights in parliament from the independent MP to the party organization” (Nohlen 1969: 720).

In Britain, by contrast, the turn to PR never occurred, given that leadership control over individual MPs had been successfully established as part of the “efficient secret” (Cox 1987). But critics rejected PR for the same reasons as their counterparts on the continent. Both Thomas Hare and John Stuart Mill (who himself stood as an independent in 1865) argued for the single transferrable vote (STV) as a personal alternative to the party vote under PR, precisely because they opposed the party dominance associated with it. Even the partial introduction of STV however failed in 1916: “When the scheme was prepared it was opposed by practically every member who would have been personally affected by it, and this contributed largely to its rejection” (Carstairs 1980: 196).

8. Conclusion

In this paper, we have developed an argument on the workings of electoral systems and of electoral reform that encompasses both the electoral and the legislative arenas. In this vein,

we made first use of two comprehensive datasets, on electoral alliances and on Roll Call Votes, covering the 30 years preceding the switch to PR in Germany. Regarding the electoral arena, we have shown that local-level pre-electoral coordination was a constitutive feature of electoral politics of the fragmented bourgeois camp. Thus, coordination was crucial for securing electoral success of just those parties that are characterized as proponents of PR in the literature. However, we have also shown that coordination in the *local* electoral arena together with these parties being characterized as elite parties rather than mass parties rendered party unity in the *national* legislative arena problematic, as evidenced by considerably lower voting cohesion among bourgeois MPs as compared to MPs of the SPD as the only mass party of the time.

Yet, the pathologies of MR were not specific to pre-PR Germany. Whether they were German, French or Italian, party leaders everywhere held a strong interest in controlling backbenchers. With the formation of a national political agenda with a view to the big regulatory and redistributive questions of the time, backbenchers' legislative individualism stood in the way of developing the party label into a brand name that would provide voters with a "low-cost cue in evaluating politicians and parties" (Carey 2009: 7). It undermined leaders' attempts at establishing their parties as ideologically homogenous organizations, capable of unified action. In Germany, PR served as a means for party leaders in their attempts at transforming their elite party organizations into modern mass parties. Central party organization, stability of parliamentary membership and voting cohesion all increased dramatically and swiftly in Germany after 1918. The party as a unified corporate actor in parliament was successfully established.

This effect of electoral reform had been well anticipated by contemporaries. However, both current and classic accounts of the switch to PR have tended to ignore this crucial dimension – the struggle between party leaders and ordinary MPs over independence and discipline. Once this is taken into account, however, the central puzzle of the “Why PR?” debate ceases to be one – namely why the introduction of PR was not very contentious between the major political camps but rather within those of them that had not yet taken the structure of the modern mass party.

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Figures and Tables

Table 1: Electoral systems in independent/self-governed European countries with universal male suffrage in 1919

Country	Electoral system						Introduction of Direct Universal Male Suffrage
	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	
Austria	(Curial system)	(Curial system)	MR>MR	MR>MR	PR	PR	1907
Belgium	PR*	PR*	PR*	PR*	PR	PR	1919
Czechoslovakia	-	-	-	-	PR	PR	1918
Denmark	PL	PL	PL	PR+PL	PR	PR	1915
Estonia	-	-	-	-	PR	PR	1919
Finland	-	-	-	-	PR	PR	1907
France	MR>PL	MR>PL	MR>PL	MR>PL	PR**	PR**	1848
Germany	MR>MR	MR>MR	MR>MR	MR>MR	PR	PR	1867
Greece	MR>MR	MR>MR	MR>MR	MR>MR	MR>MR	PR	1864
Iceland	-	-	-	-	PR	PR	1915
Ireland	-	-	-	-	-	PR***	1918
Italy	MR>MR	MR>MR	MR>MR	MR>MR	PR	PR	1913
Luxembourg	MR>PL	MR>PL	MR>PL	MR>PL	PR	PR	1918
Netherlands	MR>MR	MR>MR	MR>MR	MR>MR	PR	PR	1917
Norway	-	MR>PL	MR>PL	MR>PL	PR	PR	1905
Poland	-	-	-	-	PR	PR	1919
Portugal	PL	PL	PL	PL	PL	PL	(1918-19)
Romania	MR>PL	MR>PL	MR>PL	MR>PL	PR	PR	1918
Spain	PL	PL	PL	PL	PL	PL	1890
Sweden	PL	PL	PR	PR	PR	PR	1907
Switzerland	MR>MR>PL	MR>MR>PL	MR>MR>PL	MR>MR>PL	PR+PL	PR+PL	1848
UK	PL	PL	PL	PL	PL	PL	1918

Data apply to elections to lower houses for bicameral legislatures.

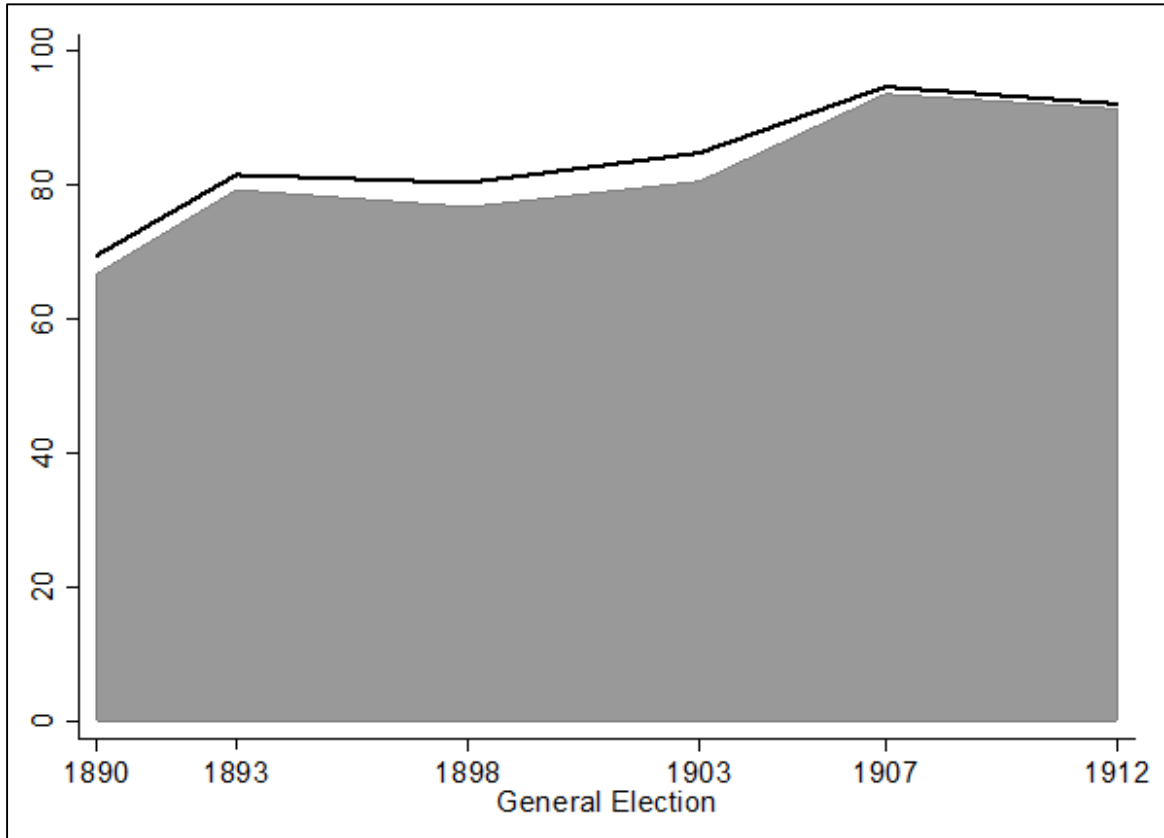
Following independence in 1919 Hungary, Latvia, and Lithuania introduced universal suffrage and PR only in 1920. Bulgaria is not considered having introduced universal male suffrage by 1919. The Serbian parliament is not considered elected by popular vote in the period 1900-1918; Yugoslavia introduced universal male suffrage and PR only in 1921.

*PR in small districts; **PR in small districts, with lists winning all mandates within district if they received the majority of votes; *** Single transferable vote in large districts.

">": features by round; e.g. "MR>PL": 1st round: majority, 2nd round: plurality; "PR+PL": system subject to district size

Data assembled from Nohlen and Stöver 2010, with additions from Braunias 1932

Figure 1: Districts with Electoral Alliances (as % of all Districts), General Elections 1890-1912



Gray: 1st round; Black: 2nd round. Hardly ever did 1st-round alliances break in 2nd round (<1% of instances).

Figure 2: Distribution of votes across parties and of alliances across supported party candidates in percent, 1890-1912

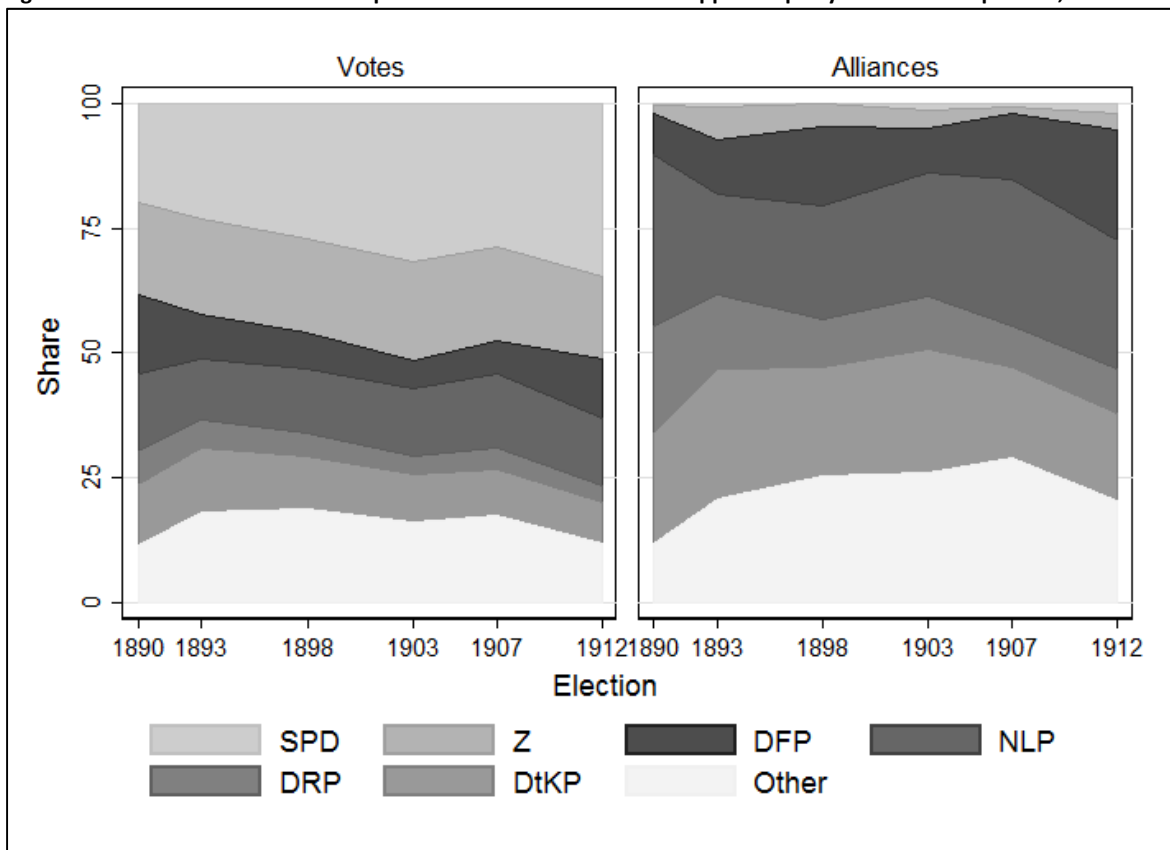
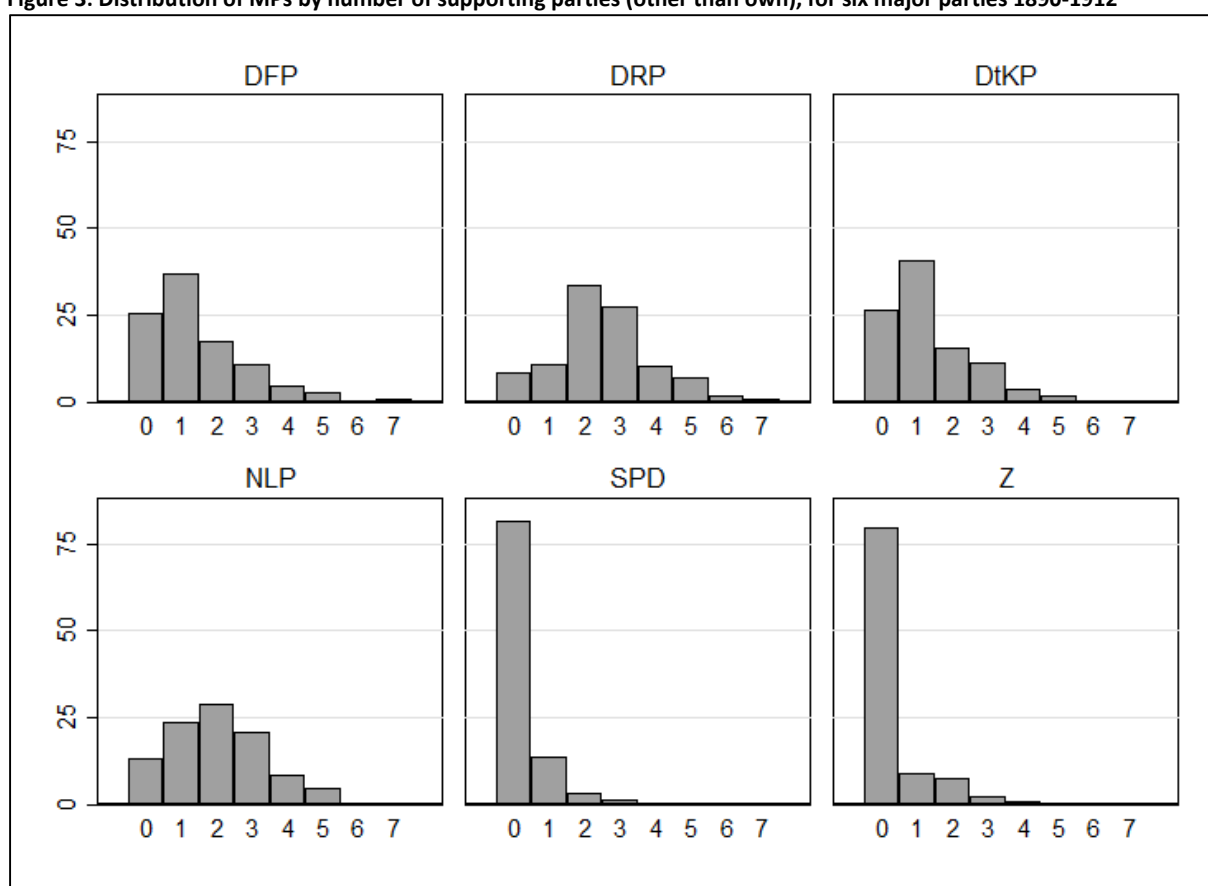


Table 2: National-level means and standard deviations of electoral characteristics of six major parties, 1890-1912

	SPD	DFP	NLP	DRP	DtKP	Z
Percent of districts contested	96.1 (4.9)	47.2 (16.4)	47.6 (4.9)	15.9 (3.4)	34.2 (3.9)	57.7 (8.7)
Number of parties in support of candidate (1 st round)	0.0 (0.0)	0.4 (0.4)	1.0 (0.5)	2.0 (0.5)	1.2 (0.4)	0.1 (0.1)
Number of parties in support of elected candidate	0.2 (0.1)	1.5 (0.7)	2.0 (0.7)	2.5 (0.4)	1.3 (0.4)	0.4 (0.2)
Nation-wide vote-share	27.6 (5.5)	9.3 (3.9)	13.8 (1.2)	4.6 (1.2)	10.5 (1.8)	18.5 (1.2)
Share of Reichstag mandates	15.5 (7.2)	8.9 (4.3)	12.1 (1.5)	5.4 (1.2)	14.5 (2.9)	25.0 (1.5)
Population-adapted share of Reichstag mandates	23.7 (9.9)	8.2 (4.2)	12.0 (1.3)	4.5 (1.3)	12.2 (3.9)	23.0 (2.1)

Own calculations, standard deviations in parentheses.

Figure 3: Distribution of MPs by number of supporting parties (other than own), for six major parties 1890-1912

Note: X-Axes: number of parties in support (0=only own party); Y-Axes: shares of MPs by party in percent.

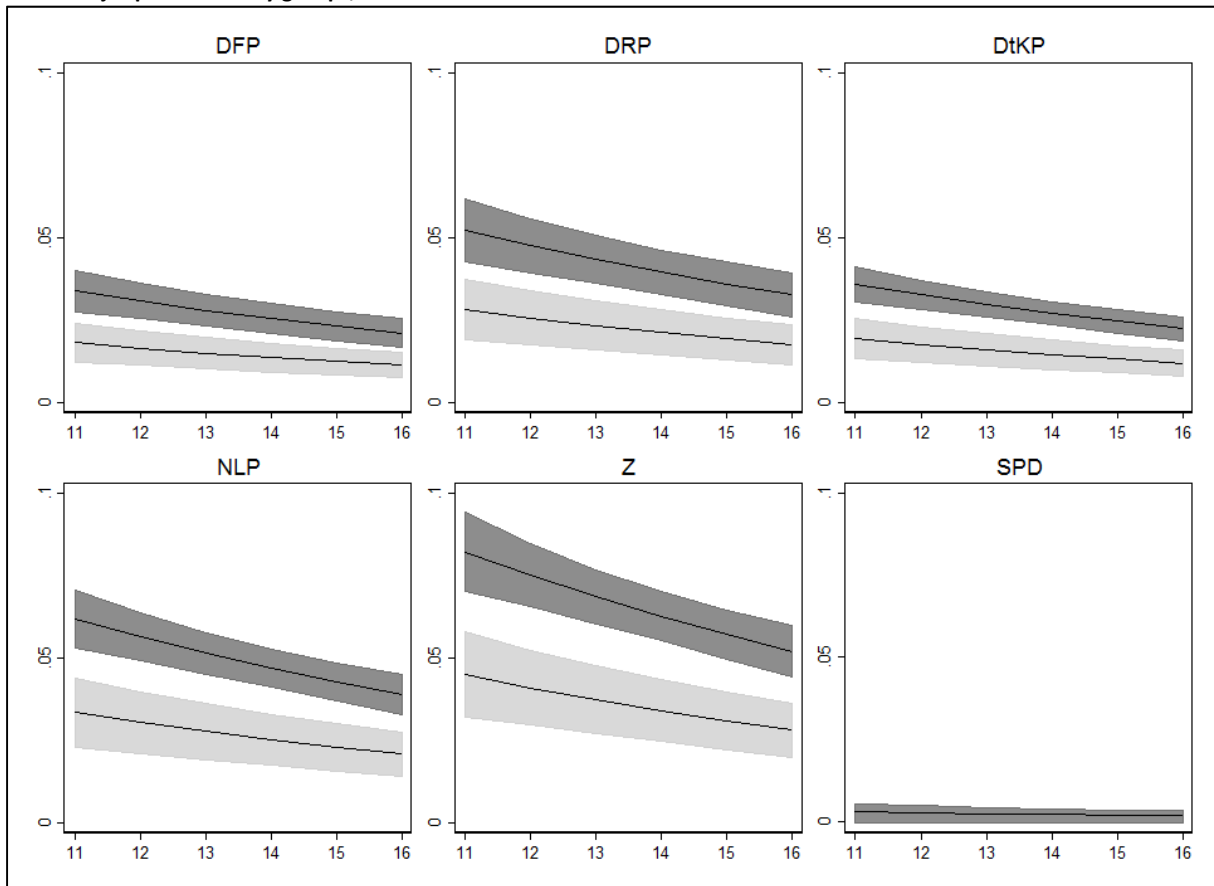
Table 3: Logistic regressions on individual defection from faction vote in Reichstag roll call votes, 1890-1918

	I – All MP		II – Only Non-SPD		III – Only SPD	
Alliance	0.21**	(0.066)	0.21**	(0.066)	0.89	(0.669)
Party leader	1.28	(0.734)	-0.43**	(0.141)	1.45*	(0.610)
Non-SPD party leader	-1.70*	(0.747)				
Vote-share in district	-0.01**	(0.002)	-0.01**	(0.002)	-0.03	(0.054)
Legislative term	-0.10***	(0.020)	-0.10***	(0.020)	-0.10	(0.216)
Party groups						
DFP	-1.78***	(0.133)	-1.78***	(0.133)		
DRP	-1.33***	(0.135)	-1.33***	(0.135)		
DtKP	-1.72***	(0.119)	-1.72***	(0.119)		
NLP	-1.14***	(0.118)	-1.14***	(0.118)		
Z	-0.84***	(0.106)	-0.84***	(0.106)		
SPD	-5.56***	(0.360)				
DRefP	-0.82*	(0.366)	-0.82*	(0.366)		
DS	-1.33***	(0.233)	-1.33***	(0.233)		
DVP	-3.22***	(0.271)	-3.22***	(0.271)		
FVg	-1.68***	(0.175)	-1.68***	(0.175)		
Poles	-4.64***	(0.467)	-4.64***	(0.467)		
WVg	-0.95***	(0.228)	-0.95***	(0.228)		
Constant	-0.26	(0.284)	-0.26	(0.285)	-4.73	(2.808)
Observations	106,156		90,762		15,394	
Pseudo R2	0.0844		0.0510		0.0194	
Chi2	685.5		492.4		29.25	
Log Likelihood	-17793		-17087		-76.00	
Clusters	1368		1186		182	

Robust standard errors in parentheses, Reference category: unaffiliated backbench MPs in the 1890 legislative period that gained their mandate outside a pre-electoral alliance.

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

Figure 4: Predicted probabilities of defection for ideal-types of party leaders without and backbenchers within alliances for six major parliamentary groups, 1890-1914



Predictions along coefficients and standard errors for model I, for non-spd party leaders (light gray) and backbenchers (dark gray) over legislative periods: period 11 (1890-93), 12 (1893-98), 13 (1898-1903), 14 (1903-07), 15 (1907-12), 16/1 (1912-14) with other variables at their means.

Figure 5: Rice scores weighted by share of mandates, for six major parliamentary groups and six legislative periods

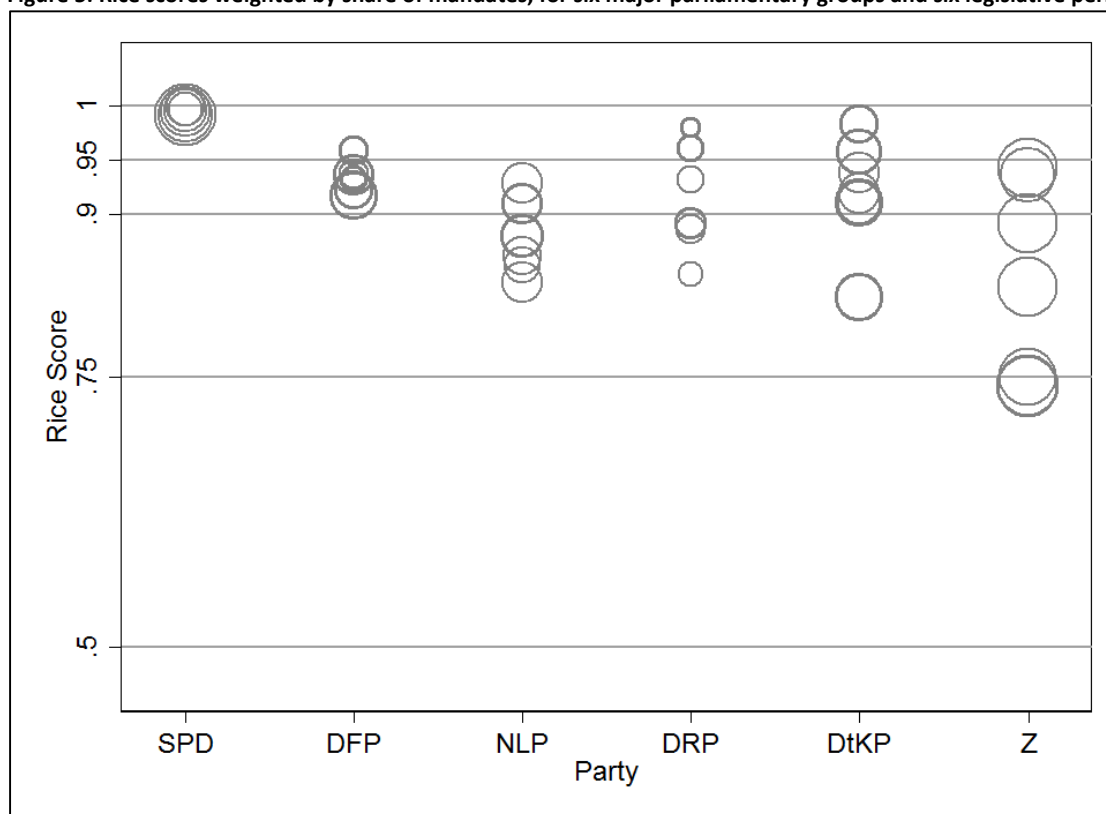


Table 4: Vote-shares and mandate-shares in the 1912 elections, and mandate-shares, mandates gained, and districts with two or more mandates according to simulation of 1917/18 reform

	SPD	DFP	NLP	DRP	DtKP	Z
1912 results						
Vote-share	34.8	11.9	13.5	3.3	8.2	16.3
Mandate-share	27.7	10.3	11.3	3.5	10.3	22.7
Simulation						
Mandate-share	29.9	10.9	12.2	3.2	9.3	21.8
Mandates gained	22	7	9	0	0	6
Mandates in multi-member districts	52	8	9	0	0	9
Mandates in PR districts	23	4	2	0	0	1
Districts with >1 mandate	13	1	0	0	0	1

DFP, Z: districts with >1 mandate - Teltow (DFP) and Cologne (Z) - held two mandates each.

Table 5: Incumbents and Non-Incumbents running and succeeding in the 1919 elections

Camp	MPs 1912 (Total)	MPs running 1919 (% of pre-1919)	Rank on list 1919 (average)		Success rate 1919 (% elected on list)		Return rate MPs 1919 1912/19 (Total)	
			Pre-1919 MP	All other	Pre-1919 MP	All other	(%)	(Total)
Socialist	123	71.0	2.9	12.0	77.6	18.8	56.1	203
Left Liberal	50	60.3	2.7	12.5	73.7	14.5	40.0	84
Established	123	24.2	2.8	13.9	61.1	7.6	13.0	66
Center	108	39.2	3.3	11.7	78.7	16.7	27.8	96
(Other)	35	66.7	4.0	9.8	50.0	11.9	20.0	8
Ethn. Mino.	23	0.0	0
Average	462	41.8	2.9	12.5	74.2	14	30.7	458

Note: MP totals refer to all MPs in the legislative periods 1912-18 and 1919-20.

Source: Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt (1913a, 1913b); Statistisches Reichsamt (1919).