ARE POLITICS LOCAL?
An Analysis of Voting Patterns in 23 Democracies

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This article measures, compares, and analyzes the degree to which local factors, be they candidate qualities or district characteristics, affect electoral politics. It applies Morgenstern and Pothoff’s components-of-variance model to 56 parties or coalitions to measure the “local vote” and shows that only in some cases do local factors manifest themselves in voting patterns. To explain this finding, the authors argue that the type of executive system, ideological cohesion, and a country’s ethnic heterogeneity combined with federalism are all strongly tied to the local vote patterns. Statistical tests also show that in spite of the large literature on the incentives that electoral systems can offer to candidates to pursue a personal vote, the electoral system does not have a clear impact on the local vote.

Keywords: personal vote; nationalization; electoral systems; presidentialism, parliamnentarism

The question of whether politics are “all local” has been a long-standing concern of academics and political pundits and has thus fostered the study of the “personal vote” and the “nationalization” of political parties. For scholars of the personal vote, the concern was that when elections turned on candidates’ characteristics rather than partisan politics, partisan responsibility was sacrificed. Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina (1987) noted that the personal vote “has implications for party cohesion in the legislature, party support for the executive, and ultimately, the ability to enforce national electoral accountability in the system” (p. 111). Comparativists have also worried about the personal vote, tying it to party fragmentation, the pork barrel, clientelism, and generally irresponsible legislatures. For scholars of the nationalization of parties, the concerns were also those of weakened partisan...
responsibility, but the culprit in this particular case was not the characteristics and qualities of individual candidates but rather the distinct characteristics and varying interests of different electoral districts.

In an early attempt to measure these effects, Stokes (1965, 1967) developed a methodology for measuring and comparing the level of localism by parsing the vote into its national, state, and local components. He then compared the size of the local component in the United States and Great Britain and found that it was much larger in the United States. The question left unanswered, however, was whether the larger local component found in the United States was driven by the greater importance of candidates in American elections or by the greater concern for local district interests.

Consequently, subsequent to Stokes’s initial work, the scholarship on localism began to diverge into two distinct literatures, focusing on either the personal vote or nationalization. The first of these has been interested in the importance of individual candidate characteristics to electoral outcomes and the latter in the importance of district-level issues to an election. An important fault in both of these sets of literature has been that attempts to measure the personal vote or party nationalization have either continued to focus on the comparison between the United States and the United Kingdom (Cain, Ferejohn, & Fiorina, 1984, 1987) or explored the issues within the context of a single country (on the personal vote, see Samuels, 1999, on Brazil; Schoenbach, 1987, and Bawn, 1993, on Germany; and Studlar & McAllister, 1994, on Australia; with regard to nationalization, see Claggett, Flanigan, & Zingale, 1984). Both the divergence in focus and the limited geographic comparisons have prevented the development of comprehensive theories that explain localism or its consequences.

As an alternative approach, Morgenstern and Potthoff (2005) developed a components-of-variance model that can be applied to a wide variety of cases and provides an indicator of what we term the “local vote.” Their measure, which we explain below, captures the degree to which local factors, be they related to candidate qualities or district characteristics, affect a party’s electoral returns. The local vote is broader than and distinguished from the personal vote in that the local vote focuses on party returns rather than individuals and acknowledges that the impacts on the vote in a given district may come from the personality of the party’s representative or (as in the case of multimember districts) representatives and/or from the idiosyncrasies of the different districts. As such, the local vote thus has implications for the concerns of scholars of the personal vote as well as those of nationalization. Although it could be useful to seek a method to separate these issues, they have a common impact on whether politicians must concern themselves with local politics. In a comparative framework, the local vote allows analysts to
distinguish between systems that turn on provincial- or national-level politics, which then allows a consideration of the factors that lead to these central distinctions.

To explore the local vote, we apply Morgenstern and Potthoff’s (2005) method to a database of 56 cases of parties or coalitions in 23 countries. The statistical analysis uncovers remarkable variability across and sometimes within countries, and a primary goal of this article is to explain this variance. In seeking an explanation for the cross-country variability, we find that parliamentarism reduces local voting significantly in comparison with presidentialism or semipresidentialism. An important negative finding is that in spite of the extensive work that focuses on the incentives inherent in electoral systems that encourage candidates in particular systems to “cultivate a personal vote” (Carey & Shugart, 1995), electoral system variables do a poor job of explaining the differing levels of localism. To consider the factors that explain differences within countries or among countries that share executive types, we move beyond a consideration of standard institutional arguments and include a set of arguments about the distinctiveness of districts and other factors that allow or encourage parties to develop distinct identities in different districts. In particular, we find that ideological cohesion as well as ethnic heterogeneity when combined with federalism, have strong impacts on the local vote.

The structure of the article is as follows. In the first section, we provide a fuller definition of the local vote, both descriptively and statistically, thus justifying the use of Morgenstern and Potthoff’s measure. In the second section, we develop our hypotheses about the variables most likely to affect individual candidates’ incentives to pursue localism, on the basis of the literatures on the personal vote and the nationalization of parties. In the third section, we operationalize our variables and provide both bivariate and multivariate tests. The fourth section reviews our conclusions.

DEFINING THE LOCAL VOTE

Conceptually, we define the local vote as the degree to which district-level factors affect voters’ decisions. Every party in every country fields a range of candidate types, and all of a country’s districts face at least some differences in terms of their ethnic, social, and economic makeup. Our interest is in the degree to which these differences are manifested in the voting for legislative candidates. The idea of local voting, then, is meant to capture the degree to which voters are influenced by factors particular to their districts.
Building on concerns about national versus local level politics, Stokes (1965, 1967) produced the seminal works that helped develop the concept of the personal vote and its measurement. His insight on which we build was that voters are influenced by a combination of local, state, and national factors and that by decomposing electoral data, he would be able to differentiate the impact of each of these levels. As other scholars (e.g., Cain et al., 1984, 1987) began to investigate similar concerns, Stokes’s local component came to be termed “the personal vote,” a somewhat unfortunate moniker. As Katz (1973) and others have argued, the literature on the personal vote has ignored the possibility that national-level shocks have variable effects across localities. For example, a national policy to reduce farm subsidies would not affect Democrats in New York with the same force as it would in Kansas. The differential movement in the vote in these two states, then, should not be solely attributable to the personal qualities of the candidates. The concept of the local vote, therefore, is meant to make explicit that these differential movements can result from candidate qualities, district characteristics, or both. Distinguishing these two different forces may be interesting, but it is also useful to measure and take account of the degree to which these combined local forces are manifested in voting patterns.

There is also one other important distinction between the local and personal votes: the focus on parties in the former and individuals in the latter. Because its focus is on individuals, students of the personal vote have focused on systems in which parties put forth a single candidate (e.g., the United States) or voters are able to choose among a party’s multiple candidates (e.g., Colombia, Brazil, or Japan). This focus, however, leaves aside the large group of countries where voters choose among party lists. This seems to us an important oversight, because these lists have differentiable personalities that may have strong effects on voting patterns. The local vote, then, focuses on a party’s total vote in a given district, whether that vote is targeted toward an individual candidate, applied to a party list, or distributed among multiple party candidates.\(^1\)

Where candidate qualities or district characteristics matter for voter choices, a candidate’s campaign style, popularity, and/or the variability in the socioeconomic structure of a locale will affect how voters feel or interpret the impact of national policies and other stimuli. For example, national decisions that address issues such as agriculture, gun regulation, trade patterns, abor-

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1. A focus on parties means that the local vote is most closely related to the personal vote for countries that use either single-member districts (e.g., Britain) or closed-list proportional representation (as in most of Europe), because there is no differentiation between a candidate’s and a party’s votes. In systems that allow intraparty competition (e.g., Brazil, Chile, Ireland, pre-1994 Japan, etc.), there is a clearer distinction between the personal vote and the local vote.
tion rights, or civil rights might be advantageous to a party in one district and deleterious (or less advantageous) in others. This should be true even when first accounting for a party’s underlying support levels in the different districts. Furthermore, where there is a significant local vote, more able candidates will have greater success in spinning the issues to the party’s advantage or attracting undecided voters.

CALCULATING THE LOCAL VOTE

To measure the local vote, we apply a statistical model that captures the consistency of change for a party’s vote across a country’s legislative electoral districts. Parties that have relatively low degrees of local voting will see their support in all districts moving consonantly. For example, if a party’s overall support increased by 10% and there were limited local voting, the party would experience an increase of approximately 10% in each district. If, however, that 10% increase overall were an average of quite disparate levels of change in the districts, then local factors must have played a greater role in the elections.

To capture the local vote, we apply Morgenstern and Potthoff’s (2005) components-of-variance model to district-level electoral data from legislative elections. The intuition behind their model comes from Stokes (1965, 1967), who argues that a party’s vote in a particular district in a particular election is composed of three elements. First, there is the underlying level of support in the district. That support, however, can be quite variable across the country, as a comparison of the Democrats’ support in a New York City district with one in rural Kansas would show. Morgenstern and Potthoff term this component of the vote “district heterogeneity.” From that base level, a party’s support can vary dynamically with each election. This variability may be attributed to both national level and local level factors. The average change of a party’s vote across all districts, which is generally termed “volatility,” can be attributed to national trends. But as a result of local factors, such as candidate qualities, socioeconomics, or the ethnic makeup of the voters in a particular district, the voters in different districts may respond to elections in different ways. This differential movement across districts is what we term the “local vote” (and Morgenstern and Potthoff awkwardly name the “district-time effect”). In sum, then, the local vote is the residual component of the vote left unexplained after accounting for a party’s base-level support in a district.

2. Morgenstern and Potthoff’s (2005) measure accounts for the underlying support by removing what they call “district heterogeneity” from consideration before calculating the local vote.
district (district heterogeneity) and the influence of national electoral forces (volatility).

Morgenstern and Potthoff (2005) provide the following illustration of these effects, on the basis of Table 1. Table 1 portrays the results for two hypothetical countries (C1 and C2), each with three equally sized electoral districts (D1, D2, and D3) and across 2 election years (Y1 and Y2). In the first election year (Y1), Party 1’s electoral success is identical in both countries. That is, Party 1 is assumed to have won 59% of the vote in D1, 53% of the vote in D2, and 47% of the vote in D3. In the 2nd election year (Y2), the overall average support for Party 1 dropped by 10 points in both countries. The distribution of that loss, however, varies from one country to the other. In C1, Party 1 loses exactly 10% in each district, whereas in C2, the 10-point total loss between the 2 years is distributed unequally among the districts. Because the change in support is identical for all districts in C1, district characteristics or candidate qualities must have played no role in the election, and the measured local vote is therefore zero. In C2, alternatively, the 10% overall shift was the result of very different movements in the districts, implying that district characteristics or candidate qualities did affect the election. The local vote is therefore greater than zero for C2.

Morgenstern and Potthoff’s components-of-variance model allows the simultaneous calculation of the three components. If there is no local vote, as with C1, the calculations for volatility and district heterogeneity are straightforward. Volatility is the variance in a party’s average overall vote change. From Table 1, the volatility for C1 would be the variance of 53 and 43, or 50, the square root of which, 7.1, represents the standard deviation of these numbers and thus provides an intuitive grasp of the extent of the party’s average change in support. District heterogeneity is the variance of a party’s average votes across districts. For C1, then, the district heterogeneity would be calcu-

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Note: C = country; Y = year; D = district.
lated as the variance of 54, 48, and 42, which equals 36. Again, the square root of this value (6) provides a sense of how evenly the party’s support is across the districts.

Where there is a local vote (i.e., a residual in the statistical analysis), as in C2, the calculations are much more involved, because the values used to calculate the variances across time and across districts must also account for the uneven manner in which the change in national support is distributed across the districts. In this case the model returns values of 44 for volatility, 18 for district heterogeneity, and 18 for the local vote. The values for volatility and district heterogeneity are lower than for C1 because, in a sense, the model attributes some of the cross-district and cross-time changes to the residual.

THE LOCAL VOTE IN 23 COUNTRIES

Morgenstern and Potthoff applied their method to data from the Americas and Europe, and we supplement those data by including Japan, Mexico, and the single-member district information for Germany.1 We also reoriented their French data.4

Following Morgenstern and Potthoff (2005), cases in our analysis are parties or coalitions that participated in at least two elections for the national legislature with consistent district boundaries and electoral laws (see Appendix A for a listing). We chose to run the analysis on the longest possible series of consecutive (post–World War II) elections in which the included parties or coalitions participated in all elections and data were available.5 The included countries have been chosen primarily on the grounds of data availability, but because the countries vary in terms of region, institutional arrangements, and levels of development, we are confident that this process of selection does not bias the results in any specific way.

3. We thank Ethan Scheiner for aid with the Japanese data, Kathleen Bawn for providing the German data, and Benito Nacif for the Mexican data. Following the system used by Morgenstern and Potthoff for single-member district races, we excluded Japanese districts where either the Liberal Democratic Party or the Japan Communist Party received fewer than 2.5% of the vote in either of the postreform elections. This led us to drop 42 districts, yielding a database of 258 districts. The three main parties all competed in every district for the included elections for Germany and Mexico.

4. On the basis of Caramani’s (2000) data set, Morgenstern and Potthoff used data on the 96 provinces of France, which constituted a simple aggregation of data from the more than 400 single-member districts. In this article, we use the data from all the single-member districts. We obtained these data from the French Centre d’Informatisation des Données Socio-Politiques.

5. More details about cases, raw data, and results for excluded cases and time periods are available at our Web site at http://faculty.leeu.edu/~sswindle/Papers/LocalVote/Main_LocalVote.htm/.
The analysis required several other data considerations. For the single-member district cases we threw out all districts where one of the major competitors failed to earn at least 2.5% of the vote in each election. For all cases, we required that parties or coalitions receive at least 10% of the national vote, because particularly small parties cannot have high local vote rates.\(^6\) Next, because our unit of observation is a party or coalition within a given electoral environment, we separately analyzed the parties in Japan both prior to and after their 1996 electoral reform. Further, because Germany and postreform Japan use two-tiered systems (single-member districts and proportional representation), we ran separate analyses for each tier.\(^7\)

Figure 1 summarizes the variance in our dependent variable, providing a first view of the degree to which parties have to concern themselves with campaigns in individual districts. The specific values for each our 56 cases

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6. Mathematically, it is possible to have high local vote rates for small parties, but this is not likely to occur empirically. See Morgenstern and Potthoff (2005) on these cutoffs.

7. There are also two tiers in Mexico, but voters have only a single vote, and the proportional representation seats are a function of the single-member district vote. The analysis therefore considers only the single-member districts for Mexico. In spite of distributing seats in just 10 proportional representation districts, the Germans collect data for the 248 constituencies in which single-member district candidates run. To provide an additional case in which there were a large number of districts in a proportional representation setting, our analysis uses the 248 districts. The local vote is not significantly different when calculated for the 10 proportional representation districts.
are listed in Appendix A. The differences are striking, implying a very different sort of electioneering and politics across the cases. We now turn our attention to trying to understand what leads parties on these widely varying paths.

HYPOTHESES DISCUSSION

As in discussions of the personal vote, there are “myriad features of a political system” (Cain et al., 1984, p. 111) that have potential impacts on the local vote. We break these potential explanations into three broad (though not necessarily mutually exclusive) categories: institutions that encourage candidates (or lists) to pursue individualistic or local-oriented rather than national party-oriented campaigns, factors that differentiate among districts, and party variables that explain differences among parties within a given country.

INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATE INCENTIVES

Presidentialism versus parliamentarism. The collective responsibility and fates of political parties in parliamentary systems are well understood. Because the executive in a parliamentary system is dependent on legislative confidence and because many parliamentary executives have the authority to dissolve parliament, the relationship between party leadership and individual candidates is very closely linked. Because of this fusion of executive and legislative responsibility, the likely governmental success of a party is enhanced by its ability to behave as a cohesive unit. Neither the executive nor the legislature can distance itself too far from the other if the party is to be successful. In presidential systems, the electoral fates of the two branches of government are independent, and therefore the necessity of strict party discipline is diminished. Executive authority is not dependent, at least formally, on the party’s electoral success in legislative elections.

This theoretical relation is largely accepted in explanations concerning the voting unity among partisans in the legislature, because parties in parliamentary systems tend to display much higher levels of party unity than their counterparts in presidential systems (though there are some notable exceptions). Our expectation, therefore, is that we should see a related effect in the electoral arena. That is, we expect that parties operating in a parliamentary government setting should have the greater incentive to restrict both the opportunity and the incentive for candidates (or districts) to differentiate themselves from one another.
Electoral systems. The literature on the personal vote (Ames, 2001; Cain et al., 1984, 1987; Carey & Shugart, 1995; Katz, 1986; Mainwaring, 1999; Samuels, 1999) and its predecessors (e.g., American Political Science Association, Committee on Political Parties, 1950; Stokes, 1965, 1967) explain how electoral systems can motivate candidates to focus their campaigns on themselves rather than their parties. Carey and Shugart’s (1995) codification of electoral systems in terms of their “incentives to cultivate a personal vote” has become a standard reference in the literature, and we build our hypothesis from their work.8

The authors of this literature suggest that the electoral system encourages the pursuit of personal votes when candidates can differentiate themselves from other members of their parties. The hypothesis, therefore, is that systems that use single-member districts or open lists, for example, will promote personal vote seeking, whereas closed-list systems (in which the district magnitude is large) will discourage such behavior. If electoral systems do drive personal vote-oriented campaigns, then we should find a relation between that variable and local vote scores. This is most clear where either single-member districts or closed-list systems are used, because the party and the candidate votes are indistinguishable under these rules. It should also hold true where there is intraparty preference voting, because these systems should lead to different levels of electoral success for the totality of the party in each district.

Campaign finance. The last candidate-level hypothesis that we consider concerns the effects of campaign finance. Historically, in the context of most parliamentary democracies, the control of campaign finance has been of little consequence. The inability of candidates to control how money is spent in parliamentary elections has led many scholars to conclude that money has played a very minor role in the electoral politics of most systems. However, this trend seems to be changing, and there has been an increase in the importance of money for electoral politics. The conventional views of modern electoral politics suggest that money is the means by which personal political reputations are built and the means through which elections are won and lost. Likewise, in the past few decades, the cost of operating political organizations and the cost of competing in elections has risen dramatically (Alexander & Shiratori, 1994; Gunlicks, 1993).

8. The authors are clear that the incentives to pursue personal votes do not necessarily translate into individualistic behavior. Much of the literature, however, has failed to heed that caution, and Carey and Shugart’s rank ordering of electoral systems has become a veritable proxy for a country’s level of personal vote seeking.
Rather than focusing on the amount of money spent in specific countries or elections, which presents both theoretical and empirical obstacles, our arguments focus on the issue of who controls campaign revenue and expenditure. In situations in which individual candidates are capable of generating and spending their own campaign money, we expect candidates to be more independent than in situations in which campaign money is controlled by party leadership. We expect, therefore, that the local vote will be greater where party leaders lack control of campaign funds.

**DISTRICT FACTORS**

*Number of electoral districts.* Countries vary markedly in terms of the number of electoral districts in which voters are grouped. This electoral system variable has the potential to influence the local vote by determining whether candidates must make their appeals to narrow or broad constituencies. There is also a mathematical effect, because at the extreme, at which there is only a single electoral district (e.g., the Israeli Knesset or the Uruguayan Senate), there can be no local vote. But as the number of districts grows, candidates will be able to direct their campaigns toward more narrow constituencies, and district-specific issues should grow in importance. This leads to our expectation that a higher number of districts should lead to greater local vote scores.

*Federalism and district characteristics.* The theoretical impetus for the effect of federalism on the level of the local vote rests on two factors: preference heterogeneity and decentralized political organization. In many cases, federal systems are adopted precisely because society is perceived as being composed of distinct social, and thus political, groups that deserve autonomous authority over certain political issues. In other words, one of the underlying philosophies of federal systems is the recognition and protection of subnational groups. It would not be surprising, then, to expect that federal electoral systems would allow for these disparate interests to be expressed in national elections. Across-district variation should increase, therefore, in direct relation to the extent to which subnational units differ from one another in terms of political preferences.

9. It is theoretically possible that voters could respond to these differing political preferences by forming distinct parties of their own instead of modifying the party labels of existing parties. In such instances, movements in a party’s support across districts would not be affected by preference heterogeneity. Our interest here, however, is in those cases in which different groups retain and modify party labels that are used across different regions.
The second reason to expect that federalism will affect the level of the local vote is administrative decentralization. One of the most important distinguishing characteristics of federalism is that political organization is constructed around subnational units. Therefore, even if a federal system emerged for reasons other than those described in the previous paragraph, the fact that political organization was decentralized might, in and of itself, be sufficient to foster political differentiation.

Either of these two considerations on its own may be insufficient to produce high levels of local vote, but in combination, they should produce dramatic effects. In other words, a heterogeneous population constrained by strong, centralizing institutions may be incapable of politically expressing those differences, and a homogeneous population with the freedom to express differences may simply have no incentive to do so. However, a heterogeneous population that is given the political opportunity to express those preferences will surely do so.

INTRACOUNTRY VARIABLES:
PARTY ORGANIZATION, IDEOLOGY, AND COHESION

Party organization. Although the variables above distinguish among countries, it is also necessary to distinguish among parties within a given country. A first variable in this class is the relationship between a party’s leaders and the rank-and-file candidates or legislators. Where leaders hold the keys to candidate nominations, campaign finance, and postlegislative careers, legislators are less independent than in countries where leaders have few tools to enforce discipline or complement their roles as opinion leaders.

As explained above, we follow Carey and Shugart (1995) in relating the centrality of leaders to the electoral system. But although the electoral system incentives apply equally to all parties in a given country, not all parties have responded by forming similar organizational structures. Brazil’s Worker’s Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores [PT]; Mainwaring, 1999), the leftist Frente Amplio in Uruguay (Morgenstern, 2001), and Chile’s rightist Unión Demócrata Independiente (Siavelis, 2000), for example, are much more centrally organized than other parties in their respective countries. Unlike their competitors, these parties are also disciplined in terms of voting behavior and cohesive in terms of the ideological orientations of their legislators (Morgenstern, 2004). These examples suggest that parties that are able to buck the decentralized norms in their countries and centralize control of campaign finance or perquisites that rank-and-file legislators seek should have lower local vote scores than others.
Ideology and cohesion. In comparison with catch-all parties that accept all comers, parties in which legislators have consistent ideological views—what we label cohesion—should have lower local vote scores, because candidates who are ideologically attuned should refrain from differentiating themselves. To a degree, cohesion may be higher in extremist parties (though in our sample, the correlation between the variables is essentially zero), and thus it would be unsurprising to find a relation of extremism and the local vote as well. On the other hand, some extremist parties make appeals to geographically concentrated groups (such as leftist parties in urban areas), which could offset the effect. We are thus ambivalent about how extremism should affect the local vote.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES AND STATISTICAL TESTS

In this section, we lay out bivariate analyses (see Appendix B for coding details) and a multiple regression to test our hypotheses. The bivariate analyses not only provide definitional clarity to our discussion but also allow for a plausibility check of our multivariate analysis that follows.

PRESIDENTIALISM VERSUS PARLIAMENTARISM

Our first hypothesis suggests that parliamentarism would depress local vote scores. Although there are some important outliers, the data do provide strong evidence in favor of this hypothesis. The histogram in Figure 2 displays this relationship, revealing a strong relationship between parliamentary government and low levels of local voting. The forces of parliamentary government clearly compel party leaders to control the local character of their parties, considering that nearly 80% of all parliamentary cases exhibit local voting scores of less than 10 (the major exceptions being parties in Japan and Canada). For presidential systems, a similar trend is not apparent, with the cases spread relatively evenly across the spectrum of local voting. 10

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

The next hypotheses relate to the effects of electoral systems on local voting. The expectation is that the greater the incentive for candidates to pursue

10. Although we have no specific expectation, it is interesting to note that local vote scores for the two semipresidential cases, Portugal and France, fall between the modal parliamentary and presidential cases.
personal votes, the greater should be local voting. The personal vote incentives, as we discussed briefly previously, are a function of the party leaders’ control over candidate nominations and the voters’ ability to choose which among a party’s candidates are elected. The specific factors are delineated by Katz (1986), with Carey and Shugart (1995) and Nielson (2003) both creating useful scales of electoral systems from these factors. With aid from Nielson and several country experts, we coded our cases according to his 9-point scale.  

Figure 3 displays a scattergram demonstrating the relationship between electoral system type and the level of local voting. The x-axis corresponds to Nielson’s (2003) index, with higher values indicating greater incentives to pursue personal vote strategies. The expectation, therefore, is that the data points should rise from the origin toward the top right corner of the graph. No such relationship seems to be present. Although the parliamentary and presidential cases cluster as before, all classes of electoral systems seem to generate varying levels of local voting.

11. Although it is quite common to use this type of ordinal scale in statistical analyses, this can be a hazardous practice because the jagged theoretical distances between the categories do not match the smooth difference between the numerical categories. Ordinal scales would be quite misleading if, for example, the theoretical implication of a move from 2 to 3 were more important than that from 4 to 5 or even from 4 to 9. Although we cannot fully discount the possibility that this issue contributed to our negative result, we did try various other coding schemes, and all yielded similar (nonsignificant) results.
THE NUMBER OF DISTRICTS

The hypothesis suggesting that the number of electoral districts would have a positive relation with the local vote does not hold up very well in the bivariate empirical test. The Pearson correlation between the local vote and the number of districts or its natural log is quite weak (.10 or .16, respectively), and a scatterplot of the data (not shown) does not suggest any particular pattern.

FEDERALISM AND DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS

In Figure 4, we provide a chart relating federalism and the local vote. Although the relationship portrayed here does not appear to be as strong as the one for regime type, there still seems to be reasonably strong evidence of a positive relationship between these two variables. Note, for example, that there is a much higher concentration of nonfederal cases at low levels of local voting and also that countries with the highest levels of local voting cluster on the federal side of the graph. This relationship appears to persist even once the issue of regime type is considered.

Although the federal variable appears to have significant explanatory power of its own, recall that we hypothesized an interaction between federal-

12. In addition to a dummy variable, we attempted to apply a measure of federalism on the basis of spending by different levels of government. The data in the International Monetary Fund’s (2001) Government Finance Statistics Yearbook provide such information, but their quality is questionable and the data are incomplete for our set of countries.
ism and the heterogeneity of preferences among districts. That is, whereas federal countries that separate widely differing groups would likely result in very disparate voting patterns, the voting patterns for districts in a federal country whose districts are distinguished by their ethnic, racial, or economic makeup would be more likely to respond to elections in similar ways.\footnote{This interaction would seemingly explain the difference in the local vote between the Canadians and the Germans (especially if Canada’s single-member districts are also added to the equation). It is important to note, however, that running the Canadian data while excluding Quebec has only a limited effect on the results.}

It is difficult to develop an empirical test of this interactive hypothesis because there are few data on the regional concentration of ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups that are comparable to a wide range of countries. Shankar and Shah (2001) provide several indicators of regional economic distinctions for 25 countries, but only 8 of their cases are in our sample. Further, because the less developed countries of Latin America have considerably more unequal distribution of income among regions than in Europe, there is an important correlation between their indicators for regional economic differences and presidentialism (though the United States presents an important exception). An alternative, though not fully satisfactory, way to test this proposition is to use an ethnic fractionalization index. These indices give a measure of the “effective” number of ethnic groups but do not consider the degree

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{federalism_and_local_vote.png}
\caption{Federalism and the local vote.}
\end{figure}
to which those groups are geographically concentrated. Still, if we can assume that ethnic groups congregate, these data do provide a reasonable proxy for the preference heterogeneity among districts.

In our tests, we have used Krain’s (1997) ethnic fractionalization index. That variable has a strong correlation with the local vote, about .57. If we consider the correlation of this index among just the federal or just the unitary states, that figure drops to .50 and .40, respectively, but this seems to underestimate the strong relation. Figure 5 divides the 56 cases by whether they are federal or not and graphs the Krain index versus our local vote scores. It shows that although both unitary cases as well as those with low ethnic fractionalization have low local votes scores, working in tandem, the two variables almost always are associated with a low local vote score. The figure also indicates that most federalist countries have relatively high levels of ethnic fractionalization and that the local vote has a large range within these cases, but never dips particularly low. Thus although unitary systems seem to be associated with a low local vote, federalism can accommodate both moderate and high levels.

14. We also tested the Taylor index in our regressions, finding no substantive differences.
CAMPAIGN FINANCES

Testing hypotheses related to campaign finance presents another data problem, because there is not sufficient comparative information for systematic coding. Several sources (Alcántara Sáez & Freidenberg, 2002; Alexander, 1989; Alexander & Shiratori, 1994; Alvarez, 1997; Burnell & Ware, 1998; del Castillo, 1985; Gunlicks, 1993; Zovatto & del Castillo, 1998), however, do allow a preliminary stab.

Brazil provides a useful test case, because one of its parties, PT, has a much lower local vote than others in the country. Because PT also stands out within Brazil for its centralized organization and control of resources, there is a first bit of evidence that these variables can counter the forces of presidentialism, federalism, and open-list electoral system that drive high local vote rates for Brazil’s other parties.

Second, as in the United States, Canadian and French legislative candidates have significant responsibility for financing their campaigns. Control of income and expenditures in countries such as Sweden and Austria, by contrast, is in the hands of national party elites. This correlates with the high local vote scores in the former countries and lower local vote scores in the latter. The Canadian experience is perhaps the most relevant, because it stands out among the parliamentary systems in terms of the decentralization of funding. According to Gunlicks (1993, Table 10.1), Canada is the only developed country in our sample that gives public subsidies to legislative candidates. Further, Canada, along with Germany, offers subsidies to state or provincial parties instead of just the national party. This decentralization, then, may help explain why Canada is distinguished for a very high local vote. Still, the low local vote in Germany shows that there is no linear relation between finance systems and the local vote, because candidates there must also raise funds and control how they are spent. Perhaps, then, candidate control of finance is a necessary but not sufficient explanation for the local vote.

PARTY IDEOLOGY AND COHESION

We explained above that cohesive parties should have lower local vote scores, and though ideological extremism could have a similar effect, we were less confident about that result. To test, we considered a party’s mean score on a left-right scale as an indicator of extremism and the standard deviation on that scale as an indicator of cohesiveness. Bivariate tests do not give much support to either of these hypotheses. A simple Pearson correlation score between cohesion and the local vote has the right sign, but the statistic
is quite low, just .2. The correlation is even smaller, in fact negative, for the extremism variable.

**MULTIVARIATE TEST**

A full test of these hypotheses, of course, requires a multivariate model. On the basis of the preceding discussion, our regressions posit that local voting is a function of the executive system, the personal vote seeking incentives in the electoral system, the number of electoral districts (as a natural log), federalism, the parties’ position on the left-right scale, ideological cohesion among party members, ethnic heterogeneity of districts, and that final variable interacted with federalism. The regressions below also include the parties’ average vote (in the last election in the series) as a control variable.

Before proceeding with a discussion of the results, it is important to acknowledge the possibility that a regression on the local vote that includes multiple observations for any individual country has the potential for contamination due to the possible lack of independence among the in-country observations on the dependent variable. In this case, however, we expect that this dependence will be limited, because we have only one observation for countries that have just two parties or coalitions, and we have excluded from the analysis the numerous small parties that compete in all our other cases. Furthermore, there are countries in our analysis (e.g., Brazil) where the parties display radically different levels of local voting, and we are interested in exploring these disparities. Still, to allay concerns and to validate our statistical conclusions, after presenting regressions that include multiple observations per country, we collapse our data and analyze the average local vote score for each country or electoral system.

Table 2 lists the results of four specifications of our model, all of which support the findings of the bivariate tests. The first regression includes all of our cases; the next two regressions separate the sample into two parts on the basis of the executive system; and the final regression, as noted, runs the tests on the basis of a single observation per country or electoral system.

Recall that Figure 2 showed that almost all parliamentary cases have low local vote scores but that presidential cases are spread across the map. Our expectation, then, is that a dummy variable for the parliamentary cases should be strongly negative, and the coefficient representing semipresidentialism should also be negative but smaller. The regression per-

15. Unfortunately, a lack of sufficiently comparative campaign finance data has required us to drop that independent variable from our multivariate analysis.
forms as expected: The coefficient on the parliamentary dummy variable in Regression 1 indicates that cases operating under parliamentary systems will, on average, have local vote scores about 16 points below presidential cases, whereas the impact of semipresidentialism works in the same direction but is less powerful (and is statistically insignificant).\textsuperscript{16}

Although the finding about regime type is strong, it is important to recall from Figure 2 that not all presidential cases have higher local vote scores than parliamentary cases; other variables do play important roles. Consistent with our bivariate analysis, the electoral system did not approach statistical significance ($p = .6$). Next, we had not found a significant role for a party’s or coalition’s degree of extremism, and that variable proved insignificant in the regression. But in the only result not consistent with bivariate tests, the

\textsuperscript{16} We also tested for the impact of a fused election of presidents and legislators, using a dummy variable for Uruguay and Bolivia. This variable was insignificant, but it raised to statistical significance the interaction of federalism and ethnic heterogeneity.
regression returned a strong statistical relationship between ideological cohesion and the local vote. The coefficient on that variable indicates that the least cohesive groups would have a local vote about 30 points higher than the most cohesive groups. Finally, although the first regression returns weak p values for federalism and the ethic fragmentation variable individually, the interaction between these variables is strong and significant.

Figure 2 also suggested a nonlinear relation between regime type and the local vote; parliamentarism seemed to reduce the local vote, but presidentialism could accommodate parties with either high or low local vote levels. To capture this effect, the second and third regressions split the sample. The magnitudes of the coefficients, as well as their statistical significance, vary sharply between the two regressions, thus substantiating the idea that the variables work differently in the two regime types.

The middle two regressions also help sort out the impact of the other variables. Most notably, although it is insignificant elsewhere, the electoral system variable gains significance in the test on the parliamentary cases. We suspect that this result is a function of picking up the high local vote of some of the parties in Japan and Canada, two of the parliamentary systems that use electoral systems hypothesized to give the greatest incentives for the personal vote (and hence an increase in the local vote). That result is tempered by the statistically significant result on the natural log of the number of districts, which is strongly related (r = .61) with the electoral system type (when testing among the parliamentary systems). That is, because the systems that purportedly provide incentives to cultivate a personal vote are also those that have larger numbers of districts, the two significant variables partially offset each other. For example, the model predicts that for parties in prereform Japan, the electoral system would generate an increase of 44 points from its base score, but that number would then be reduced by about 18 points for the large number of districts.

The results for the presidential systems (Regression 3) are also interesting, because there is greater diversity in the values of the dependent variable. The results, however, give no further credence to the importance of the electoral system in driving the variance, and the variables measuring cohesion or

17. Note that the variable could be labeled “lack of cohesion” because a higher standard deviation on a party’s left-right placement indicates less cohesion. This explains the positive sign on the variable.

18. The negative sign on the number of districts variable is unexpected. Recall that our expectation was that a higher number of districts would lead to increased differentiation. We thus conducted further tests with this variable in the multivariate context, concluding that the negative sign is the result of a complex correlational relationship between the number of districts (or its log), federalism, and the personal vote.
ideology fail to meet standard levels of significance. Cohesion, however, is somewhat correlated with the federalism variable in this subset of cases ($r = .37$), and it does gain statistical significance if the federalism variable is dropped from the equation. The regression also provides more evidence about the importance of interacting ethnic fractionalization and federalism.

The fourth regression applies the analysis to one observation (averages) per country or electoral system to obviate concerns about dependence among the intracountry observations. The outcome mirrors the other results, showing the importance of the executive system, the average vote, cohesion, and the interaction of ethnic homogeneity and federalism.

In sum, the regressions provide strong support for our main hypotheses. The nature of the executive system and federalism when combined with an ethnically heterogeneous population appear to have the strongest impact on the level of local voting, and there is also some evidence for the role of ideological cohesion. Finally, the evidence in favor of an important role for the electoral system appears rather weak, though these systems may affect the local vote for political groups competing in parliamentary systems.

**CONCLUSION**

This article has provided what we believe to be the first broadly comparative examination of the importance of district forces in electoral politics. Our dependent variable, the local vote, captures the degree to which a party’s legislative support is a function of its legislative candidates and/or district characteristics. The analysis of this variable provides a comparative view of the degree to which politics for a given party is either all local or all national, the answer to which has important implications for the nature of electoral competition, the strength of political parties, party or candidate electoral strategies, partisan electoral success, the nature of public policy, and so forth.

In seeking to explain why some parties have more local or more national foci, we have explored the theoretical bases and empirical support for several institutional, ideological, and sociological variables. These sets of variables fit into two baskets, those that explain intercountry differences and those that explain variance among parties within a given country.

Within the institutional set of variables, regime type seems to play the most dominant role. Specifically, parliamentarism appears to restrict the local vote (with some important exceptions), whereas presidentialism appears to accommodate all levels of local voting. The other important positive finding is that federalism, when combined with ethnic fractionalization, accounts for a significant part of the variation as well.
Finally, there was an important negative institutional finding. In spite of the wide literature on the effects of electoral systems on fostering a personal vote, we found only limited evidence that electoral systems affect the local vote. Although the electoral systems may create an incentive to cultivate a personal or local vote, this does not appear to necessarily translate into an ability to do so. Our findings seem to suggest that at least some parties have found ways to counteract those incentives or that the incentives generated by the electoral system are swamped by other factors. If, for example, a party controlled campaign finance and postlegislative careers, then an electoral system that would incite a candidate to pursue a local vote would have limited impact. On the other end of the spectrum, party hierarchies that are built at the provincial or state level could override an electoral system that would be predicted to generate limited local voting at the national level. The example of Argentina, where parties are decentralized in spite of a closed-list system, would support this interpretation. In sum, although “ballot,” “pool,” and “vote” may provide some incentives to legislators, other facets of the political system may counteract and overshadow that limited set of incentives.

The institutional focus of the preceding discussion provides significant insight into the variation of the local vote across countries but cannot explain the significant variation in the local vote for parties within the same country. To explore this variation, we have also explored a set of ideological and sociological variables. Our analysis suggests that the relative ideological cohesiveness of political parties has some impact on a party’s ability to manage local voting, but we found little support for the role of extremism. We also found that ethnic heterogeneity by itself seems to have little impact but that its presence is essential for the institution of federalism to accommodate high levels of local voting. Finally, the qualitative evidence suggested that control of campaign finance may have an important effect, but it was not possible to test that relation in the multivariate analysis.

In sum, our analysis points toward the factors that influence local voting, a variable that has important implications for legislative behavior, campaign styles and strategies, public policy, and party politics. Constitutional engineers can take heart that some of these factors are manipulable institutions (e.g., the executive system and federalism), but they may be frustrated by our finding of the limited influence of the electoral system on one hand and the substantial impact of structural factors (e.g., ethnic fractionalization) on the other. Although strategic constitutional manipulation may be an effective tool to alter the importance of local factors in any given system, its potential impact appears to be limited by the structural environment in which electoral politics is conducted.
Local Voting, by Party or Coalition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country, Party (Years)</th>
<th>Local Vote</th>
<th>Country, Party (Years)</th>
<th>Local Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria, Volkspartei (1971-1994)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Mexico, PAN (SMD; 1997-2000)</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia, MNR (1985-1997)</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>Mexico, PRI (SMD; 1997-2000)</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil, PT (1990-1998)</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>The Netherlands, Volkspartij (1986-1998)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia, Conservative Party (1974-1986)</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>Portugal, Alliance CDS/PSD</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany, CDU/CSU (SMD; 1980-1987)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Sweden, MS (1948-1991)</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan, DPJ (PR; 1996-2000)</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>Venezuela, AD (1968-1983)</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan, JCP (PR; 1996-2000)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Venezuela, Copei (1968-1983)</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: More data, including results for smaller parties and other time periods, are available at our Web site at http://faculty.leeu.edu/~sswindle/Papers/LocalVote/Main_LocalVote.html. PJ = Partido Justialista; UCR = Unión Cívica Radical; ADN = Acción Democrática Nacionalista; MNR = Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario; PFL = Partido da Frente Liberal; PMDB = Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro; PT = Partido dos Trabalhadores; PC = Progressive Conservative; CDU = Christlich Demokratische Union; CSU = Christlich-Soziale Union; SMD = single-member district; SDP = Soziale Demokratische Partei; PR = proportional representation; LDP = Liberal Democratic Party; DPJ = Democratic Party of Japan; JCP = Japan Communist Party; PAN = Partido Acción Nacional; PRD = Partido de la Revolución Democrática; PRI = Partido Revolucionario Institucional; CDS = Partido do Centro Democrático Social; PSD = Partido Social Democrata; MS = Moderata Samlingspartiet; AD = Acción Democrática.
a. Calculated using PR votes in the 300 SMDs.
b. In cases in which there are just two competitors, the results are the same for the two parties. The figures referring to the average vote refer to the Concertación in Chile and the Democrats in the United States.
c. Calculated using the 248 SMD constituencies. When running the data from 1980 to 1987 on the 10 PR districts, the results are remarkably similar. Note that the FDP gained over our threshold of 10% of the vote in the PR races but under 8% for the SMD races.

APPENDIX B
Independent Variable Definitions in Regression

Parliamentarism and semipresidentialism: separate dummy variables; presidentialism is left out category.

Federalism: coded 1 for federal countries (Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Colombia, Canada, Germany, Mexico, and the United States).

Personal vote: Nielson’s (2003) coding scheme runs from 1 (closed lists) to 9 (self-selecting candidates and either intraparty competition or single-member districts). We also attempted modified versions of that scheme and a system of dummy variables that parallel the variables in Nielson’s index. The index, however, is insufficient to account for the two-tiered systems, because we are measuring their electoral results separately. Thus working in consultation with Nielson and two Japanese specialists, we coded the single-member district elections 5 and the proportional representation elections 4. The two-tiered system in Germany is less problematic, because the parties keep tight control over nominations, thus earning both tiers a coding of 1.

Ln of number of districts: natural log of the number of electoral districts in the country. For systems that use both single-member districts and plurality, the variable was calculated separately for each tier.

Average vote: unweighted average of vote percentages across districts, for last year in series. In cases in which a party failed to compete (for the systems using single-member district systems), the calculation includes only those districts where the party competed. Note that our selection rule, that parties (or coalitions) were only included if they reached a threshold of 10%, was based on the vote total in the last election of the series. The mean value of this variable was 33.4, with a standard deviation of 12.3.

Extremism and cohesion: For most of our cases, the extremism and cohesion scores were based on Huber and Inglehart (1995), a survey of country experts that places parties on a left-right scale and includes the standard deviation of those scores. Extremism is measured as the absolute distance from a party’s position on those 10-point scales to 5.5 (using 5 as the center of the scale has no bearing on the outcome).
Huber and Inglehart’s database, however, does not include all of Latin America, and thus we supplemented the data with scores from Alcántara Sáez’s (multiple dates) surveys of Latin American legislators. That survey asks the legislators about their own parties’ placement on a left-right scale as well as asking them to place other parties. For each party, we took an average of these two scores. We then scaled Alcántara Sáez’s scores to Huber and Inglehart’s scores by comparing the parties covered in both studies. This resulted in only a small adjustment for the mean placements (a scaling factor of 1.03) but a relatively large adjustment (1.62) when scaling the standard deviations. The mean for the cohesion variable is 0.80, with a range of 0 to 1.47. The corresponding statistics for the extremism variable are 1.88, 0.25, and 4.50.

Ethnic homogeneity (Krain index): data from Krain (1997), available at http://www.wooster.edu/polisci/mkrajin/Ethfrac.html. In our cases, the mean was 0.20, the lowest value was 0.01, and the highest value was 0.68.

REFERENCES


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