Competing Principals, Political Institutions, and Party Unity in Legislative Voting

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Almost all legislators are subordinate to party leadership within their assemblies. Institutional factors shape whether, and to what degree, legislators are also subject to pressure from other principals whose demands may conflict with those of party leaders. This article presents a set of hypotheses on the nature of competing pressures driven by formal political institutions and tests the hypotheses against a new dataset of legislative votes from across 19 different countries. Voting unity is lower where legislators are elected under rules that provide for intraparty competition than where party lists are closed, marginally lower in federal than unitary systems, and the effects on party unity of being in government differ in parliamentary versus presidential systems. In the former, governing parties are more unified than the opposition, win more, and suffer fewer losses due to disunity. In systems with elected presidents, governing parties experience no such boosts in floor unity, and their legislative losses are more apt to result from cross-voting.

Scholarship in comparative politics frequently claims that the design of formal institutions affects the internal unity of parties. For example, parties in parliamentary systems are generally characterized as highly unified, whereas those in presidential systems are more fractious and less disciplined, with resulting difficulty for presidents in the legislative arena (Diermeier and Feddersen 1998; Hix, Noury, and Roland 2002; Persson and Tabellini 2003; Shugart 1998). Federalism, by encouraging the organization of parties at the subnational level, is regarded as fostering divisions within parties at the national level (Mainwaring 1999; Weyland 1996). Electoral systems that provide for competition among legislative candidates within the same party for personal votes are portrayed as encouraging disunity relative to closed lists election rules (Ames 1995; Golden and Chang 2001; Hix 2004).

These assertions are not uniformly accepted. Based on a broad cross-national study, Cheibub, Przeworski, and Saiegh (2004) argue that presidents are on par with parliamentary executives in forming legislative coalitions to pass legislation. Based on a case study of Brazil, a presidential federal system with intraparty electoral competition—all the characteristics listed above as undermining party unity—Figueiredo and Limongi (2000) argue that various provisions centralizing control over the legislative agenda provide leverage to control wayward parliamentarians and govern as efficiently as governments that confront none of these institutional obstacles ostensibly do.

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Why should we care about party unity in legislative voting? First, legislatures are where major public policy decisions are ratified. In all democracies, budgets, taxes, treaties, and the like must be approved by legislative vote. Voting behavior is of intrinsic interest because the stakes are high. Second, political parties serve as information conduits to citizens. Parties can pledge to support comprehensive policy platforms on which individual politicians cannot credibly claim to have much impact. Whether voters can know what they are getting in elections depends partly on legislative voting unity. If the voting behavior of a party’s legislators is unrelated to the positions in its national platform, then the party’s label has no informational value. Third, unity affects the ability of parties to win votes and shape policy. Unity determines whether governments can act decisively or, by contrast, whether each legislative decision requires separate deliberation and the construction of a distinct support coalition. In this sense, party unity is linked to the ability of parties and governments to deliver the promises in their platforms (Bowler, Farrell, and Katz 1999).

The lack of consensus over whether and how institutions matter to party unity is possible in part because there has not been a broad cross-national study of legislative voting unity sufficient to allow for variance in the institutional factors of interest. Morgenstern (2004) makes the most ambitious contribution along these lines, but his empirical analysis includes five countries, all presidential, which limits his ability to test for the effects of constitutional structure, and its interaction with party-level factors, on voting unity. The cost of collecting data on legislative votes presents a special challenge, because many assemblies do not regularly record votes at the level of the individual legislator and do not make the records easily available even when they do. This article tests a number of hypotheses regarding institutional effects on party unity, and on the relationship between unity and winning and losing votes, by examining legislative voting records across hundreds of parties in lower chambers across 19 countries.

In the following section, a number of hypotheses are spelled out regarding the effects of institutions on legislative voting unity. The next section presents a number of measures of party unity in legislative voting and discusses some methodological issues they raise, particularly with respect to cross-national comparison. The empirical data are then presented, showing party unity indices based on recorded vote data from all 19 legislative chambers. The next section presents the models used to test the hypotheses against the data, followed by the results. The article concludes by discussing the implications for the study of democratic institutions.

Hypotheses: Legislative Parties and Competing Principals

Voting unity within legislative parties might be driven by three distinct sources: cohesiveness, discipline, or agenda control. Cohesiveness implies that elections produce legislative parties whose members have similar preferences. Discipline refers to the combination of carrots and sticks, generally administered by party leaders, used to reward voting loyalty and deter or punish breaches in discipline. Agenda control implies that those who control the flow of legislative traffic steer it so as to determine whether proposals that would divide a given party or coalition come to a vote.

The competing principals theory advanced here derives hypotheses based on electoral sources of party cohesiveness and the institutional resources that drive discipline within parties. The specifics of agenda control vary across the countries included in the analysis, with control vested in chamber directorates in some cases, monopolized by executives drawn from the chamber in others, and shared with independently elected executives in others. In all cases, fundamental matters of public policy are put to the vote before legislators who, in turn, are pressured by legislative party leaders, and to varying degrees by other actors as well. The crux of the competing principals story is that when more than one actor (principal) controls resources to influence legislators’ votes, divergence in the demands of these principals will reduce legislative party unity.

Party leaders are, nearly universally, important actors to whose demands legislators might respond. Legislative theory suggests parties are essential components of legislative organization, and empirically they are ubiquitous (Cox 2005). National legislatures in all democratic systems are organized by parties, and almost all legislators are members of party groups within their assemblies. To varying degrees, the leaders of these groups control resources—appointment to key committees, control over the legislative agenda, office space, staff, and perks—valued by rank-and-file members. Legislative party leaders may also share command of national party organizations, which often control resources critical to legislators’ political career prospects, such as nominations for reelection to the legislature or for other offices, appointed posts, and access to campaign finance. Thus, virtually all legislators are subject to influence by at least one principal: their legislative party leadership. Whether they are subject to pressure from other, competing principals depends on the institutional context in which they operate.
Now consider the extent to which legislators’ electoral connection to voters might pull them in directions contrary to the demands of legislative party leaders. Where party leaders exercise strong influence over a legislator’s election, the demands to which the legislator must respond in order to pursue reelection and the demands from those who control the distribution of resources within the assembly are consistent. The principal to whom the legislator must respond on both counts is the party leadership. Where voters exercise relatively more control over legislators’ electoral prospects and party leaders less, legislators may face demands from their electoral principals that compete with those of party leaders. The rules by which legislators are elected affect their relative responsiveness to party leaders and to alternative interests in the electorate (Hix 2004; Shugart, Valdini, and Suominen 2005). Where party leaders draw up lists of candidates that are presented in general elections and cannot be altered by voters, or can be altered only under extraordinary circumstances, electoral responsiveness to a competing principal is minimized. By contrast, where candidates compete against copartisans for voter support and that competition determines which candidates from a party win seats, then legislators have reason to cultivate reputations distinct from their copartisans.\(^{1}\)

\(H1:\) Party unity should be lower where legislative candidates compete against members of their own parties for personal votes than where nominations are controlled by party leaders and electoral lists are closed.

Next, consider the effects of unitary versus federal systems of government. Under the former, the strongest level of party organization is generally national, the level at which the leaders who control the party group in the national legislature operate. Under federal systems, by contrast, the primary level of party organization, where politicians build careers and win or lose renomination for office, is often a subnational political unit (e.g., state, province, etc.). Heterogeneity across these units may be reflected within parties at the national level, subjecting legislators to competing pulls from principals at the national versus subnational levels and undermining voting unity in the national legislature.

\(H2:\) Party unity should be lower in federal systems than in unitary ones.

Perhaps the most prominent proposition regarding the effects of formal institutions on party unity is that the authority of the executive in parliamentary systems to offer legislative proposals as matters of confidence accounts for more unified parties in parliamentary than in presidential systems. The intuition is that the confidence provision raises the stakes for all parties because rejecting such a measure triggers the collapse of the government, and possibly early elections. If a party splits, and loses as a result, on a vote subject to a confidence provision, the costs are greater than just foregoing the new policy for the status quo, or vice versa (Bagehot [1872] 1961; Cox 1987; Diermeier and Feddersen 1998; Huber 1996). This implies the following hypothesis.

\(H3:\) Party unity should be higher in systems with confidence vote provisions than those without.

The confidence vote story is compelling, but not without proviso. In the first place, even where confidence vote provisions exist, they are not formally summoned on most votes, so technically there is room for party voting disunity that does not threaten government survival. Moreover, the confidence vote is not restricted to pure parliamentary systems. The best-known case combining a confidence vote provision for the cabinet with a more-than-ceremonial elected presidency is the French Fifth Republic (1958–present), but such hybrid arrangements are common among newer regimes (Frye 1997). In short, the distinction between regimes with and without confidence vote provisions does not map perfectly onto the distinction between those with and without elected presidents and, to the extent that presidents affect voting unity, the effect may confound that of the confidence vote in hybrid systems.

The competing principals argument advanced here holds that directly elected presidents can undermine party discipline, but the mechanics are distinct from the logic of confidence vote behind \(H3\). Presidential elections allow the possibility that politicians whose political careers and fortunes are built outside the legislative party system occupy the chief executive office, and they may use their influence and authority toward ends at odds with legislative voting discipline, even within their own parties.


Table 1 Legislators’ Principals under Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Government, and Opposition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opposition Parties</th>
<th>Government Parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentaryism</td>
<td>Legislative party leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidentialism</td>
<td>Legislative party leadership fused with executive authority and resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**H4: Reinforces party unity**
1. Legislative party leadership.
2. Additional influence from the president, which may reinforce or contradict legislative party leaders’ directives.

**H5: Undermines party unity relative to governing parties under parliamentarism**

(Linz 1994). Competing principals in this context suggests simply that when more than one actor controls resources the legislators value, these principals may pull in different directions, sowing divisions within legislative parties. In another context, for example, Hix (2002, 2004) demonstrates that legislators in the European Union Parliament are responsive to both national parties, which control their nominations and elections, and EU Parliament parties, which control access to resources within that assembly, and that institutional rules endowing the former principals with greater resources undermine voting unity within EU Parliament party groups. This article suggests that presidents can cause an analogous phenomenon within parties in national legislatures.

The next two hypotheses distinguish the expected impact of participating in government on party unity in systems with and without powerful presidents. The central assumption is that the resources of the executive branch reinforce the influence of legislative party leaders in the absence of a president, but can undermine this influence if vested in an independent president. Consider first the no-president scenario. In parliamentary systems, the party leadership is the principal most influential over any given legislator, and in the case of government parties, the legislative party leaders and the executive are one in the same. Where legislative and executive leadership is fused, parties in government have more resources to impose discipline than do those in opposition (Laver and Shepsle 1996). This suggests the following:

**H4: Party unity should be higher in governing parties than opposition parties under parliamentarism.**

Under presidentialism, the situation is more complex. Legislators are subordinate to legislative party leaders, but in addition to these principals, legislators in the president’s party (or coalition) are subject to influence from a chief executive with an independent electoral base and endowed with often considerable arrays of constitutional authorities—budgetary, regulatory, and often the ability to influence the legislative agenda directly (Amorim Neto, Carey, and Shugart 1997; Siavelis 2000). When the two principals of governing-party legislators concur on a given measure before the assembly, the effect should be similar to that under parliamentarism, providing a boost to unity owing to the additional resources with which the president can pressure legislators. On the other hand, when the president and legislative party leadership disagree and pull in opposite directions, party unity should suffer in governing parties. Whether the net effect of competing principals is to generate lower voting unity among governing parties than opposition parties depends on how frequently the principals pull in opposite directions and on their relative influence over legislators. To the extent the principals compete at all, however, voting unity in government parties should suffer under presidential systems relative to parliamentary systems.

**H5: Party unity in governing parties should be lower under presidentialism than under parliamentarism.**

The logic of H4 and H5 is summarized in Table 1.

**Measures of Voting Unity**

For each party on each vote, a measure of overall voting unity is calculated: one of success/failure, and one of failure contingent on voting disunity. The first is familiar to scholars of legislatures and was developed by Stuart Rice (1925) over 80 years ago. RICE scores reflect levels of
cross-voting among members of the same party and are calculated as follows:

\[
\text{RICE}_{ij} = \|\%\text{AYE}_{ij} - \%\text{NAY}_{ij}\| \text{ for party } i \text{ on vote } j.
\]

Percent aye and nay are calculated as proportions of those voting either aye or nay, and so sum to 100%. The RICE score can range from zero (equal numbers vote aye and nay) to one (all members who cast votes vote together).

Next, for each party, \(i\), on each vote, \(j\), calculate whether the party wins, \(\text{WIN}_{ij}\). One can infer a party’s preference on a given measure from the side supported by the majority of its voting members. More precisely, for every party, \(i\), on every vote, \(j\):

\[
\text{PREF}_{ij} = \{\text{Approve (AYE}_{ij} > \text{NAY}_{ij}), \text{Reject (NAY}_{ij} < \text{AYE}_{ij}), \text{No Preference (AYE}_{ij} = \text{NAY}_{ij})\}
\]

Thus, if most of a party’s votes were “aye” and the measure passed, it counts as a win; if most of its votes were “nay” and the measure passed, it counts as a loss, etc.

The last indicator is derived from \(\text{RICE}_{ij}\) and \(\text{WIN}_{ij}\) and reflects whether a party suffers a loss on a given legislative vote due to a breakdown of unity. \(\text{RLOSER}_{ij}\) takes a value of 1 if party \(i\) loses on vote \(j\) even though, given how all other legislators voted, party \(i\) could have won had all its voting members voted together. More precisely:

\[
\text{RLOSER}_{ij} = 1 \text{ IF: }
\]

\[
\text{PREF}_{ij} = \text{Approve AND Outcome}_{ij} = \text{Reject AND Total AYE}_{ij} + \text{NAY}_{ij} > \text{Threshold}_{ij}
\]

\[
\text{OR IF: }
\]

\[
\text{PREF}_{ij} = \text{Reject AND Outcome}_{ij} = \text{Approve AND Total AYE}_{ij} - \text{AYE}_{ij} < \text{Threshold}_{ij}
\]

where, for every vote, \(j\):

- Total \(\text{AYE}_{ij} = \text{AYE}_{nij} + \text{AYE}_{narij}\)
- \(\text{Threshold}_{ij}\) = number of votes necessary to approve the measure
- \(\text{Outcome}_{ij} = [\text{Approve, Reject}]\)

### Measuring Voting Unity in Small Parties

The measures of voting unity confront three types of limitations associated with small parties. First, the RICE score is not relevant for a party with only one member because cross-voting is, by definition, impossible. Thus, RICE scores are not calculated for parties with only one legislator or for votes on which only one member of a party participates. Second, RLOSER is calculated only for parties where \(N > 2\). RLOSER is derived from simulated vote outcomes under alternative, “more unified” permutations of a party’s votes, given the party’s inferred preference on the vote. Where \(N = 2\), the party either has no inferred preference (split 1-1), or is perfectly unified, in which case no alternative, more unified, permutation is possible. The third consideration is that RICE is subject to upward bias as a combined function of a party’s size and the underlying proclivity of its members to vote together. The bias is more severe the smaller the party and the less inclined its members are to vote alike. In calculating indices of RICE scores for each party, one can correct for this bias according to a method endorsed by Desposato (2005).

### Nonvotes

Interpreting nonvoting is not as straightforward as interpreting ayes and nays. Some studies of recorded votes seek to interpret the motivation behind nonvotes, in order to infer whether they likely represent breaks with party discipline—for example, if legislators were present for some votes in a session, but not others (Ames 2002; Haspel, Remington, and Smith 1998). This approach implicitly attributes analogous meaning to nonvoting and to voting, regarding each as an equivalent action for the purposes of measuring party voting unity. Except under very specific conditions, however—when the threshold for passing a motion is set in absolute terms, as a proportion of the total membership of the chamber—such an approach can mismeasure the effects of nonvoting.

Consider first the most common scenario, where the threshold to pass a measure is relative, set as the proportion of those casting aye or nay votes. If a legislator disagrees with her party’s position, she might either withhold her support from the party by not voting (whether through abstention, or not showing up, or simply not pressing her button), or she could not only withhold her support but also give her vote to the other side. The latter is a more visible breach of unity than the former and does correspondingly more damage to the party’s collective brand name; and if the vote is close, the latter is twice as damaging to the party’s prospects of winning than the former.

In some legislatures, however, thresholds are set in absolute terms, as a percentage of the full membership of the assembly. Among the cases analyzed in this article, both the Russian Duma and the Nicaraguan Assembly require approval from majorities of all members to pass any measure. Under such rules, nonvotes, whatever their intent, are equivalent to nays in their effect on outcomes. For the purposes of calculating RICE and RLOSER, the point of departure here is to treat them as such.\(^2\) This is,

\(^2\)I also calculate RICE scores for such assemblies based on the alternative procedure of discounting nonvotes altogether, and I present the average party indices for Nicaragua and Russia by that method below. That approach necessarily overestimates party voting unity as it affects vote outcomes (because any legislator who does not
admittedly, not a perfect solution, because parties may tolerate nonvoting by members who could have been mobilized, if necessary. A nonvoting equilibrium arrangement might be advantageous both to party leaders, as a means of disguising visible displays of internal dissent, and to individual legislators who are beholden to other commitments besides attendance and voting on the floor (e.g., committee work, constituency service, or simply outside professional obligations). If this is the case, then counting nonvotes as nays will correctly code the votes of members who would have voted nay, but will incorrectly code their counterparts.  

To sum up, in calculating voting unity scores, nonvotes are treated according to their effects on vote outcomes. They are counted as nays when their effects on outcomes are equivalent to nay votes. Because of ambiguity in the difference between the meaning of nonvotes under absolute majority voting rules, all the quantitative analyses reported in this article are replicated dropping the two absolute majority cases: Russia and Nicaragua. Doing so never affects any of the results reported.

The RICE Index: Weighting Votes by CLOSEness

Because the objects of this analysis are legislative party groups, it is necessary to aggregate the vote-specific measures of voting unity into indices that summarize, for each party, the overall tendency toward unity across all the recorded votes in a given legislature. One problem with such indices is that many votes in most legislatures are lopsided, either because they are taken on matters of consensus across parties, or on matters unimportant enough to attract any opposition, or because their outcome is obvious ahead of time and the losers choose not to register their opposition formally through their votes. When votes are consensual in the legislature as a whole, however, cohesiveness scores for any subset of legislators will be high. Counting all votes equally, including lopsided ones, therefore, would inflate unity indices. This would present a particular problem for cross-national comparisons where there is variance across cases in the average closeness of votes owing to characteristics of legislatures entirely unrelated to party unity. For example, if rules in legislature A require recording votes on every motion, the vast majority of which are perfunctory and consensual, whereas in legislature B only votes on substantive (and potentially divisive) motions are recorded, then unweighted indices from the two legislatures would show higher unity in A, even in the absence of any real effect on legislative decision making.

The conventional response in studies of recorded votes is to establish some criterion for throwing out votes that are too consensual to be considered relevant to party unity. Established criteria in studies of the two-party U.S. Congress focus on whether the majorities or the leaderships of the two main parties oppose each other on a given vote (Brady, Cooper, and Hurley 1977; Cox and McCubbins 1993). In the multiparty environment of most other democracies, however, such criteria are of little use. Which votes meet the selection criterion would vary according to which parties’ majorities or leaderships are considered. Another approach is to include all votes on which some minimum proportion of legislators vote on the losing side (Figueiredo and Limongi 2000; Mainwaring and Linán 1997). But such thresholds are necessarily arbitrary, and they count all votes, no matter how far above threshold, equally, contradicting the basic intuition behind selection criteria in general: that the sternest test of discipline is whether members of a party or coalition vote together when doing so matters to legislative outcomes, and therefore that the more hotly contested a vote is, the more relevant it is to a measure of unity.

This suggests an index calculated as follows:

\[ W_{\text{RICE}_i} = \sum R_{\text{RICE}_ij} \times \text{CLOSE}_j / \sum \text{CLOSE}_j \]

where

\[ \text{CLOSE}_j = 1 - \left(1 / \text{THRESHOLD}^* \times \text{THRESHOLD} - \%\text{AYE}\right) \]

for legislature as a whole on vote \( j \).

The \( W_{\text{RICE}_i} \) index is a summary statistic for voting unity in party \( i \), weighting votes according to how closely they were contested, according to the basic intuition that for a party seeking to influence outcomes, unity is more critical the more likely it is that defection by any member will be pivotal. Given that the other voting indices, \( \text{WIN} \% \) and RLOSER, are calculated directly with respect to outcomes (win, lose), they are not weighted but simply reported as proportions, out of all votes taken, on which a party was an RLOSER.

\footnote{Such paired nonvoting equilibria across parties are, of course, possible in legislatures operating under relative majority threshold rules as well. In fact, relative threshold rules are almost certainly more amenable to nonvoting equilibria, because the effects of nonvotes are less consequential to outcomes. Such agreements across parties are noted by observers of the British House of Commons, and their existence is asserted in various Latin American legislatures in interviews conducted by this author. Such equilibria can undermine the validity of measures of party voting unity that attempt to accommodate nonvoting.}
Data

This study draws on recorded vote data from lower legislative chambers across 19 countries. The unit of analysis is the party group during a given legislature. Voting indices were calculated for each party in each legislature that it enjoyed representation (WIN\%), or where its group consisted of two or more legislators (WRICE), or three or more legislators (ROUSER). Parties of different sizes carry equal weight in the dataset in order to estimate factors that determine the informational value of party labels—that is, how unified the party is in voting—for small and large parties alike. Party size enters the analyses as a control variable, both because it may affect unity and because size clearly affects the likelihood of being pivotal, which matters to models estimating vote outcomes.

The analysis includes all recorded votes during the periods for which votes were recorded, including votes on procedure, amendments, and final passage of bills, as well as on constitutional amendments in a few cases. Legislative cartel theories carry specific implications about when and where we should observe voting unity—on key procedural votes and on those that are decisive of policy, for example, and within the party that monopolizes the legislative agenda, if there is one, but not others (Amorim Neto, Cox, and McCubbins 2003; Cox and McCubbins 2005). By contrast, the competing principals account of party unity, based on electoral sources of party cohesiveness and the presence or absence of principals competing with legislative party imperatives toward discipline, does not suggest distinctions in levels of voting unity according to types of votes. Cohesiveness implies homogenous preferences. To the extent clear party labels have electoral value, discipline also suggests parties should seek unified voting generally.\(^4\)

Only for the United States are all recorded votes publicly available in machine-readable format. Some other assemblies post vote records online as lists of names that, with some work, can be prepared for analysis. In other cases, I traveled to the assemblies themselves and collected hard copies of whatever votes were recorded or else contracted with local assistants to collect the information. In a few cases, other scholars who had collected vote data in similarly painstaking fashion generously shared (or traded) data.\(^5\) In some cases (e.g., United States, Uruguay), the sample of votes represents all recorded votes during complete legislatures. In other cases (e.g., Chile, Israel), the costs of data collection prohibited collecting all votes in a given legislature, so the sample includes all votes between specified dates. The dates, the total number of votes, and properties of the corresponding CLOSE scores for the cases examined in this article are shown in Table 2.

There is tremendous variance across the legislatures for which voting data were collected in how many votes are recorded and thus available for analysis of party unity. There is also variance in what information is available about each vote (e.g., origin of the initiative, issue area, whether final passage or not). The only information available for every vote in every chamber is date, threshold for approval, and how each member of the assembly voted (e.g., aye, nay, abstain, or no vote). Finally, there is variance in the overall tendency toward consensus or contestation in votes. Mean CLOSE summarizes the extent to which an average vote was contested for each case. Votes were most narrowly won in New Zealand, Argentina, the French Fourth Republic, and Guatemala; less so in Ecuador, Chile, Peru, and especially the Philippines. In all legislatures, some votes are consensual, but in most there are deep divisions on many votes as well—enough that we can be confident that the real fights over policy have not all ended before votes come to the floor.

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for the system-level explanatory variables and for two key indices of party voting unity, averaged across all parties and all legislatures, for each country. The system-level variables are those that describe characteristics of constitutions or electoral systems and do not vary across parties within a legislature. Similarly, the mean WRICE and RLOSER indices sum up systemwide patterns of party voting unity. Note that mean WRICE is unusually low in both Nicaragua and Russia when nonvotes are coded as nays (the default approach), but jump to high levels when nonvotes are dropped in calculating RICE scores. The absolute majority threshold for approval in these assemblies allows legislators to cast an effective dissenting vote from their party’s position by doing nothing, depressing rates of explicit dissent. If Nicaragua and Russia operated under the more common relative threshold format, WRICE indices would almost certainly be in between the values calculated in Table 3. The RLOSER indices reported are based only on votes cast, so are conservative. Dropping the Nicaraguan and Russian cases does not change any of the statistical results reported.

\(^{4}\)Party leaders may seek unity particularly on closely contested votes, where losing due to a breach in discipline could turn the outcome and expose the leadership as ineffective. Whether or not votes are weighted by closeness in constructing the RICE indices used in this analysis, however, does not change the results.

\(^{5}\)All the data for this project are to be made available for public use online at http://www.dartmouth.edu/~jc Carey/legvoting.htm.
### Table 2  Recorded Vote Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Dates, Assemblies</th>
<th># Votes</th>
<th>Sum CLOSE</th>
<th>Mean CLOSE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>December 1984–December 1986</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 1987–September 1989</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>.71</td>
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<td>December 1989–December 1991</td>
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<td>.60</td>
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<td></td>
<td>December 1993–December 1995</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 1995–November 1997</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>May 1996–July 1998</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>January 1989–December 1990</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 1991–January 1995</td>
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<td>104</td>
<td>.63</td>
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<td>March 1995–December 1998</td>
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<td>291</td>
<td>.64</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
<td>May 1994–April 1997</td>
<td>735</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>May 1997–January 1998</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>.27</td>
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<td>October 1998–May 2000</td>
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<td>167</td>
<td>.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td><strong>January 1993–June 1996</strong></td>
<td>5,067</td>
<td>2,149</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>July 1998–June 2002</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France’s Fourth Republic</td>
<td>July 1946–June 1951</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July 1951–June 1956</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June 1956–June 1958</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>December 1994–November 1995</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January 1999–April 2000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>October 1999–November 2000</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>October 1998–April 2000</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>November 1990–August 1993</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 1993–November 1994</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>January 2000–August 2000</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>March 1999–June 2000</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August 2000–December 2000</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August 2001–October 2001</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>July 1995–April 1997</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1,226</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>January 1996–May 1997</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>January 1991–December 1992</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January 1993–December 1994</td>
<td>1,094</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January 1995–December 1996</td>
<td>1,321</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January 1997–December 1998</td>
<td>1,157</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>October 1985–November 1989</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 1990–August 1994</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 presents WRICE indices for the parties in each country according to whether the constitution includes a confidence vote provision and whether assembly elections provide for competition among candidates from the same party. In the bottom-left panel are systems with the confidence vote and without intraparty competition. By and large, voting unity as measured by WRICE is high, with the average over .90. Parties in France’s Fourth Republic are widely regarded to have been chronically factionalized, but even its mean WRICE is .85. Canada and Israel each have a derelict outlier, but in each case these are two-member parties in which a 1-1 split vote would drive the RICE score to zero. Overwhelmingly, the legislators in these parliamentary systems voted together with their copartisans.
TABLE 3  Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables, by Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Confidence Vote</th>
<th>Intraparty Competition</th>
<th>Federal</th>
<th>Mean  WRICE</th>
<th>RLOSER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.012</td>
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<tr>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Israel</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.002</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.36 (.96)²</td>
<td>.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.006</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Poland</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.026</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.55 (.94)²</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²Weighted RICE index not counting nonvotes as nay votes shown in parentheses.

FIGURE 1  Boxplot of WRICE Indices by Confidence Vote and Intraparty Electoral Competition
The bottom-right panel shows the one case of a confidence vote system with intraparty competition, Poland.\textsuperscript{6} WRICE is extraordinarily low. Poland’s open-list proportional representation may contribute to individualism among members of the Sejm. The Polish presidency may also contribute to disunity. It is worth noting that, of eight parties in the Sejm, President Kwasniewski’s Social Democrats (SLD) had the lowest WRICE index, consistent with a competing principals account of presidentialism. We should be cautious about drawing inferences based on this case, however. The Polish vote data are from a 20-month period following the adoption of a new constitution, and the inauguration of a new government facing an opposition president. The rules of the game, and the party system itself, were relatively young, and voting in subsequent periods may show increased unity. Nevertheless, the Polish data at hand are consistent with the propositions that intraparty competition, and alliance with the president, can generate drags on party unity.

The top-left panel of Figure 1 shows the systems without confidence vote procedures (i.e., pure presidential systems) or intraparty competition. Nicaragua and Russia are very low of course, but WRICE indices there must be eyed warily in light of their absolute majority threshold voting rules. Elsewhere, levels of WRICE are higher—a bit lower than under parliamentarism without intraparty competition, but generally in the .8 to .9 neighborhood. Finally, the top-right panel shows systems without confidence vote procedures and with intraparty competition, and the indices suggest more modest levels of voting unity overall, averaging in the .7 to .8 neighborhood, and with considerable spreads.

Figure 2 presents the same set of boxplots for the RLOSER index, and here the pattern is similar, although Poland is less extreme. Among the pure parliamentary cases without intraparty competition, parties almost never lose votes they could, but for party disunity, have won. In Poland, the median party lost about 2% of all votes due to such divisions. (It should be noted that this party, the Peasant Party [PSL], was on the winning side of 92% of all votes, so its losses due to disunity accounted for a quarter of all its losses.) At any rate, caution is again in order in drawing inferences about this particular combination of institutional variables from the Polish data alone. The top-left panel shows pure presidential systems with no intraparty competition, again showing a larger spread of values and slightly greater disunity overall than in the analogous pure parliamentary cases. Finally, the top right shows the pure presidential systems with intraparty competition and, as expected, exhibits the greatest incidence of lost votes due to disunity. The United States is

\textsuperscript{6}Attentive readers might note that both the Peruvian (Article 134) and Russian (Article 111) constitutions provide for removal of the cabinet by vote of a parliamentary majority. However, both constitutions also allow the president to dissolve the legislature in this instance, raising the costs to legislators enormously of wielding the no-confidence vote over presidential resistance. Given these provisions, I do not code Peru or Russia as no-confidence vote systems.
the outlier, with a median value of around 9% of all votes
lost due to disunity, but values in the 2–5% range are not
unusual in Peru and Uruguay, and indices run still higher
in Brazil.

On the whole, the data suggest that parliamentarism
increases party unity and that intraparty competition
in legislative elections depresses it. The substantial vari-
ance within legislatures, however, suggests that system-
level factors alone explain only part of party voting unity.
The statistical analysis below combines system-level with
party-level variables in an effort to shed light on the rel-
ative impact of each.

Models

The structure of the data presents some challenges in
testing the hypotheses listed above. First, the number of
votes—and more pointedly, of closely contested votes on
which voting unity is most consequential—varies widely
across legislatures. There is good reason to expect es-
timates of party unity to improve with more data, al-
though with diminishing returns, such that the improve-
ment from 100 votes to 200 is more important than that
from 1,100 to 1,200. On this logic, the regression models
weight observations according to the log of the sum of
CLOSE scores (see Table 2) upon which each party’s vot-
ing index is based. The more contested votes that make up
the index, the more heavily the observation is weighted.

Another issue is heteroskedasticity in the indices of
voting unity, as suggested by the different spreads across
panels in the boxplots of WRICE and RLOSER. Effectively,
system-level factors are more powerful in some cases (nar-
row spreads) than in others (wider spreads). This problem
is addressed by relying on White-corrected standard errors
(using the “robust” option in Stata), which are still reliable
even when the regression errors are heteroskedastic. An-
other is covariance in the system-level variables. As noted,
the data include only one hybrid constitution, combining
a popularly elected and powerful president with a confi-
dence vote provision for the cabinet: Poland. Otherwise,
the Presidential and Confidence Vote variables are perfect
complements of each other, making it difficult to separate
the effect of presidentialism from that of the confidence
vote. Ideally, vote data from more hybrid systems will be-
come available, so that Presidential and Confidence Vote
can vary independently to a greater degree. In the mean-
time, however, there is a key difference between the logic
of the Confidence Vote and Presidential variables that af-
fords some leverage in testing their effects. The confidence
vote argument applies systemwide in that the confidence
 provision (or the potential to invoke it) raises the stakes
of votes for all parties. The competing principals story as-
associated with presidentialism, by contrast, distinguishes
more starkly between parties allied and those not allied
with the president, based on their susceptibility to pressure
from a principal besides their legislative party leadership.
In the regression analyses, Confidence Vote is included as
a system-level variable and Presidential only as an inter-
action with whether a party is included in the governing
coalition or not.

A final challenge is the nested structure of the data,
with parties as the units of observation, nested in groups
within countries (or, more precisely, legislative cham-
bers) at which the system-level variables operate. As long
as the system-level variables account for the variance
across countries, this does not present a grave problem
for estimation, and an examination of the squared resid-
uals from the models below suggest it is not. Never-
theless, in the interest of caution, fixed-effects models
are also run, including a dummy variable for every coun-
country, save one, which becomes the point of ref-
ence. The fixed-effects specification controls for all
country-level characteristics of each party system, al-
lowing the remaining variables in the model to isolate
completely the marginal effects of party-level variables.
In the event, the estimated party-level effects are broadly
consistent in the fixed-effects models and those that
combine system-level with party-level variables, pro-
viding an additional check on the robustness of the
estimates.

The basic statistical model is weighted least-squares
regression with robust standard errors, as follows:
Voting Unity Index = a (Constant)
+ b1 (Confidence Vote)
+ b2 (Intraparty Competition)
+ b3 (Federal)
+ b4 (Government Party)
+ b5 (Government Party*
Presidential)
+ b6 (Seat Share)

where

Voting Unity Index is one of the various indices of legis-
late voting unity or success: WRICE, WIN%, or RLOSER.
Confidence Vote is coded 1 if the constitution provides
for legislative votes to be subject to confidence provisions
on the survival of the cabinet; 0 otherwise.
Intraparty Competition is coded 1 if the electoral system
requires that candidates for the assembly compete against
their own copartisans for preference votes; 0 otherwise.
Federal is coded 1 if the country has a federal constitution,
and subnational units are meaningful arenas of political
competition and the distribution of political resources; 0 otherwise.  
**Government Party** is coded 1 if the party holds at least one cabinet portfolio in the current cabinet; 0 otherwise.  
**Government Party**' Presidential interacts Government Party with a dummy coded 1 if the country has a popularly elected president endowed with substantial constitutional powers; 0 otherwise.  
**Seat Share** is the percent of seats in the assembly held by that party.  

It would not make sense to include the system-level independent variables in the model when WIN% is the dependent variable because, unlike rates of party unity, there is no reason to expect rates of winning/losing to vary across systems—all nonconsensual votes pit some winners against some losers. In the absence of the system-level variables, these models are run only in the fixed-effects specification, which isolates the marginal effect of party-level factors within each country to generate a clearer picture of what characteristics of parties contribute to winning and losing votes, regardless of voting unity.  

The logic of the independent variables and expectations about their effects are mostly straightforward from the hypotheses section, but a few comments are in order. Government Party estimates the marginal effect on the dependent variable of being in government in parliamentary systems, and Gov$^*$Pres picks up the difference in that effect between presidential and parliamentary systems.  

Seat Share is included as a control variable, but its logic depends on the dependent variable. When the dependent variable is a simple measure of parties' ability to win votes, expectations regarding Seat Share are clear-cut—a greater share of seats should lead to more wins, and correspondingly to fewer rolls and stuffs. When the dependent variable is WRICE, expectations are less firm. Parties that comprise larger shares of their chambers may encompass more diverse viewpoints and thus be subject to disunity. On the other hand, increasing seat shares generally provides increasing access to the legislative resources that party leaders employ to elicit compliance among their rank and file (Hurtado 2000). Finally, when the dependent variable is an index of vote losses due to disunity (RLOSER), the effect of Seat Share should be positive, notwithstanding the fact that bigger parties win more, because a split within a larger party should be more likely to reverse a vote outcome than the same split in a smaller one.$^7$

---

$^7$I also ran the models on vote loss due to disunity controlling for WIN%, on the grounds that only parties that win votes stand to lose some through breakdowns in unity. That is, if a party’s winning percentage is zero or close to it, we might reasonably expect that it is merely in perpetual and futile opposition, rather than that it might have won, say, 3% of those lost votes but for internal splits. This turns out not to be the case, however; the coefficient on WIN% was never close to significant.

**Results**

Table 4 presents the results of three regression models, run in the standard (top panel) then fixed-effects specification with country dummies supplanting the system-level independent variables (bottom). The number of observations varies because RICE scores are not generated for one-member party groups, and RLOSER is not generated for groups smaller than three members.  

Model 1 strongly supports Hypothesis 1, showing a large and significant negative effect of intraparty competition on voting unity measured by the weighted RICE index. Parties in systems where electoral laws provide for competition against copartisans can be expected to have indices .10—half a standard deviation on WRICE—lower than analogous parties in systems with closed lists, or single-member districts and no primaries. Model 1 offers no support for Hypotheses 2 or 3, showing no measurable effect of either federalism or the confidence vote provision on WRICE, but it does support Hypotheses 4 and 5. The residual category here is all legislators in parties not holding cabinet portfolios. The coefficient on Government Party suggests that membership in the governing coalition under parliametary boosts WRICE by .11—more than half a standard deviation—whereas this effect is entirely offset among government parties under presidentialism, which are actually less unified than opposition parties according to WRICE. The important result here is that government parties in parliamentary systems are significantly more unified than nongovernment parties, and government parties in presidential systems are less unified than those in parliamentary systems and not measurably different from parties outside government in general. There is a unity bonus to being in government under parliamentaryism, but none under presidentialism. The corresponding estimates in the fixed-effects Model 1a fail short of statistical significance, but suggest a difference between presidential and parliamentary systems, even controlling for all country-specific characteristics of each case. The coefficient on Government Party is positive but negligible, whereas parties in presidential governing coalitions have lower WRICE than those in parliamentary coalitions by .06, implying a net drag relative to nongoverning parties.  

Model 2a, estimating WIN%, sheds more light on the differences between governing parties in parliamentary
TABLE 4  Weighted Least-Squares Regressions. Observations Weighed by Log of the Effective Number of Legislative Votes on Which Each Party Unity Index Is Based

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>WRICE</th>
<th>%Won</th>
<th>RLOSSER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intraparty Competition</td>
<td>−.10*** (0.03)</td>
<td>.016*** (0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>.04 (0.03)</td>
<td>.007** (0.003)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence Vote</td>
<td>−.01 (0.03)</td>
<td>.006 (0.004)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Party</td>
<td>.12*** (0.05)</td>
<td>−.009* (0.005)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Party* Presidential</td>
<td>−.17*** (0.06)</td>
<td>.017** (0.006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seat Share</td>
<td>.03 (0.08)</td>
<td>.085*** (0.009)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.80*** (0.03)</td>
<td>−.013*** (0.003)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>218</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj.R²</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.48</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Fixed-Effects Models (Country Dummies Not Shown)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1a</th>
<th>Model 2a</th>
<th>Model 3a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Government Party</td>
<td>.02 (0.04)</td>
<td>.29*** (0.05)</td>
<td>−.004 (0.004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government Party* Presidential</td>
<td>−.07 (0.05)</td>
<td>−.23*** (0.06)</td>
<td>.015*** (0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seat Share</td>
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<td>.53*** (0.10)</td>
<td>.039*** (0.008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>−.009 (0.012)</td>
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<td>382</td>
<td>218</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adj.R²</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.75</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p ≤ .10, **p ≤ .05, ***p ≤ .01. Standard errors in parentheses.

Summary of Hypothesis Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesized Effect</th>
<th>WRICE</th>
<th>Win/Lose</th>
<th>Disunity Loss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: Intraparty electoral competition reduces unity</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: Federalism reduces unity</td>
<td>No effect</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: Confidence vote increases unity</td>
<td>No effect</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: Parliamentarism strengthens governing parties</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5: Governing parties weaker under presidentialism than parliamentarism</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and presidential systems. Beginning with the Seat Share control variable, the coefficient is positive and significant. For every additional percentage of chamber seats a party holds, its expected WIN% rises by half a point. The coefficient on Government Party shows that in parliamentary systems, government parties win at a much greater rate than do opposition parties—29% more, over and above the effects of Seat Share. The coefficient on Gov%Pres shows that this advantage is wiped out almost altogether for governing parties under presidentialism. Under presidentialism, in fact, once country-specific characteristics and seat share are controlled, the difference in WIN% between governing and nongoverning parties is not significant (not shown).

Why are government parties in presidential systems not more effective at winning votes? Model 3 indicates that a substantial share of their losses is attributable to breakdowns in unity. First, note that the Seat Share variable is a strong and significant contributor to RLOSER rates, confirming that splits in large parties are more consequential to vote outcomes than analogous splits in small parties. Once Seat Share is controlled, Model 3 shows that RLOSER jumps by about a percent-and-a-half with intraparty competition, and an additional .7% with federalism, consistent with Hypotheses 1 and 2. The existence of a confidence vote provision has no measurable effect, so here again there is no support for Hypothesis 3. There is support for Hypothesis 4, however, as governing parties in parliamentary systems lose votes due to breakdowns in unity about 1% less frequently than do opposition parties, other things equal. Given that the mean RLOSER rate across all parties is 1.4%, this is a large effect. That effect, in turn, is more than offset among governing parties in presidential systems, which not only lose due to disunity significantly more than do governing parties in parliamentary systems, but they also can expect to lose 1% more votes in this manner than do opposition parties in presidential systems (not shown). An additional 1% more losses may appear to be a slight disadvantage, but consider that governing parties, even under presidentialism, win 78% of all votes (as against 84% for governing parties in parliamentary systems), so membership in government can be expected to boost a party’s overall rate of floor losses by around 5% through its effect on RLOSER alone.

**Discussion**

Table 4 summarizes the empirical evidence regarding the five hypotheses on voting unity presented above. When electoral rules provide for intraparty competition, thus strengthening the influence of personal vote constituencies relative to party leaders, overall voting unity, as measured by WRICE, goes down and rates of vote losses due to disunity (RLOSER) go up. Federalism has no measurable effect on WRICE, but does generate increased vote losses due to disunity. The data examined here do not provide support for the widely held proposition that the confidence provision boosts voting unity within systems where cabinets depend on parliamentary confidence. It is important to note, however, that these data make it difficult to estimate separately the potential effects of the confidence vote from the effects of independently elected presidents at the system level. As more legislative voting data become available from hybrid systems, it should be possible to disentangle these stories.

The hypotheses regarding the relative impact of being in government in systems with and without elected presidents are well supported. In parliamentary systems, governing parties are more unified than opposition parties overall (WRICE), win more than their share of votes (WIN%), and rarely suffer losses due to disunity (RLOSER). Governing parties in presidential systems, by contrast, are less unified overall than their counterparts under parliamentarism, win at lower rates, and when they lose they do so more frequently due to internal disunity. Presidentialist governing parties, in fact, appear to be at no legislative advantage even relative to their own opposition. Controlling for seat share, they are marginally less unified, win at no higher rate, and suffer disunity losses more often.

Taken together, these results support the competing principals approach to legislative representation, the basic idea of which is that almost all legislators are subordinate to party leaders within their assembly, and the extent to which party groups are unified or cohesive depends on whether other principals, with competing demands, also control resources to pressure legislators. To the extent that such competing principals elicit responsiveness from legislators, they drive wedges into party groups, which we observe in vote patterns and vote outcomes. This article looks for sources of competition among principals in the constitutional and electoral rules that govern legislative politics, and in how these rules interact with the status of parties inside and outside government.

The results here confirm a number of arguments about institutional effects on legislative party unity that have either been derived theoretically or advanced on the basis of evidence from a smaller number of cases, or both. They are based on a broader cross-national dataset than any previous study, which affords for greater leverage in estimating system-level effects and for disentangling
these from party-level effects. For example, a number of scholars have attributed dishunty within parties to intra-party preference voting (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Garman, Haggard, and Willis 2001; Mainwaring and Perez Liñán 1997), whereas others rightly cautioned that, in the absence of evidence from legislative voting itself, inferring levels of party cohesiveness from voting rules alone was premature (Figueiredo and Limongi 2000). The results here should dispel uncertainty on this count. Similarly, federalism has been identified as a drag on national-level party unity in case studies of Brazil (Mainwaring 1999; Weyland 1996), although the most sophisticated study to date of legislative voting in that country’s Chamber of Deputies estimates the effect to be relatively small (Desposato 2004). The results here are consistent with that conclusion, but extend its empirical reach considerably.

The most important new results are found in the differences between parliamentary and presidential systems on governing party unity. The differences reported here do not rely on the presence or absence of the confidence vote provision, which is at the center of many discussions of party discipline. Rather, they are based on an account of how being in government differs according to whether there is an independently elected chief executive. Under parliamentarism, membership in government is a legislative asset, as one would expect given the additional resources available to government leaders to sway their legislative allies. By contrast, there is no evidence that membership in government is an asset in presidential systems, and it appears to be a liability in terms of inducing losses on votes owing to breakdowns of legislative party unity. Take two parties of the same size, hand one the presidency, and you can expect it to lose legislative votes more often because of splits within its ranks.

Studies of the presidency in specific countries frequently conclude that the office is unusually strong, even dominant over the legislature. Like students in Lake Wobegon, who are all above average, or cups of coffee at Starbucks’s, where the smallest size is “tall,” presidents appear in the literature to be an unusually potent breed. The results here suggest reassessing this verdict, at least with regard to legislative influence. Parties allied with presidents do not do any better on the floor of the legislature than others. Presidents may dominate their local political theatres in lots of ways, but not by directing the actions of unified battalions of legislators.

Presidents are disruptive to party unity because they present a potentially competing source of directives against those of party leaders within the legislature. Legislative party leaders in parties outside government need not contend with such a formidable competitor in coordinating the actions of their troops. The incentives for presidents to stake out positions “above” politics and to carry themselves as suprapartisan actors, even when they have won election on the basis of party support, buttress this effect. And the resources—political and material—that presidents command in most systems provide them ample currency with which to curry legislative favor. By this account, it is not presidential weakness, per se, that is the source of party dishunty, but presidential power. Power can only be understood as a source of party dishunty, however, if one begins by taking legislative parties, independent of presidents, as actors worth modeling in the first place. This is a step that scholars of presidentialism do not always take, but it is a necessary one in order to develop a fuller understanding of presidential power, and its limits.

References


