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THE END OF SILENT ELECTIONS

The Birth of Electoral Competition, 1832–1915

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ABSTRACT

This article explores empirically the competitive strategies of political parties aimed at maximizing electoral support in the early years of democratic elections. By spreading through geographical space in search of votes, candidates and parties challenged adversaries in their strongholds – a process that led to a reduction in the number of safe seats and uncontested constituencies. Evidence covers eight European countries from the early nineteenth century until World War I and is based on constituency-level data. The increasing competition among parties is described, and the impact of the 'massification of politics' evaluated: (1) the extension of voting rights; (2) the challenge to conservatives and liberals by mass parties (mainly social democrats after the Industrial Revolution) and the supremacy of the left–right cleavage over cultural resistances; and (3) the change from a majoritarian to PR formula as an incentive for parties to spread across constituencies. The analogy between competition in the geographical and ideological space is illustrated.

KEY WORDS ■ silent elections ■ electoral competition ■ suffrage ■ PR

Introduction

In the first Danish election to the *Folketing* in 1849 (the lower house of the *Rigsdag*, introduced after the February Revolution of 1848), the seat returned by the constituency of Odder (Århus) was won by G. Winter of *Venstre*, of the Liberal Party. Almost 30 years later, in 1876, the same candidate won the same seat again. In the interim, 13 elections took place and G. Winter was never opposed by any other candidate (except in 1852, and then later in 1879). Elections therefore never really took place in Odder for three decades. Winter had always been 'elected by acclamation' (*valgt ved kåring*), a procedure adopted in the case of unopposed candidates. He was eventually defeated in 1884.

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Such cases were not limited to single-member constituencies. In 1832,[1] the county constituency of Lancashire-Northern returned two seats to Westminster, and both remained uncontested until 1865. Actual voting therefore never took place until 1868 (the first election after the Second Reform Bill of 1866). In seven out of nine general elections, the two seats were split between one conservative and one liberal candidate. In two elections – 1837 and 1841 – the seats were won by two conservatives. The winners, however, were always the same people, changing from liberal to conservative.

Similar situations occurred under different electoral formulas. The *arrondissement* of Sint-Niklaas (Flanders) returned three seats between 1847 and 1892 with a two-ballot formula and multiple vote. In 13 elections out of 16 of this period,[2] the *Parti catholique* won all seats with 100 percent of the vote at the first ballot. Only in 1848 did the *Parti libéral* win a seat (18.57 percent at the first ballot), and until 1894 no other candidate contested that constituency and a second ballot was never needed.

These three stories reflect how electoral competition between candidates and parties emerged laboriously. The nineteenth century witnessed the most striking changes in political life with the transition from absolutist to parliamentary regimes, and with the progressive entry of the masses on the political stage. Parliaments that in many cases had not been convened since the end of the Middle Ages were reintroduced. Even though in some cases they were still based on estate representation, in all countries these bodies were soon transformed into modern parliaments based on territorial representation. Yet – as contemporary observers such as Tocqueville and Lampedusa noted – democratic revolutions did not lead to immediate change. The systems that developed in the nineteenth century remained non-competitive, and prolonged the control of the elites of the past on local political life. Since competition did not suddenly appear in the aftermath of democratic reforms, powerful local *notables* remained long unopposed. The early history of elections is full of examples such as those above, with seats solidly in the hands of the same person and – later, with the development of party structures – with opposition parties long not daring to venture into unfriendly territory.

The rules of the game themselves were not favourable to competition. The franchise remained restricted through census and capacity requirements, the abolition of which has been continuous but hard-fought. In some cases, elections remained indirect or otherwise unequal with few voters having the right to cast more votes than most others on the basis of taxation, property, literacy, and so on.[3] The possibilities of challenging established elites were therefore limited and, under such voting conditions, opposition to *notables* could hardly be expressed through the electoral channel. In several countries, the control over areas by given political groups was further reinforced by cultural elements, such as linguistic or religious affiliations or political subcultures. Before industrialization, urbanization and the development of communication had increased geographical mobility,

ethno-linguistic and religious strongholds could not readily be eroded. Majoritarian formulas, which in their many variations were employed in all countries in the nineteenth century, constituted a powerful hindrance to competition. The high thresholds for representation that these formulas set – especially when combined with single-member constituencies – discouraged candidates from contesting constituencies controlled by antagonists.

In this article, I explore empirically and comparatively the birth and historical growth of electoral competition in eight European countries from the nineteenth century until World War I. Using constituency-level electoral data, I describe party strategy aimed at maximizing electoral support by expanding through geographical space, and test hypotheses about the impact of the 'massification of politics' on the development of party competition. First, I consider the impact of the extension of voting rights to larger sectors of the society. Second, I evaluate the weight of the entry of new mass parties (mainly social democrats through enfranchisement and the Industrial Revolution) producing the supremacy of the left–right cleavage over cultural resistances. Third, I investigate whether the change of electoral formula from majoritarian to PR did introduce incentives high enough to break down the monopoly of representation of given political groups in given areas.

Framework for Analysis

Electoral Competition

From a historical perspective, a definition of electoral competition should start from its basic aspect. Competition is first a matter of *contestedness*: there is competition when there are at least two candidates for one seat.[4] On the contrary, there is no competition in constituencies in which the number of candidates equals the number of seats to be returned (for example, one candidate for one seat). The majoritarian electoral formulas in force during the nineteenth and early twentieth century in all European countries were mostly based on single-member constituencies. A constituency is therefore competitive insofar as the single seat is contested by at least two candidates. It follows that the greater the number of contested constituencies, the greater the degree of competition.

A definition based on the number of contested constituencies implies a close relationship with the territorial spread of parties across constituencies. For a high number of contested constituencies to arise, parties must diffuse through territory to challenge constituencies dominated by other parties. A regionalized party system would on the contrary indicate the existence of non-competitive areas, with the domination of one party. The competition in a political system therefore increases with the transformation of territorial or sectional cleavages into functional or ideological cleavages.

However, even in the case of a contested constituency, the level of competition is low if there is a party or a candidate dominating all others. Besides contestedness, therefore, a competitive situation arises with parties receiving evenly matched support and with an equal chance of winning the seat. By contrast, the greater the distance between the elected and non-elected candidate(s), the lower the competition in a constituency in terms of *marginality*, that is, when the shift from one party or candidate to the other of a reduced number of votes is sufficient to modify the outcome.[5] The degree of competition in a system is therefore also closely related to the degree of homogeneity across territory of party strength.[6] This article is limited to the analysis of electoral competition in terms of contestedness of constituencies and seats as engendered by the spread of candidates and parties across territory. It will be the task of further investigation to analyse empirically the growth of competition in terms of marginality among candidates and of homogeneity of support across regions.

Countries and Time Period

Up until World War I, starting with the first elections available according to countries, electoral systems varied a great deal among countries, mixing features of repeated-ballot systems with direct/indirect vote, in some cases open voting, and estate representation. Furthermore, a large amount of information is missing, especially concerning the party affiliation of candidates. It is therefore impossible to carry out a thorough exploration. This 'pilot' analysis considers instead eight European countries with mostly direct majoritarian electoral systems:

- Britain (1832–1935): plurality formula in single- and multi-member constituencies; Ireland (1832–1910), which is considered as a separate case; Denmark (1849–1913): plurality formula in single-member constituencies.
- Belgium (1847–98), Germany (1871–1912), The Netherlands (1888–1913) and Norway (1906–18): two-ballot formulas in mostly single-member constituencies. In Switzerland (1848–1917) a three-ballot, then two-ballot system (since 1900) was used.[7]

The starting point of the period of time varies for each country according to (1) patterns of state formation (2) the development of free elections, and (3) the availability of data sources.[8] For all countries the analysis ends with the last election before the introduction of PR – except for the United Kingdom, where PR was never introduced and for which data is presented up until 1935.

In several countries, democratic institutions developed under foreign domination before independence. This is the case in Norway, which was under Swedish rule from 1815 until 1905. Norwegian elections, however, are considered since 1906, the first direct election to the *Storting* after

independence from Sweden.[9] Ireland returned representatives to the Westminster parliament until 1918, but is considered here as a separate case because of the divergent development of its party system after the 1880s. In the case of Belgium, independence from the Low Countries and the introduction of parliamentary life with competitive elections were two parallel processes. Elections to the *Chambre des représentants* have been held since 1830 but registered only since 1847–48, which corresponds with the wave of democratization that invested the whole of Europe. Elections are registered since 1848 also in the cases of Denmark and Switzerland. In the former, the date corresponds to the transition from the absolutist regime, whereas in the latter it corresponds to the foundation of the federal state and the unification on national grounds of cantonal electoral laws. Unification is the starting date for the German Empire (elections from 1871 until 1912, the last election before World War I).

In several of the cases mentioned, the starting date corresponds to the transition from representation by estates (inherited from the Middle Ages) to general parliamentary representation. This transition occurred in 1848 in the case of Dutch elections to the *Tweede Kamer*. Data, however, are available only since 1888, in correspondence with the constitutional revision that reduced census requirements and abolished 'double constituencies'.[10] Representation by estates did not exist in England; 1832 is the date of the First Reform Bill and the first registered elections (the earliest case of the analysis).

Data

Data required are election results by parties and candidates at the level of single constituencies. The data used for analysis in this article are those published in machine-readable form in the CD-ROM that accompanies the handbook on *Elections in Western Europe since 1815. Electoral Results by Constituencies* (Caramani, 2000).[11] Figures are limited to general elections and lower houses.[12] No by-elections are considered, but staggered elections (*élections partielles*) are included in the analysis in the case of the Belgian *Chambre des représentants* (with half of the house renewed every two years). For each election, the data include the number of persons entitled to vote, voters and valid votes by constituencies. Also included are the number of votes for each party and/or candidate (for each ballot if applicable), as well as the number of uncontested constituencies.[13]

Indicators

Of the two interrelated dimensions of party competition discussed above – contestedness and territorial spread – the first has been considered in a number of studies (Cornford, 1970; Craig, 1977; Rose and Urwin, 1975; Urwin, 1982a). During the early periods of electoral development, plurality

systems were characterized by a high number of uncontested constituencies. The more uncontested constituencies, the less competition given that uncontested constituencies are dominated by one party, or candidate, in the absence of competitors.

The use of such a simple indicator, however, varies depending upon the magnitude of constituencies. Table 1 gives a general overview of the electoral systems in force in the various countries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An important difference among majoritarian formulas concerns whether they are based on *single-member* or *multi-member constituencies*. In electoral systems based on single-member constituencies, the number of constituencies equals the number of seats, and therefore the number of uncontested constituencies equals the number of unopposed seats. In most cases, however, single-member constituencies were combined with two-member or multi-member constituencies (for example, in the United Kingdom and Ireland). In systems based on multi-member constituencies, the number of seats exceeds the number of constituencies. There is therefore a distinction to be made between uncontested *constituencies* and unopposed *seats*.[14] In several cases, two or more candidates of different parties were unopposed. It was frequent in the United Kingdom that, in two-member constituencies, one conservative and one liberal were unopposed.[15] It can therefore be misleading to limit the count to uncontested constituencies (see Rose and Urwin, 1975). Since the two or more seats in the same constituency can be won unopposed by *different* parties, the territorial spread of parties does not necessarily lead to a lowering of the number of uncontested constituencies.

Table 1. Electoral systems in eight countries: 1832–World War I

Country	*Period*	*Number of elections*	*Electoral formula*	*Constituency magnitude*
Belgium	1847–1898	29	Two-ballot	Single-member/ Multi-member
Britain	1832–1935	20	Plurality	Single-member/ Multi-member
Denmark	1849–1915	31	Plurality	Single-member
Germany	1871–1912	13	Two-ballot	Single-member
Ireland	1832–1910	20	Plurality	Single-member/ Multi-member
Netherlands	1888–1913	9	Two-ballot	Single-member
Norway	1906–1918	13	Two-ballot	Single-member
Switzerland	1848–1899	24	Three-ballot	Single-member/
	1902–1917		Two-ballot	Multi-member

Notes: The 29 Belgian elections include five general elections (1848, 1857, 1864, 1870 and 1890) and 24 partial renewals. In Denmark, two elections in the same year were held in 1853, 1864 and 1881. The election to the Constituent Assembly of 1848 is not included. In the United Kingdom (and Ireland) in 1910 two elections were held (January and December).

Although the distinction between single-member and multi-member constituencies applies also to repeated-ballot formulas (two-ballot and three-ballot),[16] with these formulas it is also possible to operationalize the level of competition by (1) counting the number of constituencies in which a second ballot was necessary for electing a representative (the higher the number of such constituencies, the higher competition), or (2) counting the number of uncontested constituencies at second ballot (the higher the number of such constituencies, the lower competition).[17]

For both single-member and multi-member constituencies – because of the frequent redistricting and redistribution, and for the sake of cross-national comparison – figures below are based mostly on the number of uncontested constituencies as a *percentage* of the total number of constituencies.[18]

Evidence

Plurality Systems

A case of a pure single-member plurality system is Denmark from 1849 until 1915. When candidates were unopposed, voters could ask to vote either 'yes' or 'no' for the unopposed candidate. Until 1898 voting was carried out by a show of hands. The electoral committee decided, by looking at the crowd, whether or not a candidate could be declared elected on the basis of a show of hands, and only in the case of ambiguity was a count taken.[19] When there was more than one candidate, the electoral committee decided who was to be elected by looking at the crowd (only in the case of uncertainty was a roll-call election carried out). Such cases have been counted as uncontested constituencies. The fact that no count was needed demonstrates the 'uncontestedness' of that constituency (with only marginal opposition candidates).

As can be seen from the left-hand graph in Figure 1, the number of uncontested constituencies decreases continuously from 1853 to 1905. This shows that there are fewer and fewer constituencies dominated by one of the two main parties – *Højre* or *Venstre* – in which the other is absent, indicating a clear and progressive increase in the rate of competition in Danish electoral life. Uncontested constituencies displayed in the graph include mostly those won by *Højre* and *Venstre*, the two main parties of the Danish system until World War I. Other parties won unopposed seats sporadically. These parties started to appear in 1872 (the Social Democrats contested one constituency). During the 1890s the United Liberals (*Forenede Venstre*), the Moderates (*Forhandlende Venstre*), the *Radikale Venstre* and the agrarians (since 1905) made their appearance.

Let us now turn to a typical case of multi-member plurality elections – that of the United Kingdom since 1832, which includes also Ireland until

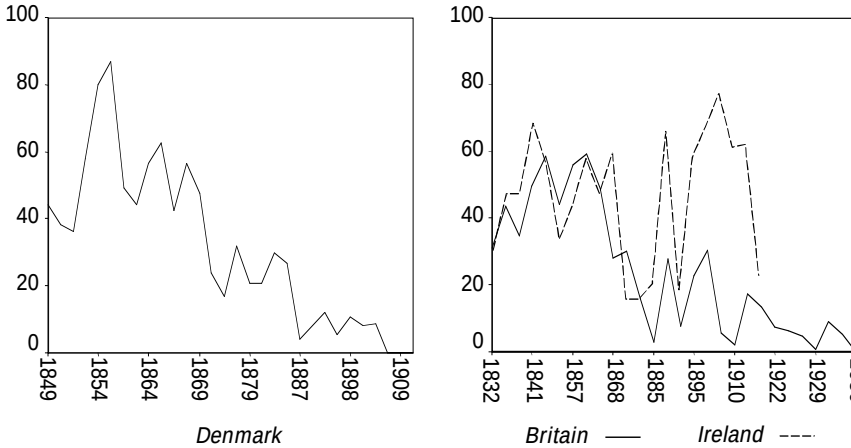

Figure 1. Percentage of uncontested constituencies in Denmark and the United Kingdom

1918.[20] Constituencies returned up to four seats, but through the mechanism of limited voting a maximum of only three votes could be cast. Variations occurred over time with 'redistributions' of seats: the number of seats returned by constituencies was changed, and, in some cases, constituencies were disenfranchised because of corrupt practices.

As in Denmark, the party system was dominated by two main parties: Conservatives and Liberals. By the mid-nineteenth century, Chartist and later Liberal Unionist candidates began to challenge these parties, but the impact of 'third' parties on the party system format was limited until the appearance of Labour candidates towards the end of the century. In Ireland, Conservatives and Liberals had been challenged since the 1870s by Nationalists and Unionists. Since the 1880s, conservative candidates have not contested Irish constituencies and the Liberals underwent a rapid decline (although they continued to contest Irish constituencies until 1918). As shown in the right-hand graph of Figure 1, Ireland and Great Britain present two different patterns. On the one hand, the number of uncontested constituencies declines in Great Britain, indicating a progressive increase in the rate of competition until the 1930s. On the other hand, in Ireland the movement is more erratic and does not give rise to a clear trend. This difference is due to the persistent partisan structure in Britain and to the radical changes that occurred in the Irish party system.

In Britain the Conservative and Liberal parties were therefore never challenged until the growth of the Labour Party (see also Figure 4 below). In Ireland, by contrast, the decrease in the number of uncontested constituencies between 1874 and 1885 was caused by the appearance of two new antagonists: the Nationalists and the Unionists. Their presence in most constituencies made them competitive and the overall number of uncontested

constituencies declined rapidly. By 1885, nationalist candidates were mainly unopposed, increasing the overall number of uncontested constituencies for that particular election. In 1892, however, the Anti-Parnell Nationalists transformed Irish constituencies into competitive ones again by opposing the Parnell Nationalists. In 1895 the Anti-Parnell Nationalists were mainly uncontested. Since 1890 the (newly unified) Nationalists won the majority of the constituencies unopposed making the system non-competitive once again.[21]

Constituencies versus Seats

What are the figures when we consider seats in conjunction with constituencies? Table 2 gives the number of uncontested seats for the first, second, third and fourth candidates for both Conservatives and Liberals in Britain.

The first columns for both Conservatives and Liberals show that one candidate has been declared elected unopposed in his constituency. In 1832 this happened in 44 (out of 335) constituencies for the Conservatives and in 81 for the Liberals. Among the 44 constituencies in which a conservative candidate has been elected, in 6 of them a second conservative candidate was also elected unopposed. Similarly, of the 81 liberal uncontested constituencies, in 24 a second candidate has been elected unopposed. The total number of uncontested *constituencies* in which candidates won an unopposed seat, therefore, appears in the first columns of each party. The remaining columns provide information about the additional seats won by unopposed candidates in the same constituencies (for example, in 1859 in one constituency four liberal candidates were elected unopposed). The sum of the columns therefore gives the total number of unopposed *seats* won in an election.

The table indicates in the first place that constituencies in which more than two candidates of the same party were elected unopposed are rare (see third and fourth candidate column). Second, there is a sudden drop in the number of constituencies in which two candidates of the same party were elected unopposed after the Third Reform Bill (1884–85) which reduced the number of two-member constituencies in favour of single-member constituencies. In addition, constituencies in which two candidates of the same party were elected unopposed became rare.

Third, the table gives the total number of constituencies in which candidates of different parties were elected unopposed. This more important information is obtained by subtracting the overall number of uncontested constituencies from the sum of the constituencies in which either at least one conservative or one liberal candidate has been elected unopposed. In 1832, for example, there were 125 constituencies in which either a conservative or a liberal had been elected unopposed. However, in total there were 104 uncontested constituencies. Therefore, in 21 constituencies both parties were present with unopposed candidates. These are ‘shared constituencies’ in which both a liberal and a conservative candidate were elected unopposed.

Table 2. Uncontested constituencies and unopposed seats in the United Kingdom: 1832–1910

	Conservatives				*Liberals*					*Total*		
Election year	*1st candidate*	*2nd candidate*	*3rd candidate*	*Total Conservative seats*	*1st candidate*	*2nd candidate*	*3rd candidate*	*4th candidate*	*Total Liberal seats*	*Uncontested constituencies*	*Sum of 1st candidates columns*	*'Shared constituencies'*
1832	44	6	0	50	81	24	0	0	105	104	125	21
1835	80	20	0	100	100	26	0	0	126	146	180	34
1837	76	26	0	102	68	13	0	0	81	116	144	28
1841	123	56	4	183	70	13	0	0	83	166	193	27
1847	123	54	2	179	105	21	0	0	126	196	228	32
1852	99	42	2	143	65	13	0	0	78	147	164	17
1857	98	36	0	134	116	33	0	0	149	186	214	28
1859	115	41	0	156	127	30	1	1	159	197	242	45
1865	82	32	2	116	110	22	0	0	132	164	192	28
1868	43	22	0	65	69	11	0	0	80	100	112	12
1874	72	44	0	116	47	3	1	0	51	106	119	13
1880	29	23	0	52	36*	3	0	0	39	56	65	9
1885	4	2	0	6	12	1	0	0	13	17	16	0
1886	83	4	0	87	37	1	0	0	38	150	120	0
1892	22	2	0	24	10	1	0	0	11	42	32	0
1895	98	3	0	101	9	0	0	0	9	124	107	0
1900	121	4	0	125	22	0	0	0	22	165	143	0
1906	3	0	0	3	23	0	0	0	23	31	26	0
1910	5	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	10	5	0
1910	51	2	0	53	31	0	0	0	31	95	82	0

Notes: Irish constituencies (1832–1918) not included. In 1910 two elections (January and December); (*) Among which one Liberal/Labour candidate. These were nominees of Liberal associations but 'campaigned mainly on trade union and labour issues' (Craig, 1977: xv).

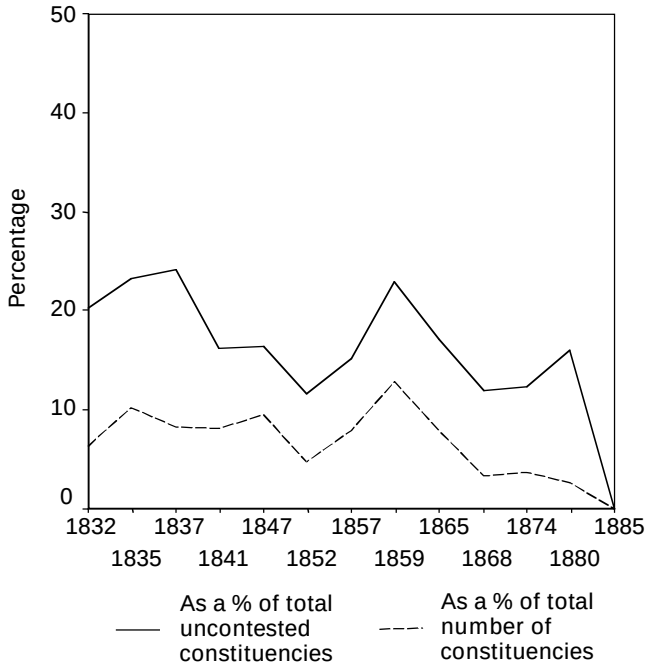

Figure 2. 'Shared constituencies' in Britain, 1832–85

Figure 2 shows the evolution of 'shared constituencies'. Shared constituencies in which both a conservative and a liberal were unopposed drops to zero in 1885 after the Third Reform Bill, which carried out a large redistribution of seats. Most multi-member constituencies were abolished and replaced by single-member constituencies. For this reason the overall number of constituencies increases from 352 to 542. As can be seen from Figure 2, the percentage of shared constituencies is limited, reaching a maximum of 45 in 1859 (12.8 percent of the total number of constituencies and 22.8 percent of the number of uncontested constituencies). The remainder of uncontested constituencies were either single-member constituencies, in which there was one unopposed candidate, or two-member constituencies, in which there were unopposed candidates of the same party. The fact that seats within the same constituency were rarely shared between the candidates of different parties reinforces previous indications of a low rate of competition. Most constituencies – either single- or multi-member – attest for the presence of one party only.

Two-Ballot Systems

Among the countries under scrutiny using a two-ballot formula, the number of uncontested constituencies at first ballots is low.[22] At first sight, this

indicates a higher rate of competition. However, if we also look at second ballots, the picture changes. To assess the emergence of national competitive patterns in two-ballot formulas, the number of constituencies in which a second ballot was necessary for electing a representative is an important additional indicator in formulas in which the actual allocation of seats is carried out in the second ballot: the more constituencies in which a second ballot was required, the greater the competition. For comparative purposes (through both space and time) we use the number of constituencies in which a second ballot was carried out as a percentage of the total number of constituencies.

Among our cases, two-ballot formulas were used mostly in single-member constituencies.[23] As shown in Figure 3, the longest trend is that of Belgium, for which both partial and general elections have been considered. These two types of election display a parallel trend: elections held alternately in 19 and 22 *arrondissements* and general renewals of the *Chambre des représentants* are characterized by a low number of second ballots until the early 1880s. This number then increases suddenly to a high of almost 60 percent of the constituencies, indicating an increased competitiveness in correspondence with the introduction of male universal suffrage in 1893 (PR was introduced in 1898). The same trend characterizes the *Reich* period

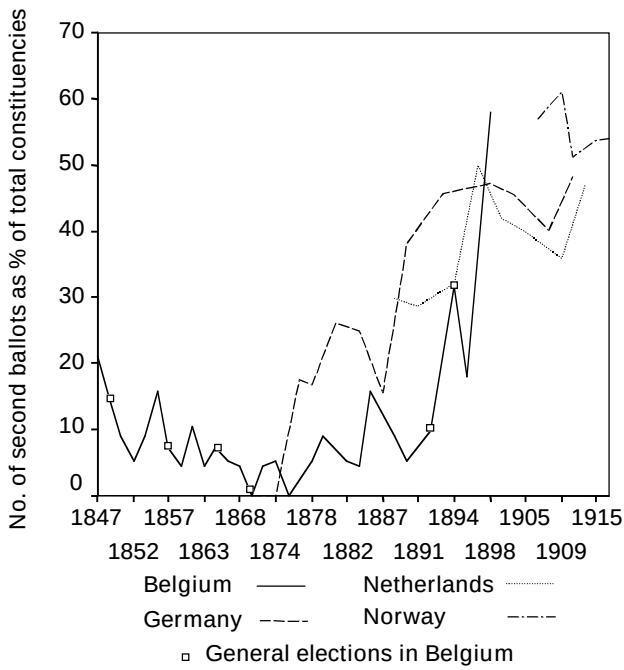

Figure 3. Percentage of constituencies in which a second ballot was held in Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands and Norway, 1847–1915

of two-ballot elections in single-member constituencies from 1871 until 1912, the last election before the Weimar constitution: the number of constituencies in which no candidate reached the absolute majority in the first ballot increases from zero in 1871 and 1874 to almost 50 percent during the 1880s and 1890s.

For the Netherlands and Norway the period of time is shorter. After the abolition of 'double constituencies' in the Netherlands in 1888, elections were held in single-member *kiesdistricten*. During the period until World War I the percentage of second ballots is similar to those of Belgium and Germany during the same period. In the case of the Netherlands, it is interesting to consider the number of constituencies in which second ballots were uncontested. These are cases in which one of the two run-off candidates withdraws, which occurred often during the whole of the 1888–1917 period: from a minimum of 50 out of 100 constituencies in 1897, to a maximum of 63 in 1909. Although, therefore, in many constituencies no candidate could be declared elected on the basis of the first ballot, in most of them the difference in terms of votes between the two run-off candidates was high enough to lead one of the two candidates to withdraw.

From 1815 until 1903 Norway voted with an indirect system: *valgmandsvalgene* (election of great electors) and *stortingsvalgene* (election of representatives by great electors). Elections became direct in 1906 (two-ballot formula). Since the 1880s, however, the two main parties had covered almost 100 percent of the constituencies (at least at the level of *valgmandsvalgene*). This competitive pattern also appears in the number of second ballots needed for electing representatives in the 123–6 *valgkredsen* between 1906 and 1918, the last election before the introduction of PR. As shown in Figure 3, the number of second ballots as a percentage of the total number of constituencies is between 50 and 60, a little higher than the percentages of Germany and the Netherlands.

The Massification of Politics and the Lowering of Entry Barriers

The National Revolution and Enfranchisement

Among the factors usually put forward as accounting for the development of party competition, the early development of representative bodies and of pluralist parliamentary life is one of the most important. It is argued that party competition is inherently linked to a precocious democratic life and old parliamentary traditions. Indeed, the 'National Revolution' has followed diverse patterns in Europe. Not only was the timing of the introduction and development of free elections very different from country to country, but also the strength and duration of previous parliamentary traditions varied a great deal among European states: while in some cases

the development of democratic life was smooth and progressive, the introduction of constitutional government in other cases was a sudden and abrupt change from previous absolutism.

Britain and Switzerland are both characterized by a long-term and smooth trajectory. The Representation of the People Act adopted in 1832 (which included Ireland, although with different franchise provisions) did not constitute a violent break from representative traditions that were not discontinued – as in most continental countries – during the absolutist period. Similarly, in Switzerland the formation of the federal state in 1848 could rely upon old democratic practices. On the contrary, in Denmark the transition from absolutism in 1848–49 was sudden and abrupt. In other cases, democratic progress was accomplished simultaneously with movements of national independence and/or unification. The Belgian revolution of 1830, when independence from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (which also included the Duchy of Luxembourg) was achieved, introduced elections with a two-ballot majority system based on a restricted franchise. In Germany, national unification in 1870 definitely introduced male universal suffrage and a two-ballot electoral system.

Furthermore, in many states, after the absolutist period, estate parliaments were introduced as a first step in the direction of general parliamentary representation. Among our cases, this occurred in the Netherlands, where elections to the *Tweede Kamer* from 1815 until 1849 were mediated by Provincial Councils in turn based on estate representation. In Belgium itself this was the case before independence in 1830. During the reactionary period that followed the 1848 revolution in most states, including Germany, parliaments were reorganized as curial systems, with the exception of Bavaria, Baden and Prussia, where the three-class electoral system was introduced.

A closely related element to the development of parliamentary life is the extension of voting rights to the entire male population. This process too varies a great deal among European states. In most of the countries considered here the introduction of (male) universal suffrage was gradual. Franchise was extended progressively in Belgium (universal suffrage in 1893),[24] Norway (1900), Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Ireland (1918). In Switzerland and in Germany, on the contrary, the extension of the franchise to all males occurred earlier and abruptly in 1848. However, whereas in Switzerland there were no reversals, the history of Germany has been more agitated with the definite extension in 1871 after the period of reaction that invested most German states before unification.[25]

Independently from the richness in diversity of national trajectories towards free elections and mass suffrage, however, the above evidence does not support the hypothesis of a strong link between the type and duration of the traditions of representation, processes of enfranchisement, and the birth of electoral competition. Competition does not take off earlier in

Britain than in other countries despite longer parliamentary and electoral practices. In all countries, on the contrary, the different indicators used to measure the degree of contestedness of constituencies display a similar tendency towards increasing competition in the second half of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, for several countries there is evidence that the levels of competition increase before the crucial extensions of voting rights, that is, before the introduction of male universal suffrage. Whereas for Belgium, Germany and Switzerland male universal suffrage is introduced before or in correspondence with the development of competition in the second half of the nineteenth century, in Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands during the same period competition increases in spite of a restricted franchise which was not extended until after World War I.

The Industrial Revolution and the Entry of New Parties

The concomitant timing of development of party competition during the second half of the nineteenth century therefore suggests that other factors have played a more important role, namely, the appearance of new challengers during this period as a result of political mobilization caused by processes of industrialization and urbanization. The entry of new competitors – in particular social democrats and labour parties – has changed the configuration of European party systems towards the end of the nineteenth century into a more competitive one.

The opposition between conservatives and liberals was typical of politics in the age of restricted electorates. If one looks broadly at the European party systems of the nineteenth century, the pattern appears to be almost invariably that of conservatives versus liberals – although in several countries conservatives were Catholic parties (as in Belgium and Switzerland, and later also in Germany) opposed to centralizing secularized liberal parties. New parties emerged from the impact of the Industrial Revolution that mobilized large strata of workers and peasants. The end of the century witnessed the rise of mass working-class parties in all countries (and large agrarian parties in the Nordic countries and in several Germanic areas).

This section attempts to evaluate the weight of the appearance of such new parties – spreading into and contesting an increasing number of constituencies hitherto controlled by conservatives and liberals – on the overall decline in the number of unopposed seats. The alternative hypothesis would be that this decrease resulted from the spread of conservatives and liberals themselves challenging the strongholds of the opposing party. The information on party affiliation allows us to determine the extent to which competition arises from the appearance of new political forces or whether new parties entered an already competitive configuration created by the 'mutual challenge' of the main existing parties.

The entry of new parties in the electoral arena can be shown with four cases for which the time series of electoral results by parties is longer:

Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland and Britain in the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century.[26] In all four cases – with some variations – three main party families of the early party systems are considered: two old established families (conservatives or Catholics on the one hand and liberals on the other) and one 'new' family (the social democrats). In Belgium, the parties considered are the *Union catholique belge*, the *Parti libéral* and *Parti ouvrier belge*. In Denmark, *Højre* and *Venstre* have been considered as conservative and liberal. The *Socialdemokrater* represent the new entrant.[27] In Switzerland, the Radicals (*Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei*) have been considered instead of the liberal wing (*Liberal-Demokratische Partei*), together with the *Katholische Konservative* and the *Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz*. Finally, in Britain the Conservative Party, Liberal Party and Labour Party have been considered. In all these countries, majoritarian formulas (two/three-ballot formula in Belgium and Switzerland, plurality in Denmark and Britain) made the existence of other parties difficult and sporadic.

Figure 4 shows the simultaneous appearance and territorial spread of new parties in Europe.[28] In all countries the social democrats spread through national territories in the last decades of the nineteenth century and in the first part of the twentieth century. This occurs in correspondence with the mobilization of the new working strata of society – either already enfranchised (as in Switzerland) or still deprived of the right to vote. Mass parties of the working class, along with agrarian parties in the Nordic countries, and later people's parties in Catholic countries, etc. (for example, in Denmark the *Radikale Venstre* displays a similar pattern to that of the Social Democrats), were able – also because of pre-existing social organizations (namely, unions) – to mobilize the new working-class and peasant electorates.

Furthermore, in the four cases considered we find conservatives and liberals – the other 'side' of the left–right cleavage – covering most of the constituencies since the beginning of the period considered, that is, since the major transitions towards democratic elections. These were the parties that first mobilized restricted electorates under the *régime censitaire* and *capacitaire*. Social democratic and labour parties appear under the effect of socio-economic transformations and geographical mobility resulting from industrialization and urbanization. This occurs towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the territorial spread of this party family is both sudden and rapid, as the solid lines show in Figure 4.[29]

In Belgium, Catholics and Liberals are present in more than 80 percent of the constituencies; since the 1880s, Catholics are present in all constituencies. The share of constituencies in which conservatives and liberals present candidates is approximately the same in Switzerland and in Britain. The period considered for Switzerland starts with the *Sonderbundkrieg* between Protestant nation-builders and Catholic cantons at the foundation of the federal state. The cleavage between Radicals and Catholics was reflected in

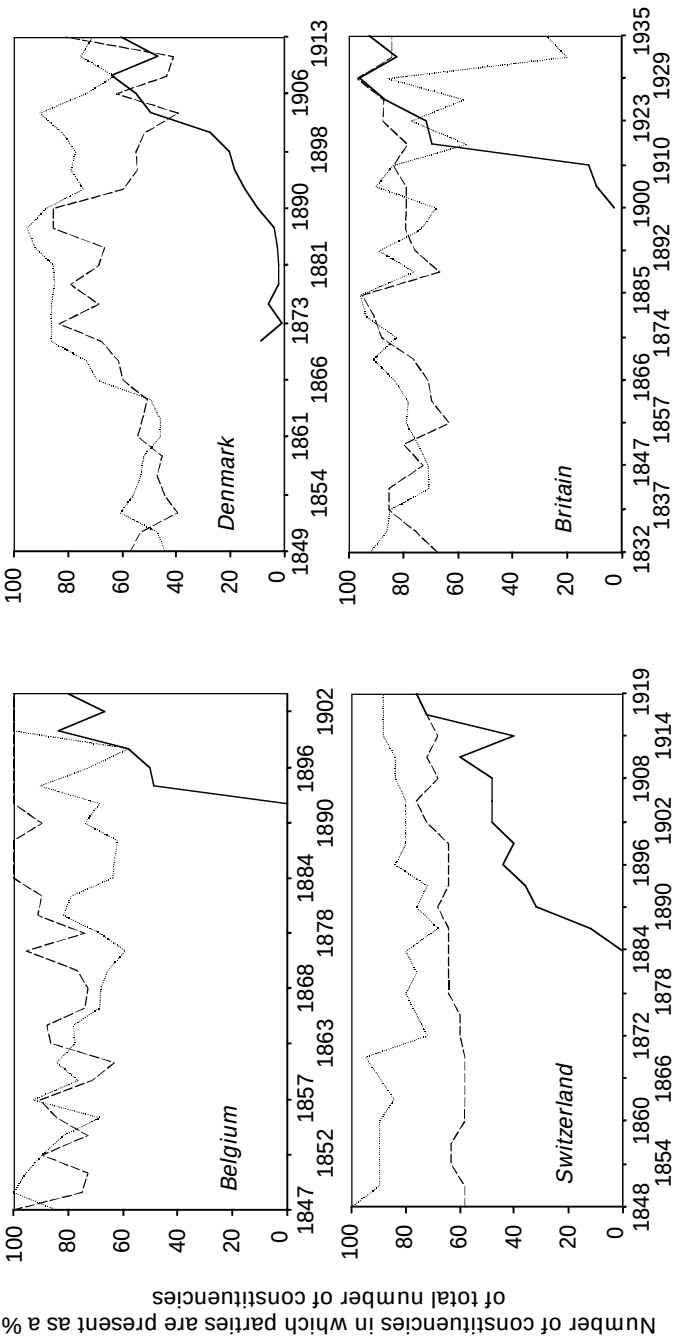

Figure 4. Territorial spread of conservatives, liberals and social democrats in four countries, 1832–1935

a clear-cut territorial segmentation of the vote. British parties were constantly present in 70–90 percent of the constituencies without significant variations over time. The coverage of territory was very large for both Conservatives and Liberals (during this period the Chartists were present in a very small number of constituencies). The electoral reforms of 1867–68 and 1884–85 (Franchise Act and Redistribution Act) stimulated the national organization of political parties (see Urwin (1980 and 1982a) on this point). Party support, however, remained dominated by local strains. Historically, liberal support (and later the vote for Labour) corresponded to the distribution of English Nonconformism, whereas Anglican religiosity tended to be associated with conservative support in the regions of the southeast and around London. Liberal support was therefore stronger in the areas on the remove from the centre.[30]

Whereas in Belgium, Switzerland and Britain the proportion of territorial coverage by conservatives, Catholics and liberals is stable through time, in Denmark the 'Right' and 'Left' increased the number of constituencies in which they presented candidates over the decades. In the early elections after the sudden transition from absolutism to democratic representation, the two parties were present in around half of the *valgkredse*. Both parties expanded in the 1860s to 1870s, reaching around 80 percent of the constituencies. Each of the two parties increasingly challenged the domination of the other in further constituencies during this period. A retrenchment then again occurred to some extent in the 1890s and 1900s for *Højre* and later also for *Venstre*.

What has been the impact of the spread of social democrats on the rate of contestedness? For Denmark and the United Kingdom the number of seats won in uncontested constituencies by each party is also known, and allows us to verify whether the overall decline in the number of uncontested constituencies is caused by the appearance of new parties contesting an increasing number of seats that up to that point were won by either the Conservatives or the Liberals, or whether alternatively this decrease has been determined by the spread of the support of the Conservatives and Liberals themselves – *Højre* or *Venstre* in Denmark – challenging the strongholds of the adversary party.

Figure 5 answers this question for Denmark. Social Democrats contest the first election in 1872. As it appears, however, by that time the overall number of uncontested constituencies had already dropped dramatically. In the Danish case, the entry of the Social Democrats was therefore not at the origin of the contestedness of constituencies. The entry of this new party affected the overall number of uncontested constituencies only marginally. As can be seen earlier in Figure 4, the spread of the Conservatives (*Højre*) and of the Liberals (*Venstre*) started long before 1872. Percentages of territorial coverage by these two parties increase continuously from 1849 until 1890, after which all three parties cover a similar portion of territory (around 60–70 percent). Also the reduction in the number of uncontested

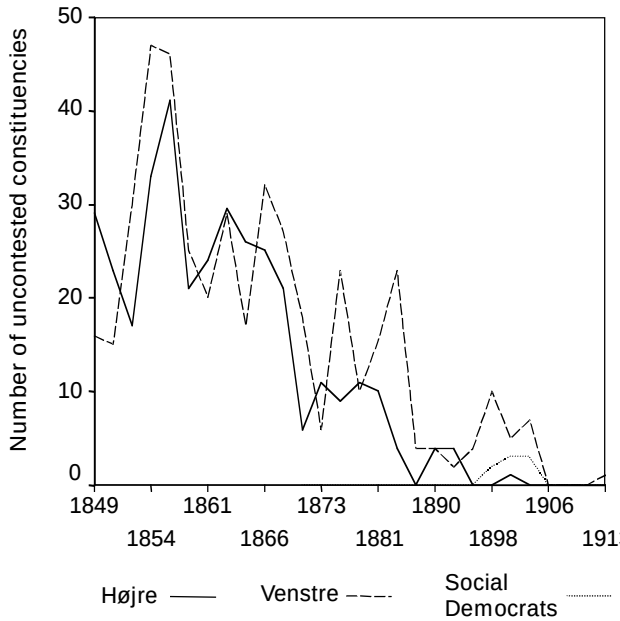

Figure 5. Number of uncontested constituencies for *Højre*, *Venstre* and Social Democrats in Denmark, 1849–1913

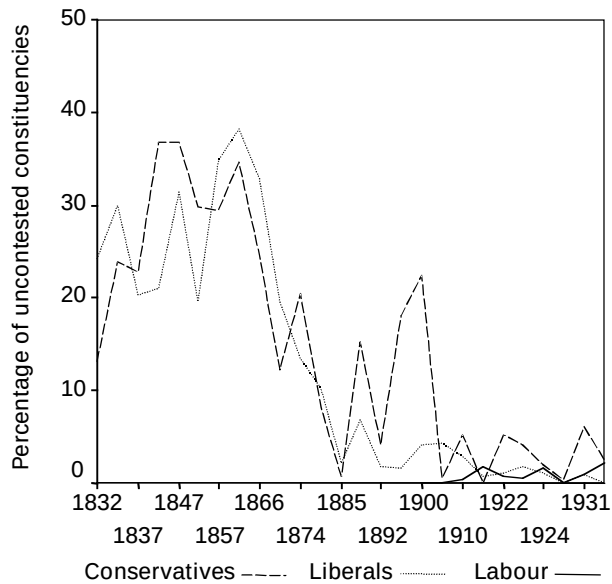

Figure 6. Percentage of uncontested constituencies for Conservatives, Liberals and Labour in Britain, 1832–1935

constituencies had started long before 1872 (Figure 5) through the 'mutual challenge' of the Conservatives and Liberals and to the diffusion of these two parties through constituencies.[31]

According to Figure 6, the same pattern seems to apply in the British case. Before the appearance of Labour towards the end of the century, parties other than the Conservatives and the Liberals were weak and sporadic (the other main political formations were the Chartists, the Liberal Unionists and independent candidates). The first Labour candidates did not enter the electoral arena before the end of the century. Their entry is extremely sudden: by 1910, they cover already around 80 percent of the constituencies. As early as the 1850s, however, Conservatives and Liberals had won a decreasing number of uncontested constituencies. Before 1900 the only antagonist that made these constituencies competitive was the 'other' party, either the Conservative or Liberal Party.

Unlike Denmark, however, Figure 4 shows that Conservatives and Liberals were present in almost all constituencies already in 1832 (between 70 and 90 percent of territorial coverage). The reduction in the number of uncontested constituencies for both parties displayed in Figure 6, therefore, is caused not so much by the spread of these parties through constituencies, but by the redistribution of seats. A part of the drop in the number of uncontested constituencies between 1866 and 1885 can be attributed to the roughly 20 percent of 'shared constituencies' which disappear by 1885 (see Figure 2). These constituencies were uncontested but both parties were present. If these are divided into single-member constituencies, the two parties contest the single seat.

The Irish case (see Figure 7) is different from both Britain and Denmark. There is no decline of conservative and liberal uncontested constituencies until the 1870s, and only in 1874 and 1880 did the number of uncontested constituencies decline dramatically. After 1885 the graph shows the complete change in the party system with the entry of Nationalists as the dominant party. A replacement of parties therefore took place after 1885 with Nationalists winning up to 60–65 percent of the constituencies unopposed. Furthermore, the Unionists also won between 5 and 10 percent of the constituencies unopposed since 1866. Overall, therefore, almost three-quarters of the constituencies were not competitive from 1885 until World War I. In Belgium, finally, Catholics and Liberals have occupied most constituencies since 1847. However, it is only since 1894, the moment at which universal suffrage is introduced and the Socialists enter the electoral arena, that the number of second ballots really increases (see Figure 3), indicating growth in the rate of competition.

In conclusion, therefore, whereas in Denmark competition seems to have originated from the mutual challenge among conservatives and liberals, and in Britain also through the redistricting and redistribution of seats, in Belgium the entry of new actors through the mobilization of the working-class electorate seems to have had a stronger impact. In all cases, however,

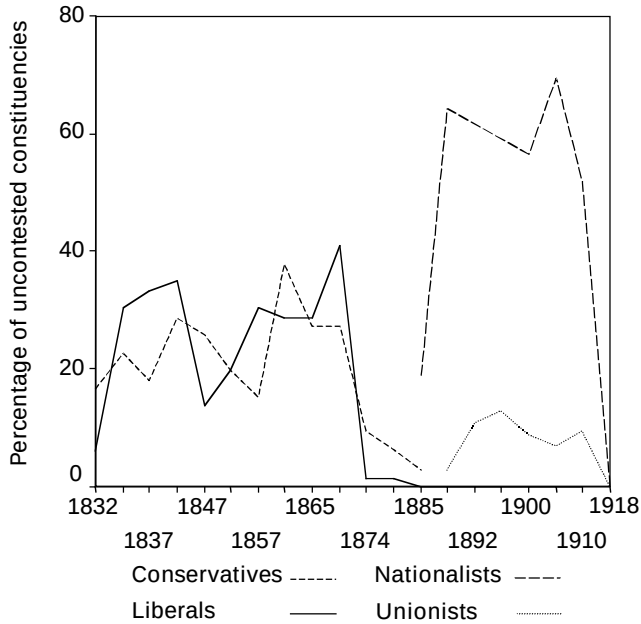

Figure 7. Percentage of uncontested constituencies for Conservatives, Liberals, Nationalists and Unionists in Ireland, 1832–1918

by the time of the entry of new actors onto the political arena, conservatives and liberals had already occupied the available political space and created competition independently from new parties. At their appearance, therefore, the new mass parties issued from the Industrial Revolution – and in some cases from the enlargement of suffrage – did not create a competitive configuration, but rather entered already competitive party systems.

In some cases, as in Britain, the appearance of labour parties even replaced the liberal party. The process of *dépassement par la gauche* of the liberals as the 'second' party of the system takes place in the 1930s (see Figure 4), when the Liberal Party contests only about 30 percent of the constituencies. In other cases, the social democrats – as well as agrarians and, later, communist parties – transformed competition from two-party into multi-party competition. This difference is partly due to the electoral formula.

The Lowering of Entry Barriers: Majoritarian versus PR Formulas

The third factor to be considered causing increased competition in party systems is the lowering of the entry barriers represented by the electoral law. Majoritarian systems set very high thresholds for representation, making the entry of new and small parties problematic.[32] This concerns in particular

the new parties of the working class which mobilized the left electorate. Furthermore, given the high thresholds typical of the majoritarian systems in force in all countries until the beginning of the twentieth century, established parties too were not encouraged to spread in territories in which they could not hope to reach the majority of the votes, indispensable in a 'first-past-the-post' system. As a consequence, it has been argued that majoritarian systems inhibited competition by increasing the persistence of territorial and subcultural electoral strongholds. It is therefore plausible that the introduction of PR around World War I has increased the competitiveness of party systems.

According to Duverger (1950 and 1951), majoritarian systems – in particular plurality systems based on single-member constituencies – do not foster the spread of parties in new constituencies. On the contrary, plurality allows parties whose support is territorially concentrated to survive despite their national weakness: 'minorities can secure representation on the national level only because they constitute the majority in certain constituencies. The effect is that the majority vote accentuates geographical divisions of opinion: it might even be said that it tends to convert a national current of opinion [. . .] into a regional opinion, as its only chance of representation is in those parts of the country where its strength is greatest' (Duverger, 1951: 331–32). In addition, parties have no incentive to increase efforts in campaigning and in presenting candidates in those constituencies in which they do not have a chance of winning the seat. This is not the case with PR, which represents a strong incentive for spreading in all constituencies and in adversary strongholds. Parties are encouraged to expand and to present candidates in all constituencies where, even with a small number of votes, it is possible to win seats: 'in the countries which have adopted PR after having been used to the majority system, we can see a sort of gradual "nationalization" of opinion' (Duverger, 1951: 332).[33]

This view of PR systems favouring the spread of competition is shared by other research. For Rose and Urwin, in 'multi-member constituencies of proportional representation [. . .] there is much more incentive for parties to offer a full slate of candidates in all regions' (1975: 19). For example, Urwin notes about Germany that '[t]he particular variant of proportional representation introduced in the Weimar Republic encouraged parties to contest every electoral district' (1982b: 192). Also Rokkan notes that 'proportional representation systems encourage a wider participation while majority systems discourage minorities' (1970: 350).[34]

With list systems, the presence of several candidates of one and the same party hinders single personalities from campaigning idiosyncratically and favours a national standard partisan campaigning along ideological–programmatic lines. General issues therefore take a more important place with respect to particular local ones: 'the list system [. . .] compels the elector to vote for a party rather than for personalities, that is to say, for a system of ideas and an organization of national scale rather than for the

champions of local interests' (Duverger, 1951: 333; see, on the same point, Rokkan, 1970: 21). In general, the fewer the seats returned in one constituency, the more small parties are penalized.[35] Therefore parties have no incentive to present candidates in constituencies in which they are weak. This emphasizes the relationship between the disproportionality of the electoral formula (the difference in the share of votes and seats) and the spread of party support across constituencies. The higher the disproportionality, the higher the disparities between territorial units and, therefore, the smaller the number of constituencies in which parties contest adversaries. Historically, electoral formulas and magnitudes of constituencies largely overlap: plurality formulas and, more generally, majoritarian systems (repeated-ballot systems)[36] were usually based on single-member constituencies (although two- and three-member constituencies were frequent in Britain as well as in other countries); PR systems are always based on multi-member constituencies.

In reality, the hypothesis of a strong link between PR and the birth of competition is difficult to test, because the introduction of PR electoral formulas by or in the aftermath of World War I fundamentally altered the type of electoral competition. PR did not so much increase electoral competition as change its nature. The single-member plurality formula is the ideal-typical case of a 'winner-takes-all' type of competition, in which the candidate or party receiving the most votes takes 100 percent of the stakes in a constituency. With PR, on the contrary, parties compete for the largest 'share of the cake' in each constituency.[37] Instead of 'all-or-nothing', the rationale in multi-member PR constituencies is to run for election even in those constituencies in which support is supposed to be weak, since this will lead to some reward in terms of seats.

Electoral formulas had rather strong consequences on the format of party competition. With the introduction of PR at the beginning of the twentieth century, new parties could be incorporated into a multi-party configuration. On the contrary, under plurality systems the entry of new parties challenges the existence itself of the existing parties. This appears clearly in Figure 4, in which it is shown that in Britain (the only country which did not switch to PR after World War I) the Labour Party *replaced* the Liberal Party in the electoral competition in most constituencies during the 1930s. On the contrary, in most other European countries – which all introduced some form of PR by or after World War I – the format of party competition was modified through the addition and incorporation of new parties.[38]

What appears clearly in the different graphs, however, is that the trend towards more competition in European party systems occurs *before* the introduction of PR and, therefore, independently from the changes in the electoral formula. After World War I, PR has increased the incentives for new and established parties to spread through constituencies and has mobilized voters' turnout (all votes count) by not hindering them from voting for the weakest parties in their constituencies. However, at

the time PR was introduced, competition had already developed independently from changes in the rules of the game, with parties spreading in search of new votes in spite of the barriers set by disproportional representation systems.

From Territorial to Functional Competition

'Silent elections' – *élections tacites* or *stille Wahlen* – progressively disappeared from the European electoral landscape. By World War I competition had started off everywhere. Non-competitive configurations survived only in some cases, usually in the most traditional or remote locations. In Ireland, uncontested constituencies continued to exist after the introduction of STV. In 1922, when the first election to the Dáil after independence was held, there were still 8 (out of 28) uncontested constituencies. The last uncontested constituency is Donegal West in 1944. In Switzerland, uncontested cantons continued to exist after the introduction of PR in 1919, mostly in the smaller alpine cantons in which the only seat is allocated by plurality. Between 1919 and 1987 the number of such cantons has varied from one to three.[39] Similarly, the Valle d'Aosta in Italy and the Åland Islands in Finland are under the control of ethno-linguistic parties. In the United Kingdom, most university and business seats were uncontested until they were abolished with the redistricting of 1950.[40] With the exception of these few cases, however, multi-party competition after World War I imposed itself everywhere, indicating the most radical change in political practice, and with competition and democracy becoming overlapping concepts (Schumpeter, 1954).

With the gradual disappearance of territorial strongholds, competition transformed from territorial into functional. Functional competition has been described after World War II by spatial analyses of electoral behaviour and party systems. According to the model, political competition takes place on an imaginary 'ideological space' in which political parties move in search of the optimal location for the maximization of votes (Downs, 1957). This model was inspired by the work on geographical localization of firms carried out by economists (Hotteling, 1929). It is a *functional analogy* of what had been developed on the basis of originally geographical concepts – 'location', 'space', 'distance', 'hunting ground' (Panebianco, 1988), '(de)radicalisation' – and from what had happened at the territorial level. These models describe the competition of the second half of the twentieth century and, consequently, the geographical dimension of competition has disappeared. The functional–ideological dimensions of conflict considered by spatial analyses are mainly the left–right and religious dimensions (Sartori, 1976). Evidence above, however, has shown that the same competitive logic working on the ideological level also worked on the territorial level at an *earlier stage* of electoral development.

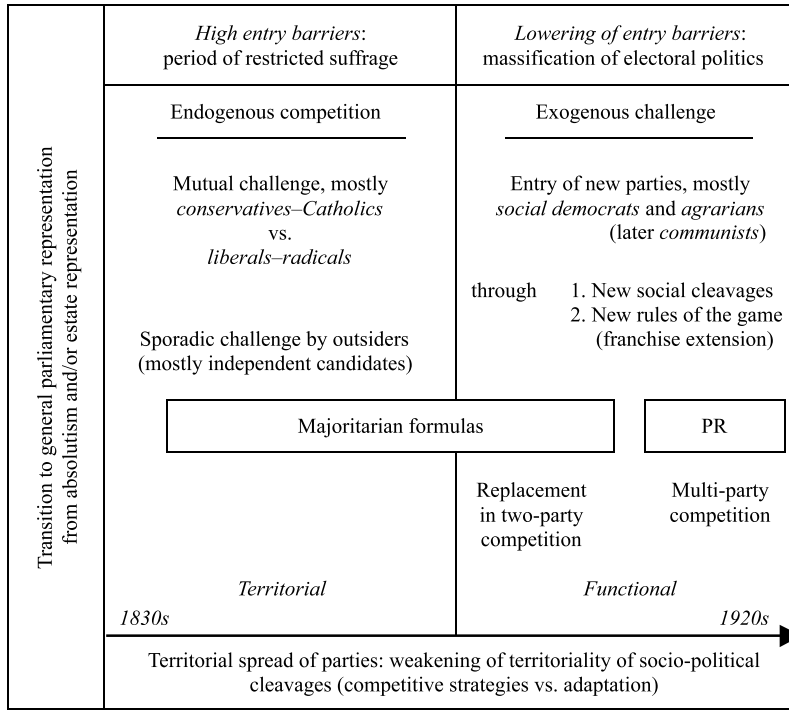

Figure 8. Main historical phases of party competition: 19th–early 20th century

Competition in the territorial space preceded competition in the functional–ideological space, and parties were 'catch-all over parties' before being 'catch-all parties'.

Figure 8 summarizes these two main phases of the development of party competition and of its transformation from territorial into functional. There are three main factors that determined this evolution which this article has attempted to put forward. The first is the increasing tendency of parties to challenge other parties in their former strongholds and to 'conquer' and 'occupy' constituencies which were hitherto in the hands of adversaries. The competitive strategy of parties consists of expanding their support by weakening social and territorial barriers which led to the transformation of cleavages through a loss of territoriality. On the one hand, parties adapted to changing social conditions that eroded territorial oppositions resulting from processes of geographical mobility and peripheral integration through state formation and nation-building, as well as through industrialization, urbanization and the growth of communication technologies.

On the other hand, the evidence presented here has shown that the transformation of political cleavages has not simply been a 'by-product' of the general integration of societies to which parties adapted, but the product of the action of parties themselves and of their inherent competitive strategies

which led them to break down territorial barriers. Parties tended to expand in search of support all over the country. At the territorial level – as later at the ideological level – they tended to cover as much space as possible. If parties faced and adapted to new social conditions, it is also true that they contributed to create conditions that favoured them; and the outcome has been less clear-cut territorial oppositions.[41]

To mobilize the most remote and peripheral electorates, parties needed a capillary network of local organizations. They therefore developed centralized national agencies for the control of local candidacies and relied upon more efficient campaigning techniques which became available with technological progress. Candidates in single-member constituencies during the period of majoritarian elections until World War I became increasingly 'party candidates'. They no longer represented merely their constituencies but rather nationwide functional interests and values. Candidates became representatives chosen by national and central party organizations rather than the expression of the *notabilat local*. Parties also started intervening directly on questions and set the agenda on issues which are not territorially delimited and which could be accepted in all areas of the country. They addressed issues and presented platforms which appealed to large sectors of the electorate.[42] In much the same way as on the ideological level, positions of parties were 'nationalized' to make them acceptable to a larger proportion of voters; on the territorial level parties abandoned local claims and privileged national ones. This was done by emphasizing issues which were national in scope.

The second factor leading to functional competition is the disruptive impact of the Industrial Revolution and the consequent supremacy of a nationwide and territorially homogeneous left–right dimension over territorially based cultural resistances. The 'massification' of politics and the mobilization of working classes and peasants allowed for the rise of an exogenous challenge to established parties coming from new mass parties, in particular labour parties and social democrats, but also agrarians and communists. The impact of these new challengers which emerged from the Industrial Revolution and its new cleavages was to increase the rate of competitiveness in party systems, and the non-territorial nature and nationwide scope of the left–right cleavage determined the fast pace at which social democrat candidates spread across constituencies. Territorial oppositions gave the way to ideological competition and, in this sense, the hegemony of the left–right dimension has been a strong factor in the 'nationalization' of electorates and party systems.[43]

Finally, the third factor that definitively transformed competition from territorial into functional is the general transition in continental Europe to PR. This formula had a major effect on reducing territorial opposition. After its introduction, competition mainly opposes groups and parties on an ideological non-territorial basis. The change of the electoral formula from majoritarian to PR introduced incentives high enough for attempting to

break down the monopoly of representation of given political groups in given areas. Not only did PR favour the access and growth of social democrats and consequently the domination of the left–right dimension, but PR has represented a strong incentive for parties to spread across territory. Whereas the majority vote accentuates geographical divisions of opinion, the list system hinders local particularisms and favours a national standard party organization and programme. National issues therefore occupy a more important place with respect to territorially localized ones.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on a collection of electoral data published in the form of a handbook and CD-ROM (Caramani, 2000). I wish to renew my gratitude to the persons who contributed to that project. For comments on earlier versions of this article, I am particularly indebted to Stefano Bartolini.

Notes

1 The 1832 election was the first after the First Reform Bill in which the largest seat redistribution and constituency changes were carried out in the United Kingdom.
2 Only five general elections took place in Belgium from 1847 to 1898. The remaining 24 elections were partial, with half of the *Chambre des représentants* renewed every 2 years with 2 alternating groups of constituencies.
3 For example in Belgium, with the *vote plural* from 1893 to 1914. In Norway, voting remained indirect until 1903.
4 This concept refers to the first of four concepts introduced by Bartolini (1999 and 2000), *contestability*, in regard to party competition. Contestability points to the extent to which conditions for the electoral market to be open are met, that is, the thresholds for entry for candidates and parties. *Contestedness* points to the degree to which elections are contested once the main barriers to entry have been removed. The former refers to whether or not it is possible to contest elections, the latter to how much elections are actually contested.
5 For Stokes the degree of competition is determined by two factors: (1) the scope of change between two elections, that is, the number of shifted votes; and (2) the size of the majority, that is, the margin or distance between the two major parties (Stokes, 1967). Sundquist (1973: 333–40) defines a competitive party system as one characterized by an equal balance between parties, a roughly 50/50 balance between the two parties. See, along the same lines, Key (1964).
6 The link between territorially uniform electoral support for parties and the competitiveness of elections was first established by Schattschneider in his study on American politics (1960, see especially Chapter 5 on 'The Nationalization of Politics'). He shows that the sectionalism of American voting behaviour – with the Republican Party concentrated in the North East and Middle West, and the Democratic Party in the South – 'curtailed competition' (1960: 84). This

situation changed in 1932, when a national political alignment replaced sectional cleavages. Electoral support of the two major parties diffused throughout the national territory, producing a two-party system throughout the country. This produced 'a very great extension of the area of party competition' (1960: 90). Other authors have established a close link between the homogeneity of territorial configurations of voting behaviour and the degree of competitiveness of political systems (for example, Urwin, 1974, 1982a, b). However, Claggett, Flanigan and Zingale have noted that 'there appears to be some confusion between increasing nationalization in this sense of convergence in the levels of support and increasing competitiveness of the party system. These phenomena are not necessarily connected' (1984: 81). It is only if a 50/50 configuration is diffused in many constituencies that the rate of competition increases, both locally and nationally. For a discussion, see Caramani (1996).

7 For Switzerland, data by party affiliation are available only at the level of 25 cantons rather than constituency level; for this reason, a systematic analysis of uncontested constituencies is not possible. There were between 47 and 52 (depending on the period) single- and multi-member constituencies (*Bezirke*).

8 For these reasons other countries are excluded from the analysis. In Austria, representation by estates (five *curiae*) was abolished only after the 1900/01 election. In Finland, the first election after the abolition of estates was held in 1907 (still under Russian rule). In France, reliable data are available only since 1910, with the adoption of the new *Règlement de la Chambre* (allowing representatives to belong to no more than one parliamentary group). In Italy, data by parties since 1861 (unification) are sporadic, not least because of the fluid nature of the party system. Furthermore, the aggregation of results by party affiliation (regions) does not allow for a significant analysis. In Greece, elections have been registered only since 1926 after the abolition of lead ballots and in Luxembourg since 1919 (election to the constituent assembly). Data are fragmented and unreliable for Portugal and Spain before the transitions to democracy in the 1970s despite longer periods of parliamentary life during the nineteenth century.

9 Present-day spelling is adopted for proper names throughout the article (for example, *Storting* instead of *Storthing*). For historical spelling, see Caramani (2000: 16).

10 Direct elections in two-member constituencies with one of the two representatives elected for 4 years every 2 years.

11 See Caramani (2000: 1017–75) for complete official and secondary data sources. The CD-ROM gives results by candidates and parties at the level of single constituencies which have been collected and computerized since the earliest elections according to standard rules. Data are available in different programmes (SPSS, SAS, Excel), formats (absolute figures, row and column percentage distributions), as well as structures: for analysing data (horizontal time dimension), building time series (vertical time dimension), and matching socio-economic data (mixed structure).

12 In Norway, one-quarter of the elected representatives to the *Folketing* constitutes the upper house (*Odelsting*) and three-quarters the lower house (*Lagting*).

13 The main missing cases are results for the 1912 German election for some parties (information for 3 to 329 *Wahlkreise* out of 397), for 16 constituencies (out of 100) in the 1888–94 Dutch elections, and for the six cantons (out of 25) in which voting was open from 1848 until 1869 in Switzerland.

14 To stress terminologically the distinction between constituencies and seats, I speak of 'uncontested constituencies' and 'unopposed seats' or 'candidates' or 'parties'.
15 On the contrary, in 1859 all seats of the four-member constituency of the City of London were won unopposed by four liberal candidates.
16 In Germany, The Netherlands and Norway (1906–18) the two-ballot formula was combined with single-member constituencies; whereas in Belgium and Switzerland the two-ballot (or three-ballot) formula was based on both single-member and multi-member constituencies.
17 To do this, cases in which the exhaustive ballot is uncontested because of the withdrawal of candidates before election must be added.
18 The total number of constituencies for which data are missing has been subtracted from the total number of constituencies.
19 In Denmark, elections between 1849 and 1915 were held in 100–13 single-member *valgkredse*. After 1901 (when secret balloting was introduced), if there was a single candidate, elections did not take place unless 50 voters asked for the 'yes/no' vote.
20 In Great Britain, the number of parliamentary constituencies varied between 333 in 1832 and 585 in 1935. For Ireland, considered separately for 1832–1910, the number of constituencies is 64–6, and 101 since 1885. Because figures for Britain do not include the number of Irish uncontested constituencies, they differ from those presented by Craig (1977: 624) and Urwin (1982a). For Britain, figures for the entire period include only conservative/liberal unopposed seats.
21 Only a small number of uncontested constituencies was won by the Unionists.
22 The number of uncontested constituencies in Belgium was one in 1848 and one in 1894 (both at the first ballot). In The Netherlands, the number of uncontested constituencies was also low: from a minimum of 5 in 1913 to a maximum of 11 in 1901–09.
23 In Belgium, elections were held in 41 *arrondissements* during 1847–98 then grouped in 30 constituencies in 1900. In Germany, the 382 *Wahlkreise* of 1871 were raised to 397 in 1874 with the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. In The Netherlands the number of *kiesdistricten* was 100 over the entire 1888–1917 period. During 1906–18, elections in Norway were held in 123–6 *landdistrikter* and *kjøstæder* (rural and urban districts).
24 In Belgium, a plural voting system was introduced along with universal male suffrage. One additional vote was given to persons in the higher tax brackets, heads of households and capitalists; two additional votes were given to teachers and persons with higher education.
25 Competition was also affected by the prolonged use in some countries of indirect elections, either indirect elections as such (elections in two or more steps with the use of great electors) or elections by the members of provincial councils. In Belgium, elections remained indirect until 1847; in Denmark until 1849; in Germany in several states until national unification; in The Netherlands until 1848; in Norway until 1906; and in Switzerland elections in the cantons were indirect until the creation of the federal state in 1848. In the United Kingdom (and in Ireland) elections have never been indirect.
26 Similar figures, not reproduced here, can be obtained for Germany and The Netherlands since the 1870s/1880s.
27 Agrarians too appear as 'new' parties with enfranchisement and the Industrial Revolution. However, Denmark, among the Scandinavian countries, is the only

case in which a large agrarian party did not develop (agrarian candidates contested elections only during 1898–1903 and, later, the *Bondepartiet* from 1935 to 1939).

28 The measure is the number of constituencies in which a party is present (nominator) as a percentage of the total number of constituencies (denominator). To adjust for missing data the number of missing constituencies has been subtracted from the total number of constituencies. Furthermore, uncontested constituencies have been considered as constituencies in which the unopposed party is present.

29 Among the four countries considered, it appears in Figure 4 that the spread of workers' candidates was faster in the two more industrialized countries, Belgium and Britain, whereas it was more gradual in Denmark and Switzerland.

30 Until the end of the 1860s this was the case also in Ireland, at the time returning MPs to Westminster. Conservatives and Liberals were each present in around 70 percent of the constituencies, with the exception of the 1847 election in which Peelete and Repealer candidates increased their share of the vote and challenged the two main parties in several constituencies. However, by 1885 conservative candidates stopped contesting Irish constituencies and Nationalists began to dominate the system. From this moment on, also, the Liberals underwent a steep process of territorial retrenchment.

31 Unopposed seats won by *Radikale Venstre* and *Forhandlende Venstre* have not been included in the graph.

32 Rokkan's 'third threshold of democratisation' (1999: 254).

33 A similar conclusion has been reached by Mair in his analysis of the nationalization of electoral strategies in Ireland under STV (1987: 128). As also noted by Hanham (1959) in the British case, elections were not always general in the sense that, for a long time, local and constituency-level factors prevailed on national competition.

34 Furthermore, Rokkan notes that PR leads to the abandonment of local clienteles; with plurality systems, marginal votes are useless if the constituency is safe whether the party wins or loses the seat, while with PR each vote counts and therefore mobilization is encouraged in every single constituency (Rokkan, 1970: 333 and 337).

35 Among the many analyses reaching this conclusion, see Lijphart (1994).

36 The reasoning is the same with repeated-ballot formulas: parties must have a strong chance of reaching the second ballot to present a candidate and this is possible only for larger parties in a given constituency. There is no incentive to present a candidate who has no chance of reaching the second ballot, since representation will not be secured.

37 More generally, this is true for all electoral systems – even majoritarian ones – based on multi-member constituencies. However, majoritarian systems were historically based on small constituencies in terms of magnitude, whereas PR systems have always been based on much larger constituencies (if one excepts STV as a PR formula).

38 This is Sartori's well-known hypothesis (1968), sometimes referred to as the 'strategy of the weak', about the introduction of PR in terms of survival of the old parties facing the challenge of new mass-mobilization parties and preferring the safety of their established positions of control in minority parties to the uncertainties of mergers (Rokkan, 1970: 88–90).

39 Mostly Appenzell Inner-Rhoden and Obwalden (where the Catholics dominate up to the present with more than 85 percent of the vote), Appenzell Ausser-Rhoden (where the Radicals dominate), and Glarus (where social democrat and independent candidates dominate). Only in 1939, exceptionally, was the number of uncontested cantons nine.

40 Also in Ireland the constituency of Dublin University was uncontested until it was abolished in 1937.

41 As Lipset and Rokkan wrote, 'we consider the possibility that the *parties themselves* produce their own alignments independently from the geographical, social and cultural conditions of the movements' (1967: 3).

42 In the American case, Schattschneider noted that 'the party realignment of 1932 is closely related to a deep change in the agenda of American politics' (1960: 93). The high degree of territoriality of American politics dissipated because after 1932 it became dominated by national rather than local questions. The Depression and the New Deal had the effect of nationalizing political issues. This process was reinforced a decade later by international events focusing the attention of the entire nation: World War II and the beginning of the Cold War.

43 See my forthcoming volume on the formation of national electorates and party systems, and on the progressive territorial homogenization of electoral behaviour (Caramani, 2003).

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