Party Preferences and Electoral Reform: How Time in Government Affects the Likelihood of Supporting Electoral Change

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Most of the literature asserts that political parties rationally define their preference for electoral reform with respect to their possible gains and the balance of power between and within parties. Other scholars moderate this rationality, underlining the role of the uncertainty inherent to any change in the electoral system. This article shows how risk and expected gains interact. Through an analysis of the preferences of 84 parties in 13 different electoral reform debates, it shows that risk impedes parties from supporting even advantageous change. However, it also points out that not all parties are equally sensitive to risk. Parties that are dissatisfied with the current system are more willing to favour a reform from which they expect gains. In other words, dissatisfaction makes parties more seat-maximising.

In their analysis of the preferences of parties for potential electoral reforms, political scientists underline a variety of motivations to support or to oppose change. Although some point out the role of ideas or values (Birch *et al.* 2002), tradition (Norris 1995) and institutions (Sakamoto 1999), self-interest is believed to be the key determinant (Boix 1999; Bowler *et al.* 2006). According to this perspective, parties are first and foremost strategic players which evaluate any change in the electoral system with regard to its impact on the balance of power between and within parties.

Yet different authors conceive of self-interest in different ways. De Mesquita (2000), for example, conducted a very subtle and sophisticated analysis which disentangled the multi-stage strategies of parties. On the opposite end, Benoit (2004) proposed a parsimonious model. He stated that parties' preferences only depend on their evaluation of the expected gains a reform will bring in terms of seat share for the next election.

Parties often oppose reform even when it would benefit them, as shown by Pilet (2008) or Rahat (2008). This observation leads scholars to develop alternative explanations. Andrews and Jackman (2005) insisted on the role of uncertainty that impedes parties from supporting a reform from which they expect gains in the long run. Shugart (2008) stated that it is the evaluation of past elections instead of future elections that motivates parties to support or oppose electoral reform. According to him, parties that have been constantly disadvantaged by the current electoral system are more willing to change it.

In this paper, we propose to test these alternative approaches in order to determine the way parties define their self-interest when it comes to reforming the electoral system. Which approach can best account for the parties' preferences? How can these alternative explanations be combined to create a meaningful and powerful model?

Theoretical Framework

As stated by Leyenaar and Hazan (2011), the field of electoral reform studies has been expanding rapidly in the last 15 years. Many issues related to this theme are scrutinised regularly in the scientific literature (see inter alia Blais 2008; Colomer 2005). One of the central issues is parties' preferences. As most reforms are elite-imposed (Renwick 2010), parties are indeed key players for the adoption of a new system. What motivation shapes their decision to support or to oppose a given electoral reform? In addition, why would politicians elected by a given electoral system vote for a new system without any guarantees of being re-elected under the new legislation (Norris 1995)?

The academic community seems to unanimously consider that parties are first and foremost strategic players strongly influenced by their vested interest, as any electoral reform implies a redistribution of power among political players. Strategic considerations are not the sole determinant, however. The role of other factors such as institutions, ideas and social structures is acknowledged, but the centrality of power-related motivations is undisputable (Boix 1999). Yet precisely how parties evaluate whether or not a reform is in their favour has not been settled up to now.

A tentative answer is that the consideration of potential gains in terms of seats a given electoral reform could yield will shape a party's preference. Reformers 'try to maximise their seat share, given their (expected) votes, through the choice of electoral rules' (Brady and Mo 1992: 406). Benoit developed a model of electoral system choice stating that parties rank reform plans according to their expected seat share under the various systems and they opt for the one that maximises their share of seats (Benoit 2004: 375). If all parties follow the model, a reform will occur when the parties that believe they will win extra seats due to reform are able to secure together a majority of seats within the parliamentary assembly that is in

charge of voting on electoral reforms. It is then prospective strategic motivations that account for the parties' opposition to or support for potential reform. However, the straightforward model developed by Benoit is often criticised. Many scholars underline situations in which parties opposed a reform despite the fact that they expected a gain of seats (Pilet 2008; Rahat 2008).

Other explanations are put forward to make up for the lack of empirical robustness of Benoit's model. Andrews and Jackman (2005) argue that changing the electoral system is a risky operation, and no matter how much it may increase their seat share in the long run, parties are not prone to support it. This risk results from the small amount of information they have on what will be the exact allocation of seats under the new system. This uncertainty calls for extreme caution. As the saying goes, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. For instance, the Flemish Christian Democrats (CVP-CD&V) in Belgium and the Christian Democrats (CDA) in the Netherlands both opposed a shift to a majority system despite being the biggest parties in their respective countries. Their already dominant position under PR (almost constantly in power) led the two parties to be cautious about changes to the system in use even though most simulations forecast substantive gains in terms of seats if the reform passed (Pilet 2008; van der Kolk 2007).

Shugart (2008) completes this argument, stating that it is the evaluation of past performance of the current electoral system that shapes parties' preferences for a new system. Parties that have benefited from the system in use oppose any reform since the expected gains cannot be certain. Shugart defines this performance in terms of disproportionality between votes and seats and access to government. Both are obviously linked. If party X has often received a share of seats that is smaller than its share of votes, and if party X is often excluded from power, then party X is more likely to support an electoral reform. According to this perspective, reforms happen when parties that have long been disadvantaged from power return to government after a long period in opposition.

Model and Hypotheses

On the surface, the explanations offered by Benoit (2004), Andrews and Jackman (2005), and Shugart (2008) are opposed rather than complementary. The standpoint of this article is that they can be combined into a general model which accounts for parties' preferences as regards electoral system change. The central point of the model is that parties are mainly strategic players evaluating any reform with regard to its potential impact on their seat share. Yet these calculations are mediated by two elements, namely risk and satisfaction. Parties know that a change in the electoral system is risky since it is hard to predict what will be the exact allocation of seats and the general balance of power resulting from a reform. This risk

inhibits parties to act, especially if they already have a satisfactory position in the current balance of power. In such a situation, the uncertainty involved in any electoral reform acts as a 'barrier' (Rahat and Hazan 2011). If they are satisfied with the system in use, i.e. if they have often been in power, the barrier of uncertainty will prevent them from supporting a reform. On the contrary, if they are dissatisfied, this barrier disappears and so does their reluctance to change the system. In such circumstances, parties have nothing to lose and the risk vanishes.

In order to test this model, three hypotheses have been built and empirically tested.

> H1: The more extra seats parties are expecting to gain with an electoral reform, the more they will support it.
> H2: The less time parties have spent in government, the more they will support an electoral reform.
> H3: The time spent is government has a conditional impact on the effect of the expected gains in terms of seats resulting from a reform. Only parties dissatisfied with the system in use because they have spent too much time in opposition would be influenced by the extra seats they could win.

The first hypothesis directly relates to Benoit's model and states that parties are in favour of reform when they expect to increase their share of seats under the new electoral system. The second hypothesis relates to Shugart's work according to which reforms are pushed by parties that are dissatisfied with the electoral system in use, notably because they spent a long period in opposition.[1]

The core of this article is the third hypothesis stating that there is an interaction effect between the expectation of gaining extra seats under the new electoral system and the time spent in power under the current electoral system. The idea is that the time spent in power affects parties' assessment of simulations concerning the allocations of seats under the new system. The perspective of gaining extra seats does not convince parties that are satisfied with the current electoral system. The risk is too high. By contrast, dissatisfied parties are the ones concerned with the expectation of increasing their share of seats under the new system.

In order to test these three hypotheses, the following variables are constructed.[2] Concerning the dependent variable, i.e. the preference of parties in terms of changing the electoral system, we constructed the 'support for electoral reform' variable. It consists of an expert coded fourfold ordinal variable measuring parties' preferences concerning the proposed electoral reform, ranging from fully against to fully in favour, with somewhat against and somewhat in favour as middle points.[3] The rationale for the fourfold typology is that a distinction was needed between parties that are and have been constantly for or against a reform, such as the British

LibDems, and parties that have often changed their mind, such as the British Labour Party.

The 'fully' positions have been attributed to parties with a strong view on electoral reform (either in favour or against), that are unified on the issue and have not changed their mind during the reform process. The 'somewhat' positions have been used for parties with a more mixed view. They are internally divided on their preferences as regards changing the electoral system and/or have switched positions on the issue during the reform process. The best example is the British Labour Party in the late 1990s. Before the 1997 general elections, Labour was in favour of a more proportional system for the House of Commons. Yet the party was divided on the issue with both a pro-PR (proportional representation) and a pro-FPTP (first past the post) group. However, the official line of the party changed once Labour came back to power in 1997.

There are various ways to operationalise the independent variable accounting for a party's expectation of increasing its seat share under a new electoral system. One may calculate one's own simulations or use simulations that circulated among politicians during the actual debate. We have opted for the second option whenever it was possible in order to get closer to what parties really knew about the impact of a reform at the moment of the debate. In most of the cases considered in this article, such simulations were published by state authorities in an official report. In Canada, Italy and Israel there were no officially published simulations. Therefore, we used simulations run by academics which were published at the time of the reform debate.[4] We built the 'gain/loss seats ratio' indicator using these simulations.[5] It consists of the bounded[6] and weighted[7] difference between the party's seat share according to this simulation and the party's seat share for the elections preceding the start of the debate about electoral reform.[8]

For H2, an indicator of the time spent in government was needed. We took the proportion of time the party had spent in government in the 25 years preceding the initiation of the reform debate.[9] The term of 25 years is chosen because it covers an extensive period – practically a lifetime in politics.

For H3 – the central hypothesis – we added an interaction term consisting of the multiplication of the two independent variables.

Because of the ordinal nature of the dependent variable, we ran ordered logit regression. The logit function was chosen due to the virtual equivalence of the number of cases in the categories of the party 'support for electoral reform' variable. The country/provinces to which the party belongs is added as a control variable in order to account for unspecified nation-specific effects. Likewise, as five of the 13 country/provinces are Canadian (four provinces and the federal state of Canada), a dummy variable is also added as a control variable in order to avoid a possible 'Canadian effect'.

Case Selection

Our hypotheses are tested on 84 political parties involved in 13 electoral reform debates over the past 20 years. Data were gathered about Belgium, British Columbia, Canada, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Brunswick, New Zealand, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec and the United Kingdom (see Table 1).

The selection criteria for the reform debates are the following. First, only serious debates are included, or, put differently, minor debates among small parties or bills proposed by the opposition are not included. Consequently, all debates included in our study have been important enough to be at one moment in the hands of the government, either with the government drafting a bill, deciding on the creation of a commission or a citizens' assembly, or opting for a referendum to be held on the issue. The second criterion is to include both reform debates that finally led to the adoption of a new electoral system, as well as those that failed and have not led to the amendment of the electoral law. And, finally, we include only electoral reform debates concerning the electoral formula, that is, 'major' electoral reform (Jacobs and Leyenaar 2011) – potential shifts from PR to mixed or majority systems and the other way round. In that sense, we are more restrictive than Lijphart's definition, which also includes changes in the ballot structure, the introduction of electoral thresholds and modifications of constituency boundaries and district magnitude (Lijphart 1994). The 1993 electoral reform in Italy has not been included because of the radical change in the party system that occurred at the same time. Since our explanatory model is based upon the past performance of parties under the system in use before the reform, we can hardly include Italy 1993 and analyse the

TABLE 1
CASES OF ELECTORAL REFORM DEBATES

Country/Province	Year of reform initiation	System in use	Proposed system	Success
Belgium	2000	List PR	Mixed	0
British Columbia	2003	FPTP	STV	0
Canada	2004	FPTP	Mixed	0
Israel	1984	List PR	Mixed PR	0
Italy	2005	Mixed Maj	Mixed PR	1
Japan	1994	SNTV	Mixed	1
Netherlands	2002	List PR	Mixed	0
New Brunswick	2003	FPTP	Mixed	0
New Zealand	1992	FPTP	Mixed	1
Ontario	2003	FPTP	Mixed	0
Prince Edward Island	2003	FPTP	Mixed	0
Quebec	2002	FPTP	Mixed	0
United Kingdom	1997	FPTP	Mixed	0

Notes: PR = proportional representation; FPTP = first past the post; SNTV = single non-transferable vote; STV = single transferable vote.

preference of only brand new parties. The cases that were studied are the following, in alphabetical order.

In Belgium, in 1999, when the Liberals came to power after 12 years of opposition, they pushed to open the discussion about changing the electoral system. In 2000, the newly formed rainbow coalition (Liberals–Socialists–Greens) decided to institute the *Parliamentary Commission for Democratic Renewal*. The change considered was the introduction of a mixed system, but the coalition never agreed upon a final decision since all parties but the Liberals opposed a reform (Pilet 2007).

In British Columbia, the newly elected Liberal cabinet decided in 2001 to institute a *Citizens' Assembly* in charge of proposing a new electoral system for provincial elections. The proposed system (STV) was submitted to citizens via a referendum in 2005 but, with 57 per cent of support, it failed to reach the required 60 per cent threshold (Ruff 2004).

In Canada, in 2004, the federal minority Liberal cabinet was pushed by the New Democratic Party to consider electoral reform. A Minister for Democratic Renewal was appointed, but the cabinet abandoned the idea of a reform and no draft was ever issued (Russell 2006).

In Israel, in 1984, the Labour–Likud cabinet decided to open a debate about changing the electoral system in order to make it a bit less proportional and to reduce the influence of small parties. A bipartisan committee was set up. A bill proposing a mixed-member proportional system failed to pass before the 1988 elections (Diskin and Diskin 1995). After the elections, in 1989, the second Labour–Likud government instituted a second bipartisan committee on electoral reform but was not more successful (Hazan 1996).

In Italy, in 2005, the Berlusconi government initiated a reform process to make the mixed electoral system – which had been in use since 1994 – more proportional. A few months before the 2006 elections, the right-wing coalition *Casa Della Libertà* submitted a bill making the electoral system proportional but with a majority bonus for the winning coalition (55 per cent of the seats) and with blocked lists (Baldini 2011). The bill was passed in December 2005 with the support of the right-wing and centre-right parties (*Forza Italia*, *Lega Nord*, *Alleanza Nazionale*, UDC and *Nuovo PSI*) (Renwick *et al.* 2009).

In Japan, in 1993, when the Liberal Democratic Party was defeated and ended up on the opposition benches for the first time in 40 years, the coalition made up of all other parties put electoral reform on the agenda. Finally, after long debates and tensions between parties, including within the ruling coalition, a new mixed system was adopted in 1994 with the support of all parties (Shiratori 1995).

In the Netherlands, the newly formed government (CDA–PvdA–VVD–D66) opened a debate in 2002 to amend the electoral system. D66 received the ministry in charge, which circulated a report in 2003 proposing a shift to a mixed system. A draft bill was submitted in 2005 but never received support, except from D66.

In New Brunswick, in 1993, the newly elected Progressive Conservative government appointed the *Commission for Democratic Reform* to report about a potential electoral reform for the province. In 2005, the Commission suggested shifting to a mixed system. The Progressive-Conservative cabinet aimed at organising a referendum in 2008, but when the Liberals returned to power in 2006, they decided to abandon the reform plan that they had always opposed (Cross 2007).

New Zealand's *Royal Commission for Electoral Reform* recommended MMP (mixed member proportional) in 1986. At the time, it received little attention from parties, media and citizens. During the 1990 campaign, all parties put the issue back on the agenda (Renwick 2007). In 1993, after two referendums, the reform was eventually adopted (Lundberg 2007; Nagel 1994; Vowles 1995).

In Ontario, in 2004, the newly elected Liberal government opened the debate about changing the electoral system and created a *Citizens' Assembly* following the example of British Columbia (Massicotte 2008). In 2006, the *Citizens' Assembly* proposed MMP and a referendum was organised in 2007. The change was eventually defeated by 63.1 per cent (Leduc 2011).

In Prince Edward Island, after the results of the 2003 elections, Judge Norman Carruther, appointed by the Progressive-Conservative Prime Minister to report on a potential change to the electoral system, proposed to switch to STV and to organise a referendum on this issue. The government delayed the proposition and instituted a broader commission, which, in 2005, suggested shifting to MMP. On 28 November 2005, a referendum was organised but MMP was defeated by 64 per cent.

In Quebec there have been various discussions about shifting to MMP since the 1970s (Milner 2006). The one considered in this paper is the debate starting in 2002 when the *Parti Québécois* cabinet appointed a *Minister for Democratic Reform*, who strongly pushed for MMP. The Quebec Liberal Party, which won the elections in 2003, maintained the idea of changing the electoral system and submitted a draft bill in 2004, also suggesting a form of MMP. However, the reform process stopped at that stage and no signs of new developments are currently observable.

In the United Kingdom, just before the 1997 general election, Labour and the LibDems issued a joint statement on constitutional reform, which, among other things, promised a referendum on the FPTP system. Although Labour entered government in 1997, this referendum had never been organised. However, it had the effect of stimulating a frenetic debate in the United Kingdom about the switch to MMP (Mitchell 2005).

As regards the selection of parties in the 13 countries/provinces included in the analysis, the criteria were the following. In PR systems, all parties represented in parliament when the reform debate was launched were selected. In majority systems, parties without representation in parliament but that received at least 2.5 per cent of the votes in the election preceding

the initiation of the debate about changing the electoral system were added (e.g. Green Party in British Columbia).

For practical reasons – mostly the difficulty of finding reliable information on the party's preference about the electoral system – the following minor parties were excluded: National Front (Belgium), *Leefbaar Nederlands* (The Netherlands), United Socialist Party (Japan), Marijuana Party (British Columbia), Referendum Party (UK) and the New Italian Socialist Party (Italy). The four parties from Northern Ireland were also excluded (*Sinn Féin*, UUP, DUP, SDLP). This leaves us with a total of 84 parties in the database, much more than for any previous test of Benoit's model.

Analysis

The estimation of Model 1 (based on Benoit) in Table 1 validates H1: the greater a party's expectations in terms of seats, the more it supports an electoral reform. More precisely, if a party expects to gain 1 per cent of seat share, the odds of it moving to the next higher category of the 'support for electoral reform' variable are 1.068.[10] Thus, there is a positive effect of the expected gains in terms of seats on the dependent variable. However, being close to 1, this effect is rather small and the coefficient is not significant at a level of 0.05. Although the requirement for the parallel regression assumption is respected (as the log likelihood is not significant), the low model fitting information proves the lack of robustness of Model 1.

With an examination of the same indicators, Model 2 (based on Shugart) fits our data even less. As stated in H2, the proportion of time in government in the preceding 25 years has a negative effect on the dependent variable. This effect is small and not significant.

Model 3 (our hypothesised interaction effect) is more convincing. The model fitting information shows that the model with regressors is significantly different from the model without at a level of 0.01. The pseudo R^2 is also much higher than the one for Models 1 and 2. How should we interpret this model? The 'gain/loss seats ratio' coefficient (significant at a level of 0.01) shows the effect of the variable when the other variable, i.e. the proportion of the time in government for the preceding 25 years is set to 0. Under these circumstances, if a party's expectations to gain extra seats increases by 1 per cent, the odds of it moving to the next higher category of the dependent variable are 1.299. Conversely, the coefficient for the 'proportion of time in government in the preceding 25 years' variable is not significant, meaning that this variable has no effect on the dependent variable when the 'gain/loss seats ratio' is set to 0.

The interaction term between the two independent variables is small (but significant at a level of 0.05) and negative. In order to visualise this relation, and more specifically to assess the modifying effect of the 'proportion of

TABLE 2
ORDERED LOGIT MODELS

Regressor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gain/loss seats ratio	0.066 (0.047)		0.262** (0.101)
% of time in government		–0.007 (0.007)	–0.007 (0.007)
Gain/loss seats ratio * % of time in government			–0.004* (0.002)
Controls and constants			
Model diagnostics			
Pseudo R^2 (Nagelkerke)	0.284	0.270	0.354
Model fitting log likelihood	191.687*	175.981*	188.761**
Parallel regression assumption log likelihood	159.685	148.650	170.619
N	84	84	84

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. Control variables are country/province to which the party belongs and a dummy Canada and Canadian provinces vs. Other countries. Their coefficient is shown in the Appendix. Computed with SPSS 16.0.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

time in government in the preceding 25 years' variable on the 'gain/loss seats ratio', the graph on marginal effect proposed by Brambor *et al*. (2006) is reproduced in Figure 1.

The figure discloses the marginal effect of a one-unit increase in the 'gain/loss seats ratio' (from its mean) on the expected log odds as one party moves to the next higher category in its support for an electoral reform according to the proportion of time the party spent in government in the preceding 25 years (as a percentage). It shows that the higher the proportion of time in government, the lower the marginal effect of the 'gain/loss seats ratio' on parties' support for electoral reform. From 0 per cent to 40 per cent, although diminishing, this marginal effect is positive and significant. Further, it ceases to be significant as the 95 per cent confidence interval includes 0. Figure 1confirms the empirical relevance of H3: all other things being equal, the lower the proportion of time in government, the greater is the effect of the expectation of gaining extra seats on a party's support for an electoral reform. The cut-off point is around 40 per cent of the time in government, and beyond this, no matter how great the expectation of gaining seats, parties do not support any change in the electoral system. It is too risky and the system is rather satisfactory for the parties.

Discussion and Conclusion

The relevant literature on electoral system change mobilised various elements in order to understand and explain the attitudes of political parties when electoral reform is on the agenda. The dominant approach considers that parties are driven by strategic motivations. According to this perspective, they are supposed to favour systems that maximise their political power and oppose reforms that could threaten their position

FIGURE 1
THE MARGINAL EFFECT OF THE 'GAIN/LOSS SEATS RATIO' ON 'SUPPORT FOR
ELECTORAL REFORM' ACCORDING TO THE PROPORTION OF TIME IN
GOVERNMENT
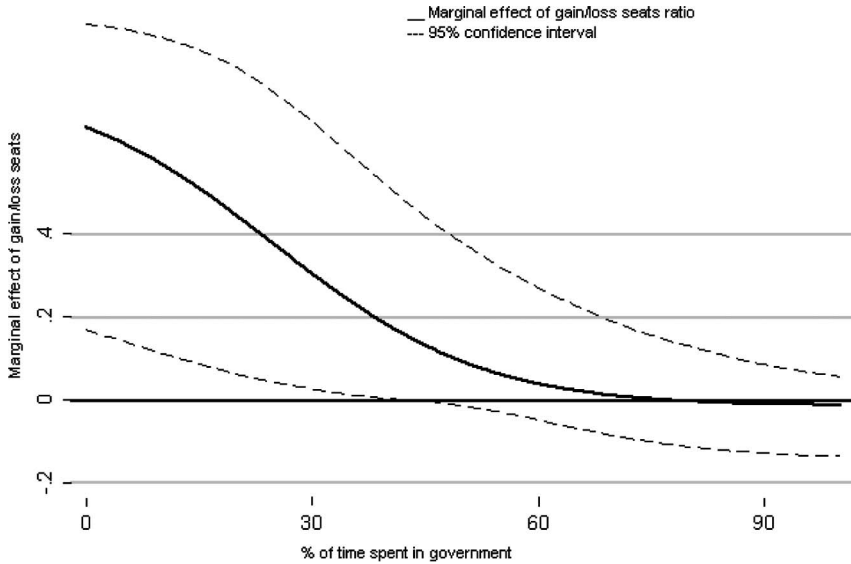
Notes: The dotted lines are 95 per cent confidence intervals and the solid line is the marginal effect of 'gain/loss seats'. Drawn with StataSE 8.

(Boix 1999). Yet it is difficult for parties to predict what the party system resulting from a reform would be. What the balance of power would be between and within parties is indeed highly uncertain. According to this approach, the definition of parties' preferences regarding electoral system change is neither clear nor straightforward.

The aim of this article was to dig deeper, combining different hypotheses to develop a more complete picture which accounts for parties' strategic interests. Different models were tested, based on the positions of 84 political parties concerning a change in the electoral system in 13 different political systems (Belgium, British Columbia, Canada, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Brunswick, New Zealand, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec and the United Kingdom). It appears that the potential gain in terms of seats has a positive effect on a party's support for electoral system change. However, the proportion of time in government is also crucial, since it acts as a barrier. If a party was in power for more than around 60 per cent of the time in the preceding 25 years, it did not support reform regardless of how many seats it would gain. The perspective of gaining seats only has a positive effect on support for change for parties that have spent more than 40 per cent of the time in opposition during the same

period. This proportion rises at around 60 per cent if we look at significant results (at a level of 0.05).

Two theoretical implications can be derived. First, parties are risk averse. They tend not to rely on simulations based on previous electoral results. They know that changing the electoral system would imply some evolution in voters' behaviour. In some respects, parties act as 'peasants' and not as 'bankers' (MacKuen *et al.* 1992). Peasants define their attitudes by considering their present experiences. They do not rely upon expectations for an undefined future. 'Bankers', however, are 'indifferent about the past except as it portends the future' (MacKuen *et al.* 1992: 597). Interviews conducted by Pilet (2008) in Belgium and Canada confirmed this assumption. In Belgium, for example, the former Prime Minister (1991–99) Jean-Luc Dehaene (CD&V – Flemish Christian Democrats), was asked about the simulations published to evaluate the allocation of seats in the event of a shift towards a run-off system, and declared that he absolutely denied the validity of these simulations, knowing that voters would vote very differently under the new proposed electoral system. The same idea was present in another interview conducted with the former Minister of Institutional Reform (2002–03) Jean-Pierre Charbonneau (Bloc Québécois). He explained that many members of the cabinet were sceptical about the validity of the simulations. They both stipulated specifically that simulations must be used with extreme caution.

The second theoretical implication is that psychological factors play a key role in the definition of parties' preferences regarding electoral reform. Although they are driven by self-interest, their strategies are not fully rational. Indeed, parties that have been in opposition for a long time tend to distrust the system in use even after being elected under this system (at least in the first months following their victory). They think their victory is due to pure luck and fear that they will not be able to win another election in the coming years (Katz 2005). Very often, these are the parties that put electoral reform on the agenda. There are numerous examples, such as the British Labour Party in 1997 (after 18 years in opposition), the Liberal Party in Ontario in 2003 (after 13 years in opposition) and the Flemish Liberals in Belgium in 1999 (after 12 years in opposition). One of the first reform proposals they put on the agenda was to change the electoral system.

But, as shown in this article, support for changing the system is affected by presence in government. There is a psychological inclination to evaluate the existing electoral law positively once in power. It affects parties that used to be in opposition – after a few years in government they change their mind, such as the British Labour Party or the Flemish Liberals, two parties that abandoned their support for electoral reform after one term in power and one re-election. But the impact of being in power is even greater for those that have spent a long period in government. Even losing one or two elections does not lead parties to oppose the system in use. They

still believe that they can win next time. The examples of the Flemish Christian Democrats in Belgium (in opposition between 1999 and 2007), the Conservatives in Britain (in opposition since 1979 and 2010), and the Conservatives in Canada (in opposition between 1988 and 2006) can be mentioned here. Losing elections only affects the psychological inclination to support the system after a while.

One of the values of these findings is that they confirm what was already known by many observers of electoral reforms. In particular, they give a systematic and robust confirmation of the interaction between strategic interests, risk and (dis)satisfaction in order to understand the parties' preferences concerning electoral systems.

Notes

1. Compared to Shugart's explanation, we did not consider the disproportionality between vote share and seat share since it is strongly correlated with the access to government.
2. A variety of indicators were tested to measure the different concepts involved in the hypotheses. Only the most robust and significant are presented in the text. The others are presented in the Appendix.
3. Parties' scores on the dependent variable (see Appendix) were double-checked by national experts. We would like to thank Louis Massicotte, Bill Cross, Brian Tanguay, Henk van der Kolk, Alan Renwick, Gideon Rahat and Caterina Paolucci for their help.
4. For Canada, we use the simulation published by *Elections Canada* in (2004). For Israel, we use Watermann and Zefaida (1992). For Italy, we use the same computations as Renwick *et al.* (2009) adapted to the 2001 elections. Although not published at the time of the reform debate, it is reasonable to assume that parties ran similar simulations in the latter two cases.
5. In some countries (e.g. the Netherlands), the official simulation included different reform scenarios. In such circumstances, we opted for the scenario that was closest to the reform bill being discussed by parties in parliament or in government.
6. The variable ranges from -100 to $+100$ in order to facilitate the interpretation.
7. Consider, for example, two parties with an equal gain of seats, whereby the party with the bigger seat share for both the simulation and the preceding election receives a smaller value for the variable.
8. The details of all the variables can be found in the Appendix.
9. The proportion is multiplied by 100 in order to facilitate the comparison with the 'gain/loss seats ratio' variable. It then ranges from 0 to 100.
10. The coefficients shown in Table 2 are the logarithms of the odds of moving to the next higher category of the dependent variable. To compute the odds, one should take the exponential of the coefficients.

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APPENDIX

Variables Tested that Appear in the Paper

'Support for electoral reform': fourfold ordinal variable measuring the preferences of parties about changing the electoral system in the country/ provinces they belong to (fully against a reform, somewhat against, somewhat in favour, fully in favour).

$$\text{'Gain/loss seats ratio'} = \frac{(S_{sim\ i} - S_{el\ i}) - S_{el\ i} \cdot (|S_{sim\ i} - S_{el\ i}|)}{(S_{sim\ i} + S_{el\ i})}$$

S_{sim} = number of seats according to the simulation
$S_{el\ i}$ = number of seats for the elections preceding the initiation of the debate
S = total seats in parliament

$$\text{'Proportion of time in government in the 25 years'} = \frac{T_{gov}}{25}$$

T_{gov} = number of years spent in government
*or the number of years ranging from the first participation in an election to the initiation of a reform debate if the party had been created less than 25 years before the initiation of a reform debate

Other Variables Tested but Not Retained

Independent variables:

- A dummy variable based upon official simulations which made a distinction between parties expecting to gain extra seats in the event of reform and those expecting to lose seats
- A continuous, not weighted and not bounded variable accounting for the impact of electoral reform in terms of seats
- A dummy variable accounting for the position of the party at the time of the initiation of the debate, in the opposition or in the government

Dependent variables:

- A dummy variable (against/in favour of a reform)
- A threefold variable (against/divided/in favour of a reform)

TABLE A1
DATA FOR THE VARIABLES OF INTEREST

Country	Party	Support for electoral reform	Gain/loss seats ratio
Belgium	Parti Social-Chrérien	Fully against	−0.67
Belgium	Parti Socialiste	Somewhat against	4.60
Belgium	Parti Réformateur Libéral	Somewhat in favour	−0.08
Belgium	Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten	Somewhat in favour	−0.25
Belgium	Christelijke VolksPartij	Somewhat against	13.67
Belgium	Socialistische Partij	Fully against	−2.13
Belgium	Ecolo	Fully against	−7.33
Belgium	Agalev	Fully against	−6.00
Belgium	VolksUnie	Fully against	−5.33
Belgium	Vlaams Blok	Fully against	−10.00
New Brunswick	Progressive Conservative Party	Somewhat against	−6.01
New Brunswick	Liberal Party	Fully against	0.91
New Brunswick	New Democratic Party	Somewhat in favour	4.77
Prince Edward Island	Progressive Conservative Party	Somewhat against	−8.82
Prince Edward Island	Liberal Party	Somewhat against	23.70
Prince Edward Island	New Democratic Party	Fully in favour	7.41
Ontario	Progressive Conservative Party	Fully against	2.61
Ontario	Liberal Party	Somewhat in favour	−3.75
Ontario	New Democratic Party	Fully in favour	3.40
Ontario	Green Party	Fully in favour	0.00
British Columbia	Progressive Conservative Party	Somewhat in favour	−10.02
British Columbia	Liberal Party	Somewhat against	17.37
British Columbia	New Democratic Party	Fully in favour	0.00
British Columbia	Green Party	Fully in favour	12.00
Quebec	Parti Québécois	Somewhat against	−1.71
Quebec	Parti Libéral	Somewhat against	1.07
Quebec	Action Démocratique du Québec	Somewhat in favour	2.86
Canada	New Democratic Party	Fully in favour	3.40
Canada	Liberal Party	Somewhat against	−0.32
Canada	Conservative Party	Somewhat against	−0.01
Canada	Bloc Québécois	Somewhat against	−0.89
Canada	Green Party	Fully in favour	2.92
United Kingdom	Labour Party	Somewhat against	−0.68
United Kingdom	Conservative Party	Fully against	0.05
United Kingdom	Liberal Democrats	Fully in favour	2.15
United Kingdom	Scottish National Party	Fully in favour	0.16
United Kingdom	Plaid Cymru	Fully in favour	0.02
New Zealand	Labour Party	Somewhat against	−1.45
New Zealand	National Party	Fully against	−2.77
New Zealand	Alliance	Fully in favour	12.99
New Zealand	New Zealand First	Fully in favour	3.94
Japan	Japan Communist Party	Somewhat in favour	−0.02
Japan	Democratic Socialist Party	Fully in favour	−0.27
Japan	Japan New Party	Fully in favour	−0.13
Japan	Komeito	Fully in favour	−2.36
Japan	Liberal Democrat Party	Somewhat against	4.13
Japan	Sakigake	Fully in favour	0.18

(*continued*)

TABLE A1 (*Continued*)

Country	Party	Support for electoral reform	Gain/loss seats ratio
Japan	Japan Socialist Party	Somewhat in favour	−1.27
Japan	Shinseito	Fully in favour	−0.29
Netherlands	Christen Democratisch Appèl	Somewhat against	0.83
Netherlands	Democraten 66	Fully in favour	−0.73
Netherlands	List Pim Fortuyn	Fully against	0.19
Netherlands	Christen Unie	Fully against	−2.67
Netherlands	Groen Left	Somewhat against	−0.67
Netherlands	Staatkundig Gereformeerde	Fully against	−1.33
Netherlands	Socialistische Partij	Fully against	−0.40
Netherlands	Partij van de Arbeid	Somewhat against	0.01
Netherlands	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie	Somewhat against	0.00
Israel	Shas	Fully against	0.06
Israel	Agudat Israel	Fully against	0.08
Israel	National Religious Party	Somewhat against	0.08
Israel	Hadash	Fully against	0.09
Israel	Tehiya	Fully against	−2.50
Israel	Progressive List For Peace	Fully against	−0.83
Israel	Likud	Somewhat in favour	0.35
Israel	Alignment	Somewhat in favour	0.25
Israel	Ratz	Fully in favour	0.08
Israel	Arab Democratic Party	Fully against	−0.83
Israel	Tzomet	Fully in favour	−1.67
Israel	Moledet	Fully against	−1.67
Israel	Degel Ha Torah	Fully against	−1.67
Israel	Shinui	Fully in favour	−1.67
Israel	Mapam	Fully against	−2.50
Italy	Union Valdôtaine	Fully against	0.00
Italy	Rifondazione Comunista	Fully against	1.93
Italy	Südtiroler VolksPartei	Fully against	−0.01
Italy	Forza Italia	Fully in favour	0.27
Italy	Alleanza Nazionale	Somewhat in favour	−0.25
Italy	Lega Nord	Fully in favour	−0.03
Italy	Biancofiore	Fully in favour	−0.85
Italy	Democratici di Sinistra	Fully against	−0.33
Italy	Democrazia è Libertà – La Margherita	Somewhat against	0.20
Italy	Partito dei Comunisti Italiani	Fully against	0.02
Italy	Il Girasole	Somewhat against	0.48

TABLE A2
ORDERED LOGIT MODELS (FULL)

Regressor	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Gain/loss seats ratio	0.066	(0.047)			0.262**	(0.101)
% of time in government			−0.007	(0.007)	−0.007	(0.007)
Gain/loss seats ratio * % of time in government					−0.004*	(0.002)
Non-Canadian countries/provinces (UK as reference)	1.103	(1.339)	0.943	(1.340)	1.161	(1.350)
Belgium	−2.456*	(1.076)	−2.249*	(1.068)	−1.402	(1.122)
Israel	−2.066*	(0.990)	−1.932	(0.991)	−1.812	(0.997)
Italy	−1.563	(1.013)	−1.298	(1.030)	−1.293	(1.033)
Japan	0.663	(1.116)	0.634	(1.115)	0.987	(1.130)
The Netherlands	−2.015	(1.064)	−1.916	(1.061)	−1.794	(1.066)
New Zealand	−0.679	(1.250)	−0.437	(1.237)	−1.166	(1.332)
Canadian countries/provinces (Quebec as reference)	−		−		−	
British Columbia	1.191	(1.457)	1.157	(1.415)	2.095	(1.683)
Canada (federal state)	0.602	(1.320)	0.532	(1.323)	0.616	(1.337)
New Brunswick	−0.453	(1.480)	−0.534	(1.479)	−0.766	(1.508)
Ontario	1.062	(1.403)	0.878	(1.396)	1.358	(1.423)
Prince Edward Island	0.079	(1.524)	0.441	(1.472)	0.409	(1.592)
Constant 1 (Parties' support = totally against)	−0.945	(1.052)	−1.217	(1.078)	−1.039	(1.091)
Constant 2 (Parties' support = somewhat against)	0.351	(1.045)	0.059	(1.068)	0.327	(1.083)
Constant 3 (Parties' support = somewhat in favour)	1.070	(1.054)	0.790	(1.075)	1.153	(1.093)
Model diagnostics						
Pseudo R^2 (Nagelkerke)	0.284		0.270		0.354	
Model fitting log likelihood	191.687*		175.981*		188.761**	
Parallel regression assumption log likelihood	159.685		148.650		170.619	
N	84		84		84	

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. Computed with SPSS 16.0.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).