Majority Protection

The Origins of Distorted Proportional Representation

André Walter / Patrick Emmenegger

University of St. Gallen

Swiss Political Science Association, February 2018

Structure of the Presentation

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Minority Protection
- ▶ Rokkan Upside Down: PR as Majority Protection
- ▶ The Adoption and Design of PR in the Swiss Cantons
- ▶ Results

Introduction

- ▶ Prominent discussion on the adoption of PR in Europe at the turn to the 20th century
- ▶ Still considerable disagreement over the causes of the introduction of PR
- ▶ However, Rokkan remains point of reference

Introduction

- ▶ We focus on Rokkan's argument that PR was adopted for reasons of minority protection; Swiss cantons as main point of reference for Rokkan
- ▶ We show that PR was either imposed on the majority party by minority groups (e.g. direct democracy) or majority group supported PR but manipulated law (electoral thresholds, low magnitude districts)
- ▶ Main point of contention might not be the adoption but the design of PR

Minority Protection

- ▶ Focus on ethnic heterogeneous countries before the rise of socialist parties
- ▶ PR was introduced by majority parties to grant representation to minority groups in order to stabilize the political system (Braunias, Rokkan, Lutz and Zila)
- ▶ Political stability is a rather abstract goal, other instruments for minority protection (e.g. constitutional quotas, Single Member Districts) also possible
- ▶ Implausible if parties are seat-maximizing actors

Rokkan Upside Down: PR as Majority Protection

- ▶ We start from the assumption that dominant parties have no interest in giving up their advantages; therefore, electoral reforms are conflictual and come in two forms:
- ▶ First: Dominant parties opposed PR; PR has to be imposed by minority groups (e.g. direct democracy)
- ▶ Second: Dominant parties support PR but try to shape electoral rules to their advantage ("distorted" PR: Electoral quotas, low-magnitude districts)

The Design and Adoption of PR in the Swiss Cantons

Therefore, we expect:

- ▶ The more dominant the advantaged party is, the less likely a canton will adopt PR
- ▶ If PR adoption was supported by the dominant party, then the resulting PR law is less proportional
- ▶ The less proportional a PR law, the lower the seat share loss of the dominant party in the first PR election

The Design and Adoption of PR in the Swiss Cantons

Data

- ▶ We replicate Lutz and Zila (2009) using their data
- ▶ We employ newly collected data on cantonal governments, covering the period 1848-2017 (Walter and Emmenegger 2018)
- ▶ To calculate the median electoral threshold, we have collected data on electoral districts and electoral quotas for all cantons
- ▶ We employ OLS and fixed effects logit estimators

The Timing of PR Adoption in the Swiss Cantons

	Introduction PR						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
% Seat Share Dominant Party	-12.52*** (2.739)	-12.32*** (3.092)	-12.19*** (2.778)	-11.98*** (2.948)	-13.23*** (3.414)	-16.40** (5.673)	
% Vote Share Left		0.122*** (0.0342)	0.149 (0.117)	0.180* (0.0780)	0.00148 (0.108)	0.0259 (0.0784)	-0.0111 (0.0522)
Number of Parties			1.082 (0.863)				
Numb. Part.*Vote Left			-0.0207 (0.0396)				
Right Margin				-0.00639 (0.0124)			
Right Margin*Vote Left				-0.00163 (0.00159)			
Dominant Party*Vote Left					0.176 (0.149)		
Largest Vote Share Non-Socialist							-0.261 (2.732)
Diffusion						18.66*** (3.633)	17.90*** (3.511)
Mean Fractionalization						-36.13 (27.37)	-34.16 (27.91)
% Industrial Sector						12.24 (34.73)	22.39 (40.40)
ln Population Size						184.7** (70.45)	147.6** (52.48)
Cantons	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Observations	1098	1098	1098	1098	1098	1098	1098

Note: Cluster-Robust Standard Errors in parentheses. ⁺ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Dominant Party Position, Median Electoral Threshold and Seat Share Loss

	Seat Loss	Threshold	Seat Loss
Intercept	0.17*** (0.03)	7.90*** (1.65)	0.23*** (0.05)
Dominant Party Support	-0.12* (0.05)	6.55* (2.33)	
Eff. Median Threshold			-0.01* (0.00)
R ²	0.28	0.28	0.26
Num. obs.	20	22	20

Note: Standard Errors in parentheses. + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Conclusion

- ▶ Rokkan's Minority protection argument is implausible from a theoretical perspective
- ▶ In addition, the cases of the Swiss cantons provide no evidence of minority protection (i.e. the cases from which the argument originated from)
- ▶ The main point of contention might not only be whether to adopt PR or not but the design of PR laws (also blank spot in cross-national research)