

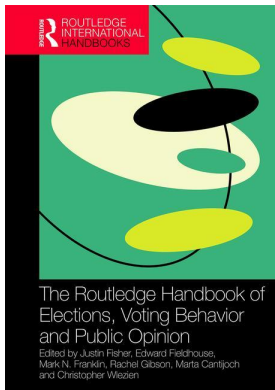
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## 4

# INSTITUTIONS AND VOTING BEHAVIOR

*B. Guy Peters*

The study of political institutions and voting behavior are generally kept far apart in contemporary political science theory. This separation is unfortunate, given that the two aspects of political life are, in practice, closely linked and an understanding of one can inform the understanding of the other. Elections are generally about the capacity to control an institution or multiple institutions. And institutions – notably legal institutions – shape the manner in which elections are conducted and can directly influence the outcomes. While some academic division of labor is inevitable, that division should not go so far as to exclude important factors arising in different elements of the discipline, or allied disciplines.

As well as the more empirical justifications for linking institutions and mass political behavior such as voting, there are theoretical reasons as well. Most obviously, these are the two sides of the classic structure versus agency problem in the social sciences (Giddens 1979; Thornton and Ocasio 2003). Do we explain observed outcomes based on the nature of institutions and other formal structures or do we explain those outcomes through the behaviors of individuals? The most satisfying answer to this somewhat false dichotomy is both. But that answer requires elaboration, and the interactions between structure and agency must be developed theoretically as well as empirically.

For the study of voting behavior and other forms of mass politics, the usual assumption about explanation has been agency, with individual voters being the relevant actors. These actors may be embedded in a social and political system but their attitudes, partisan identifications and perceptions of self-interest have dominated the discussion of voting (but see Blais, Singh and Dumitrescu 2014). While accepting that individual choice is central in voting and other forms of mass participation, we should also consider the role that political institutions have in shaping the opportunities for participation, and in providing incentives and disincentives for voting, and even for voting in certain ways.

This chapter will look at the reciprocal influences of structure and agency on political participation. The impact of voting and other aspects of political behavior on institutions is perhaps the more obvious direction of influence, given that voting will determine the occupants of institutional positions, at least in democratic regimes. I will, however, begin by attempting to demonstrate how the nature of institutions influences the behavior of individuals as well as the collective behavior of interest groups and political parties. In this perspective, institutions comprise the locus in which political participants engage in order to shape policy and the performance of the political system. Or, in the terms of Douglass North (1990; see also Khalil

1995), institutions are the rules of the game and political parties and other organizations are the teams playing the game. Also, for elections, individual voters can be conceptualized as participating in the “game” that is structured by the institutions.

The discussion to this point has been primarily in terms of formal institutions and their capacity to shape political behavior. But informal institutions, including norms, values and organizational routines can also be important in shaping the behaviors of individuals.<sup>1</sup> For example, campaigning for office may have relatively few formal rules but the behavior of candidates is constrained by understandings and informal protocols. Likewise, within formal institutions of government there are informal expectations and standards of behavior that also shape how individuals perform their roles.<sup>2</sup>

### **Institutional effects on individual and group behavior**

Individuals are, by definition, the primary actors in mass politics but they are always acting in a context defined by formal and informal political institutions. In addition to the effects of those institutions on individuals, the institutions influence the behavior of organizational actors such as political parties and interest groups. Further, we can also conceptualize the political parties and interest groups themselves as institutions (see Peters 2010) that in turn interact with one another and also shape the behavior of individual citizens.<sup>3</sup>

I will be arguing that institutions have two primary effects on political participation and voting. The first is that institutions are *opportunity structures*, and the more open these structures are to the involvement of citizens then the greater encouragement they will provide for participation. The other effect of institutions on participation will be through *information*. To the extent that institutions can reduce the information costs of potential participants in the political process, the more likely those citizens are to actually participate.

### ***Institutions as opportunity structures***

One general way of conceptualizing the impact of institutions on individuals is to think of them as opportunity structures for individuals. That is, the formal institutions in the public sector can provide opportunities for political action, or they may be designed in ways that discourage or actively repress participation and involvement. These opportunities, or lack thereof, can be developed from the level of macro-constitutional structures all the way down to the structures of political parties and interest groups themselves. Further, the institutional features affecting behavior need not be formal organizations, but rather may also be legal prescriptions or prescriptions on behavior that affect the opportunities for involvement.<sup>4</sup>

In his conceptualization of opportunity structures, Kitschelt (1986) focused on the openness of institutions, as well as the effectiveness of institutions in making and implementing policy, to define types of structures. In this model, open systems, and especially those with effective governments, provide the greatest opportunities for participation, and have a style which attempts to assimilate social movement or other attempts to influence policy. On the other hand, more closed and ineffective political systems tend to provide fewer real opportunities and produce more confrontational styles of governing.

The term of opportunity structure has been employed in a variety of ways in the literature on political participation. The dominant use of the idea of opportunity structures has been in relationship to the development and success of social movements (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996). In this perspective, the openness of the state to its citizens and their articulation of interests will influence the capacity, and the necessity, of those social movements to form and to

have demonstrable effects on policy. On the other hand, the capacity of the state to employ repression to prevent mobilization of movements will obviously limit the opportunities for those movements to have any success.

I tend to subscribe to Giovanni Sartori's (1970) tenets about the dangers of concept "stretching." There is an inherent danger that by stretching the concept it loses meaning and is applied in circumstances in which it is inappropriate and may, in fact, cloud meaning rather than contribute to understanding. In this case, however, I do think it may be useful to extend the discussion of opportunity structures to encompass the various ways in which political institutions shape the opportunities available to citizens for participation. This stretching does not undermine the basic content of that concept in any significant manner, even though it does apply the concept to a much wider range of phenomena, in terms of both the institutions and the actors, than originally intended.<sup>5</sup> This should also be understood in a context in which some versions of institutionalism may themselves be considered "stretched" when compared to a formal, structural conception of that term.

In the following discussion, I will be examining the influence of institutions on opportunity structures for individuals and groups in society. The same logic that has been applied to social movements can be extended to a range of phenomena. While the study of social movements has tended to focus on the movements themselves, this analysis will focus more on the institutions that present the opportunity structures for participation, and which may even shape the direction of participation for citizens. The primary "dependent variable" for this discussion will be voter turnout, but other patterns of participation will also be considered.

### ***Opportunity structures at the macro-level***

As noted above, the concept of opportunity structures can also be applied at the macro-institutional or constitutional level as well as for mass participation. Several of the conventional institutional differences among political systems can be conceptualized as differences in opportunity structures for participation. While institutional differences such as those between presidential and parliamentary systems, and between federal and unitary regimes, are usually discussed in terms of their impacts on governance capacities (Lijphart 2012; Weaver and Rockman 1993), these different institutional structures also can be argued to influence levels and types of political participation of individuals.

If we begin with the classic distinction of presidential and parliamentary systems, we could posit several potentially contradictory hypotheses about the effect of these institutional structures on mass participation. On the one hand, the presence of two independent structures in presidential systems that have influence over policy provides citizens with multiple opportunities for voting, and for voting that actually does influence the policies being adopted by government. Parliamentary regimes, on the other hand, allow only one set of votes that in the end determine the occupants of both executive and legislative offices.

The alternative hypothesis would be that voters want the chance to actually choose policy when they vote, and therefore parliamentary regimes, especially parliamentary regimes with the opportunity to produce a one-party government, or a coalition with a limited number of parties, may provide them greater opportunities to shape policy directly. Voting for the parliament that in turn will determine the nature of the executive does not confront the voter with as great a probability of gridlock and dilatory institutional politics as is possible, or even likely, with presidential governments and their checks and balances.

The opportunities provided voters to make decisions about both executive and legislative officials in presidential governments appear to be taken by voters, and often result in divided

government (Mayhew 1991). Divided governments emerge frequently at both the federal and the state government levels in the United States. There is a seemingly disproportionate number of elections that result in divided governments, with voters – whether consciously or subconsciously – choosing the legislature from one party and the executive from the other. If this outcome is intentional on the part of voters, then those choices would appear to contradict the assumption that voters like to choose governments and thereby to select public policy. Rather, these voters appear to be selecting inaction and gridlock.

Divided governments are not, however, solely an American phenomenon (Elgie 2001). In semi-presidential regimes such as France, there have been several periods of *cohabitation* since the formation of the Fifth Republic (Tsai 2008). Likewise, other countries copying the French model, especially in Eastern and Central Europe, have also had periods of divided government, sometimes with negative consequences for governing (Gerghina and Mosciou 2013). Leaving the governance consequences aside for the moment, the capacity to vote separately for the legislature and for the president provides more opportunities for participation and perhaps for differentiated choices by voters.

There are several possible effects on participation of having a presidential form of government. On the one hand, voting for president appears to focus attention on that election and to make voters believe that their participation is particularly important (Blais 2000). With the presidentialization of parliamentary systems (Poguntke and Webb 2007), the connections between voting for candidates and the choice of executive appear to have become clearer in many parliamentary systems, notably those with a limited number of possible post-election coalitions. However, when the coalition possibilities are not known *ex ante* the connections between voting in parliamentary elections and the governmental and policy outcomes of the election may be more difficult for voters to identify.<sup>6</sup>

At an extreme, the numerous elective positions in many American state and local governments can provide both opportunities for participation and a source of potential confusion for voters (see, for example, Green and Gerber 2015). Some American states in the South and Midwest provide for up to a dozen statewide elected officials in the executive branch – not counting legislators or judges. And then there are numerous local government officials to vote for as well, especially when local governments are nested within larger units.<sup>7</sup> These multiple opportunities for participation can at some point impose such great information demands on voters that they may opt out of voting. The multiple elections can also produce voter fatigue, especially with, as in Switzerland, multiple referendums (Rallings, Thrasher and Borisyuk 2003).

### Federalism

The division of powers among levels of government, and the degree of autonomy available to sub-national governments, is another standard institutional question in the public sector. This question is usually phrased as federalism but the formal constitutional differences between federal and unitary systems tell only part of the story. For example, there are marked differences in the powers available to the provinces or states within federal regimes (Fenna and Hueglin 2010). Likewise, in some instances, sub-national governments in nominally unitary regimes may have more autonomy to raise taxes and make autonomous policy decisions than do those in federal regimes.<sup>8</sup>

We should therefore tend to think of this question of sub-national government more in terms of the degree of decentralization existing within a regime (Falleti 2005). What powers are decentralized – whether to provincial or local governments – and what powers are retained in

the center? And to what extent are political powers decentralized? This division of power among various levels of government presents opportunities and barriers to voters attempting to control public policy. On the one hand, more decentralized forms of governance present more opportunities for citizens to participate. On the other, however, more decentralized regimes may make influencing overall patterns of policy more difficult; a party or an interest group would have to be successful in a number of different venues to shape national policy.

Although decentralization is the more generic concept for addressing the question of the allocation of powers among tiers of government, the formal institutions associated with federalism also have some relevance. In particular, having a sub-national tier of government with some degree of sovereignty and having autonomy over some aspects of governing – especially when that involves own-source revenues – creates arrangements that can influence the utility of voting, as well as the pattern of voting.

To be more precise, federalism creates the possibility of another form of divided government. Voters can, if they wish, create patterns in which the central government is controlled by one party or coalition and the states or *Länder* are controlled by another political group. These voting opportunities have special relevance when, as in the case of Germany and Austria, those *Land* governments send representatives to the second chamber of parliament. These second chambers cannot dismiss a government formed in the lower house, but they can make the life of that government rather difficult, as is true in any form of divided government.

### *The bureaucracy and participation*

Bureaucracy and democracy are usually thought of as antithetical concepts, albeit both having substantial relevance for governing. However, the structure of bureaucracies may have some impact, albeit very indirectly, on the behavior of voters and the politicians whom they elect. The accountability function is central to any democratic regime (Brandsma and Schillemans 2013) and elections are far from irrelevant for promoting that accountability. This is especially true if, as Keane (2009) has argued, democracy is increasingly about monitoring government activities rather than voting to attempt to make grand policy decisions.

In addition to the argument concerning the monitory nature of contemporary democracy, the increased presidentialization of governments (see Poguntke and Webb 2007; Savoie 2008; but see Norton 2013 on the United Kingdom) may also emphasize voting as a mechanism for accountability rather than for policy choice. If in parliamentary regimes power is moving toward the executive and parliamentary democracy has in essence become prime ministerial democracies, then voting may be an even blunter instrument than in the past for controlling policy. That is especially true for multi-party systems in which the coalition that will emerge after an election is not known.<sup>9</sup>

The diminished capacity to control policy through the election appears to be a reality of contemporary democracies, and with it there may be a decrease in the real and/or perceived efficacy of voting for many citizens. That said, the necessity of controlling governments retrospectively will, if anything, have been increased by executive dominance in government. With the powers of the political executive parliaments increasing significantly, voters can react to perceived poor policy choices, or other perceived failures, through replacing that executive through a subsequent election.

At the same time that political executives have been increasing their powers relative to parliaments, there have been significant changes in the nature of public bureaucracy that also have made the voting act seemingly less efficacious in controlling the bureaucracy. As early as the 1980s (Day and Klein 1987), it had become clear that the classic form of parliamentary

accountability was becoming less dominant and other forms of accountability depending more on the use of social actors and stakeholders were ascendant.

The shift in accountability is only one manifestation of changes in the public bureaucracy that may have some effect on voting, at least indirectly. Part of the logic of the New Public Management (see Christensen and Laegreid 2011) has been to emphasize the role of public administrators in making policy and denigrating their nominal political masters. As well as a general cultural shift within the public sector, structural changes, such as the use of agencies, tended to reduce the control of political leaders over the bureaucracy (Verhoest 2010).

While this shift in the linkage of voting to accountability over the public bureaucracy may tend to devalue voting, the positive side of the story is that these transformations may open different opportunities for participation. Although reforms of the public sector have tended to emphasize the autonomy of the bureaucracy, that autonomy is also limited by increased powers for clients and participants at the level of the individual facility (Gilley 2009). If voting does not provide the public with the type of influence over the executive that should exist in a democracy, there may still be effective forms of participation available for those citizens.

### ***Information costs and voting***

Information costs can be a second major variable affecting voting, and especially voting turnout. High information costs can be considered a major deterrent to potential participants in the political process. If voters have to invest heavily in acquiring information then they will be less likely to participate. Either the costs will be too high and they will not seek out the information, or they will not want to consider themselves ignorant when they go to the polls, so will not go. Institutions in the political system, and especially party systems and the nature of political parties, can raise or lower information costs, and hence affect turnout.

Campaign laws themselves may increase information costs for voting. In some countries, such as the United Kingdom, there are limits to the distribution of campaign information, and an inability to purchase media time. In others, campaigning may end a day or several days before the poll, so that last-minute potential voters have less information. And in the interest of preventing bandwagon effects, opinion poll information can be restricted. While done in the interest of fairness in most cases, these mechanisms do impose greater information costs.

While lowering information costs for voters may in general be a positive value for the political system, like so many aspects of designing institutions there will be trade-offs with other important values (Smith 2009). For example, lowering information costs for voting by reducing the number of parties and making the party system more stable (see below) will tend to reduce the representativeness of the party system and the parliament. Likewise, lowering information costs for voters through reducing the number of elective offices, or by reducing opportunities for referendums and initiatives, will potentially have a negative effect on democratic controls over government.

### ***Credible commitment***

The concept of credible commitment has been used to describe the need for public sector institutions, such as central banks and regulatory agencies, to make policy choices that will survive beyond a single term of office (Majone 2002; North 1993). Again, if we stretch the concept of credible commitment further, we can argue that political parties as institutions should make credible commitments to policy positions and ideology to reduce the information costs of voters. And if they can reduce those information costs then citizens will find it easier to make choices and to vote.



To some extent, the choice to maintain consistent policy positions is the decision of the party itself. If it wishes to maintain a stable approach to policy across time, there are few constraints on its doing so, other than perhaps electoral success. That said, the electoral systems and electoral laws may also influence the capacity of the party to maintain a predictable position. If we return to Duverger's (1951) classic distinction between parties of maneuver and parties of position, we could argue that parties of maneuver, usually parties in two-party or limited multi-party systems, will provide more unstable, or perhaps merely ambiguous, policy positions. In contrast, parties in more extreme multi-party systems will maintain more consistent positions and thus lower information costs for voters.

Proportional representation also tends to reduce the need for tactical or "sophisticated" voting. Perhaps only when there are questions of getting an allied party over a threshold is there much reason to vote for the party representing the voters' real preferences. In single-member districts, however, there are often significant incentives to vote for a less preferred alternative in order to prevent the least preferred party from winning (see Kiewiet 2013). The possible advantages of this type of voting in turn require higher levels of information from voters than would be true in other voting systems.

Unfortunately, there appears to be an equally viable alternative hypothesis about the role of multi-party systems. More extreme multi-party systems offer fewer barriers to entry for new parties, whether these be personalistic "flash" parties or attempts to create more stable and enduring parties. When there are a number of new parties entering the electoral market, then voters will have to sort through more options and acquire more information in order to make a rational choice among the options. Or they may simply opt not to participate.

The above discussion assumes that voters are indeed making their voting choices based primarily on their policy preferences. We have assumed the same already in some of the discussion of opportunity structures, with the argument being that when multi-party coalition systems obscure the connection between voting, the coalition that is formed, and policy choices, then potential voters may think that their vote is too blunt an instrument to affect the final choices made by government (see Selb 2009). In this case, the necessity of frequently renewing one's stock of relevant political information to take into account new parties that come, and may soon go, may lead potential voters to spend their time and energy elsewhere.

### **Electoral laws and voting behavior**

I have already discussed some general analytic and theoretical approaches concerning the role of institutions in affecting voting. I will now look more specifically at the most significant institution affecting voting, namely electoral laws. These laws will influence voting behavior through both of the mechanisms mentioned above, and may have some more specific effects on the behavior of individuals as they become involved in the political process, as well as on the role of political parties that have an indirect effect on individual behavior.

Law is a fundamental institution of society, and for the political system. For the purposes of defining the opportunities for participation, and defining the impacts of voting behavior, electoral laws represent a crucial legal framework (Bowler 2006). From at least the time of Maurice Duverger (1951), we have understood clearly that electoral laws affect the party system, with two-party systems being likely to occur only in electoral systems with first-past-the-post systems. More recent scholarship (Taagapera and Shugart 1999) has refined the linkage between electoral laws and the capacity of electoral systems to produce outcomes that represent closely the division of votes among parties, and have discussed the effects of various electoral systems on the outcomes of elections.



We can hypothesize that this basic impact of electoral laws on the number of parties and the diversity of the ideologies (or at least electoral platforms) offered by the parties will affect the behavior of voters, as well as their political activities beyond voting. For example, the general argument – supported by some evidence – is that proportional representation systems are related to higher levels of turnout than are single-member district, first-past-the-post systems (Ladner and Milner 1999). This linkage between electoral law and the representativeness of parliaments is a manifestation of the logic of opportunity structures discussed above. If the electoral laws provide more opportunities for parties to enter politics, and therefore make it easier for voters to select parties whose policies they support, then citizens may be more likely to participate.<sup>10</sup>

The general assumption has been that proportional representation is linked to higher levels of turnout (see Brockington 2004, for a nuanced perspective). The effects of proportional representation on turnout appear to be manifested through several paths. The most obvious is that, with multiple parties running for office, the voter is likely to find a party that is close to his or her political views than in the more constrained selection of parties available under other electoral systems. In addition, the voter may feel more efficacious in a proportional representation system, knowing that their party or candidate has a greater opportunity to gain at least some representation.

There may, however, be some point at which the electoral institutions can permit too many parties to participate, and with that cause confusion and impose significant information costs on voters. Leaving aside small and obviously idiosyncratic parties, the Dutch general election of 2012 had 20 parties participating, while the Peruvian elections of 2016 for president had candidates representing 18 parties.<sup>11</sup> Especially if the party system is not well-institutionalized and there are numerous shifts in party names and composition between elections, this proliferation of parties can impose a major information burden on voters.

As well as the possible negative effects of a large number of parties on turnout, the informational demands imposed by more complex electoral systems, such as the Single Transferable Vote (STV), may also suppress participation. If a voter has to rank all candidates in a multi-party election then all but the best informed and most diligent of voters may feel somewhat reluctant to participate. Thus, those electoral systems that provide voters the greatest power over outcomes may also demand the most from those voters. Thus, in this setting there may be a conflict between the opportunities provided to, and the information required of, the voters.

Even in single-member districts, however, there may be effects of other aspects of electoral law on voter turnout. For example Jackman (1987) found that in the United States elections in competitive districts tend to have higher turnout than in those that are less competitive. The same appears to be true in most British elections (Denver 2015). In the competitive districts there was something to vote for, while in less competitive districts there may be little reason to vote, other than to express systemic support. Thus, in American elections with congressional districts and state legislatures increasingly gerrymandered to ensure one party or the other wins consistently, already low levels of turnout should be expected to worsen (Angstrom 2013). The relative absence of gerrymandered and safe seats in proportional representation systems provides voters with greater incentives to turn out to vote on a more consistent basis.

While these two basic notions of the linkage between electoral institutions and voting are useful, there may be several more detailed points that should also be made. The first is that the relationship between electoral laws and turnout is more suggestive than conclusive, and there are certainly cases in which the effects are the opposite of those argued above. The degree of representativeness produced by electoral laws and the capacity of voting to ensure the formation of government are inversely related. Therefore, voters may be deterred from voting if they think that their vote will not be related to the outcomes of the election. That said, however,

majoritarian political systems tend to have lower levels of political participation than do proportional representation, arguing that voters appear to value having their views represented more than they do producing winners.

The presence of threshold values for the representation of a party in the parliament may affect the strategies of voters more than it affects the level of turnout. For example, if a political party A likely requires another particular party B as a coalition partner, then voters who actually prefer A may decide, or even be encouraged, to vote for B in order to ensure that B surpasses the electoral threshold. For example, the rather high threshold of 5 percent in German elections may encourage Christian Democratic Union adherents to vote for the Free Democrats in order to ensure that their usual coalition partner is indeed present in parliament.<sup>12</sup>

The threshold requirement may also affect turnout. If adherents of a particular party do not think their party can surpass the needed proportion of votes, then they may choose not to vote unless one of the other available parties is acceptable to them. While the presence of a threshold was intended to deter, at least in part, the representation of radical and anti-systemic parties in parliament, it may have a more pervasive effect of institutionalizing a particular cartel of parties and in the process discouraging voters who want to move away from the status quo, even if in benign directions.

Finally, other changes in electoral laws may also be able to influence turnout, and in a positive direction. Mechanisms such as postal voting, early voting, extending the time period for voting and Sunday elections all appear to increase turnout (Franklin 2001). These mechanisms appear to be especially important in the United States for increasing the electoral participation of members of minority groups.

### ***Other reasons for voting***

The above discussion has been premised on an assumption that voters choose parties, or candidates, for policy reasons. We know, however, that voters in many countries tend to be more interested in the capacity of politicians to provide constituency service, and to “bring home the bacon,” than they are in their policy stances. That is, voters want representatives who will serve as intermediaries with the bureaucracy, and who can bring public money (whether as infrastructure or government contracts for local firms) to their area. For politicians, then, taking policy stances runs the risk of alienating voters while successful constituency service only makes friends.<sup>13</sup>

If we leave aside for a moment the more clientelistic forms of relationship between voters and their elected representative (Piattoni 2001), we can still identify the presence of an interaction among electoral laws, the provision of benefits for individuals and districts, and voting. First, for this relationship to function, there needs to be some close connection between the voter and the representative, something that is more likely to exist in first-past-the-post majoritarian systems.<sup>14</sup> The relationship is, however, confounded by the tendency for these voting systems to produce incumbency and safe districts, reducing the incentive for voters to turn out. Voters can therefore be free riders, taking the benefits of constituency service when needed but not having to invest time and effort in voting.

### ***Political parties and participation***

Not only do electoral laws affect the participation of individuals in politics, as I have argued above, political parties themselves may, as one type of institution, offer more or fewer opportunities for individuals to participate and to be effective in that participation.<sup>15</sup> At one extreme,

one can find the American party system in which the leadership of the party has little control over the party and who can run for office in the name of the party. The primary system allows outsiders who have not worked their way up the hierarchy within the party – namely, Donald Trump and Ben Carson – to parachute into candidacy and, especially in state and local elections, even to win office. While the endorsement of the party may still be necessary for election – if nothing else being assured of places on the ballot – that endorsement is possible for an extremely wide array of individuals.

At the other end of this spectrum of political parties, those that function in closed list electoral systems can control not only who runs in their name but also the order in which they appear on the ballot. These more formalized structures and roles for political parties in the electoral process enable them to control political recruitment, but may also provide fewer opportunities for voters to express their views, especially of individual candidates. The capacity to control recruitment and placement of candidates strengthens parties as institutions, but also provides greater predictability for voters and thus lowers the information costs for those voters.

This powerful role assigned to the leadership of parties will be effective when there are strong party loyalties and commitments, as has been true for traditional parties in Europe and, to some extent, Latin America. But the commitment of voters to parties has been decreasing significantly for the past several decades (van Bizen, Mair and Poguntke 2012) and appears likely to continue. The former cartel parties (Katz and Mair 2009) are facing increased competition from “flash parties” and other less institutionalized parties (Barr 2009).

## Summary

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the connection between the institutional design of political systems and the behavior of voters. Although these institutional effects may appear far removed from more proximate causes of voting, such as attitudes and policy preferences, they are nonetheless important for understanding patterns of behavior at an aggregate level. These connections also point to the interactions between individuals and institutions that are important for institutional theory.

As well as the importance for institutional theory, this discussion is obviously very relevant for understanding how political participation – and most notably, voter turnout – can be shaped. While affecting attitudes toward government and a sense of civic duty toward voting may be difficult, institutions can be manipulated more readily. But, as already noted, attempts to affect levels of public participation may be only one of a number of criteria that institutional designers may consider when shaping institutions. Political institutions are complex structures with a wide range of effects on their members and on politics as a whole, and their role in political participation should not be underestimated.

## Notes

- 1 The sociological approach to institutionalism (March and Olsen 1989) defines institutions in terms of these concepts, and does not differentiate clearly between formal and informal institutions. For the purposes of this analysis, I will focus on formal institutions defined in more legalistic and structural terms.
- 2 One of the best examples of this influence is Matthews (1960).
- 3 One of the standard understandings of institutional theory is that the environment of any one institution is composed of other institutions.
- 4 Elinor Ostrom (1990) defined institutions as structures of rules that permit, prescribe and proscribe behaviors by individuals.

- 5 In Sartori's terminology, this application of the concept of opportunity structures involves increased extension of the concept, although in this case there is not any significant reduction of the intension of the concept.
- 6 Richard Rose (1976) developed a model of party government that linked voting choices, the characteristics of the individuals occupying government positions and policy choices. He argued that even in majoritarian political systems such as the United Kingdom the linkage between voting and the choices of governments was tenuous.
- 7 For example, I vote for officials at the county level as well as for the borough in which I reside. And I also vote for school board members.
- 8 For example, Swedish local governments have substantially more taxing powers than do sub-national governments in federal regimes such as Germany.
- 9 Of course in some moderate multi-party systems, to use Sartori's term, there may be only a limited number of possible coalitions so that voters would have a much better chance of assessing *ex ante* likely policy choices.
- 10 For an analysis of the effects of proportional representation as opposed to the first-past-the-post system, see Dunleavy et al. (1998).
- 11 Perhaps the tradition of compulsory voting in the Netherlands mitigates some of the effects of so many choices for the voters.
- 12 In the 2013 election, this strategy failed and the Free Democratic Party did not pass the threshold. The Social Democrats have had a somewhat similar relationship with the Green Party, especially at the Land level.
- 13 This logic is at least part of the reason for high levels of reelection of sitting members of legislatures. For the classic statement, see Fiorina (1977).
- 14 That said, the STV voting system in Ireland, with the capacity of voters to rank candidates, may create some of the same patterns. See Collins (1985).
- 15 On political parties as institutions, see Peters (2010, Chapter 8).

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