Representation as a median mandate: Taking cross-national differences seriously

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Abstract. The extent and ways in which popular preferences influence government policy are absolutely central to our understanding of modern democracy. Paul Warwick's discussion of these in the *European Journal of Political Research* in 2010 puts itself at the heart of the debate with its critique of the median mandate theory of McDonald and Budge, proposing an alternative 'bilateralist' concept of representation. This article questions whether this concept has much to add to our theoretical understanding of representational processes. However, Warwick's further conceptual points deserve serious consideration. These concern the time horizons within which representative processes work, and the status of the median position given multi-motivated voting. At the evidential level, Warwick argues that survey-based measures of voter and party left–right positions fail to produce the correspondence between median and government policy positions that median mandate theory would have us expect. However, survey-based measures of median voter and party placements obscure important cross-national variation. Using the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES 2007), as Warwick does, this article shows that survey respondents norm their own and their country's party positions to their national context. The consequence is to make the political centre in all nations appear similar. Allowing for the relevant cross-national differences brings the relationship between the median voter and government position back in line with expectations.

Keywords: median mandate; bilateralism; representation; cross-national variation; party positions

Introduction

Paul Warwick's recent article in the *EJPR* (Warwick 2010) raises interesting questions, at both a theoretical and an empirical level, about party representation of popular policy preferences. At the theoretical level Warwick makes three important points:

- He opposes 'bilateralism' to the 'median mandate' as a contrasting mode of representation.

- He objects to giving much weight to long-term processes when describing and analysing policy representation.
- He queries what standing the median voter policy preference has in light of multi-motivated voting.

On the empirical side, Warwick makes these two points:

- He suggests that McDonald and Budge's (2005) use of the median voter measure (Kim & Fording 1998) improperly strengthens the relationship between government policy positions and popular preferences.
- He replaces the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data on party positions with the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) survey data, claiming that the greater measurement independence of voter and party placements in the latter shows that democratic governments actually stand further away from electoral preferences than the median mandate allows.

We address these points in order, starting with the conceptual question of whether two-party (or two-bloc) choices fall outside the median mandate's frame of reference. The third section discusses two further conceptual questions. One is whether time can really be ruled out when evaluating representation in its descriptive, voice and action forms. The other is whether the position of the median voter is to be marked by what voters tell survey organisations or by the votes they cast. The fourth section speaks directly to Warwick's fundamental measurement concern. It considers why data describing the left–right policy space within a nation miss cross-national differences between and among nations. Our conclusions return to the broader context, where we agree with Warwick that time horizons and carriers of the popular preference require further attention from representational theory.

Bilateralism versus median mandate: An exaggerated contrast?

Bilateralism is taken account of within median mandate theory and does not enter as a distinct and separate representational mode. The two major mechanisms for party policy representation of popular opinion have long been seen as party convergence on the median in pursuit of votes (Downs 1957: 118–122) or voter choice between divergent party positions, one of which attracts an electoral majority and is thus authorised to be effected in government (McDonald et al. 2004a). Convergence abolishes electoral choice as all parties end up endorsing the same policy, even if it does reflect the popular preference.

Mandate theory, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of voter choice. Thus party policy differences are essential.

In his article, Warwick argues that two-party or two-bloc competition between relatively far-out policy positions (bilateralism) is essential to the process of bestowing a mandate. The 'median mandate' as proposed by McDonald and Budge (2005) and their associates is simply a concealed convergence theory where policy converges on the median in government and parliament rather than at the party and electoral level. Two-bloc competition is pervasive in contemporary democracies, Warwick argues, and results in government policies that are generally less directly responsive to median voter or elector positions than allowed for by the median mandate. Evidentiary support for the latter point comes from examining recent cross-sectional survey data rather than the median voter estimates used by McDonald and Budge (2005).

We discuss the different databases and measures of incongruence later. Warwick's other empirical observation, that two-bloc competition in elections is widespread even under proportional representation (PR) and predetermines many coalition partnerships, is clearly correct. One only has to think of the alternation between left- and right-dominated governments in Scandinavia, France, Italy, Spain and Portugal – or of government parties confronting 'others' in Germany and Austria, or of Liberals competing with Socialists as to who will partner the Christian Democrats in the Low Countries – to see that many coalitions are founded on the ability of parties or electoral alliances to attract plurality if not majority support. This is echoed under single-member district plurality (SMDP) systems in 'Anglo-Saxon' countries, which create single-party parliamentary majorities out of election pluralities.

Two-party or two-bloc competition under PR, however, has somewhat different effects from competition to be the plurality party under SMDP. The very fact of having to form an electoral or government coalition, or depend on other parties' support, creates a need for compromise – usually with centrist parties that pull government policy towards their own position. 'Bilateralism' cannot therefore be taken as an undifferentiated phenomenon exerting the same effects under all types of election system. Given its pervasiveness and longstanding recognition (Sartori 1976; Budge & Herman 1978), can it have been entirely neglected in median mandate theory?

The answer of course is 'no'. Indeed, median mandate ideas were developed from traditional theories of the party mandate, focused on spontaneous single party majorities, in order to deal with the numerous cases (almost 90 per cent) of elections where no such majority emerges. The next best thing was to take the position of the median voter as the one around which any latent popular majority would form. The distance between the median policy

preference and the policy position(s) taken by any type of government could then be used as a touchstone to see how far governments were effecting popular preferences.

This close relationship between traditional party mandate ideas and the median mandate is illustrated by the summary statements of each given in Tables 1 and 2. From these it emerges that the majority-based single party mandate is simply a special case of the median mandate as the median voter has to be a member of any policy-based party majority. What the median mandate thesis does is to extend the idea that government policy should conform to the wishes of the majority to situations where a spontaneous majority for any one party or bloc has not emerged. In this sense, the median position, round which any emerging policy majority would have to form, provides a general evaluative standard for the quality of policy representation under single-party *or* single-bloc *or* multi-party coalition governments.

Using congruence with the median position as a criterion we do find that certain kinds of political arrangements produce better representation – that is, more reliably congruent representation. The contrast does not, however, lie between countries with two-party or two-bloc election competition and others. Rather it lies between countries with PR and multi-parties and those with SMDP and more restricted numbers of parties. The reasons for the difference are twofold. With more parties, one of them is more likely to be closer to the median position than where there are fewer. The electoral median party – the one the median voter supported and thus the 'carrier' of her or his preference to the parliamentary and government levels – will thus itself be closer to her or

Table 1. Conditions for a government mandate to emerge

1. *Party distinctiveness* – at least two parties have policy profiles distinct from one another.
2. *Voter information* – voters recognise the policy profiles for each party.
3. *Voter motivation* – voters cast their ballots on the basis of the party policy profile they prefer to see implemented by a government.
4. *Voter majority* – a majority of voters are revealed to have the same preference, given the choices available.
5. *Electoral system translation* – the election outcome clearly designates the party with majority electoral support to form a government that will carry out its policy.
6. *Party policy commitment* – the party in government carries out its policies announced at the time of the election.

Sources: These conditions are a synthesis of statements made by various authors about conditions required by mandate theory, referred to variously as conditions for the 'responsible party model', the 'Westminster model' and 'popular control over public policy' (Polsby & Wildavsky 1971; Sullivan & O'Connor 1972; Aldrich 1995).

Table 2. Conditions for a median mandate to emerge

1. *Party distinctiveness* – at least two parties have policy positions distinct from one another.
2. *Voter information* – voters recognise the policy profiles for each party.
3. *Voter motivation* – voters cast their ballots on the basis of the party policy position they prefer to see in control of policy making.
4. *Shared party–voter alignment* – voters and parties arrange their public policy preferences within broadly the same policy space, probably a left–right dimension.
5. *Electoral system translation* – the election outcome makes the party supported by the median voter the party with which the median parliamentarian affiliates.
6. *Party policy commitment* – parties are motivated by a desire to see their own policy position control policy making to the greatest extent possible.
7. *Power of the median* – the occupant of the median position is crucial to the creation of a majority in both the electorate and parliament.
    (a) Majority-endorsed preferences tend towards the median voter position, so this forms the best indicator of popular policy preferences in general.
    (b) Public policy tends towards the policy of the parliamentary median under legislative majority voting procedures.

his position than where she or he only has the alternative of voting for one or another party at the extremes. Compounding the effect, the closer party will also be better able to pull government policy towards its own and the median voter position where there are multi-party governments, because centrist parties have strong bargaining power.

There are thus good reasons why a contrast in representational quality should open up between PR, multi-party and coalition systems, on the one hand, and SMDP, restricted party systems and single-party governments, on the other. However, this is not bilateralism versus the median mandate. Rather, it is a matter of certain election and party systems providing poorer representation than others under a median criterion which applies to all of them, and which indeed is used not only by McDonald and Budge (2005), but also by Huber and Powell (1994) and Powell (2000), among others. We shall pursue these points further after considering the major empirical evidence Warwick cites in support of the argument that bilateralism is a better description of representational processes – that is, that democratic governments generally stand distant from the median voter and elector. This would imply that representational processes do not operate in the nuanced way that median mandate theory says they do, but rather more crudely and approximately as 'bilateral' groupings alternate in government. We shall evaluate this possibility by examining the comparative data ourselves later in this article.

Conceptual distinguishing features of bilateralism and the median mandate

An important piece of evidence supporting the median mandate thesis is the existence of a one-to-one, long-run relationship between the left–right position of the median voters and the left–right position of governments (McDonald & Budge 2005: 186–191).[1] The one-to-one relationship indicates that when the average position of the median voter is, for instance, ten units left or right of the political centre in CMP data units, the position of the government is, on average, also ten units left or right of the political centre.

Using cross-sectional survey data, Warwick finds that left–right government positions correspond to left–right median voter positions, but the relationship is far from one-to-one. Centrist median voters appear to choose between left-centre and right-centre governments. His estimates indicate that median voters standing at, say, 4.5 versus 5.5 on the CSES 0–10 survey data left–right metric end up with governments standing at, respectively, 3.7 and 6.4. Put in more substantive political terms, Warwick reports that nations with median voters as self-described political centrists have governments strongly influenced by (sometimes exclusively under the control of) parties of the Social Democratic and Conservative (or free-market Liberal) families.

Who would dispute that? Probably no one. It is an instructive empirical generalisation. The median mandate thesis accepts it, but puts it in the context of an ongoing election-based process that brings voter preferences together with government policy over time. Its conceptual shortcomings are twofold: first, too much emphasis on representation as 'voice' compared to policy action; and second, undue emphasis on self-described attitudes compared to actual political choices. We take up these two points in turn.

Short and long time horizons

Warwick conceives of representation as lying essentially in election-by-election congruence between popular preferences and government policy – begging the question of whether we are talking about policy intentions ('voice') or actually effected policy. As policy ('action') change must take time and is often thwarted (Soroka & Wlezien 2010), any serious study of representation has to separate promises from performance. The actual policy being implemented *is* surely more important than what the government just says. Yet by the same token it cannot be studied without taking time into account and seeing elections as a connected process rather than separate events.

Taking a long-term perspective is often criticised (see, e.g., the commentary by Warwick 2010: 19–20). Elections as representational devices work in the

long-run but create only loose and unreliable voter-government connections in the short run. That is what median mandate theory argues. However, Warwick (2010: 20) objects, 'it makes a great deal of difference whether policy tracks movements in median voter opinion closely, government by government, or whether small changes in public opinion provoke much bigger changes in policy stance'. We certainly agree that the short-run mismatch and a long-run match of preferences and intentions is important. Indeed, it is precisely the short-term mismatch versus long-term match that the median mandate is designed to reconcile. At the centre of this reasoning is the distinction between short-run representation as voice that is relating electoral preferences to government policy *intention* and long-run representation as policy action that is relating preferences to *actually effected* policy. Warwick's objection conflates the two.

Notice in Warwick's own words, quoted in the paragraph above, he first writes of 'whether policy tracks movements in median voter opinion' – that is, representation as policy action. By the conclusion of his thought, however, Warwick is talking about 'whether small changes in public opinion provoke much bigger changes in policy stance' – representation as voice/policy intentions. The analysis of evidence undergirding the median mandate in McDonald and Budge (2005) shows short-run incongruence, but long-run one-to-one responsiveness. Thus – initially to the surprise of the authors – the evidence revealed three tendencies: (1) in the short run, government intentions unreliably matched up with changes in median voter preferences, (2) consistently going further to one extreme or to the other than they really indicated. However, as election outcomes veer from one extreme to another in their exaggerated government response, they consistently average out into something close to a one-to-one relationship with the median voter positions in terms of policy intentions and (3) in both short and long runs, with the slow process of policy making operating as a governor on the machinery of government, actual policy outputs end up round about the centre in line with differences in the median voter positions.[2]

Given the essential distinction between intended and effected policy, it is difficult to analyse representation properly without taking in these differing time horizons. The median mandate thesis considers Hanna Pitkin's distinctions among the 'concepts of representation' as having varying time requirements. Questions about descriptive representation (e.g., equivalence of party seat shares and votes) are short-run inquiries. Representation as voice (e.g., government intentions and voter policy preferences) is a short- *and* long-run matter, asking about congruence in the short run versus bias and responsiveness in the long run. Representation as policy action (i.e., equivalence of policy outcomes and voter policy preferences) is mostly a long-run concern because

the relationship is disguised in the short run (McDonald & Budge 2005: 141–168) by swirling political forces that are three to five times as fast-paced as changes in policy outputs (McDonald & Budge 2005: 182–183). As a result, over time processes have to be taken into consideration.

Who is the median voter?

Warwick's analysis raises a second conceptual distinction masking as an operational one. A simple, revealing and penetrating fact is that only 33.3 per cent of voters seem to be policy deterministic proximity voters. Only a third report voting for the party standing closest to them in terms of voting for the party with the closest mean placements along the left–right dimension (Warwick 2010: 18). This implies that care is needed when identifying a median voter position. On this we are in complete agreement with Warwick.

Voters clearly have privately held left–right policy positions, which they reveal when asked by survey organisations. If their private preferences could not be accurately represented because the available party policy offerings require voters to make choices that necessarily lead to incongruence, the possibility of congruent representation would have to be judged encumbered by the constraints parties put on voters. However, the evidence from the CSES surveys show that is not much of a problem. Best and McDonald use the CSES to ask whether congruent representation outcomes are available if voters cast ballots in line with their survey-revealed left–right positions (cf. Best and McDonald 2011: 93–95).

Voters also have publicly expressed left–right positions, if one chooses to read votes as left–right policy statements. Can votes actually be read this way? On Warwick's evidence from the CSES it appears they can. He reports that 80.5 per cent of respondents say they voted for the party 'to which they felt closest in the most recent election' (Warwick 2010: 18). It is also telling that Warwick's results reveal parties to be located at the mean left–right position of voters who supported them (Warwick 2010: 12). What voters say about their left–right positions to survey organisations and what they say about their left–right positions to fellow citizens and governments when they vote are not the same thing. On one side are the self-placements of survey respondents in terms of left–right positions; on the other side are vote choices for parties that stand at various points along the left–right continuum. The median voter's position could either be marked by the self-placements in surveys or by the positions they take up when they vote.

Where, in fact, *does* the median voter stand? The answer matters for several reasons. In the context of Warwick's re-analysis of the median mandate, it matters because the bilateralism he sees is less evident when the median

left–right position is estimated from votes than when estimated from left–right self-placements. Compare the slope values in his survey placement model 1 with his (à la Kim & Fording 1998) vote placement model 2 (Warwick 2010: Table 1, 15).

To be sure, the survey responses do reduce the risk of conflating measurement artifacts with political facts. Anyone who has used the Kim–Fording format as applied to the CMP left–right scores to calculate a median voter position and, in turn, to analyse political representation, has to be concerned that an artificial relationship is created by placing parties in parliament, government and the electorate on the same left–right metric. If a party system as a whole moves rightward, as appears to be the case for several party systems through the 1980s and 1990s, the recorded movement carries parliaments, governments and voters with it. To the extent that the recorded party movements are more a matter of changes in the measuring instrument than of changes in behaviour, responsiveness and synchronisation of parliamentary, government and electoral left–right positions are a measurement artifact and not a political fact.

Notice, importantly, that in the Warwick analysis that sort of conflation is not possible. His two measurement strategies – both survey-based, one relying on self-placements regardless of voting behaviour and one relying on Kim–Fording calculations that implicate votes directly – have less to do with measurement choices than conceptual distinctions. The survey-based indicator is a privately expressed statement; the Kim–Fording indicator is a public choice. That the voters say one thing but do something else raises a set of interesting questions. But, we hasten to add, it is what voters *do* that counts in democratic forms of government. Their votes are their official statements. It should not be a surprise to learn that government left–right positions are more directly responsive to the median voter position as revealed by voting than to the median elector position as recorded in unofficial surveys (again, comparing slopes from Warwick (2010: Table 1, 15)). Nor should it be a surprise that the median voter position is the position recorded by the votes that voters cast. As long as parties are reasonably placed along a left–right dimension, it is the vote distribution along that continuum that marks the actual median voter position.[3]

This assertion follows from the very nature of the representative process in modern democracies, where the general election, and not the opinion survey, is the authoritative basis for what the elected government claims as its policy mandate. The way in which representative democracy expresses the majority preference in any one election is through the vote distribution over the party alternatives – stated in terms of policy simultaneously with competence and record plus all the other factors that affect the election campaign. Instead of

being asked to register a pure policy preference, as in surveys, voters in general elections are put in a different choice situation. They are asked to record preferences on the policies parties currently put on offer within the context of the other considerations raised by the campaign. As Warwick notes (2010: 18), this may lead to 66 per cent of them (in 2004 anyway) shifting their party vote from what it might have been were it based on their abstractly determined policy position and an unlimited range of party alternatives. Yet surely this is to be expected as they shift from an ideal political world to the real one.

Collecting the evidence, it reveals these patterns. Two-thirds of voters choose to vote for a party other than the one standing closest to them on a left–right spectrum (Warwick 2010: 18). Voters could realise more congruent collective representation by casting ballots for the available party standing closest (Best & McDonald 2011: 93–95). Thus, on these two pieces of evidence, it is difficult to point to unavailable party offerings as a major obstacle to congruent collective representation. Moreover, four out of five voters report that their votes reflect their personal choice for the party they deem as standing closest to them (Warwick 2010: 18). When all is said and done, the average left–right positions of party supporters 'are very closely connected' to party positions, as those party positions are assessed either by experts or by the mass survey respondents themselves (Warwick 2010: 12). Thus, a reasonable inference is that voters wittingly choose parties that do not lead to governments as congruent with their privately expressed, settled preferences as they could.

Carrying these bits of evidence forward to the next step in order to ask how democracies respond to the voters' choices, one finds that on an election-by-election basis left–right government positions are more directly responsive to what the voters choose than to the underlying, long-run left–right preferences they reveal in their survey responses (comparing Warwick's slopes in Table 1 (Warwick 2010: 15), as the median mandate claims: McDonald et al. (2004b); McDonald & Budge (2005)). The rub for the representational process, potentially, is that voters are choosing not to realise the representation that their underlying, long-run left–right preferences might be read as telling us they actually want. One possibility is to throw up our hands and conclude: 'that's just democracy', and so be it, the ill- and under-informed voters, fickle as they appear to be, have to live with what they wrought. Another possibility is to look to the median mandate thesis and ask the next question. Can the voters, at each one-off election, choose governments that are loosely but directly responsive to their short-run preferences expressed in their votes and, still, in the long run, despite not abiding by their underlying private preferences at each (maybe any) election, produce governments and government polices that are congruent with their underlying, long-run preferences? When the two

time horizons are allowed into one's theoretical understanding of representation, as is requested by the median mandate thesis, the answer appears to be 'yes' on both counts (McDonald & Budge 2005: 171–242).

Empirical distinguishing features of bilateralism and the median mandate

Revealing as they are, the conceptual points made above do not amount to much if the empirical foundation of the median mandate thesis is itself untenable. Warwick's chief message is just that: the empirical foundation of the median mandate thesis is on shaky ground. Warwick's empirical results thus require detailed consideration.

Representation of the median is a within-country relationship. By extension, however, the existence of this one-to-one relationship within most countries implies that the one-to-one relationship will hold cross-nationally as well.[4] That makes Warwick's cross-national investigation a valid means of re-testing the thesis. If the one-to-one relationship does not hold cross-nationally, it cannot hold within each country.

Critical to any cross-national analysis, however, is the proper measurement of cross-national variation. We suspect that Warwick's failure to find empirical support in line with the median mandate thesis is a result of missing cross-national variation among respondent left–right placements in the CSES data. In the remainder of this section we do the following. We first illustrate how and why we believe the CSES data are missing important cross-national variation. Second, we estimate likely cross-national differences using CMP data and adjust the CSES left–right positions of median voters and governments to reflect these cross-national differences. Finally, we re-estimate Warwick's cross-national analysis using our cross-nationally adjusted CSES data. After accounting for the missing cross-national variation, we find the one-to-one cross-national relationship between Warwick's calculation of the median voter position and the left–right position of governments that the median mandate thesis would have us expect.

In their original formulation of the median mandate thesis, McDonald and Budge chose not to use left–right positions from survey data for several reasons. One is the tendency of respondents to norm left–right placements to their country's political context, which Warwick refers to as the problem of 'differential item functioning' or DIF (see Golder & Stramski 2010). While Warwick uses the CSES data to analyse the median mandate and arrives at his bilateralist interpretations empirically, his discussion of DIF problems speaks mostly to the ability of voters to think in meaningful left–right terms. As more

than 90 per cent of respondents in most nations do (Warwick 2010: 11), we do not see this as an issue. The fundamental problem, purely and simply, is the measurement issue of whether survey data are up to the task of producing a record that permits comparison of left–right positions across nations.

As a starting point, we take data from Module 2 of the CSES and locate the median citizen within 15 democracies included in our original analysis.[5] In 13 of the 15 democracies, the median citizen is located (by his or her own self-placement) precisely in the middle of the 0–10 left–right scale – that is, in 13 out of 15 countries, median voters are located in category '5'. In the other two democracies (Germany and Spain), the median citizen is located in category '4'.

To believe these results is to believe that the median citizen in such diverse systems as the United Kingdom, Sweden, Portugal and Australia have left–right policy preferences that are roughly the same. Given the varying political discourse and the diverse political trajectories of these 13 democracies, we find this difficult to accept. Instead, we suspect that the left–right self-placements included in the CSES data are normed to a respondent's national context. We have evidence of such norming in expert surveys on party positions (see Klingemann et al. 2006; McDonald et al. 2007). This makes it credible to wonder whether the same is true for mass survey respondents.

We begin our inquiry into the mass survey responses in the same way as for cross-national variation in expert surveys (Klingemann et al. 2006; McDonald et al. 2007). The first step is to explore the extent to which party family affiliations account for variation in the left–right CSES party placements. While a good deal of cross-national variation of party positions is due to differences in the number and type of party families represented in a country's political system, we would also expect additional cross-national variation due to differences among parties that share a family. For instance, we would expect some degree of cross-national variation to be attributable to the differences between British Labour, the Dutch PvdA and the Swedish Social Democrats.

We ask to what extent the CSES left–right party placements tell us about cross-national variations in party systems beyond simple party family affiliations. If all the variation comes from differences between and among families, a reasonable worry is that voters in all countries accept the political centre in their own country as the norm – despite how it might differ from the political centre in other countries – and then place a communist party, say, two standard deviations to the left of centre, a social democratic party one standard deviation to the left, Christians at the centre, a conservative party one standard deviation to the right, a pro-state nationalist party two standard deviations to the right, and so on.

Table 3 shows the mean left–right positions of seven party families and compares the variance explained by party family affiliations for both the CSES data and the CMP data. To ease comparison between the two data sources, we have transformed the CMP left–right index into a 0–10 metric by computing [(CMP + 50)/10]. The mean values, by family, line up in similar ways across the two datasets, though the parties on the right are judged to be further right by survey respondents compared to the CMP manifesto estimates.[6]

The more instructive evidence comes from the R^2 values at the bottom of the table. A striking 82 per cent of the variance can be attributed to differences between party families in the CSES data. In the CMP data, party family affiliations explain only a little over half of the variation. Maybe the CSES is so orderly and the CMP data is so filled with disorderly noise that this is to be expected. If that is so, then the noise-filled CMP data would have nothing else to tell us. But that is highly unlikely. The best estimates of the CMP reliability put the orderly variance in the neighbourhood of 0.8 to 0.9, (Klingemann et al. 2006: 86–103),[7] not down around 0.5 as explained by party family. Thus, rather than interpreting these preliminary results as saying something about orderliness versus disorderliness, we can check further on our suspicion that the CSES is almost exclusively about party family differences while the CMP tells

Table 3. Average party left–right positions by family

Party family	Comparative Study of Electoral Systems	Comparative Manifesto Project
	Mean (standard deviation)	Mean (standard deviation)
Communist	2.04 (0.51)	2.01 (1.06)
Green	3.28 (0.88)	2.78 (0.96)
Social Democrat	3.82 (0.62)	3.38 (1.24)
Liberal	5.47 (1.19)	5.11 (1.96)
Christian Democrat	6.26 (0.52)	5.48 (1.48)
Conservative	7.13 (1.01)	6.00 (1.40)
Nationalist	7.38 (0.75)	6.78 (1.61)
Summary statistics		
R^2	0.82	0.53
Adjusted R^2	0.81	0.50
s_e	0.85	1.45
N	89	82

Notes: Table entries are party family means and standard deviations on a 0–10 scale. Summary statistics come from regressing the party positions onto dummy variables for each of the seven party families, omitting one family as a reference category.

us something about party family differences but also provides additional information about cross-national individual party differences.

We provide this further check by asking how much of the remaining variation can be explained as cross-nationally generated. To investigate this, we take deviations from the party family mean positions and evaluate whether national party systems systematically differ from one another. Table 4 summarises these distances by country and presents the summary statistics for regressions that use them as a dependent variable regressed on country dummy variables. In the CSES data, none of the countries show any distinct

Table 4. Average distance from party left–right positions to party family left–right means by country

Country	Comparative Study of Electoral Systems Mean (standard deviation)	Comparative Manifesto Project Mean (standard deviation)
Australia	–0.44 (0.76)	0.61 (2.68)
Belgium	–0.05 (0.49)	–0.30 (1.15)
Canada	–0.54 (0.19)	–1.04 (1.01)
Denmark	0.21 (0.96)	1.20 (1.36)
Finland	0.54 (0.70)	–0.66 (0.79)
Germany	0.07 (0.40)	0.62 (1.08)
Iceland	0.10 (0.93)	0.02 (0.82)
Ireland	0.02 (0.79)	–1.10 (0.37)
Netherlands	0.13 (0.74)	0.74 (0.72)
New Zealand	–0.36 (1.22)	0.14 (2.33)
Norway	0.29 (0.79)	–1.17 (1.20)
Portugal	0.11 (0.48)	–0.63 (1.10)
Spain	–0.64 (1.36)	–0.27 (0.60)
Sweden	0.55 (1.06)	0.47 (1.32)
United Kingdom	–0.25 (0.92)	0.86 (1.18)
Summary statistics		
R^2	0.15	0.30
Adjusted R^2	–0.02	0.14
s_e	0.82	1.28
N	89	82

Notes: Table entries are means and standard deviations of the distance between the party family means and party left–right positions by country. Summary statistics come from regressing the distances onto dummy variables for each country, omitting one country as a reference category.

party system left–right position variation beyond what can be assigned to family differences. All of the estimated coefficients are statistically indistinguishable from zero. Moreover, the Adjusted R^2 confirms that the country dummies taken as a group have nothing to tell us about left–right positions; they provide no statistical value-added. The results using the CMP data, in contrast, show additional cross-national variation, as evidenced by statistically significant estimates for some of the countries and an Adjusted R^2 that suggests that the country dummies improve the model. In short, we find little evidence that the CSES data contain cross-national variation beyond party family, but the CMP data appear to capture something important about the positions of individual parties in different national systems.

The next step requires examining the direct relationship between the CSES and CMP left–right positions. To what extent are these two measures of party left–right positions related, and to what extent does the absent cross-national variation in the CSES show up in the CMP measurements? Answering these questions requires us to treat the CMP as the dependent variable to investigate the effects on the variance of adding in country variables. Simply regressing the CMP scores (as adjusted to the 0–10 metric) onto the CSES scores reveals a slope of approximately 0.81, which unsurprisingly is statistically significant. Thus, these two measures are certainly related and share a good deal of common variation ($r^2 = 0.60$). Our next step is to add the country dummy variables to the regression to investigate further whether the additional variation in the CMP data is cross-national in nature. The results are presented in Table 5. Again, we find a slope of approximately 0.8 between the CSES and CMP left–right positions, and, importantly, we find statistically significant cross-national variation in the CMP data that is not accounted for by the CSES data. A comparison of Adjusted R^2 values and a formal F-test between this model and the regression without the country dummy variables confirms that the CMP has systematic cross-national variation not contained in the CSES party positions.[8]

Reviewed briefly, we have this evidence. First, the CSES left–right position of the median citizen was the same in almost all of the 15 democracies considered here, suggesting that respondents norm their left–right placements according to their national context. Next, party family affiliations explain a high proportion of the cross-national variation in the CSES data. After accounting for party families, no systematic cross-national variation exists in the CSES data. Using the CMP data as a basis for comparison, we see that systematic cross-national variation in party positions appears to be missing in the CSES data.

The positioning of median voters and parties in the top portion of Figure 1 for four countries shows what we think the CSES data are telling us. By way of

Table 5. Relationship between left–right party positions from Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data while taking account of cross-national differences

DV: CMP left–right score	Coefficient	(s_b)
CSES left–right score	0.82**	(0.06)
Australia	0.22	(0.64)
Belgium	–0.84**	(0.37)
Canada	–1.16*	(0.64)
Denmark	0.55	(0.39)
Finland	–1.77**	(0.50)
Germany	0.23	(0.45)
Iceland	–0.73	(0.55)
Ireland	–1.73**	(0.45)
Netherlands	0.00	(0.39)
New Zealand	–0.19	(0.42)
Norway	–1.90**	(0.45)
Portugal	–1.38**	(0.50)
Spain	–0.42	(0.56)
Sweden	–0.54	(0.50)
United Kingdom	0.50	(0.64)
Summary statistics		
R^2	0.76**	
Adjusted R^2	0.70	
s_e	1.11	
N	82	

Notes: Party left–right positions are on a 0–10 scale for both sets of data. Left–right positions are centred by subtracting five from each party's score. Regression omits the constant. ** $p \leq 0.05$; * $p \leq 0.10$.

contrasting evidence, the positions of median voters and parties in the bottom portion of the figure are what the CMP data indicate is the state of the cross-national electoral world for four countries. What can be done to square the two? If one is ready to accept that the CSES has missing cross-national variation, the direct solution is to do as the bottom portion of the figure suggests – that is, slide the metric of the CSES data left or right. This repositions each nation's political centre and keeps the corresponding differences between and among the median voter and the various parties.
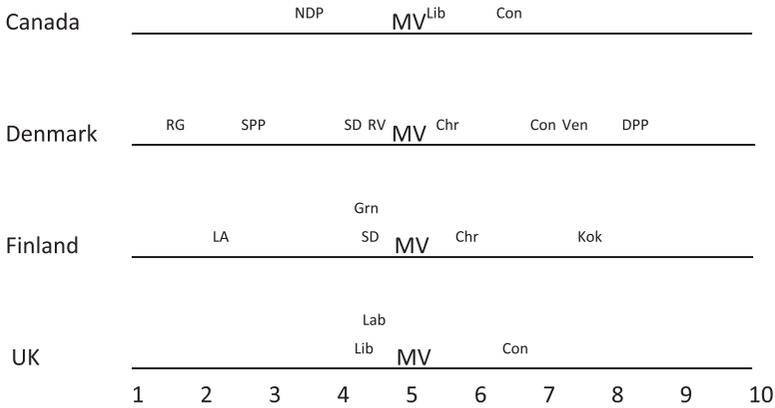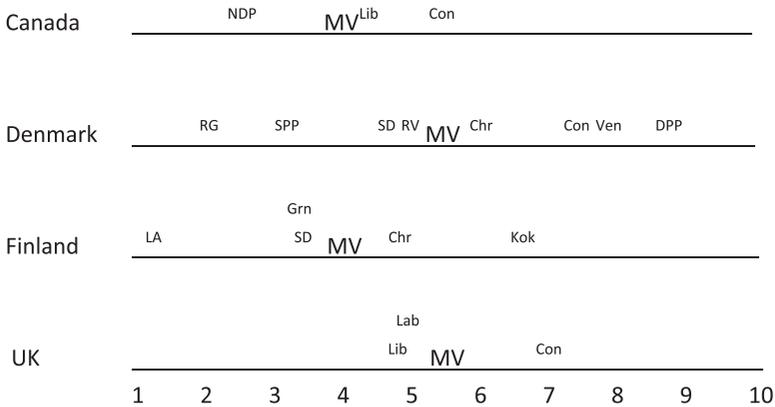
Figure 1. Examples of survey data normed to a common centre versus examples adjusted for cross-national differences in the left–right space.

The magnitudes of each country's movement left or right relies on the estimated country-specific coefficients presented in Table 5[9] as these provide weightings that indicate how far the CSES estimates neglect the cross-national variation reported by the CMP data. Left–right positions in Belgium, for instance, are shifted 0.84 points to the left, while left–right positions in Australia are shifted 0.22 points to the right. In this manner, we slide each country's left–right scores in either direction so that we approximate the cross-national variation that is otherwise missing in the CSES data. We make these

adjustments both for median citizens and party positions, which means that the government left–right scores are also adjusted as they are a weighted average of policy positions for the parties in the government (McDonald & Budge 2005: 50).

Adjusting the CSES left–right scores by introducing this cross-national variation puts us in a position to re-evaluate Warwick's cross-national analysis of the median mandate thesis. In the two left-hand columns of Table 6, we replicate Warwick's results for our 15 democracies using weighted parties in government positions related to both the CSES-based median voter and the Kim–Fording calculation. The results for these 15 countries are nearly the same as Warwick's reports for Western, Central and Eastern European countries. They are consistent with a bilateralist interpretation in the sense that the relationship between government and median voter positions is substantially greater than one-to-one. Centrist citizens appear to produce left or right governments far removed from each nation's median voter. However, the results change when we adjust for the missing variation. In the two right-hand columns we repeat the same analysis with adjustments for cross-national differences in the left–right space. With those adjustments we find a relationship between median citizens and governments slightly greater than, but statistically indistinguishable from, one-to-one. Therefore, once we account for the missing cross-national variation, the results of the analysis using survey data line up as the median mandate thesis suggests.

Conclusions

Much of our discussion has been about measurement, but the issues it has raised go far beyond measurement to the very basis and processes of policy representation. Democracy is the 'necessary correspondence between acts of government and the equally weighted felt interests of citizens with respect to those acts' (Saward 1998: 51; May 1978: 1). Thus, our emphasis above on enacted policy rather than expressed intentions, or the debate with Warwick on how citizens' 'felt interests' are expressed (by the voting or by the survey-based median position), touch on central questions of how democratic functioning should be described and evaluated. Anyone who thinks such questions can be evaded in real life should think again about how he or she wants democratic ideals to be concretely expressed in day-to-day politics.

The (normative and descriptive) question at issue in the debate between 'bilateralism' and 'median mandate' is whether we can only approximate good

Table 6. Re-estimation of the relationship between government and median voter left–right positions, without and with adjustments for missing cross-national variation in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) data

DV: Weighted government left–right position	CSES MV left–right	Kim–Fording MV left–right	CSES MV left–right X-Nat'l Adj	Kim–Fording MV left–right X-Nat'l Adj
	Coeff. (s_b)	Coeff. (s_b)	Coeff. (s_b)	Coeff. (s_b)
MV Position	2.72** (0.66)	1.65** (0.27)	1.23** (0.40)	1.19** (0.23)
Constant	–8.60** (3.38)	–3.44* (1.48)	–0.83 (1.87)	–0.89 (1.13)
R^2	0.57**	0.74**	0.43**	0.68**
Adjusted R^2	0.54	0.72	0.38	0.66
s_e	1.07	0.84	1.31	0.98
N	15	15	15	15

Notes: The two columns on the right present the results after adjusting the CSES left–right scores for both the median citizens and governments as determined by coefficients on each country reported in Table 5. * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$.

representation under party democracy, or whether (in the long run at least) we can get a nuanced and sensitive translation of majority preferences into state policy.

An important element in the empirical underpinning of the median mandate thesis appears secure. Government and median voter left–right positions line up in something like a one-to-one correspondence. To understand and accept this depends on whether the CSES survey data are, without adjustment, cross-nationally comparable. In our judgement, based on the evidence provided here, they need to be adjusted. The way we have done it, using the manifesto estimates to correct for national bias, has broader implications for all survey-based party placements, including those made by experts, and should be further explored.

The generally observable one-to-one correspondence between median and government policy positions which our re-analysis reveals is important in affirming the general validity of the median mandate thesis. However, evidence on that one point is not all that is available for this. We have emphasised that the possibility of bilateralism is itself contained within the median mandate and thus cannot serve as a falsifying observation. It is often the way the median mandate works in predominantly two-party Anglo-American countries (and sometimes elsewhere, even in multi-party systems). Also, objections to taking time into account in the long-run convergence of policy and median voter preference are not falsifying. Indeed, we see the long versus short time horizons as facets of the concept of representation that need more emphasis in order to explain the mechanisms that reconcile short- with long-run outcomes. Finally, whether to mark a median voter position by survey responses or by votes cannot be much in dispute on any account of representation. The empirical referent is the median position as *voted*. Of course, interesting and important issues lie in the gulf between survey responses and the votes cast. These need attention not only from voting specialists, but also from anyone interested in representation. In that area, Warwick (2010) has raised issues which go beyond our present debate but which will be much discussed as representational theory expands and develops.

Notes

1. McDonald and Budge report relationships in a two-step sequence: (1) between the median voter and parliamentary median, and (2) between the parliamentary median and the government. In most nations neither beta is statistically distinguishable from 1.0.
2. The details of how the short and long terms come together were not worked out fully in the original statement of the median mandate thesis, but have now been more fully

explored in a recently completed book manuscript (Ian Budge, Hans Keman, Michael D. McDonald and Paul Pennings *Organizing Democratic Choice: Party Representation Over Time*).

3. We recognise that the assumption of unidimensionality is arguable. However, left–right dimensionality is not the core issue in the bilateralist versus median mandate interpretation of representational processes. We therefore leave that argument for another time and place.

4. Given all relationships for various *i* countries have the form: $G_{it} \approx 0 + 1\ MV_{it}, + e_{it}$, where G is the government position and MV is the median voter position of country *i* at time *t* for each and every one of the individual *i* countries, then, when viewed cross-nationally as Warwick does, it follows that the expected value of the government position has to be in one-to-one correspondence with the median voter position: $E(G_{it}) \approx 0 + 1\ E(MV_{it})$. The nation-by-nation cross-temporal relationships translate into the same one-to-one cross-national relationship form because each of the various nation-by-nation linear equations is anchored so that the line passes through the point Y-mean and X-mean, where from the top equation each Y-mean and X-mean have the same numerical value.

5. The 15 democracies are: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Data for Belgium are taken from Module 1 of the CSES data, as Belgian party left–right positions are missing in Module 2. We strive to make our findings comparable to Warwick's and, consequently exclude respondents who placed themselves and all parties in the same location and weight respondents by the CSES political weights.

6. This may not be unusual. Michael Laver and Ben Hunt report a bias from expert respondents, one which has left-leaning respondents pushing parties on the right to more extreme rightward positions than other evidence would suggest is valid (Laver & Hunt 1992).

7. We should also note that SIMEX-corrected estimates for the CMP left–right scale, kindly supplied to us by Kenneth Benoit, correlate with the original CMP estimates at r = 0.99. This can also be regarded as a reliability coefficient.

8. There could also be cross-national differences in the variances of perceived party placements, with respondents in some countries compressing the left–right space while respondents in other countries stretch it. We have investigated this possibility by allowing the slope of the CSES party location to vary by interacting each country dummy with the CSES party score variable. However, only two of 15 countries have a slope statistically significant different ($p < 0.10$ level) from the 0.82 slope in Table 5. Inasmuch as 1.5 of 15 countries are expected to reveal statistical significance at the $p < 0.10$ level, there is no strong indication that adjusting for variance differences are worth the tradeoff in the complexity it would add to the analysis.

9. While most of the country adjustments have face validity (Australia and the United Kingdom lean to the right, while the Scandinavian democracies lean to the left), the estimated coefficient for Ireland shows it leans substantially to the left. We suspect this is a result of the two major Irish parties (Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael) being more centrist than other parties in their respective families, combined with the existence of the quite leftist Irish Labour Party. In any case, it is difficult to place too much confidence on left–right statements about the two major Irish parties (Mair 1987) or to attribute much meaning to their party family affiliation as these are not based so much on party family lineage as on which party grouping they joined after sending members to the EU parliament (see Mair & Mudde 1998).

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