Proximity, Candidates, and Presidential Power: How Directly Elected Presidents Shape the Legislative Party System

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of direct presidential elections on legislative party systems. We argue that presidential power shapes the effective number of presidential candidates in a way that will have a reductive effect on the legislative party system, but this reduction will be observed only within an intermediary range of presidential power. We also argue that this proposition should be tested solely on the population of countries with direct presidential elections. We find that the effect of presidential coattails is less important than has typically been suggested, that by contrast presidential power has an influence on the legislative party system, but also that we need to think carefully about how to capture variation in presidential power when trying to estimate its effect. This latter point applies to the debate about the determinants of the legislative party system but also to debates about the effect of presidential power more generally.

Keywords: presidential elections; party systems; coattails effect; honeymoon elections; presidential power

Introduction

There is a vast literature on the determinants of legislative party systems. At the most general level, there is basic agreement that institutional and social factors interact to generate party system structures. To this end, scholars typically focus on the effects of specific electoral systems and the impact of social heterogeneity (Cox 1997; Lijphart 1994; Mozaffar et al 2003). However, scholars have increasingly integrated other factors into the study of legislative party systems. Specifically, there is an ongoing debate about the effect of direct presidential elections. Here, there is support for the proposition that presidential coattails help to shape the legislative party system (Amorim Neto and Cox 1997; Mozaffar et al 2003; Golder 2006; Samuels and Shugart 2010; Shugart 1995; Hicken and Stoll 2013; Stoll 2013). The idea that the relative proximity of presidential and legislative elections is a determinant of the electoral competition is highly intuitive. However, recent work has stressed how the effect of presidential coattails is contingent upon other factors. Amorim Neto and Cox (1997) and Golder (2006) have emphasized the interaction between the proximity of elections and the effective number of presidential candidates at the previous presidential election. In turn, Hicken and Stoll (2013) have stressed the importance of presidential power as a further interaction term.

In this article, we build on existing work. First, we argue that propositions about presidential coattails should be tested solely on the population of countries with direct presidential elections, whereas to date such propositions have included parliamentary republics and monarchies in

the sample. Second, we follow Hicken and Stoll in hypothesizing that presidential power is likely to shape the effective number of presidential candidates in a way that will have a reductive effect on the legislative party system, but we argue that this reduction will be clearly observed only within an intermediary range of presidential power. This is because political parties have a distinct incentive to coordinate their electoral behavior at presidential elections only within such a range. By contrast, with both weak and strong presidents there are conflicting coordination incentives. When we test our proposition on a selection of democracies with direct presidential elections in the period 1945-2011 inclusive we find good support for it. However, we also show that with different measures of presidential power the reductive effect of presidential power can be seen when there are weak presidencies too. Overall, our findings suggest that the effect of presidential coattails is less important than has typically been suggested, that by contrast presidential power has an influence on the legislative party system, but also that we need to think carefully about how to capture variation in presidential power when trying to estimate its effect. This latter point applies to the debate about the determinants of the legislative party system but also to debates about the effect of presidential power more generally.

Theory

There is now a considerable body of work on the determinants of party systems. The effects of electoral systems are well known (Shugart 2005). However, the institutional determinants of party systems are not confined to electoral systems. Increasingly, there is an interest in the impact of direct

presidential elections on the number of competitive political parties at legislative elections. When the president is elected on a separate ballot from members of the legislature, parties have to compete at two separate contests. This generates the potential for what Samuels and Shugart (2010: ch. 5) call "an electoral separation of purpose". The electoral separation of purpose can vary. A low separation of purpose occurs when the presidential and legislative electorates of parties overlap. When this happens, similar to parliamentary systems presidents neither hurt nor improve their parties' fortunes in legislative elections. A high separation of purpose occurs when the electorate for the presidential candidate is substantially different from that of candidates in the legislative race. What factors influence the variation in the electoral separation of purpose?

One highly intuitive factor is the proximity of the presidential election to the legislative election (Shugart 1995). There is now considerable evidence that if the presidential election is held proximately to the legislative election, then there will be a reductive effect on legislative party system (Amorim Neto and Cox 1997; Mozaffar et al 2003; Golder 2006). Working on the assumption that the presidency is the most important institution in the system, the presidential election becomes the focus of electoral competition. In this context, legislative elections approach second-order elections, especially when they are held immediately after the system-defining presidential election. The primacy of presidential over legislative elections ensures that presidential elections can have substantial coattails effects, shaping the legislative party system in its image. We see an example of this effect at work in France. In 2000 a constitutional amendment reduced the length of the president's term to five years, the same as for the legislature. At the same time, legislative

elections were scheduled a few weeks after the presidential election. The result is that however close the result, there is a strong incentive for voters at the honeymoon legislative election to confirm the outcome of the presidential election, returning a majority for the newly elected president. We can clearly observe this effect following both the 2002, 2007, and 2012 presidential elections. Extrapolating on the basis of this logic, when the temporal gap between presidential and legislative elections grows, the shadow of the presidential election weakens. Thus, the coattails effect declines as the gap between the two elections increases.

Another factor is the presidential party system. There are good grounds to believe that the effective number of candidates at the presidential election shapes the effect of the proximity of presidential and legislative elections on the legislative party system. Cox (1997: 212) argues: "[t]he nature of the coattail opportunities that face legislative candidates should be similar, the nature of the advertising economies of scale that might be exploited should be similar, and so forth". Thus, if there is a small number of candidates at the presidential election, this can reinforce the reductive effects of proximity on the legislative party system. By contrast, if the number of presidential candidates is high, then the reductive effects of proximity may be counteracted. Indeed, a high number of presidential candidates may have an inflationary effect on the legislative party system. Golder (2006) has tested and found support for this hypothesis. Specifically, he finds that presidential elections "stop having a statistically significant reductive effect on the number of electoral parties once there are more than about 2.8 effective presidential candidates" (ibid.: 40). Thus, Golder (ibid.) prioritizes the interaction between

the proximity of presidential and legislative elections and the effective number of candidates at the presidential election.

Recently, Hicken and Stoll (2013) have added a further factor to this debate. They emphasize the importance of presidential power. The direct election of the president does not imply that the president is the central political actor in the system. There are countries with directly elected but very weak presidents. Ireland is a case in point. There are others with relatively strong presidents, such as France, and yet others with very powerful presidents indeed, for example Chile. Thus, the size of the presidential prize varies from one country to another. As a result, there is no necessary reason to believe that presidential elections will always have the same impact on legislative elections. Instead, the effect of proximity and the number of candidates at the presidential election will depend on what Hicken and Stoll (ibid.: 295) call the "horizontal centralization" of policy-making authority. This means that a weak presidency may counteract the reductive effect of very proximate presidential and legislative elections on the legislative party system even when there are few candidates at the presidential election. In sum, Hicken and Stoll (2013) prioritize the interaction between the proximity of presidential and legislative elections, the effective number of candidates at the presidential election, and the power of the presidency.

We aim to make two contributions to this debate. The first concerns the context to which it should be applied. To date, the theoretical insights of this literature have all been tested on data sets that pool countries with directly elected presidents and those without, including both parliamentary republics and parliamentary monarchies. For example, in Golder's article parliamentary systems constitute 60.7 per cent of the 603 observations in his whole sample

(2006: 39). In Hicken and Stoll's study, parliamentary systems comprise 60.8 per cent of the 590 observations in their pooled model. Indeed, monarchies alone make up 41.5 per cent of their total observations (2013: 304-305). However, the inclusion of parliamentary systems is somewhat puzzling, because the theory relates solely to the effects of direct presidential elections on legislative elections. What is the theoretical justification for including parliamentary systems in the study? Surprisingly, only Hicken and Stoll (2013) provide such a justification. They state: "the ultimate counterfactual to a presidential election being held concurrently with a legislative election is no presidential election at all. In other words, at the most basic level, the experimental "treatment" is the existence of a presidential election" (ibid: 300). They go on to say: "we compare the legislative party systems of the treatment group (legislative elections in regimes with a popularly elected president) to the legislative party systems of the control group (legislative elections in regimes without a popularly elected president)" (ibid.). Stoll (2013) reiterates this logic.

The language of natural experimentation is alluring. Even so, we can question whether these studies meet basic experimental conditions. In particular, we can question whether the assignment of the treatment is 'as if' random (Dunning 2008). For example, there may be 'demonstration effects' such that countries choose systems that are close to their neighbors. The adoption of presidentialism across Latin America is a case in point. In addition, even if the treatment was assigned 'as if' randomly, are the treatment and control groups comparable (Sekhon and Titiunik 2012)? The same subjects are not observed before and after the application of a particular treatment or placebo. Instead, the differences within and between the subjects

in the two groups are merely controlled for in the multivariate regression. This is an entirely appropriate way to test the theory, but it is not a natural experiment. Finally, when we conduct a natural experiment, we include a control group to provide us with variation in the explanatory variable. However, when we examine the effects of proximity, the effective number of presidential candidates, and presidential power on legislative party systems, we do not need the variation that comes with a control group. There is already variation within the set of countries with directly elected presidents. To put it another way, the experimental "treatment" is not the existence of a presidential election, it is the presence or absence of proximate presidential and legislative elections, a higher or lower number of effective presidential candidates, and stronger or weaker presidents. We should still be able to observe the effects of these variables solely within the population under consideration without the need for a parliamentary "control group".

In sum, we question whether parliamentary systems should be included in a test of a theory about the effects of direct presidential elections. We are skeptical as to whether their inclusion can be justified as an example of a natural experiment. Moreover, even if they are included, we would still expect the results to be robust to their exclusion. If they are not, then this would suggest that any positive findings are being driven by their inclusion in the dataset, rather than by the substantive effect on the population to which the hypothesized effect applies.

Secondly, we think differently about the nature of the interaction between presidential power and the effective number of presidential candidates. We follow Cox (1997) above in thinking that there is a positive relationship between the effective number of presidential candidates and the

legislative party system. We also have good theoretical reasons to expect that presidential power will affect the number of candidates at the presidential election. Hicken and Stoll (2008) have already proposed such a relationship. They hypothesize that when the presidency is very weak, parties have little incentive to stand candidates. So, the number of candidates should be small. However, when presidential power increases somewhat, then parties have more of an incentive to stand, but they have little incentive to coordinate their presidential candidates, meaning that number of candidates contesting the presidential election should be relatively high. When presidential power increases further still, the incentive for strategic coordination is present, meaning that the number of candidates should decline. Thus, they expect a bell-shaped curve. They find some evidence to support this theory, though as presidential power increases they find that the reductive effect disappears. In fact, they find that when presidents are very powerful, there is a puzzling increase in the number of candidates once again. So, rather than a bell-shaped curve, they find a sideways, elongated S shape (ibid.: 1120). At this high level of presidential power, though, the relationship with the number of presidential candidates is not statistically significant.

We agree with Hicken and Stoll that there is likely to be a relationship between presidential power and the number of presidential candidates that will shape the legislative party system, but we think differently about the logic. We agree that when there is a very weak presidency, there may be little incentive for parties to stand a candidate at the presidential election. It may be more efficient to save the costs of campaigning for the legislative election. At the same time, though, when there is a very weak presidency the political costs of losing the presidential election are also very small. Moreover, non-

partisan candidates may have a greater incentive to stand. If the presidential election is seen as a second-order election, then partisan voting may be weak and non-partisan candidates may stand a greater chance of winning votes. Therefore, even when there is a very weak presidency, we may observe a large number of presidential candidates. Thus, a very weak presidency can be associated both with a small number of presidential candidates and a large number. Ireland is a case in point. Here, the president is very weak and since 1937 six presidential elections have been uncontested. This suggests that the presidency is a prize that is scarcely worth winning and parties do not always see an incentive to contest it. Even so, in 2011 there were seven candidates with an effective number of 3.75. In addition to party nominees, there were also non-partisan candidates, one of whom came second at the election. So, the same country has experienced both very low and relatively high numbers of presidential candidates as a function of the calculations made by partisan and non-partisan actors.

We expect an equivalent dual logic when the presidency is very powerful. In this case, the prize may be so big that parties have little incentive to engage in strategic coordination. The costs of not standing and, therefore, not winning the presidency may be so great that there is an incentive for parties to stand. So, Shugart and Carey (1992: 201) point out that if the stakes are sufficiently high, then the certainty of losing the presidency by not contesting it may be much worse than the probability of losing it to another opponent. This logic is similar to the one that Hicken and Stoll (2008: 1121) suggest to explain their puzzling finding. At the same time, though, if the prize is so great, then losing may also be very costly. As they suggest elsewhere but in relation to candidates at legislative elections (Hicken and

Stoll 2013: 296), when the presidency is so powerful it is important to be on the winning side. Therefore, there may be an incentive not to stand a presidential candidate, but to wait and support the candidate that emerges victorious from the contest. Thus, a strong presidency may be associated both with a small number of presidential candidates and a large number. For example, in Panama there were three candidates at the 2009 presidential election with an effective number of only 1.99. By contrast, in 1994 there were seven candidates with an effective number of 5.56.

If the logic about weak and strong presidents is correct, we would expect to observe a significant reductive effect of presidential power on the number of presidential candidates only in an intermediary range when the incentive for strategic coordination is strong. We can think of this effect in terms of the electoral separation of purpose. In this intermediary range, presidents and assemblies need to cooperate with each other in order to govern effectively and avoid political deadlock. Voters understand that presidents need the support of the assembly in order to pass the national policies on which they campaigned. Therefore, they have an incentive to support the president's party at the legislative election too. Smaller parties may also see an incentive to be part of the presidential coalition rather than presenting their own candidates. For these parties, the strongest incentive to take sides occurs when the race between two serious presidential contenders is so close that by running their own candidates minor parties might risk tipping the balance in favor of their less preferred option (Shugart and Carey 1992: 255). In sum, while we expect a positive relationship between the effective number of presidential candidates and the legislative party system, we expect presidential power to shape competition at the presidential election

in a way that means we are only like to observe a reductive effect of presidential power on the legislative party system at an intermediary range of presidential power.

Overall, we differ from both Golder (2006) and Hicken and Stoll (2013) in that we expect the key interaction to be between presidential power and the effective number of presidential candidates, whereas they privilege proximity as a constituent element of their preferred interactions. We are agnostic about the independent effect of proximity. We wish to include an estimation of the effect of proximity to test for whether or not there is evidence of presidential coattails, but we do not necessarily expect it to find support for such an effect. In addition, whereas both Golder (2006) and Hicken and Stoll (2013) expect support for their preferred interactions when countries with direct presidential elections are pooled with countries with parliamentary systems, we have no such expectations about our preferred interaction. We expect to find support for it when the population is limited to countries with directly elected presidents. What is more, we argue that even if there is evidence to support both Golder (2006) and Hicken and Stoll's (2013) expectations when all countries are pooled, we would expect their findings still to be robust to the exclusion of parliamentary systems, otherwise a theory about the effect of direct elections would have little direct relevance to the population to which it is meant to apply.

Variable descriptions

The dependent variable in this study is the relative fragmentation of the party system at legislative elections. Consistent with Amorim Neto and Cox (1997),

Golder (2006) and Hicken and Stoll (2013), we capture this variable by coding the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP). The main source of the data for this variable is Bormann and Golder's (2013) dataset recording democratic electoral systems around the world, 1946-2011.

We have three explanatory variables of interest. The first measures presidential power (PRESPOW). There are many different measures of presidential power and the reliability of some of these measures has been questioned (Fortin 2013). Moreover, the correlation between different measures can be relatively low (Tavits (2009: 48). Unsurprisingly, she finds that her results vary as a function of the measure she uses. One of the main reasons for the low correlations is that the measures are capturing different and/or multiple dimensions of presidential power. Ideally, we would want to compare the power of presidents along a single dimension. To this end, we take Siaroff's (2003) measure of presidential power. The main advantage of this measure is that it tries to capture actual rather than merely constitutional presidential power. Siaroff's measure comprises nine separate indicators. We conduct a factor analysis to determine whether a combination of these indicators can capture a single dimension of presidential power. However, we exclude two of them – whether or not the president is directly elected and whether the president and the legislature are elected concurrently – because they are already included independently in our study. We take the remaining seven indicators and perform an iterated factor analysis, which is appropriate for indicators recording binary variables. We retain two factors. The rotated factor loadings show one factor capturing a single dimension of presidential power comprising just one variable and another comprising three variables. We focus on the latter. The three variables are: whether or not the president

chairs cabinet meetings, has a central role in foreign policy, and in government formation. These three indicators capture a range of presidential activity, ranging from the formation of government, to its ongoing management, to the formulation of policy. So, we can be confident that together they are not simply capturing an idiosyncratic aspect of presidential power. On the basis of these indicators, we generate a four-point measure of presidential power with a range 0-3 inclusive. The rotated factor loadings and the full set of presidential power scores can be found in the supplemental materials at http://prq.sagepub.com.

The second explanatory variable is the effective number of presidential candidates (ENPC). This variable records the ENPC figure for the presidential election that was held immediately prior to the legislative election if the elections are not concurrent or at the concurrent presidential election if they are. We take the values of ENPC from the data set described in Bormann and Golder (2013) and their enpres variable. This means that in the event of an uncontested presidential election, such as ones in Ireland, we record an ENPC value of 1. Consistent with the practice adopted by Golder (2006) and Hicken and Stoll (2013), we record an ENPC value of 0 in countries without a directly elected president.

The third explanatory variable is a measure of the proximity between presidential and legislative elections (PROXIMITY). Again, we follow standard practice and follow the methodology adopted by Amorim Neto and Cox (1997), Golder (2006) and Hicken and Stoll (2013). The PROXIMITY measure ranges from a value of 0 when a legislative election is held at the exact mid-point between two presidential elections and 1 when the legislative election is held concurrently with the presidential election. The only change

we make is that we calculate the value as a function of the days between the two types of elections. This means that we have a continuous variable within a range 0-1. By contrast, Golder (2006) and Hicken and Stoll (2013) calculate the value as a function of the years between the two types of elections. This means we have a greater variation in the values for our proximity variable than Golder and Hicken and Stoll. Even so, we are confident that this amendment does not substantively change the results because Stoll (2013) has shown that Golder's results are robust to whether years or days are used as the units to calculate the proximity index. Consistent with the existing literature, the PROXIMITY value for countries with a parliamentary system is always recorded as a value of 0.

We have three control variables. These are the same as those included in the models by Golder (2006) and Hicken and Stoll (2013). The first (MAGNITUDE) captures the independent effect of the electoral system for legislative elections. MAGNITUDE is a measure of the average district magnitude in the lowest electoral tier in a country (Golder 2006: 37). It is calculated as the total number of seats allocated in an electoral tier divided by the total number of districts in that tier. We take the values from the data set described in Bormann and Golder (2013) and their tier1_avemag variable. Where there are missing observations we calculate the values ourselves using their formula. This affects 3.8 per cent of the total observations. Consistent with standard practice, we log the values for this variable. The second control variable (ENEG) captures the level of social divisions in a country. This is the effective number of ethnic groups. We take the values for ENEG from the replication data set that Golder (2007) makes available for his 2006 article. This variable is stationary within country units. Therefore, we can record a

value for countries beyond the period included in Golder's study. Golder calculated the ENEG figures from Fearon's (2003) data. Therefore, where countries are missing from Golder's data set, we calculate the ENEG value directly from Fearon's data. These data are available at www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/ (accessed 1 July 2013). Thirdly, consistent with previous work, we include an interaction of MAGNITUDE*ENEG.

Data and model specifications

We test our theory on an original data set of countries and elections from 1945-2011. The rules for the inclusion of countries in the data set, the full list of countries included, and the time periods for which we record elections is listed in the supplemental materials at http://prq.sagepub.com. We have a total of 546 legislative elections in 82 countries. The number of elections per country ranges from 1 to 32.

We use the models with the same constitutive explanatory variables as Golder (2006: 37) and Hicken and Stoll (2013: 301). (See Table 1). However, the interaction terms and the case selection vary across the set of models. Model 1 replicates Golder's (2006) model where the interaction term of interest is PROXIMITY*ENPC. This model includes parliamentary systems. Model 2 replicates Hicken and Stoll's (2013) model where the interaction term of interest is PRESPOW*PROXIMITY*ENPC. This model includes parliamentary systems and also includes three further constitutive interaction terms PROXIMITY*ENPC, PRESPOW*ENPC and PRESPOW*PROXIMITY. Models 1 and 2 are designed to determine whether or not we can replicate the original results of Golder's (2006) and Hicken and Stoll's (2013) models. If we can,

then we can be confident that our case selection is not artificially driving the result. Model 3 replicates Model 1 but excludes parliamentary systems. Model 4 replicates Model 2 but excludes parliamentary systems. Model 5 tests the model that we propose in this article. Here, the interaction term of interest is PRESPOW*ENPC. We include PROXIMITY as a control variable and we test the model solely on countries with a directly elected president. Consistent with the original specifications, we use ordinary least squares regression to estimate Models 1-4 and, consistent with Golder's (2006) preferred estimation, we report country-clustered standard errors in parentheses for Models 1 and 3, while for Models 2 and 4, consistent with Hicken and Stoll's (2013: 303) preferred estimation, we report Newey-West standard errors, which are robust to both autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity, in parentheses. For Model 5 we use Beck and Katz's (1995) panel-corrected-standard-errors (PCSE) model. Hicken and Stoll (2013: 315) reject this estimation technique on the grounds that there is little theoretical reason to expect cross-country contemporaneous correlation in such models and that it is difficult to obtain a good estimate of this correlation when there are few common time periods across countries. However, most of our observations are from the early 1990s onwards and we know there are demonstration effects at elections across countries. For example, recent Latin American elections have increasingly manifested similar types of presidential candidates, ranging from more left-wing populist often indigenous candidates to more neo-liberal, pro-business candidates often backed by international investors. So, it is reasonable to use a PCSE model as our main model. However, we do re-estimate our model with Newey-West standard errors and report the results along with other robustness tests below.

Results and robustness tests

We report the results of the five models in Table 1. Model 1 tests Golder's hypothesis with the inclusion of parliamentary systems. It is very difficult to interpret the regression table when there are interaction terms (Brambor et al 2006). Therefore, like Golder (2006: 41, Figure 1e), Figure 1 portrays the key interaction effect graphically. In Golder's original model proximate presidential and legislative elections have a reductive impact on the effective number of legislative parties when the effective number of presidential candidates is slightly fewer than three. The same model with our dataset shows the same result when the effective number of presidential candidates is around the same figure. Therefore, we are capturing his key finding. Our model also shows a significant inflationary impact on the effective number of legislative parties when the effective number of presidential candidates is greater than about five, whereas Golder does not show this result. However, his graph ends when this figure is seven and the trend for the effective number of legislative parties is upwards. Overall, we can be confident that our dataset is generating basically the same result as Golder's original model.

Table 1 about here

Figure 1 about here

Model 2 tests Hicken and Stoll's hypothesis with the inclusion of parliamentary systems. In their article, Hicken and Stoll (2013: 307) present figures that show the interaction of the proximity of presidential and legislative elections and the effective number of presidential candidates at four values of presidential power. Given space limitations, we discuss the

results for just one value, namely when the president is relatively strong with a presidential power score of 2 on our four-point scale from 0-3. The interaction effect is presented graphically in the supplemental materials at http://prq.sagepub.com. We find that when there is a relatively strong president proximate presidential and legislative elections have a reductive impact on the legislative party system when the effective number of presidential candidates is fewer than three. We also find that when there is a large effective number of presidential candidates, there is a significant inflationary impact on the effective number of legislative parties. Both results are very similar to those of Hicken and Stoll. We do not report them, but we find equally similar results for values equivalent to very weak and very strong presidents too. Overall, we can be confident that our dataset is generating very similar results to those reported in the original articles by Golder and Hicken and Stoll.

Model 3 tests Golder's hypothesis excluding parliamentary systems. Figure 2 graphs the key interaction effect. We see very clearly that the proximity of presidential and legislative elections has no significant effect on the legislative party system at any value for the effective number of presidential candidates. Model 4 tests Hicken and Stoll's hypothesis excluding parliamentary systems. The key interaction effect is presented graphically in the supplemental materials at http://prq.sagepub.com. Again, we discuss the result with a presidential power value of 2. Like the result for Golder, we find that at this value of presidential power the proximity of presidential and legislative elections has no effect on the legislative party system whatever the value of the effective number of presidential candidates. We do not report them, but we find the same result for values equivalent to

very weak and very strong presidents too. Overall, we find that when we exclude parliamentary systems there is no longer support for either Golder's or Hicken and Stoll's hypotheses.

Figure 2 about here

Model 5 tests our hypothesis solely on countries with directly elected presidents. Figure 3 graphs the key interaction effect. In general, we find a linear trend. Presidential power has a reductive effect on the legislative party system for low values of the effective number of presidential candidates and an inflationary effect for high values. So, even if there are conflicting incentives to stand candidates at both low and high levels of presidential power, it would appear as if the reductive effect on the legislative party system of the effect number of candidates is dominant when there is a weak presidency and few presidential candidates and the inflationary effect is dominant when there is a strong presidency and many presidential candidates. However, as expected, the reductive effect is significant only at an intermediate range of presidential candidates. Specifically, we find a significant result for such a reduction in a range between 1.5-2.5 candidates. When there are high values for the effective number of presidential candidates, we do not find a significant inflationary effect. We note, though, that the substantive effect of our finding is small. In terms of the control variables, the interaction effect between the effective number of ethnic groups and the natural log of average district magnitude returns the expected result. The effective number of ethnic groups has a significant and positive effect on the legislative party system at values for the natural log of average district magnitude that are greater than about 0.5, namely outside pure first-past-the-post systems.

Figure 3 about here

To confirm the robustness of our result, we re-estimated Model 5 using OLS with Newey-West standard errors in the same way as Hicken and Stoll (2013). We do not report them here, but we find almost identical results. We also re-estimated the model without the inclusion of the MAGNITUDE values that we calculated ourselves. Again, the results are substantively the same. There is, though, a nagging concern about the presidential power variable. We noted long-standing issues relating to the reliability of presidential power measures and the sensitivity of results to different such measures. To explore these concerns, we re-estimated Model 5 on the basis of a number of different measures of presidential power. First, we created a second new measure by pooling ten existing ones (Amorim Neto and Costa Lobo 2009; Armingeon and Carreja 2004; Cranenburgh 2008; Elgie and Moestup 2008; Johannsen 2003; Moestrup 2011; Frye 2002; Hicken and Still 2008; Shugart and Carey 1992; and Siaroff 2003). (See supplemental materials at http://prq.sagepub.com.) The advantage of pooling existing measures in this way is that the idiosyncrasies of individual measures are likely to wash out. The correlation between the values for our first presidential power variable and this variable is 0.89. When we re-estimated Model 5 with the new presidential power variable, we returned the same result, but with a much bigger substantive effect. Second, we re-estimated Model 5 using the presidential power scores from Hicken and Stoll's (2013) dataset. This time we returned the same general result, but we observed that presidential power had a reductive effect on the legislative party system in an intermediate range of values for the effective number of presidential candidates only within 90 per cent confidence intervals ($p = 0.055$ at an ENPC value of 3).

A problem with these two new measures is that they are almost certainly capturing multiple dimensions of presidential power. So, to test the robustness of our results further we wish to re-estimate Model 5 with an alternative measure that captures only a single dimension. To do so, we return to Siaroff (2003). When we factor analyzed this data set initially, we retained two factors. When we retain only one, we capture a single dimension of presidential power comprising four variables. These are the three original indicators plus whether or not the president has discretionary appointment powers over key individuals in the system. Incorporating this new indicator, we create a five-point scale of presidential power ranging from 0-4. When we re-estimate Model 5 using this presidential power variable we see as before a significant reductive effect on the legislative party system in an intermediate range of values for the effective number of presidential candidates, but we also see a similar effect for a very small number too. (See Figure 4). This result is consistent with the essentially linear trend that we observed in Figure 3. However, in contrast to the results from Model 5, when we use a different measure of presidential power we find that presidential power has a significant reductive effect on the legislative party system for low values of the effective number of presidential candidates as well as for values in the intermediary range, even if there is still no significant inflationary effect at high values. Overall, we find that our results are robust to various measures of presidential power, but that they do change when different measures of this concept are operationalized. We address this point in the discussion section below.

Figure 4 about here

Discussion

These results raise two main issues. Firstly, they show that in countries with direct presidential elections the proximity of presidential elections to legislative elections has neither an independent effect on the legislative party system nor an effect that depends upon another standard institutional variable. This finding flies in the face of well-known empirical examples, such as the French case since 2002. It also goes against the findings of Shugart (1995), who identified a separate independent effect of proximate elections, as well as Amorim Neto and Cox (1997), Golder (2006) and Hicken and Stoll (2013), who all found a significant effect for proximity when interacted with other variables. We stress that our findings are probabilistic. We do not claim there is no promixity effect anywhere. Therefore, it is perfectly reasonable to think there is a proximity effect in France, whereas generally this is not the case. More substantively, though, we are struck by how the debate about the effect of proximate elections has developed over time. Shugart and Carey (1992) first discussed the notion of an independent effect of proximity, but did not submit it to rigorous testing. Shugart (1995) did test its independent effect, but on only a relatively small number of countries. Amorim Neto and Cox (1997) and Golder (2006) then tested its effect in interaction with the effective number of presidential candidates. Hicken and Stoll (2013) added a further interaction with presidential powers. One way of thinking about this debate is to say that researchers have been downgrading the independent effect of proximity over the course of time. Put another way, while the idea that presidential elections have an impact on the legislative party system is highly intuitive, work has increasingly suggested that this intuition needs to be

refined. In this context, our findings merely take such a story to its logical conclusion. What is more, we have stressed that since the work of Amorim Neto and Cox (1997) studies of proximity have included countries with indirectly elected presidents and monarchs in their estimations. Indeed, we have noted that parliamentary countries comprise a majority of the observations in recent studies. Yet, by definition, there can be no coattails effect in these countries. For that reason, the coding of the proximity variable in them is hypothetical. The value recorded is the same as the one for elections at the exact mid-term in a country with a direct presidential election. This strategy is the best available option if parliamentary republics and monarchies are to be included. However, why include them when we have no expectations about the effect of the key variables under consideration in these regimes, when including them requires recording a hypothetical value, and when there is already variation in the key set of explanatory variables under investigation within the set of countries with direct presidential elections alone? Overall, while there has been a long-standing expectation about the effect of proximate presidential and legislative elections on the legislative party system, we find no evidence of this effect and we suggest that this finding is not as unusual as it might at first appear, given the way in which the debate has developed over time and given recent research strategies.

Secondly, we have stressed the importance of presidential power in shaping the legislative party system when interacted with the effective number of presidential candidates. All the same, we have shown that there are ongoing concerns with how a presidential power variable is typically operationalized. There are problems of face validity. For example, some measures of presidential power, particularly those that record solely

constitutional powers, record low values for presidents who are typically strong in practice and relatively high values for those who are weak. There are also problems of reliability. Most measures capture presidential power on the basis of many different individual indicators. However, in so doing they conflate multiple dimensions of presidential power, rendering aggregate measures problematic. We have tried to address these problems by working from an index that tries to capture presidential power in practice and by generating cross-national scores on the basis of a single dimension of presidential power. Even so, we acknowledge that our results vary to a greater or lesser extent as different measures of presidential power are operationalized. This is to be expected. Indeed, we would be very surprised if Hicken and Stoll's (2013) results were not sensitive to different measures of presidential power as well. In fact, the same point is likely to apply to any study that operationalizes this variable. Our study has shown that it is necessary to operationalize the concept of presidential power very carefully and to submit the results of any estimation that includes this variable to rigorous robustness checks. Indeed, this point applies not only to the ongoing debate about the institutional determinants of legislative party systems, but also to topics in comparative politics more broadly.

Conclusion

This article builds on the existing literature about the effect of presidential coattails on the legislative party system. Controlling for standard electoral system and social heterogeneity variables, we argue that the legislative party system is shaped by the effective number of presidential candidates but only

within an intermediary range of presidential power. This is because presidential power itself helps to determine the effective number of presidential candidates by encouraging parties to behave strategically but only in a way that we can clearly observe within such an intermediary range. We also think differently about how we should test for the effect of this interaction. Typically, scholars have done so by pooling presidential, semi-presidential, and parliamentary countries, even though the effect of the variable under investigation only applies to countries with direct presidential elections. We are skeptical that parliamentary countries can be included on the basis that they constitute a natural experiment. Instead, we suggest that the effects under consideration should be tested solely in countries with directly elected presidents. Overall, our results cast doubt on the highly intuitive idea that presidential coattails shape the legislative party system. However, they reinforce the idea that the effective number of presidential candidates is an important determinant of the legislative party system, suggesting that we need to reassess the determinants of this factor. Following Hicken and Stoll (2013), we emphasize presidential power in this regard. We show that presidential power is a difficult concept to capture and that there are problems with many existing measures. We argue that when we wish to estimate the effect of presidential power on an outcome variable, we need to think carefully about how we capture the concept and that we should avoid drawing conclusions from results that rely on a single measure. This point applies not only to the ongoing debate about the institutional determinants of legislative party systems, but also to many topics in comparative politics more generally.

Table 1   Estimating the effective number of electoral parties

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
PROXIMITY	-3.39 (0.64)***	-3.19 (1.19)***	-0.46 (0.83)	-0.90 (2.20)	0.05 (0.25)
ENPC	0.16 (0.14)	-0.07 (0.15)	0.90 (0.24)***	0.43 (0.49)	0.70 (0.35)**
PROXIMITY *ENPC	1.02 (0.27)***	1.25 (0.42)***	0.15 (0.28)	0.49 (0.78)	
PRESPOW		-0.73 (0.11)***		-0.64 (0.47)	-0.43 (0.31)
PRESPOW* PROXIMITY		0.65 (0.45)		0.36 (0.80)	
PRESPOW* ENPC		0.26 (0.06)***		0.21 (0.18)	0.10 (0.12)
PRESPOW* PROXIMITY* ENPC		-0.30 (0.16)*		-0.18 (0.28)	
ENEG	0.25 (0.15)*	0.11 (0.08)	0.26 (0.22)	0.03 (0.12)	0.03 (0.12)
MAGNITUDE	0.08 (0.32)	-0.19 (0.20)	0.05 (0.42)	-0.29 (0.31)	-0.29 (0.28)
MAGNITUDE* ENEG	0.20 (0.17)	0.29 (0.11)***	0.24 (0.27)	0.41 (0.18)**	0.41 (0.17)**
Constant	2.98 (0.50)***	3.73 (0.29)***	0.39 (0.92)	2.23 (1.29)*	1.69 (0.91)*

N	454	444	291	288	288
R-squared	0.29	0.31	0.39	0.39	0.38
Root mean square error	1.76	1.70	1.73	1.69	1.69
	Country-clustered standard errors	Newey-West standard errors	Country-clustered standard errors	Newey-West standard errors	Panel-corrected standard errors

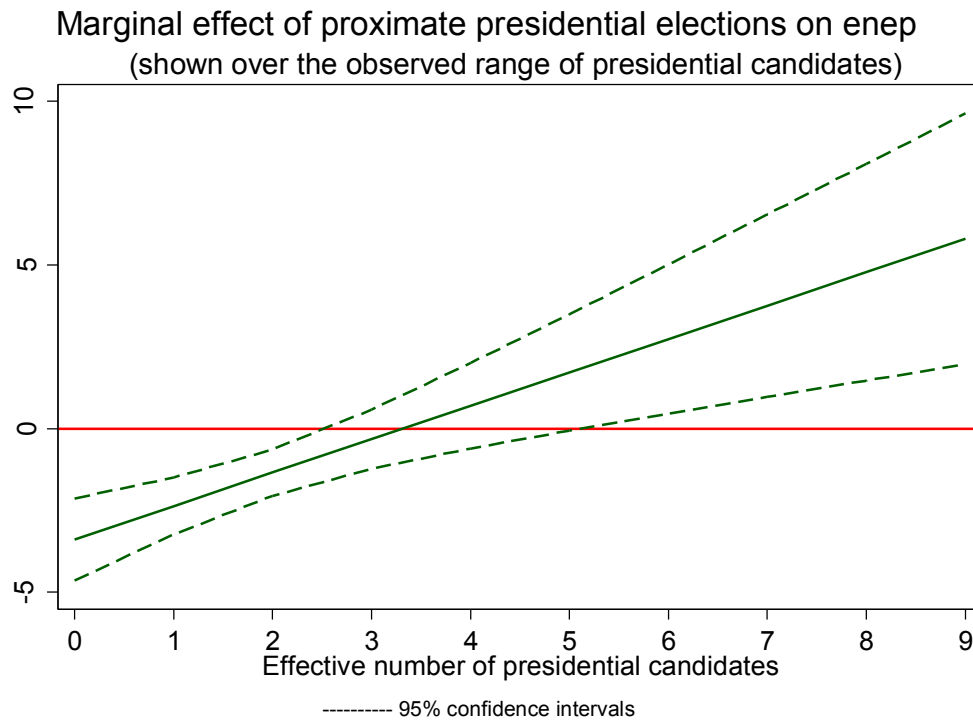**Figure 1   Replication of Golder's model (Model 1)**

Marginal effect of proximate presidential elections on enep
(shown over the observed range of presidential candidates)

Effective number of presidential candidates

---------- 95% confidence intervals

Figure 2   Replication of Golder's model without parliamentary systems

(Model 3)

Marginal effect of proximate presidential elections on enep
(shown over the observed range of presidential candidates)

Effective number of presidential candidates

---------- 95% confidence intervals

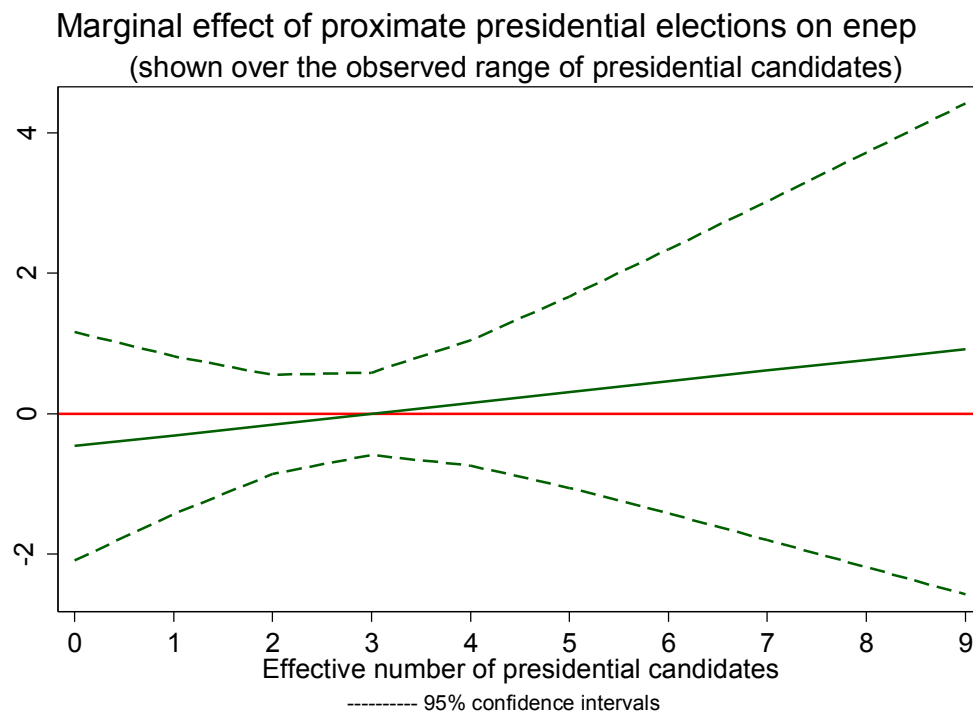**Figure 3**   **The interaction of presidential power and the effective number of presidential candidates on the legislative party system (Model 5)**

Marginal effect of presidential powers on enep
(shown over the observed range of presidential candidates)

Effective number of presidential candidates
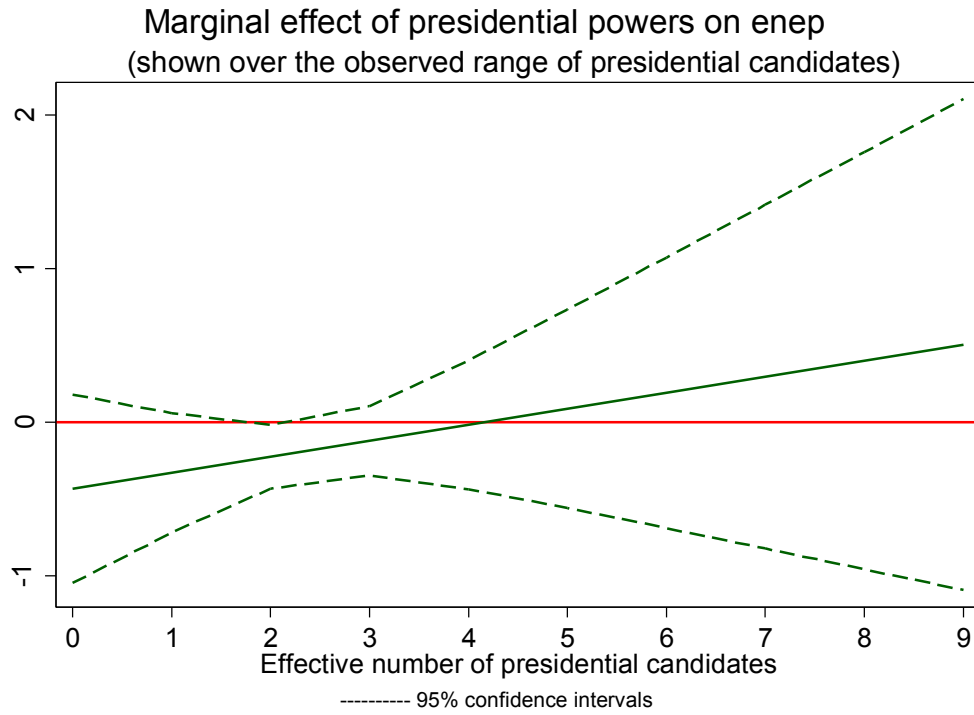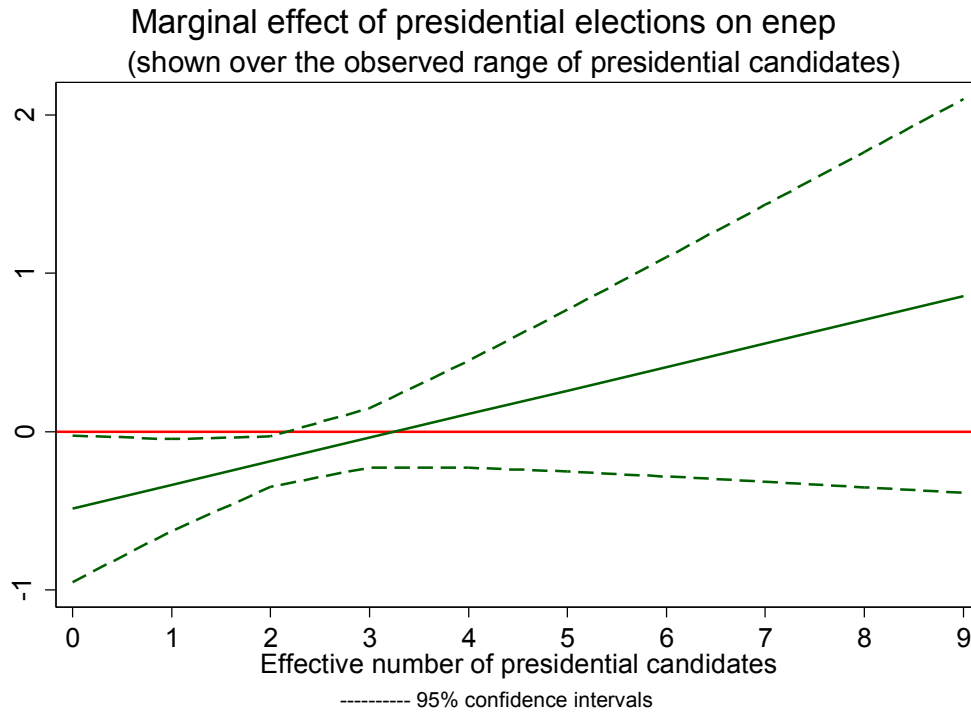
---------- 95% confidence intervals

Figure 4 **The interaction of presidential power and the effective number of presidential candidates on the legislative party system with an alternative measure of presidential power**

Marginal effect of presidential elections on enep
(shown over the observed range of presidential candidates)

Effective number of presidential candidates

---------- 95% confidence intervals

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