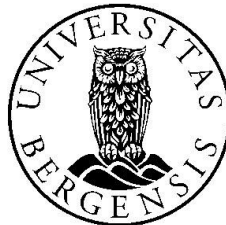


[Do Electoral Systems Influence Political Equality?]

[A Multimethod Thesis on the Relationship
Between Electoral Systems and Political Equality]

Tommy Gjesdal Tjensvold



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Institutt for sammenliknende politikk

Universitetet i Bergen

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Abstract

In this thesis I look at the relationship between political equality and electoral systems. While I mention several different aspects of electoral systems in the thesis, mostly I focus on the effects of district magnitude and whether or not there is a proportional allocation of seats. I discuss five different mechanisms, two relating to equal descriptive representation and three relating to substantive representation. I utilize the synthetic control method on a constitutional reform in New Zealand, which implemented Mixed Member Proportional Representation, in a country previously using the First Past The Post system. Then I do a literature review to try to qualitatively determine any causal effects by discussing empirical studies from other studies. Both the findings of the synthetic control analysis and the literature review indicate that proportional representation systems in general are associated with increased levels of political equality and that this relationship likely is due, at least partly, to the proposed mechanisms.

Forord

Jeg har lyst til å takke venner og familie som har støttet meg i denne prosessen. Spesielt vil jeg takke min stemor, Mona Tjensvold for nyttige råd rundt oppgaveskrivingsprosessen. I also want to thank my advisor, Yvette Peters. You have provided me with valuable feedback and support through the process, which began with you inspiring me during your course “Understanding inequality in (democratic) politics”. You deserve a lot of credit for this thesis! Jeg har også lyst til å takke Ruben Berge Mathisen for nyttige kommentarer og tilbakemeldinger, både i skisseminarene og gjennom seminaret I CORE gruppen. Til slutt vil jeg takke alle andre som har støttet meg i løpet av utdanningsløpet.

1. Introduction

Equality is a critical criterion for democracy and the statement that “all human beings are of equal intrinsic worth, that no person is intrinsically superior to another, and that the good or interests of each person must be given equal consideration”, should not be considered a controversial one (Dahl, 2006, p. 4). Still, it is a morally demanding statement, both in everyday life and in the social scientific quest for morally justifiable institutions and norms. Still, most, if not all modern democracies arguably fail to treat all of their citizens according to this ideal.

The equal consideration of each person’s interests in a democracy requires equal responsiveness of the government to its citizens, while the empirical literature seems to indicate unequal responsiveness. According to some empirical findings, resources like money and education and also identity markers like gender may influence the political power an individual exercises over their government and ultimately their peers (Gilens & Page, 2014; Persson et al., 2024; Schakel & Van Der Pas, 2021).

This does not only have moral implications, but may also have practical consequences, like the loss of legitimacy and trust among underrepresented citizens, or the failure of the political system in responding to economic grievances (Arnesen & Peters, 2018; Clayton et al., 2019; Leighley & Oser, 2018). Taking a comparative perspective, there does seem to be a tendency of unequal responsiveness according to income in most if not all countries, potentially making these consequences a universal feature of democracy (Persson & Sundell, 2023).

There are strong theoretical arguments for why institutional features like veto points and the concentration of political power should influence the degree of government responsiveness (Soroka & Wlezien, 2009, pp. 45-58). There is also a strong case to be made for other characteristics of democracy to be relevant in the discussion on political equality, like descriptive representation in parliament, or participation in politics, in which there is significant variation among democracies (Blais, 2006; Joshi & Och, 2014; Stockemer, 2015). Because of this, finding the institutional configurations that give the highest degree of political equality based on these metrics should be a scientific priority.

1.1 Research Question

One of the central institutional variations between modern liberal democracies concerns the electoral system in use. As will be discussed more in depth later in the thesis, electoral systems vary quite a lot, with these variations producing different incentive structures. These incentive structures may then influence or even cause citizens and their representatives to behave a certain way that they would not have otherwise (Clark & Wilson, 1961).

Electoral systems have been studied in several contexts, also when it comes to government responsiveness and political equality, with some mixed results but also some clear empirical trends. For example, there seems to be consensus regarding the association between proportional representation and improved descriptive representation of marginalized groups, while there is more uncertainty regarding government responsiveness (Bernauer et al., 2015; Blais & Bodet, 2006; Breunig et al., 2022).

This thesis seeks to contribute to the field with two methodological innovations: it uses new data and uses this data in a new context. First, it studies the effects of a constitutional reform in New Zealand that resulted in changing the electoral system in a proportional direction. This relative change in proportionality may then be used to draw inferences on the advantages and disadvantages of certain electoral system characteristics. Secondly, the Varieties of Democracy dataset, which includes an egalitarian democracy index, offers a novel way to measure political equality which has to my knowledge not been used in this context before.

Research question: Is there a relationship between electoral systems and political equality?

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

First I will give an introduction to some relevant discussions within the relevant literature fields in the background chapter. The background chapter includes four subchapters: one discussing the justification of egalitarian democracy, one discussing the median voter theorem and how it predicts the translation of votes into policy outcomes through elections, one giving a summary on the literature on government responsiveness and political equality, and one chapter introducing some relevant mechanisms influencing political equality in general.

Then, in the theory chapter I will discuss five mechanisms through which electoral systems are hypothesized to causally influence the degree of political equality in a democracy. These mechanisms include candidate selection mechanisms, party magnitudes, sincere voting, district competitiveness and negative campaigning, where each are discussed in their own subchapter.

In the data and methods chapter, I introduce and discuss the datasets and the methods the thesis is based on. The thesis uses one quantitative method, the synthetic control method and one qualitative method, a literature review. The synthetic control method is used to estimate whether a constitutional reform changing the electoral system from a First Past the Post, majoritarian system to a Mixed Member Proportional system in New Zealand which will be introduced as a case in the Case selection Chapter.

The data and methods chapter also discusses the datasets included in the thesis. The thesis includes variables from both the Varieties of Democracy Project and the Comparative Political Dataset. These datasets are discussed with both data availability and measurement in mind to determine the degree to which they provide a good basis for the paper.

In the case selection chapter, I will as mentioned above introduce New Zealand as a case. The chapter will start by discussing events prior to the reform, such as economic instability and reform. Then I will discuss how the reform took place, and why it took place. Lastly I end the chapter discussing the generalizability. These discussions then help in determining the degree to which it is possible to isolate the effects of the reform and apply it elsewhere in other cases.

In the results chapter I present and discuss the results with some robustness checks. I conclude that the reform in question had an effect. Then, in the literature review, I discuss and summarize the empirical findings that are relevant to the relationship between political equality and electoral system. Lastly I summarize and conclude in the conclusion chapter.

2. Background

The study of political equality is broad and includes several disciplines and subdisciplines, with both a normative and a descriptive or causal character. This chapter seeks to give a brief introduction to some relevant discussions and results within these disciplines. Firstly, it is beneficial to discuss the normative value of political equality, one of the main variables of interest in this paper. This discussion is primarily based on Rawl's thought experiment of "the veil of ignorance", which requires us to consider everyone's interest equally, which may be intuitively appealing (Dahl, 2006, pp. 34-36). Then a brief introduction of the median voter theorem follows, with a discussion of its assumptions. This theorem is relevant as it describes the theoretical relationship between voters and political parties in an optimal democracy (Romer & Rosenthal, 1979).

Lastly, a somewhat comprehensive discussion of empirical studies on the relationship between societal institutions in general and electoral institutions in particular and political equality is given. This discussion focuses on methodological choices and the usage of different methods, to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the results found in the literature to try to create a picture of the state of the literature and summarize what we know about the causal relationships at the moment. This may then give a broader context which this paper can be placed within.

2.1 The Normative Basis of Political Equality

Discussing normative values and principles, requires a moral framework. Rawl's thought experiment of the original position may serve as an intuitive framework for discussing the value of political equality. John Rawls proposed a thought experiment, where societal norms and institutions were to be deliberated on and decided by citizens behind a "veil of ignorance", where they would be unable to know their interests in the real world (Audard & Forsé, 2022).

This way the following institutions would only be influenced by universal values, normative principles and potential social laws or tendencies. Under this circumstance, every citizen would according to Rawls be incentivized to adopt a maximin strategy, where they would choose the institutional alternatives that would minimize the negative consequences and maximize the positive consequences for the least well off, as they themselves could end up in this position (Kaye, 1980).

What these citizens would conclude on is unknown and any conclusions are speculative and hypothetical. Some assumptions are however reasonable to make. One intuitive assumption is that they would prefer a monopoly on violence, as what Hobbes called the natural condition under anarchy puts everyone's health and well-being at risk (Gauthier, 1979). The citizens would also be likely to agree on one or more distributive mechanisms for the distribution of resources, both because the individual attainment of resources via violence of course violates a monopoly on violence, but also more importantly because this would run counter to the maximin strategy behind the veil of ignorance.

It is impossible to know which distributive mechanisms would have been chosen behind a veil of ignorance, but some kind of democracy in its ideal form is arguably the real-world institution most similar to Rawl's thought experiment. Robert Dahl has put forward some reasonable requirements for ideal democracy: effective participation, equality in voting, everyone gaining enlightened understanding of the issues at hand, the citizens having a final control over the agenda, and with everyone included in the democratic process. Lastly, these aspects have to be formalized in a set of universal and fundamental individual rights (Dahl, 2006, pp. 8-10). All of these aspects require that citizens have an equal opportunity to influence legislation, making deliberation under ideal democracy similar to deliberation in the thought experiment.

As there may be tradeoffs between different goals and values, the citizens behind the veil of ignorance may not prioritize complete political equality. The maximin rule allows for some inequalities when it advantages the least well off, and there are several potential examples where some political inequality may indirectly advantage the least well off. Ideal democracy with a high or nearly perfect degree of participation would be costly both in regard to resources and time, thus some version of representative democracy may be preferable in practice (Dahl, 2006, p. 12 & 13). Representative democracy opens possibilities for inequality in participation both electorally through voting, through participation in interest groups and civil society and descriptively in legislatures and political offices (Schakel & Van Der Pas, 2021).

There may also be a potential tradeoff between political equality and democracy on the one hand and the quality of political decisions on the other. The competence principle states that "It is unjust to deprive citizens of life, liberty or property, or to alter their life prospects significantly, by force and threats of force as a result of decisions made by an incompetent or morally unreasonable deliberative body, or as a result of decisions made in an incompetent and

morally unreasonable way” (Brennan, 2011). If we are to accept the competence principle, the moral character and competence of the voters influences how legitimate democratic rule is.

This principle may be used in an argument to discriminate citizens based on their competence as voters and restrict suffrage, putting less emphasis on the value of political equality. David Estlund has put forward some assumptions that need to be true for this kind of voter discrimination to be legitimate (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2012):

“(1) There are true, procedure-independent normative standards by which political decisions ought to be judged. (The truth claim).

(2) For any demos, it is true that there is a small group of people - the epistocrats - who know those normative standards better than others and, thus, know better what the decisions that conform to those standards are. (The privileged knowledge status claim)

(3) For any demos, if it is true that the epistocrats know those standards better than others, then these people should have political authority over others. (The authority claim)”.

Only one of these claims needs to be disproven for some kind of deliberate restriction of universal suffrage and political equality to be illegitimate. This is because the claims build on each other. If there are no true procedure-independent normative standards, there are no legitimate epistocrats who can claim to possess superior judgement to legitimize them having more political influence. Similarly, the epistocrats need a monopoly on having superior judgement and to be a coherent group based on the same procedure-independent normative standards.

Estlund only rejects the authority claim with the argument that epistocracy does not provide a selection mechanism for epistocrats that is uncontroversial within public reason (Min, 2016). The privileged knowledge status claim is also problematic. If, for example, maximizing economic growth were regarded as the most important goal for the state, most would likely find it relatively intuitive to put economists in charge of public policy. Then epistocracy would not provide a sufficient mechanism to discriminate between the opinions of economists, as the heterogeneity of opinions are high both on fundamental procedural questions on methodology and on practical questions like the consequences of free trade (Reiss, 2019).

If any of the claims proposed by Estlund can be rejected, as seems to be the case, then democracy under the condition of political equality would be preferable, as the maximin rule arguably would put the burden of proof on the alternatives to democratic governance. The relevant question is then which system of democratic governance the people behind the veil of ignorance would choose and which configuration of institutions. If the necessity of some kind of representative democracy justifies some political inequality, then this aspect of politics ideally should be minimized via the optimal configuration of institutions. This then gives the comparison of electoral systems based on representativeness and equal influence importance.

2.2 The Median Voter Theorem

The median voter theorem is a central part of modern political science on elections. The median voter theorem predicts that the average voter, empowered by elections, is the main power factor in determining public policy (Gilens & Page, 2014). The theorem predicts that “if preferences are jointly single-peaked so that they can be arrayed along a single dimension [...] two vote-seeking parties will both take the same position, at the center of the distribution of voters’ most-preferred positions” (Gilens & Page, 2014). This then implies that the legislation these two parties will enact during a legislative term will closely align with the wishes of the people.

The most fundamental assumption the theorem makes is that there is a principal-agent relationship between voters and parties. Principal-agent relationships imply that there are resources that are exchanged, so that both parts can realize their interests, with the emphasis being on the actor furthering the interests of the principal to get desired resources in return (Braun & Guston, 2003). In the median voter framework, the vote-seeking parties act as an agent on the voters, or principals, half in exchange for the resources that votes unlock.

This implies the existence of a data generating process, as it builds on the existence of incentives as a major causative factor in human behavior. The data generating process is the concept of society and human behavior being caused by underlying laws or tendencies in the same way that physical movements are being caused by physical laws (Huntington-Klein, 2022). It follows from this implication that humans have less agency to act independently of these laws and tendencies and that the course of social events may, to a certain degree at least, be predicted deterministically.

It also assumes that voters hold non-contradictory and consistent opinions (Manza & Cook, 2002). This is because the implicit or explicit agreement between an actor and a principal needs to be stable and clear for the actor to know what to do. In contrast to these assumptions, some scholars argue that voters to a large extent are ambivalent or have non-attitudes, with elites being solely responsible for continuing public debate and the deliberation of ideas (Shapiro, 1998). If voters don't hold genuine opinions and have genuine stakes and interests in public policy formation, then the question of responsiveness may be considered irrelevant.

The theorem also makes the assumption that voters and parties are informed about each other's ideological positions. If either party has a skewed perception of the other, this may skew behavior, resulting in a lower degree of responsiveness. There are empirical examples of this. For example, in a study of state politicians in the US, perceptions were significantly skewed towards politicians believing public support for conservative ideas were higher than it was (Broockman & Skovron, 2018a).

Lastly, it does not include any other incentives for either the agent or the principal. This arguably makes the theorem less predictive in the real world when a political system is placed in a context of other institutions and actors. For example: in the real world, time is costly for voters, creating a disincentive to both vote and participate in the exchange of political information relevant to voting, especially in combination with the chance of influencing the legislative outcome of elections, which is small for individual voters (Somin, 2016, pp. 75-84).

There may at the same time be other agent-principal relationships present in politics, creating disincentives for politicians being responsive to voters. For example, interest groups like businesses may incentivize politicians to act in their interests through offering resources in return, in a process of regulatory capture (Laffont & Tirole, 1991).

The choices people make at a certain moment, also have a great influence on the future choices other people make. Thus, individuals are restricted in how they can best promote their own interests, meaning that the aggregated preferences in representative democracy may best be considered as a product of institutions than individual choices (Immergut, 1998). This critique by institutionalism, combined with the fact that several of the general assumptions made by the median voter theorem is problematic, may make some political inequality possible, counter to what the theorem predicts.

2.3 The Current State of The Literature

Political inequality is studied in a variety of ways. One approach is focusing on opinion polls and actual policy outcomes, and seeing if the two correlate. One of the most important empirical studies using this method was done by Martin Gilens, investigating unequal responsiveness of the US government to different socioeconomic strata (Gilens, 2012). The study found significant differences between different income percentiles political influence, as when different income groups disagreed, public policy was found to be significantly more responsive to higher income individuals (Gilens, 2012, p. 102). This means that when there is class conflict, voters among the 90th percentile generally have fewer public policies to be discontent about.

This policy centered approach may give an accurate portrayal of the influence of different groups (Hacker & Pierson, 2014). Still, an inherent weakness may be that policy implementation can influence public opinion, making reverse causality difficult to uncover (Page, 1994). There are also inherent flaws in using questionnaires and opinion polls tied to the sequence and formulation of questions influencing the answers respondents submit, opening for uncertainty and variation between each opinion poll (Zaller & Feldman, 1992).

There have been a few studies replicating this study design in other countries, with empirical results supporting the notion that unequal responsiveness is a general phenomenon not tied to specific cases. Studies done in The Netherlands, Germany, Norway and Sweden also show unequal responsiveness regarding income (Elsässer et al., 2018; R. B. Mathisen, 2023; Persson, 2020; Schakel, 2019).

In addition to these, a similar study done in Spain showed unequal responsiveness by educational and occupational status (Lupu & Tirado Castro, 2022). The study done in Norway also included educational status for comparison, and found that this variable mattered more than income, but the degree to which this is the case in other cases is yet to be determined (R. B. Mathisen, 2023).

There has been one more extensive study replicating this design in a larger context. Persson and Sundell included thirty countries over thirty-eight years in a comparative study allowing them to see the impact of economic inequality, campaign finance laws, turnout and union density. They found unequal responsiveness according to income as previous studies, but none of the variables had a significant effect (Persson & Sundell, 2023). This finding is puzzling as there

are good theoretical arguments for all of these variables to have a mitigating effect. The finding is also strengthened by the amount of data that is included, with 516 country years in total.

If there is unequal responsiveness according to income, it may also be probable that there is unequal responsiveness according to wealth or fortune. Although the truly wealthy is a minority in every country, and thus difficult to do research on, there is some evidence for this. The disconnect between tax policy and what citizens seem to prefer when asked on capital income taxes may be a good indicator for this (R. Mathisen, 2023).

There is also direct evidence that economic elites are consistently more economically conservative than the general population and that this conservatism strongly increases as the wealth of an individual increases (Page et al., 2013). Looking at these results in the context of the effectiveness of campaign contributions of earning votes, it might be reasonable to assume that these individuals skew economic policy towards their preferences and away from the median preference (Bekkouche et al., 2022).

In addition to income and wealth, education and occupational status, there have also been studies looking at gender as a variable. One study, using a “many to many” approach where congruence is measured geometrically as the overlap between men and women and parliamentary MPs in a two dimensional space, found slightly more overlap for women than for men (Dingler et al., 2019). The authors argue that this may be due to an increased turnout among women, supporting the impact of voting on government responsiveness (Dingler et al., 2019).

Two studies found the opposite result with the government being more responsive towards men (Persson et al., 2024; Reher, 2018). The contrasting empirical findings in these studies may reflect different methods and study design. While they all based themselves on survey data, Reher used implemented policies and took the salience of issues into account, which strengthens the findings. Persson et al. did not look at the salience of issues, but they did specifically look at policies where women and men disagree on average in addition to general substantive representation and found a greater degree of unequal representation in those cases.

At the same time, the “many to many” design used by Dingler et al. is better at detecting the variance among the two genders, than the regression analysis used by Reher and Persson et al.. It would be necessary to replicate the study by Dingler et al. to conclude to which degree their finding was due to random statistical chance, different data or their methodological choice. It

lastly should be noted that men and women tend to mostly agree, meaning that any unequal responsiveness or unequal substantive representation may be difficult to isolate.

Age group also may be a relevant variable. There are generally fewer studies looking at age than the variables previously mentioned, especially when it comes to responsiveness and substantive representation. Still, one study focusing on climate issues, which is relevant as younger age groups may feel a greater sense of urgency on the matter, showed a weaker substantive congruence between young people and representatives than their older counterparts (Helliesen, 2023). Looking at 11 policy issues, another study found a small tendency of weaker substantive representation for senior citizens (Kissau et al., 2012). Thus, the degree of representation according to age may vary on different issues and among different cases.

Lastly, geography may be a variable, depending on how electoral circuits are drawn and the proportion of citizens to representatives within each circuit. Electoral systems are sometimes formed to explicitly overrepresent the periphery or rural populations, one example being the US Senate (Stephens, 1996). This then implies that some votes are more impactful than others.

There may also be geographical overrepresentation in systems where this is not explicitly intended, based on the fact that parties may prioritize areas where they are moderately popular when forming ballots, as these areas may contain more potential voters than other areas (Latner & McGann, 2005). If certain voter groups are concentrated in certain areas, government may then be more or less responsive to them.

2.4 Mechanisms Influencing Political Equality

There are several mechanisms that may have an influence on the degree of political equality and government responsiveness to the median voter. These may be divided into several mechanisms. The first of these is the degree to which different groups are adequately represented descriptively. The second is the degree to which political participation is equal among all groups of the population. The third mechanism is about the role of organizations and organizational memberships. Lastly, the fourth mechanism is about the provision of high-quality journalism and media consumption.

2.4.1 Descriptive Representation

There are several explanatory variables and institutions that may be detrimental to government responsiveness and political equality, both inside and outside of the political system. One of the most studied variables is descriptive representation, where women, younger people and the working class tend to be underrepresented (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2023; Ruedin, 2010; Wences, 1969). This may have several causal consequences that is relevant for the degree of responsiveness and substantive representation, as the behavior of legislators may depend on their background.

According to the politics of presence argument, men and women tend to behave differently as parliamentary representatives, influencing policy outcomes in cases where policy is not planned in advance through party programs (Wängnerud, 2000). A study on British representatives supports this argument on gender issues specifically, but the presence of women may not have a significant effect on most other issues (Lovenduski & Norris, 2003). This was a quantitative study using survey data and actual policy proposals, strengthening the finding. A similar study from Australia found similar results (McAllister & Studlar, 1992). If this is the case in all contexts is yet to be determined.

Studies focusing on actual policy outcomes also show an effect of an increase in the descriptive representation of women. One study on Norwegian municipalities showed that an increase in the proportion of women representatives correlated with higher child care coverage (Bratton & Ray, 2002). This study might have limited generalizability though, as political parties play a different role in local politics than in national politics, both in Norway and other European countries (Aars & Ringkjøb, 2008, p. 111).

Another study looking at Indian local politics found an effect of a quota system for women on the provision of public goods, for example with significantly higher investment in water infrastructure when the Prahan (a local leadership position) is a woman (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004).

Focusing on the descriptive representation of the working class, another study found that working class representatives were significantly more congruent with working class voters regarding the left-right dimension and European integration, but not on issues like redistribution and immigration (Hahn, 2022). This may then be a significant mechanism for unequal

responsiveness according to income, as the working class is severely underrepresented in most OECD countries (Carnes & Lupu, 2023, p. 185).

It should be noted that this effect increases the more right leaning the ideological party position is and is less relevant for the congruence between working class voters and left-wing parties. Thus, there may be different mechanisms influencing policy responsiveness depending on the ideology of the party in government. This may be due to the fact that most working class representatives are in left wing parties, making a diminishing effect possible (Carnes & Lupu, 2023, p. 194). Regardless, based on this finding, the politics of presence argument may be relevant for other demographic groups as well.

2.4.2 Political Participation

Another variable often mentioned in the literature is political participation, through behaviors like voting. Since elections are thought to be the main mechanism of accountability between voters and representatives, the degree of participation in these elections may influence the degree of responsiveness. This is because as turnout drops, it seems to often drop disproportionately in different demographics, for example among voters with lower-than-average education (Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2017; Gallego, 2010; Janmaat et al., 2014). This then leads to voters often being less representative of the general population.

This may influence the degree to which different demographic groups are represented descriptively. A study including several US cities showed that a depressed turnout leads to a less proportional descriptive representation of several ethnic groups like African Americans and Latin Americans (Hajnal & Trounstine, 2005).

The same association may not hold true for socioeconomic status: a higher electoral turnout might increase the representation of nonlawyer professionals, party bureaucrats and labor leaders, and similarly decrease the number of lawyers and business leaders, but not influence the representation of the working class (Wences, 1969). This study is older and the finding is only correlational, so further research is needed in determining the validity of this conclusion.

Turnout may also influence actual policy outcomes and the party system. It is for example found to mediate the relationship between economic inequality and social spending: only if turnout is

sufficiently high, is increasing economic inequality associated with increasing social spending (Larcinese, 2007).

The implementation of compulsory voting in Australia, leading to a 24 percent increase in turnout, also led to increased pension spending. This law also led to a 7 to 10 percentage points increase in labor seats, directly signaling that the average voter changed ideologically (Fowler, 2013). Simulating increased turnout in US Senate elections, generally yield generally weaker and more inconsistent results in influencing vote shares of parties than the finding out of Australia, somewhat weakening the generalizability of the finding (Citrin et al., 2003).

2.4.3 Organizations

Organizations may also play an important role in responsiveness. As political contention requires collective action, the degree to which voters and other political actors are informed about each other's political views and interest are vital. High organizational membership rates may therefore make politics more predictable and cognitive heuristics and shortcuts less necessary, leading to voters being more able to defend their interests and elites more willing to compromise or yield when their interests are opposed to the general population (Weyland, 2012).

Labor unions in particular are generally one of the organizational types to have achieved the highest membership mass, and political elites may perceive strong labor unions and their members as an important electoral block with distinct interests (Boreham et al., 1996). This perception may have merit: a study of 60 countries found that union members participate significantly more politically through activities like demonstrating and party work than their non-member counterparts (Kerrissey & Schofer, 2018). They may also be heavily involved in the formation of public policy through both formalized or informal deliberation in parliaments or government bureaucracies through corporatist and other state institutions (Boreham et al., 1996; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001).

The importance of mass based civil society organizations is based on the principal-agent relationship involved, but their presence in a democratic society may not exclusively facilitate responsiveness. Membership rates for organizations can in many circumstances be lower than electoral turnout, meaning that members may have different interests than the average citizen

(Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001; Siaroff & Merer, 2002). According to the famous iron law of oligarchy, there are also always an inherent power difference between ordinary members and the leadership in every bureaucratic organization (Leach, 2005). If the leadership then have other interests than other members, this may bias the behavior of the organization.

Some Civil Society organizations may in the worst-case scenario forge implicit alliances with other political forces and interests, antagonistically blocking democratic governments from enacting policies supported by their voters (Foley & Edwards, 1996). Still, organizational memberships are a source of funding for political campaigns that does not stem from economic elites, creating a fiscal counterforce, mediating their influence (Wang, 2006). They are also a decentralized source of funding, reducing the risk of organizational capture by interests providing more concentrated funding (Rex, 2020). Thus, a strong membership based civil society may overall be a facilitating variable for political equality.

2.4.4 The Media

The media may also be a relevant variable in determining the degree of political equality. It is thought that newspapers partially counterbalances the power of special interests by combining news with entertainment, mobilizing otherwise passive and ignorant voters (Dyck, 2013). In this way a high newspaper readership may counteract the differences in political participation that is otherwise observed. Still, providing the most accurate information and the best entertainment, is not the only potential motivation. Privately owned media often have financial interests, which have been shown to influence their news reporting (Gilens & Hertzman, 2000).

Another problem is the disproportionately low newspaper readership among certain demographics. Sociologists often consider cultural consumption to have a function of signaling one's own social status (Tak Wing Chan & John H. Goldthorpe, 2007). If acting in accordance with democratic responsibilities, like being informed by current affairs by reading news, is perceived to be important and associated with status, then citizens are more likely to adopt these behaviors. Not all citizens may adopt the same behaviors in the search of higher social status, however.

The characteristics of cultural consumption, including the degree to which one reads the news and investigative journalism, may then vary based on which values different groups emphasize

as being tied to high social status. Newspaper readership seems to correlate positively with education in several countries, signaling that socialization within the education system plays an important role (Schoenbach et al., 1999; Torche, 2007).

Age and income has also been isolated as predictors in most countries, which may for example be due to the cost of newspapers and the time usage (Elvestad & Blekesaune, 2008). These differences may give some voters a disproportionate advantage in influencing the policy process, due to the importance of political knowledge.

These problems may partially be solved by public funding of newspapers. Investigative journalism may be considered a public good, thus fully privatized and unregulated news markets may be associated with market failure and suboptimal provision. This is partly due to political knowledge being valuable for society as a whole and not only newspaper buyers themselves. They are also non rivalrous, so that the availability does not shrink as demand increases (Kind & Møen, 2014).

Thus, subsidizing investigative journalism and news in general may not be associated with misallocation of resources, and may increase the availability of political knowledge. Still, one paper studying Norway, Sweden and Finland have shown a decline in the amount of published titles despite extensive subsidization, indicating that subsidies are insufficient in isolation (Grönlund et al., 2024).

Despite abandoning direct subsidies in the 1990s, the newspaper market in Finland is in a comparatively good situation, somewhat undermining the usefulness of media subsidies (Grönlund et al., 2024). Still, the amount of published titles is an insufficient indicator when assessing things like journalistic quality, the distribution of readership in different socioeconomic groups and how extensive each published title is.

In addition to newspaper subsidies, well-funded public broadcasting services are also proposed as a solution. The public seems to be generally more informed about current affairs and politics in countries that fund their public broadcasting more (Soroka et al., 2013; Aalberg & Cushion, 2016). The public in these countries might also be more likely to engage in politics, possessing more positive civic values (Newton, 2016). Also highly relevant is the tendency of smaller knowledge gaps in these countries (O'Mahen, 2016). These effects may come from public broadcasters not needing to consider commercial aspects like profit margins and their journalism being freely available.

1.5 Empirical Findings on Electoral Systems

Lastly, there is an extensive literature looking at electoral systems and their impact on variables related to political equality. Proportional systems are generally associated with higher turnout and a more proportional descriptive representation of women, compared with majoritarian systems (Ladner & Milner, 1999; Paxton et al., 2010; Sanz, 2017). It may also tend to protect and represent minorities and their interest to a greater extent, which may make the political system more available to the most disadvantaged (Lijphart, 1991).

The debate is less clear regarding substantive representation. Proportional representation seems to underrepresent women and the poor to a smaller degree than majoritarian systems do (Bernauer et al., 2015). A salience based approach comparing policy salience and policy speeches in The UK and Denmark found greater congruence between the two in Denmark (Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2005). As these two both are parliamentary liberal democracies, but with The UK having a majoritarian system and Denmark a proportional system, this comparison may point towards the latter system being more responsive, even though it is limited in scope.

There are also studies on bill legislation in parliament. A study on Korean parliamentarians, where some representatives are elected proportionally in party list elections and others in majoritarian elections, found that the party list representatives more actively promoted women's issues (Kweon & Ryan, 2022). Perhaps more surprisingly, this effect was stronger on the men in parliament, which could potentially modulate any impact of descriptive underrepresentation. This may signal a greater responsiveness to groups at the political periphery, as representatives can specialize to a greater extent (Dow, 2001).

3. Theory

There is a great variety of electoral systems, and thus a great variety of mechanisms through which they may affect societal institutions and political equality. To briefly mention some differences, electoral systems vary regarding the size of the electoral districts, the electoral formula used to select representatives, whether party lists are required, or individuals can run, whether runoff elections are mandated and the degree to which quotas are used (Blais, 1991).

This thesis looks at how these aspects of electoral systems influence political equality through some key mechanisms. I have identified six key mechanisms, which influence two aspects of political equality: the degree to which enfranchised citizens are equally descriptively and substantively represented in the political systems they are enfranchised in.

Two mechanisms are hypothesized to influence the degree to which citizens are equally represented descriptively: the selection mechanism used by political parties to select their candidates before an election and party magnitude, or how many candidates are on a party ballot. Proportional representation systems are argued to generally promote more inclusive party primaries and allow for higher party magnitudes, which both are argued to reduce the influence of party elites, which might otherwise be expected to hinder the sufficient representation of marginalized groups to protect their own interests (Matland, 1993).

Although these two mechanisms could indirectly promote greater substantive representation through the presence of different viewpoints and perspectives, there are four mechanisms who specifically relate to substantive representation in particular (Lawless, 2004). One of these concern voting behavior, where voters may vote more sincerely in proportional systems, compared to majoritarian ones (Hix et al., 2017).

The last two mechanisms describe a theoretical relationship between electoral systems and turnout, which then relates to substantive representation. One of these mechanisms describes the competitiveness aspect of elections. The argument is that majoritarian systems produce some uncompetitive districts, that fail to incentivize candidates to mobilize peripheral voters or in other words, voters without an interest in politics (Blais & Aarts, 2006). In contrast, proportional representation systems encourage candidates and parties to campaign more equally in all districts, increasing turnout.

The other mechanism describes how electoral systems could incentivize campaigning strategies of parties. Proportional representation systems are thought to promote coalitions and multiparty governance, thus giving parties disincentives discouraging them from using negative campaigning strategies towards potential coalition parties or parties that could be valuable cooperation partners in the future (Haselmayer & Jenny, 2018). This could particularly be the case for harsh and uncivil attacks. This aspect of proportional systems could then decrease the depressive effects harsh negative campaigning has on turnout.

These six mechanisms are discussed in their own subchapters. Still, they are interrelated, one example being how higher party magnitudes might increase turnout through ticket balancing (Salmond, 2006). There are also considerable disagreement in the literature relating to several of the mechanisms, for example negative campaigning, which might be mobilizing more voters than demobilizing (Martin, 2004). In general, however, the main expectation would be that proportional systems promote political equality through these mechanisms to a bigger extent than majoritarian systems do.

3.1 Selection Mechanism

As descriptive representation may play a role in political equality and political responsiveness, the selection mechanism that decides who is put on the ballot may be of particular interest. Candidate selection methods vary from primaries, where the general public or party members are enfranchised, to exclusive committees representing either the party leadership or party members indirectly (Kenig et al., 2015).

Parties may be more likely to adopt open or more inclusive primaries in circumstances where, districts are smaller, there is a higher degree of party system fractionalization and electoral competition is lower (Bermúdez & Cordero, 2017). All of these aspects of political systems might be influenced by the electoral system in place, meaning that differences like whether the election formula is majoritarian or proportional or whether districts are single member or multimember, might influence the descriptive representation of different groups.

Parties in smaller districts may for example be incentivized to encourage local participation due to a need to understand local issues and opinion, while also having a greater need for locally popular candidates (Shomer, 2014). Systems with smaller districts also tend to have more

decentralized party structures, which in turn is associated with a more inclusive candidate selection processes (Hazan & Voerman, 2006).

Party system fractionalization decreases the average vote share of the parties, increasing the amount of electorally relevant smaller parties. These are then in turn thought to be incentivized to adopt more inclusive candidate selection methods due to an increased need to be electorally relevant and use local notables in their campaigning. They are also thought to be less complex requiring less coordination, resulting in a smaller need to develop a centralized party bureaucracy (Lundell, 2004).

Parties in more competitive districts may adopt more exclusive candidate selection than parties in safe districts. This is because the candidate valence, or the likeability of a candidate in particular, may to a greater extent be revealed during a contested primary, which introduces risk for the party as a whole. If unlikable characteristics of a candidate are revealed during a contested general election, this might make moderate voters refrain from voting for their otherwise preferred party (Snyder & Ting, 2011).

Holding an open or more inclusive primary may also drain the resources of a party or a candidate. There is an inherent budgetary cost to campaigning and there is a limited amount of volunteers available to execute a good campaign (Fouirnaies & Hall, 2020). In a more competitive district, the party leadership might thus prefer a more exclusive selection mechanism, including only party members or a select committee.

All of these may be influenced by the electoral system, implying an indirect relationship between institutional differences like district magnitude and candidate selection procedures. Single member districts may for example incentivize parties to adopt more inclusive candidate selection procedures through geographically smaller districts, and less competitive districts on average due to the existence of safe seats (Maeda, 2016). At the same time, they might disincentivize the usage of inclusive selection methods through incentivizing voters to refrain from voting for smaller parties, increasing party size. Thus, electoral systems may have contradictory effects.

Descriptively speaking, it is argued that exclusive candidate selection may result in a lower amount of women getting nominated, as party gate keepers tend to be men (Cheng & Tavits, 2011). The gender of gate keepers might influence the nomination of women through several mechanisms, like an unconscious preference for candidates that are similar to themselves or

tendencies in who they know in their social network. Thus, in cases where party gate keepers are consistently unrepresentative of the general population, open primaries and more inclusive selection mechanisms might make election ballots more representative on average. The effects of primaries might however be context dependent, as strong parties might mediate their effects through informal and cultural means (Indriðason & Kristinsson, 2015).

Still, this would be supported by voters' willingness to vote for both working class candidates and women, two traditionally underrepresented groups (Bridgewater & Nagel, 2020; Carnes & Lupu, 2016). At the same time, both open and closed primaries might be more vulnerable to influence by financial donations than selection by committees in a more institutionalized manner (Thomsen, 2023). Thus, if there are barriers to fundraising for certain groups, like working class candidates, open primaries might result in less representative candidates regardless of voter attitudes (Treul & Hansen, 2023).

In regard to substantive representation, the inclusivity of candidate selection may influence how ideologically moderate the chosen candidates are. It is thought that by expanding the selectorate, the average primary voter might become more average in terms of ideology, resulting in more moderate candidates being elected (Kaufmann et al., 2003). An expanded selectorate might also fail to distinguish between moderate and extreme candidates, counteracting the effect of more moderate primary voters (Ahler et al., 2016). If more extreme candidates are elected in all contesting parties, then this could result in substantive underrepresentation of moderate voters.

H1: Proportional systems might to a greater extent incentivize parties to adopt inclusive primaries which in turn leads to a higher degree of political equality.

3.2 Party Magnitudes

In addition to selection mechanisms, party magnitudes, defined as the number of seats parties have in a district, may also influence the characteristics of the representatives that are elected (Matland, 1993). Party magnitudes are influenced by district magnitudes, as the latter is a limiting factor. In single member districts, the party magnitude is limited to one, while in party list proportional representation systems, it is often possible for parties to win several representatives from the same district.

Within political parties there may exist intra-party networks of relatively powerful and influential individuals safeguarding their own interests by ensuring that they themselves or their allies are put on the ballot. When party magnitudes are larger, marginalized groups may gain some representation without posing a threat to these networks (Matland, 1993).

Higher party magnitudes also typically allow for a greater degree of ticket balancing, with a more descriptively diverse ballot to appeal to different voter groups (Salmond, 2006). Still, individuals from these groups may disproportionately achieve candidacy status if their winning chances are perceived as somewhat low, in line with the sacrificial lambs hypothesis (Thomas & Bodet, 2013).

There also tend to be more party lists represented in higher magnitude districts, which could potentially lower the average party magnitude. Looking at gender specifically, this may negate the indirect effect of district magnitudes, as party lists often tend to be headed by men. This does however only seem to moderate the effect of district magnitude on women's representation, as the overall effect seems to be positive (Lucardi & Micozzi, 2022).

Party magnitudes may similarly also influence the representation of the youth and ethnic groups (Lublin & Bowler, 2018; Stockemer & Sundström, 2018). An increase in both women, ethnic minority and youth representation could be particularly important as these groups may intersect, which would severely limit the descriptive representation of individuals belonging to multiple of these groups. This may then influence their trust in the political system, potentially influencing political behaviors like voting (Montoya et al., 2022).

In addition to increasing trust and satisfaction with democratic institutions, more proportional descriptive representation may also alter the behavior of parliamentarians. A descriptively more representative parliament is thought to bring a more diverse set of perspectives and ideas into parliamentary debate. This may then make parliamentarians more able to represent their constituents on new and uncrystallized issues, where parties have not yet taken a formal position (Mansbridge, 1999).

This advantage of descriptive representation could also mitigate the consequences of class biased reporting with the perspectives and interests of higher income citizens to a larger degree being covered by the media (Jacobs et al., 2021). It could also mitigate the biases in who contacts representatives, which otherwise may be a contributing factor in biasing their perception of public opinion and the demands of voters (Broockman & Skovron, 2018b). In this

way, it could give access to arguments that would have been unavailable otherwise, enriching public debate and making it easier for parties to pander to all groups in exchange for votes.

Taking a comparative perspective, there is some evidence that increased district magnitudes only have an effect on descriptive representation in proportional list based systems, as plurality multi-member systems, where there are multiple candidates that are elected by plurality vote, don't show the same effect of district magnitudes on women's representation as proportional systems do (Studlar & Welch, 1991). Thus, conceptually, this association may require other typical traits of party list proportional representation systems, like party lists, strengthening the notion that it is party magnitudes in particular that may be beneficial for women's representation, with district magnitudes having an indirect effect.

Party magnitudes may have different effects in different societal contexts. There seems to be a threshold effect, where developing countries may not see this effect until a certain point of development (Matland, 1998). At the same time this result may disappear when cultural and regional variables are accounted for (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999). Thus, Party magnitudes may have an effect in all countries, but whether there are interaction effects with other variables is yet to be determined.

At the same time higher party magnitudes could weaken the principal agent relationship between voters and representatives, as representation is seen as a public good. This is because the risk of losing a seat is dependent on the popularity of the group of representatives as a whole, reducing the incentives of any particular representative to represent their constituents optimally (Portmann et al., 2012). Thus, representatives in single member districts may be more incentivized by voters than representatives in party list districts.

Lower magnitudes may also promote accountability due to incentivizing voters to vote for bigger parties, reducing the number of parties to keep track on (Stadelmann et al., 2014). This may also have the added benefit of increasing turnout, as a smaller amount of parties might lessen the informational demands that elections place on voters (Muraoka & Barceló, 2019).

This might also disproportionately increase turnout among certain demographic groups, such as voters with a lower-than-average education, as these on average have worse access to political knowledge (Sondheimer & Green, 2010). Still, a meta-analysis on choice overload, which is the phenomenon of refraining to make a choice when confronted with a multitude of options, puts this mechanism into question (Scheibehenne et al., 2010).

At the same time, proportional representation may have an advantage compared to single member districts with incentivizing more than two parties, increasing the probability that voters find a party they mostly agree with (Taagepera et al., 2014). Having two or more ideologically similar parties may also increase party competition in cases where electoral markets are segmented by for example social sector or geography, if parties do not have a monopoly in a segment of voters (Boix, 2010).

H2: Proportional systems might make it easier for disproportionately underrepresented groups to attain political representation due to higher party magnitudes, increasing the degree of political equality.

3.3 Sincere Voting

There may be a higher degree of sincere voting in proportional systems, especially when the district magnitude is higher (Hix et al., 2017). One potentially important mechanism for why this is, is how high the effective threshold is in a particular district. Proportional representation systems tend to have lower effective thresholds than majoritarian systems do, meaning that less votes are required to win a seat in parliament (Ruiz-Rufino, 2011).

In majoritarian elections with only one winning candidate, only a plurality of votes gets translated into representation in the legislature, meaning that other votes could be considered wasted. Because of this, voters tend to coordinate with each other, strategically voting for candidates with a higher chance of winning a plurality of the votes. These voting patterns over time tend to form a two party system in accordance with Duvergers law (Riker, 1982). This is because the formation of new parties is disincentivized, as the chance of winning any representation is low unless a party wins a plurality of the vote.

In a median voter perspective, a two-party system is not necessarily different from a multiparty system, as all parties take centrist positions in the search for the most voters. Still, there is some relevant differences. One of these is the difference in the degree to which coalitions between voter groups are formalized with coalition agreements or informal through voter support and behavior. In majoritarian systems bargaining takes place during the election, through creating and campaigning on manifestoes and party platforms supported by a plurality of the population

while in proportional systems, it takes place through formalized coalition bargaining between different parties in parliament (Huber, 1993).

Formalized bargaining between different parties, commonly observed in multiparty systems, might have some merits, in that voter groups are represented by parties that can credibly commit to their platform via the potential threat of exiting a coalition. Thus, centrists are able to vote more sincerely in regards to high stake policy dimensions, as the influence of ideologically peripheral voter groups is more predictable (Döring & Manow, 2017). This may be especially the case in terms of redistribution, as voters experience loss aversion more strongly than the motivation of fiscal gain, creating a conservative bias under uncertainty (Iversen & Soskice, 2006).

As a solution to this commitment problem, economically progressive parties might then become more conservative in majoritarian systems, especially under conditions of increasing income inequality. Thus, they increase their appeal to centrist voters by signaling predictability and explicitly limiting the influence of ideological peripheral groups in the party (Becher, 2016). This might increase redistribution in line with the preferences of the median voter, but not to an optimal level in line with public opinion and at the expense of the substantive representation of peripheral groups.

Another difference is how different cleavages are represented in parliament. While all democratic countries have a left-right cleavage with at least one center left and one center right party, proportional systems are often characterized by other cleavages being represented in the party system by distinct parties (Manow, 2008). In two party systems, parties often absorb these cleavages as there is a greater mismatch between the possible amount of parties based on latent cleavages and the actual amount of parties (Neto & Cox, 1997).

A two party system might to a greater extent rely on individual representatives to maintain contact with interest groups and social movements they identify with, in line with the politics of presence argument (Celis et al., 2015). This might grant these groups and movements agenda setting power in the legislature. However, proportional systems might represent cleavages more accurately through multiparty systems, where for example postmaterialist issues are represented through green parties and radical right parties (Marthaler, 2008).

H3: Proportional systems might increase sincere voting behavior among voters due to solving the commitment problem, reducing the probability of wasted votes and representing more cleavages, thus increasing substantive representation and in turn political equality.

3.4 District Competitiveness

As discussed in the background chapter, turnout may be an important factor in political equality because changes in turnout often disproportionately takes place among certain groups of the population, such as different educational groups (Gallego, 2010). This then implies that the median voter and the median citizen may be different and may have different political interests and opinions. If, then the opinions and preferences of voters causally influence government policy, a low and unequal turnout might make government less responsive towards the median citizen and marginalized groups.

Electoral systems might influence turnout through several mechanisms, but one of the most important mechanisms might be how competitive districts are on average. Under the assumption of geographical ideological variability, where districts are ideologically distinct from each other, parties might win overwhelmingly in some, while not being represented at the ballot in others. This might then lead to some seats being safe, leading parties to invest less in campaigning and fewer voters to turn out to vote (Blais & Aarts, 2006).

In contrast to this, proportional representation systems incentivizes parties to invest in mobilizational efforts more equally in all districts, as votes are more proportionally translated into parliamentary seats, regardless of the electoral district they are cast in (Cox, 1999). This difference between electoral systems might influence certain voters more than others, disproportionately increasing turnout in otherwise lower turnout groups.

To understand why, it is useful to distinguish between core and peripheral voters. While core voters generally express interest in politics regardless of the mobilizational efforts of parties, peripheral voters show interest only under particular circumstances such as under high salience elections. This then implies that turnout is more elastic among peripheral voters, and that drops in turnout is primarily due to fewer peripheral voters turning out to vote (Teele, 2023).

Thus, in a majoritarian electoral system with some uncompetitive districts, peripheral voters could remain under-mobilized, as there is not sufficient mobilizational efforts from political parties and volunteers to mobilize these voters. Because there are cultural factors, like gender norms, that may depress political interests in certain groups and thus produce peripheral voters, proportional representation might reduce the impact of these cultural factors (Skorge, 2023).

H5: Proportional representation formulas increase turnout through increasing the average competitiveness of electoral districts, thus increasing political equality.

3.5 Negative campaigning

Proportional representation may also influence turnout through promoting coalition building and parliamentary cooperation between different parties. As proportional representation tends to promote multiparty governance and parliamentary fractionalization, this necessitates changes in campaigning strategies during elections. In particular, parties in a multiparty context need to legitimize future cooperation with potential coalition parties, which may make the use of negative campaigning to mobilize voters counterproductive (Haselmayer & Jenny, 2018).

This is due to several considerations. Negative campaigning might for example lead to coalition bargaining costs, because of bad rapport between those involved in negotiations (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010). The usage of negative campaigning by a party may signal to potential coalition partners that it might be unreliable and uncooperative. Another consideration is the risk of electoral backlash among voters who could be disillusioned by their party of choice governing with a party they have antagonistic attitudes towards (Walter, 2014a).

There may also be smaller potential gains of votes achieved by negative campaigning in proportional systems. In a majoritarian system, negative campaigning may reduce turnout among the voters of the other main party, while in proportional systems these voters might instead opt for voting for another ideologically similar party (Walter, 2014b). This then means that a party utilizing a negative campaign strategy might boost other competitors, while not gaining any votes itself.

If proportional representation disincentivizes negative campaigning strategies, this implies that parties have fewer strategies to rely on, which may make some voters difficult to reach and

engage. This might especially be the case for peripheral voters, which were introduced in the previous subchapter. These voters might only be mobilized during highly salient election campaigns, with high perceived stakes, which may be more difficult to accomplish without attack behavior (Teele, 2023).

This means there are contradictory theoretical predictions in whether negative campaigning strategies have a positive or negative impact on turnout. As already mentioned, in majoritarian systems attack behavior might decrease turnout among the voters of the competing party. Still, attack behavior might also have mobilizing effects, because negative messages are perceived as more salient (Bazerman, 1984). Thus, this might make the election more salient, mobilizing peripheral voters.

There is, however, a useful distinction between two different types of negative campaigning. While legitimate criticism based on policy proposals might have a mobilizing effect, particularly harsh and personal attacks might alienate voters (Kahn & Kenney, 1999). Particularly harsh campaigning might also be disincentivized to a larger degree than factual and policy-based campaigning in proportional systems, as this might be extra detrimental to future coalition talks and governance.

There might be individual differences in how different voters respond to harsher campaigning strategies. In particular, there might be differences based on the big five personality traits, where harsh negative campaigning may backfire amongst voters higher in agreeableness, extroversion and lower in emotional stability. There is a different reasoning for each of the personality traits: agreeable voters may react negatively due to compromising and conflict averse tendencies, extroverted voters might react negatively due to their preference for positivity and voters low in emotional stability might find the negativity unpleasant and engage in avoidance behavior (Nai & Maier, 2021).

Electoral systems might mediate the effects of harsh campaigning through the party system. As majoritarian systems tend to strongly disincentivize party system fractionalization to the degree that there might only be two serious contenders in a particular district, voters do not have any alternatives if they get alienated from an attacking party while at the same time being demotivated in voting for the party that is under attack (Walter & van der Eijk, 2019). This leads to H6:

H6: Proportional systems disincentivize harsh negative campaigning, while also minimizing its demobilizing effects amongst voters effects, increasing turnout.

4. Data and methods

Establishing cause-effect relationships is a central goal of modern social science, as causal knowledge gives us the opportunity to intervene to create the desired effects we want (Marini & Singer, 1988). There are ontological differences between social scientists on how to make a valuable and valid causal claim and causation could be understood both mechanistically and in counterfactual terms. A mechanistic understanding of causation usually requires some sort of process tracing of the mechanism in question, where the causal inference is only valid for the case in question and is difficult to generalize (Beach, 2020).

A counterfactual understanding of causation on the other hand seeks to generalize based on overall trends among multiple cases with variation on the independent variable (Beach, 2020). This variation may then allow us to make inferences on the effects of certain events or variables, as it gives access to both cases that are influenced by the variable in question and cases that are not. It is thus impossible, in a counterfactual framework, to infer causal relationships with only one case, as each individual case only one outcome may be observed, meaning that it is impossible to access the true counterfactual of a case. This is known as the fundamental problem of causal inference (Ding & Li, 2018).

In this chapter, I discuss how we may draw strong causal inferences despite the lack of true counterfactuals through the application of the synthetic control method. I argue that using this method on the chosen case, New Zealand, may allow us to make useful inferences about the effects of electoral systems due to an electoral system reform.

Then I discuss how a literature review may be beneficial in complementing the synthetic control analysis both in general and in this thesis in particular. Here I argue that a literature review may be beneficial due to it complementing the counterfactual based reasoning that the synthetic control method offers. In addition to this, a literature review helps synthesize research from different scientific disciplines and subdisciplines, which makes it possible to draw stronger inferences that separate studies may be able to (Rew, 2011).

Lastly I discuss the included variables and data, describing the data in general and how the main independent variable is composed. The main variable is the Egalitarian Democracy Index, which is coded and provided by the Varieties of Democracy Institute. I argue that this is a good

measure as it is a holistic measure on political equality as a whole and that it provides an extensive data coverage (Coppedge et al., 2024).

4.1 Synthetic Control Method

One recent statistical innovation that builds on a counterfactual understanding of causation is the synthetic control method, which constructs a counterfactual for a selected unit using machine learning algorithms to select donor pool units. It does this by using preintervention trends for the treated unit to construct a duplicate unit using a mix of untreated units (Abadie et al., 2015).

This duplicate, which is a synthetic unit, is not guaranteed to be a perfect fit, but the degree to which it is, we may assume that it is similar to the treated unit in regard to other trends than the trends in question. If there for example is an association between political inequality and both electoral systems and turnout, a regression analysis failing to control for the latter may be affected by confounder bias, something that may be less of a risk using synthetic control (Johnston et al., 2018). This is due to the synthetic control method making it explicit how similar the treated and control unit is in the relevant aspect that is studied (Abadie et al., 2010).

The synthetic control method also to a larger degree allows for quantitative case studies. Case studies have traditionally been mostly qualitative, focusing on within case analysis and process tracing, meaning that the options for counterfactual based inferences have been limited to paired comparisons in which the researchers picks the counterfactual based on theoretical arguments (Tarrow, 2010).

The way the synthetic control method chooses the donor pool units is mostly data driven and atheoretical, limiting the dangers of the researcher's biases influencing the results. It then makes this mix of donor pool units explicit, so that the researcher may discuss how comparable the counterfactual unit is to the treated unit from a theoretical perspective (Cunningham, 2021, p. 514).

These aspects of the synthetic control method makes it a good choice for studying the reform of the electoral system of New Zealand, which went from using a First Past The Post majoritarian system to a Mixed Member Proportional system, starting with the 1996 election (Nemoto et al., 2012).

The synthetic control analysis will use the Egalitarian Democracy Index as a measure of political equality to measure if the reform had an effect (Coppedge et al., 2024). If it does have an effect, this could be used to infer that it was the proportional representation element of the implemented Mixed Member Representation system which caused the effect. This would imply that electoral systems have an effect, and that proportional representation systems may have advantages over majoritarian systems (Linhart et al., 2019).

4.2 Semi-Systematic Literature Review

A semi-systematic literature review tries to analyze and synthesize the current literature when the topic has been conceptualized differently or when it has been studied by a wide range of disciplines or subdisciplines (Snyder, 2019). This may be advantageous because the study of electoral systems and political equality includes both studies on unequal responsiveness, unequal participation, political behavior in general and policy outcomes (Manow, 2008; Sanz, 2017; Soroka & Wlezien, 2015). In addition to this, electoral systems are not only one thing. They vary along several dimensions, like the formula in use or the size and structure of the districts (Blais, 1988). This may make most methodological designs insufficient if the goal is to look at one or more broader relationships.

A semi-systematic literature review holds several advantages that complement the synthetic control analysis. One of the biggest advantages would be that it can be used to see how probable multiple theoretically likely mechanisms are in causing any effects of electoral systems on political equality. This mechanistic focus could complement the counterfactual inferences that is possible to draw using the synthetic control method (Beach, 2020).

It also allows for taking the weight of evidence into account and get an overview of a wide literature. This allows for much more robust causal inferences, as the findings of individual studies might be influenced by random variations in the data or methodological weaknesses (Baumeister, 2013, p. 119).

The review is structured into several subchapters, looking at different questions that may be answered by different literatures and sub disciplines. First, I look at descriptive representation due to its relationship to political equality through the politics of presence argument (Lovenduski & Norris, 2003). I then look at substantive representation and government

responsiveness. I look at the substantive representation and responsiveness of and towards both marginalized groups and the median voter, as the two are intrinsically linked. If for example the poor, minorities or women are politically marginalized, this skews responsiveness, so that the median voter is affected too (Oprea et al., 2024).

After this, I discuss the literature on the proposed mechanisms, trying to isolate their effects. Isolating causal mechanisms complements the counterfactual understanding of causation as mentioned earlier, because if the results of two distinct scientifically valid logics support each other, this may strengthen inferences by triangulation (Beach, 2020; Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012).

Lastly I look at policy outcomes and economic confounders. These chapters are relevant as it is necessary to put the research on electoral systems in a wider societal context. I argue that proportional representation systems may bias policy outcomes in a way that might decrease the consequences of economic inequality on political inequality (Paulsen, 2022; Rosset et al., 2013). When discussing economic confounders, I discuss whether these policy outcomes and their potential effects on political equality might be spurious due to economically equal countries being more likely to select proportional representation in the first place (Cusack et al., 2010; Cusack et al., 2007; Flavin, 2018).

4.4 Variables and Data

In the synthetic control analysis, the constitutional reform in New Zealand from FPTP to MMP in 1996 and the egalitarian democracy index constitute the independent and the dependent variables respectively. The egalitarian democracy index from the Varieties of Democracy Institute, measures the degree to which the following conditions are achieved: “Egalitarian democracy is achieved when 1 rights and freedoms of individuals are protected equally across all social groups; and 2 resources are distributed equally across all social groups; 3 groups and individuals enjoy equal access to power” (Coppedge et al., 2024).

The index is expert coded. The expert coders are picked according to five criteria. These are their expertise, usually indicated by an advanced degree or a record of publications, their relation to the country in question, where permanent residents are preferred, their willingness to invest time into the project, their impartiality and political neutrality and lastly, that their

backgrounds are diverse in respect to employment and professional backgrounds (Coppedge et al., 2019).

Although these strict criteria are not a guarantee against bias, experts generally do not seem to be influenced in their coding by their individual traits. The exceptions are coding variation and knowledge levels, which may make intuitively sense (Marquardt et al., 2019). Because of this, the egalitarian democracy index should somewhat objectively reflect the actual levels of political equality as the index defines it.

The index is an aggregated index based on the formula “ $v2x_egaldem = .25 * v2x_polyarchy1.585 + .25 * v2x_egal + .5 * v2x_polyarchy1.585 * v2x_egal$ ”, where $v2x_polyarchy$ is the Electoral Democracy Index and $v2x_egal$ is the Egalitarian Component Index. The index assigns the polyarchy and the egalitarian component indices 25 percent weight each and assigns a 50 percent weight to an interaction effect between the two (Coppedge et al., 2024). The table below shows the composite indices of the Egalitarian Component Index.

<p>Egalitarian Protection Index</p>	<p>Contributes 1/3 and asks: “How equal is the protection of rights and freedoms across social groups by the state?”</p> <p>In terms of aggregation, this index is formed by “taking the point estimates from a Bayesian factor analysis model of the indicators for social class equality in respect for civil liberties ($v2clacjust$), social group equality in respect for civil liberties ($v2clsocgrp$) and percent of population with weaker civil liberties ($v2clsnlpct$); reversed scale”</p>
<p>Equal Access Index</p>	<p>Contributes 1/3 and asks: “How equal is access to power?”</p> <p>In terms of aggregation, this index is formed by “taking the point estimates from a Bayesian factor analysis model of the indicators power distributed by socioeconomic position ($v2pepwrses$), power distributed</p>

	by social group (v2pepwrsoc), and power distributed by gender (v2pepwrngen)”
Equal Distribution of Resources Index	Contributes 1/3 and asks: “How equal is the distribution of resources?” When it comes to aggregation, this index is formed by “taking the point estimates from a Bayesian factor analysis model of the indicators for particularistic or public goods v2dlencmps, means tested vs. universalistic welfare policies v2dlunivl, educational equality v2peedueq and health equality v2pehealth”

Table: The composition of the egalitarian democracy index (Coppedge et al., 2024).

The Egalitarian Protection Index measures the protection of rights and freedoms across social groups. This is maybe the most intuitive part of the Egalitarian Component Index, as the unequal provision of civil liberties, such as voting rights or freedom of speech, formally excludes some social groups from democracy (Diamond & Morlino, 2004)

The two other indexes describe the more indirect parts of political equality that is less obvious and apparent at first sight. The Equal Access Index looks directly at the political power distributed by socio-economic status, social group and gender. This aspect is more about social norms and participation, which is equally as important as the equal provision of rights as informal norms may often matter more than formal institutions do (Zelinska & Dubrow, 2022).

The Equal Distribution of Resources Index describe the impact that economic and welfare inequality has on political equality. The reasoning for this is that political participation and the effective exercise of political rights requires some resources and the deprivation of these often excludes certain groups, like the poor from influencing policy (Rosset et al., 2013).

These three variables all contribute to a third of the variation in the Egalitarian Component Index each. This index interacts with the Electoral Democracy Index to form the final Egalitarian Democracy Index. The justification for this interaction lies in how crucial elections and the rights that are necessary for these elections to be fully democratic is for egalitarian democracy (Sigman & Lindberg, 2015).

Thus, it can be argued that the egalitarian democracy index is a precise and comprehensive measure of political equality. Although it only indirectly takes into account variables like political participation, civil society, voter behavior and other variables that are discussed in this thesis, all of these variables should theoretically have an impact on how coders code the final scores (Coppedge et al., 2024).

5. Case selection

To explore the effects of electoral systems in general and compare the effects of proportional representation to first past the post systems in particular, New Zealand offers both unique advantages and disadvantages as a case. New Zealand reformed its political system from a Majoritarian system to a Mixed Member Proportional Representation system during the 1996 elections (McRobie, 1997).

Mixed Member Proportional gives the voter two votes during parliamentary elections. One of the votes is for the local district election where a local representative is elected with a plurality, while the other is for a party list proportional election. The party list election then ensures that parties generally gets representatives based on the proportion of votes they get, while the single member plurality election ensures local representation (Linhart et al., 2019).

Thus Mixed Member Proportional Representation is often considered a hybrid between the two systems, which means that on a continuum between a completely majoritarian first past the post system and a completely proportional party list system, New Zealands political system became relatively more proportional after the reforms compared to before, giving an opportunity to infer the causal effects of the two systems through comparison (Dunning, 2008). At the same time both events prior to the reform, the way the reform was implemented and general characteristics of New Zealands culture, politics and society may create obstacles in the pursuit of causal knowledge.

This chapter is divided into three subchapters. Subchapter one introduces previous events that might influence the results and in particular the introduction of rapid economic reforms in the 80s. Subchapter two gives a brief overview of how the reform took place and what caused it. The last subchapter discusses how generalizable the findings of a case study on this reform is, considering the preceding economic reforms.

5.1 The Introduction of “Rogernomics”

The desire for constitutional reforms in 1990s New Zealand is generally thought to be caused by the rapid economic reforms under finance minister Roger Douglas, which from 1984 to 1990 implemented what has later been called the “Rogernomics” program. This program consisted

of rapid economic reforms implemented in quantum leaps before interest groups, or any political actors, could react, rejecting the arguably important democratic norm of ruling by consensus (Kelsey, 1998, pp. 32-34 & 303).

“Rogernomics” consisted of radical liberalization, and significant austerity measures, meant to stabilize the economy, which was in a recession at the time (Boston, 1993). As a result, New Zealand went from being one of the most regulated economies in the OECD to one of the least (Menz, 2005, p. 50).

One of the key reasons for this recession was the entry of the UK into the EU, which resulted in the loss of New Zealand’s preferential trade status as EU tolls and trade regulations were applied on New Zealand’s exports. This led to a significant economic loss, and the economy still seems to be significantly weaker than it would have been without this trade loss (Grier & Munger, 2021). The loss of trade was coupled with a foreign exchange crisis, a high deficit and a growing public debt (Boston, 1987). Thus, “Rogernomics” was motivated by quite serious economic problems.

Douglas’s allies in implementing these relatively radical reforms seems to primarily have consisted of institutional elites within the state bureaucracy (Goldfinch, 1998). These elites, together with the ruling government, are thought to have been enabled by New Zealand’s system of government, with parliamentary sovereignty, plurality voting, a high degree of party discipline and a unitary state (Nagel, 1998).

Thus, legislative majorities often consist of one party and don’t meet much resistance during the implementation of their political agenda. This in combination with the strategy of the government of introducing reforms quickly so no one could react properly, made it possible to implement reforms voters generally didn’t want, making the Labour government historically unpopular (Denemark, 1994).

5.2 Constitutional Reform

The 1990 general election lead to a crushing defeat of the Labour government with National, the main opposition party, gaining 69 percent of the seats in parliament, although only with 47 percent of the vote (Levine & Roberts, 1991). This disproportionality is caused by the fact that

a candidate only has to get the most votes by a small margin to get elected, which is reflected in the big variation that's observed in proportionality in majoritarian first-past-the-post systems, that is not observed in proportional systems (Bingham Powell Jr & Vanberg, 2000). This election was a part of a long term trend: increasing disproportionality, party system dealignment and decreasing turnout, meant that governments had become increasingly unaccountable, resulting in decreased trust in parliament (Vowles, 1995).

At the same time National had promised a referendum on electoral reform in their manifesto, which somewhat reluctantly got passed with bipartisan support in the parliament (Levine & Roberts, 1994). The motivations behind this promise could range from the need to discredit Labour to listening to public discontent and calls for reform among both campaigners and voters in general. At the time, the campaign for MMP, which was conducted by the Electoral Reform Coalition had been successful in both convincing the public, but also some MPs and people in the political elites (Renwick, 2007).

Despite the referendum gaining bipartisan support, at least some MPs voting for the referendum seem to have expected the referendum to fail. Thus, when the implementation of MMP turned out to have support in the population, some MPs had maybe unexpectedly forced their own hand, resulting in the reform being implemented in the following election (Church & McLeay, 2003). Thus, the implementation of MMP was a result of several factors like party system dealignment, decreasing trust as a result of hasty reforms without public support and miscalculations among MPs, leading to a reform nobody would have predicted a decade prior.

Did the reforms result in any relevant changes? In terms of attitudes, New Zealanders reported a greater belief in their votes mattering, while fewer believed that the country was run by a few big interests (Banducci et al., 1999). This may have impacted the political behavior of voters, promoting political participation.

Voter turnout in the first election under the new system increased, especially on the extreme left, signaling that voters on the ideological periphery to a greater degree was integrated into the political system (Karp & Banducci, 1999). The problem of overrepresentation in parliament also has diminished, with the ruling coalitions only being overrepresented by an average of 4,7 percent between 1996 and 2011 (Nagel, 2012).

5.3 Generalizability and Threats to Inference

Although studying New Zealand provides us with a good opportunity for drawing valuable causal inferences, the change of electoral systems is not the only variable that theoretically could have an effect on the variable of interest, namely political equality. Prior to the reform, New Zealand had been subjected to a set of reforms under the Rogernomics program of finance minister Douglas. Partly as a consequence, between the 1980s and 2000s union membership plummeted and wage inequality rose (Ahlquist, 2010). Both of these could theoretically affect political inequality, if we assume that political equality requires an equal distribution of resources, a key assumption in power resources theory (Korpi, 2019, p. 15).

The rapid economic and welfare changes during the Rogernomics period, coupled with the political trends that eventually led to the electoral reforms was significant enough that this period could be considered a critical juncture. Critical juncture theory posits that positive feedback leads to path dependence; thus a single event can have a drastic effect on long term power resources (Pierson, 2000). As Paul Pierson writes:

“Increasing returns processes can transform a situation of relatively balanced conflict, in which one set of actors must openly impose its preferences on another set ("the first face of power"), into one in which power relations become so uneven that anticipated reactions ("the second face of power") and ideological manipulation ("the third face") make open political conflict unnecessary. Thus, positive feedback over time simultaneously increases power asymmetries and renders power relations less visible” (Pierson, 2000).

If the Rogernomics” period changed the distribution of power resources in a significant manner, this may then have set the power balances between different groups on a trajectory of increasing power asymmetries between different groups, such as low- and high-income earners or labor unions and businesses and the state. In the case of the latter power relationship, during the Rogernomics” period, union density dropped from 66 to 46 percent (Harbridge & Hince, 1993). This seems to have started a development of increasing returns for businesses and other interests opposed to unions where union density had plummeted to around seven percent in 2002 (Harbridge et al., 2002).

Some of the changes that occurred during this period have been reversed by later legislative majorities, such as a toning down of the new public management element in the provision of welfare services showing that new paths following critical junctures isn’t necessarily fixed in

stone, but the legacy of Douglas's term as finance minister still is distinctly visible on the New Zealand welfare state (Chapman & Duncan, 2007). Thus, if we expect the change to MMP to increase political equality, reforms implemented before the constitutional reform could in theory cancel out these effects, making it more difficult to properly test the hypothesis.

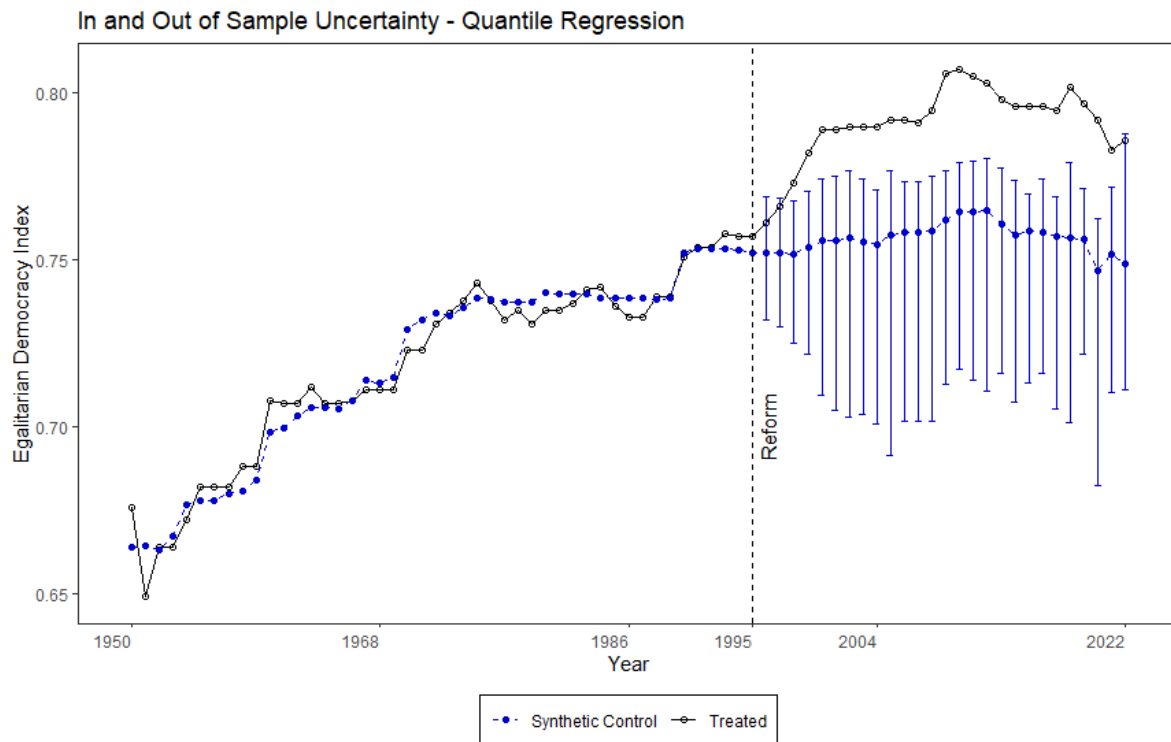
6. Results

In this chapter, I present and briefly discuss the empirical results from the synthetic control models. The chapter is divided into two subchapters. In subchapter one I present the synthetic control results, which indicates that the implementation of Mixed Member Proportional Representation had an effect. In addition to this, I present the results from two robustness checks: one leave-one-out check and one placebo model. Both of these strengthen the notion that the reform had an effect on political equality.

In subchapter two I discuss these results in light of other case studies on the reform. These do in general support both the research question and strengthen the plausibility of several of the mechanisms. There seems to be both an improved representation of women and the maori, an increase in sincere voting, a more proportional translation of votes to seats and a decrease in negative campaigning (Banducci et al., 1999; Church & McLeay, 2003; Cross & Gauja, 2021; Ridout & Walter, 2015; Vowles, 2018). This supports the findings presented in the first subchapter.

6.1 Synthetic Control Analysis

The synthetic control unit that acts as a counterfactual, is constructed from 19 donor pool countries, mostly from western Europe and northern America, within the timeframe of 1950 to the reform in 1996. The SCPI package allows for quantifying uncertainty through prediction intervals. These visualize the uncertainty of the development within the synthetic control unit, and more explicitly they mark the area in which the trend is 90 percent likely to be placed within in a given year (Cattaneo et al., 2022).



The degree of political equality seems to increase gradually and then stagnate from 1950 to the late 1980s, reflecting several trends. Especially the decline in union density, and the increase in women representatives, the globalization process and the number of parties in many affluent democracies might have had an impact during this period (Best, 2013; Hughes & Paxton, 2019; Vachon et al., 2016).

The trend seems to be stable for more than a decade, which may indicate several things. There might have been a stabilization, where these trends stabilized on a new baseline. There might also have been conflicting developments, with the policies under what has later been called the Rogernomics program, reducing political equality, as the reforms did not reflect voter demands and were generally disruptive, while for example there were an increase in women representatives (Goldfinch, 1998; Matland, 1998).

After this period of stability, there seems to have been both a smaller increase right before the reform and then a somewhat more drawn out and substantial increase after the reforms. This might indicate several things. There could be either a rebound effect towards the real baseline, that were just temporarily reduced, or it could be a backlash effect after the implementation of the unpopular economic reforms. It is difficult to rule out any of these, but in terms of voting

there were a slight increase in turnout at the 1993 election, which may indicate such effects (Vowles, 2010).

Another possibility could be that the referendum and the reform process itself had an impact. The logic of this argument bases itself on the fact that the reform process was disruptive and that it was to some degree a bottom-up process, challenging the New Zealand political elites. The reform also had a mobilizational effect, increasing citizens interest in political affairs (Vowles, 1995).

Still, their model indicates that there were an increase after the reform, and that this increase were mostly outside of the uncertainty intervals of the synthetic control method (Cattaneo et al., 2022). This increase also took place immediately after the reform during a five-year period, stabilizing afterwards, indicating that the reform did indeed have an effect.

Although the donor pool includes 19 countries, the synthetic control unit is only composed of four units: Luxembourg (48 percent), Denmark (26,6 percent), Germany (17,9 percent) and Norway (7 percent). The reliance of the synthetic control method on few donor pool units might make it disproportionately sensitive to changes in the country weights (Abadie et al., 2015).

Thus, one suggested robustness check is the leave one out check, where a donor pool unit is omitted to see if it has a disproportionate effect on the result. This is possible, since there often is a multiplicity of solutions, where multiple combinations of units may produce equally optimal results (Abadie & L'Hour, 2021).

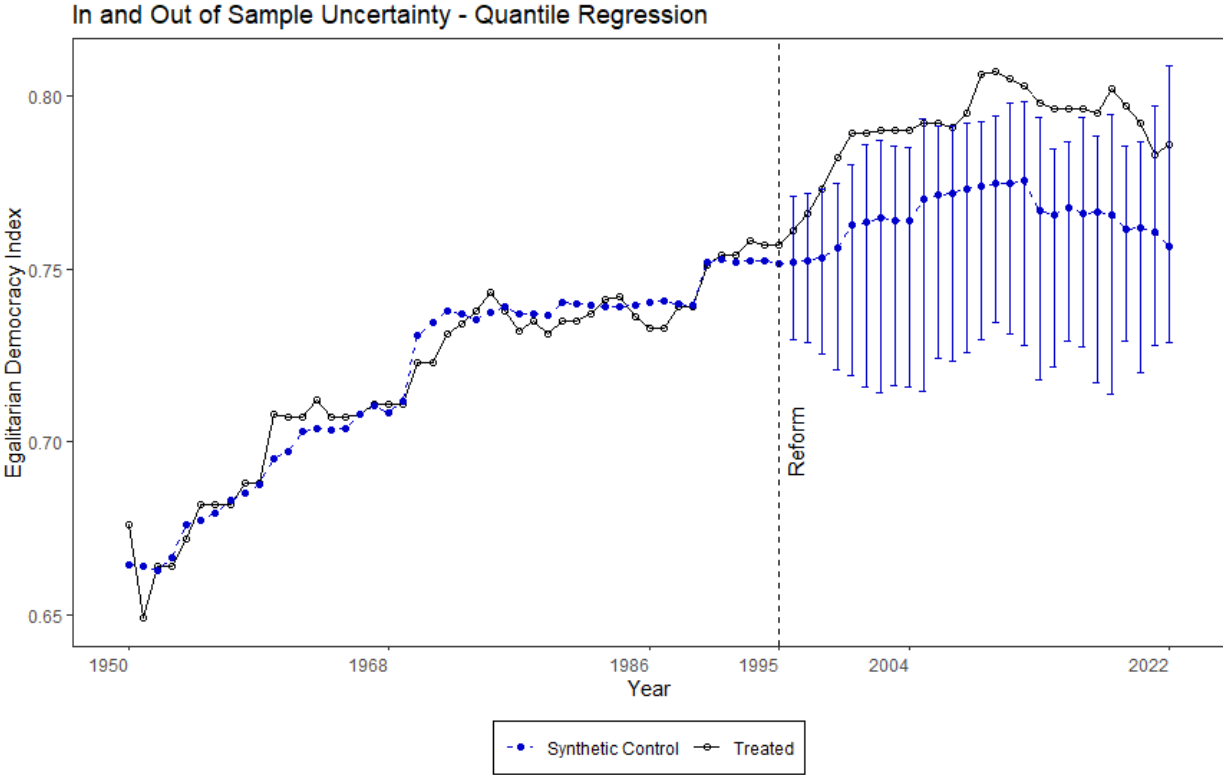


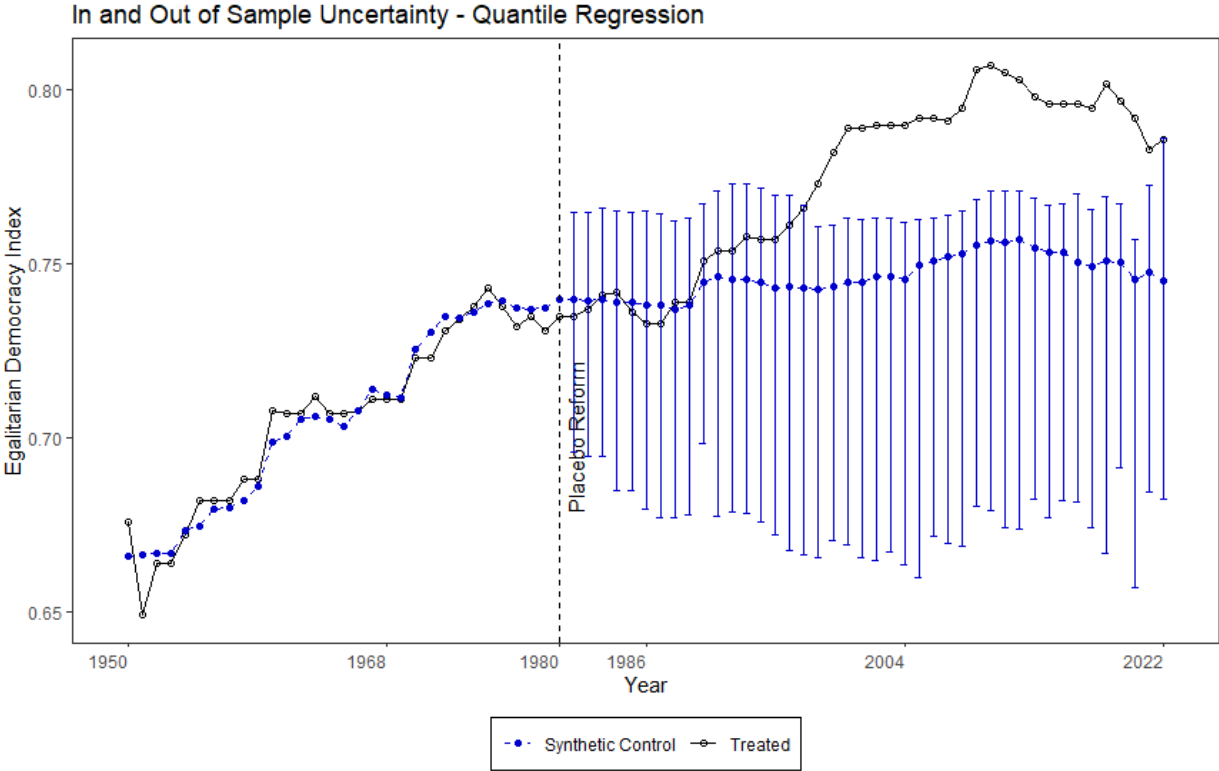
Figure 2

The new model includes The UK (10,8 percent), Iceland (2,3 percent) and Belgium (1,3 percent) as new active donor pool units in addition to Denmark (43,5 percent), Norway (27,4 percent) and Germany (14,7 percent). The omission of Luxembourg generally leads to wider uncertainty intervals, resulting in more years being within the intervals. In the previous model the treated model was only within the uncertainty intervals in 1996, 1997 and 2022, while the model without Luxembourg it is within the intervals in 1996, 1997, 1998, 2005, 2007, 2021 and 2022.

	Treated	Synthetic	Left	Bound	Right	Bound		Treated	Synthetic	Left	Bound	Right	Bound
1996	0.761	0.752	0.732	0.768	1996	0.761	0.761	0.752	0.730	0.772			
1997	0.766	0.752	0.730	0.768	1997	0.766	0.766	0.752	0.729	0.772			
1998	0.773	0.752	0.725	0.767	1998	0.773	0.773	0.753	0.725	0.774			
1999	0.782	0.754	0.721	0.770	1999	0.782	0.782	0.756	0.721	0.775			
2000	0.789	0.756	0.709	0.774	2000	0.789	0.789	0.763	0.720	0.780			
2001	0.789	0.756	0.704	0.775	2001	0.789	0.789	0.764	0.716	0.786			
2002	0.790	0.757	0.702	0.776	2002	0.790	0.790	0.765	0.715	0.788			
2003	0.790	0.756	0.703	0.774	2003	0.790	0.790	0.764	0.717	0.786			
2004	0.790	0.755	0.700	0.771	2004	0.790	0.790	0.764	0.717	0.785			
2005	0.792	0.757	0.690	0.776	2005	0.792	0.792	0.770	0.715	0.793			
2006	0.792	0.758	0.700	0.773	2006	0.792	0.792	0.771	0.725	0.791			
2007	0.791	0.758	0.701	0.773	2007	0.791	0.791	0.772	0.724	0.792			
2008	0.795	0.759	0.701	0.775	2008	0.795	0.795	0.773	0.726	0.793			
2009	0.806	0.762	0.713	0.776	2009	0.806	0.806	0.774	0.729	0.793			
2010	0.807	0.764	0.716	0.779	2010	0.807	0.807	0.775	0.734	0.794			
2011	0.805	0.764	0.713	0.779	2011	0.805	0.805	0.775	0.731	0.798			
2012	0.803	0.765	0.710	0.781	2012	0.803	0.803	0.776	0.728	0.798			
2013	0.798	0.761	0.715	0.777	2013	0.798	0.798	0.767	0.718	0.794			
2014	0.796	0.757	0.706	0.774	2014	0.796	0.796	0.766	0.722	0.785			
2015	0.796	0.759	0.712	0.770	2015	0.796	0.796	0.768	0.729	0.787			
2016	0.796	0.758	0.714	0.774	2016	0.796	0.796	0.766	0.728	0.793			
2017	0.795	0.757	0.704	0.769	2017	0.795	0.795	0.766	0.718	0.789			
2018	0.802	0.757	0.701	0.779	2018	0.802	0.802	0.765	0.713	0.794			
2019	0.797	0.756	0.721	0.771	2019	0.797	0.797	0.761	0.730	0.786			
2020	0.792	0.747	0.682	0.762	2020	0.792	0.792	0.762	0.721	0.787			
2021	0.783	0.752	0.710	0.771	2021	0.783	0.783	0.761	0.729	0.797			
2022	0.786	0.749	0.711	0.787	2022	0.786	0.786	0.756	0.730	0.808			

Figure 3: Table summary of figure 1 and 2

Lastly it would be valuable to perform a placebo test, where the model is instructed to make a model as if there were reforms at an earlier time. Because what has later been termed the “Rogernomics program” started in 1984, which is discussed in the previous chapter, it would be advantageous to choose a time before this. Thus, 1980 is chosen, with the time period between 1950 and 1980 used to create the synthetic unit.



The placebo model mostly correctly predicts the development between 1980 and the reform in 1996. The exception is an increase in the treatment unit after 1990 that is not reflected in the synthetic unit. This might indicate a development or event that exclusively or disproportionately took place in New Zealand that is not a causal factor in units in the donor pool. This then weakens the symmetry assumption that the synthetic control method relies on that the donor pool units can adequately be used to predict future developments (Chen & Yan, 2023). At the same time this pre-reform development is within the confidence intervals before 1999, meaning that the results does not significantly weaken the confidence in the original model.

The developments in the synthetic control models seem to support the proposed relationship between proportional representation and increased political equality, as the reform seems to have had an effect. In both model 1 and 2, most observations in the treated unit fall outside of the uncertainty intervals, consistently above the upper bounds. Although model 3 shows most of the observations within the uncertainty intervals, it could be argued that this model is weaker due to less data.

Although the placebo model did not fully predict the increase in political equality before the reform, weakening the hypotheses, this development may as discussed earlier be accounted for

by developments like the referendum that triggered the reform as well as any mobilizational effects caused by antipathies towards the Murdoc government and its economic reforms (Karp & Banducci, 1999).

6.2 Other Studies on the Reform

One major trend following the reform, is the more proportional descriptive representation of different groups. For maori people the creation of the Maori party, which is competitive and able to win seats in the national proportional list based circuit, might have played an especially important role (Xanthaki, 2009). There also seems to be an increase in the representation of women due to the introduction of national party lists, as expected in accordance with the second hypothesis (Church & McLeay, 2003).

There are also changes in voter behavior, that may indicate an increase in sincere voting. There are several proxies and indicators that can be used to assess the degree to which voters vote sincerely or strategically. One method is to look at the probability that a voter votes for a specific party when several conditions are present. One study found that voters are significantly less likely to vote for a particular party when they believe this will result in a disliked party also gaining power through a coalition government or parliamentary cooperation (Bowler et al., 2010).

Another more indirect method is how much trust voters place in government and parliament. If voters are trusting, they may be more likely to anticipate a high degree of responsiveness and be more content with current voting choices. Although trust in parliamentary MPs have decreased under MMP, trust in government has increased, signaling heterogeneous effects of the reform (Vowles, 2018, p. 817).

There is also a development regarding which parties voters consider before elections. The New Zealand Election survey reports that voters were 8,5 percent more likely to consider a minor party in the 1996 election compared to the 1993 election. The same survey also reported a 10 percent increase in voters who thought their vote mattered (Banducci et al., 1999). All of these developments might indicate a decrease in strategic voting and an increase in substantive representation of the median voters.

There is also one study that can be used to infer whether the elections became more competitive. The disproportionality of election results in first-past-the-post systems might be a good proxy for the competitiveness of elections, because it may be a proxy for low stakes, that are so low that voters do not engage in strategic voting. These two mechanisms are not relevant in proportional systems, as election mandates are allocated according to a proportional formula. Thus it is not unexpected that the disproportionality of New Zealand elections fell from a 18,2 in the 1993 elections to a 3,4 in the 2008 elections on the Gallagher index (Vowles, 2018, p. 808).

There is also some evidence that the amount of negative attack ads in New Zealand elections decreased post-reform. The amount of negativity in ads declined from an average of 32,7 percent before the reform to 20,4 percent from the reform in 1996 to 2011, with the decline being especially apparent in ads from Labour and National (Ridout & Walter, 2015). This supports the proposed causal mechanism of multiparty systems disincentivizing negative campaigning.

In addition to these indicators supporting the notion that proportional systems increase the competitiveness of elections and disincentivizes negative campaigning at the same time, there is also some evidence regarding turnout, which these mechanisms is expected to influence. Comparing the last election using a majoritarian first-past-the-post system with the first election using a mixed member proportional representation system, turnout increased three percentage points, temporarily reversing a general trend of decline (Karp & Banducci, 1999).

7. Literature Review

The results seem to support the notion that electoral systems have an impact on political equality. In the synthetic control models, both the main model and the leave-one-out robustness check indicated that there were some increases after the reform in the treated unit, New Zealand, that the models failed to predict. As the reform introduced a proportional representation list element into New Zealand politics, the effect of the reform indicates that it is this element that had an effect and that proportional representation systems in general are associated with an increased level of political equality. The placebo model also strengthens this proposed relationship, as it mostly correctly predicted the development until the reform.

In this chapter, I discuss the relevant parts of the literature, focusing on empirical results from other studies and whether these support or weakens any causal relationship between electoral systems and political equality. I focus on a wide range of studies, using methods varying from regression analyses to field experiments. The subchapters are organized by key topics like descriptive and substantive representation, the proposed mechanisms and lastly policy outcomes.

In the first subchapter, I start with descriptive representation. This research focuses on whether groups like women and the working class are sufficiently represented in parliament compared to their shares of the population. The literature generally supports some positive effects of party list proportional representation in particular, particularly for women, but possibly also for the working class (Pilotti, 2015; Profeta & Woodhouse, 2022). In addition to this, the literature also indicates some interaction effects with other aspects of society, like gender norms, which will also be discussed (Tremblay, 2007).

In the second subchapter, I discuss substantive representation and government responsiveness. The findings from this literature suggest that proportional representation systems are better at representing the interests of marginalized groups like women and the poor, but when looking at representativeness to the median voter, the results are less certain (Bernauer et al., 2015; Ferland, 2021). There may, however, be significant differences between proportional and majoritarian systems, as party fractionalization and veto points may play different roles in different countries (Soroka & Wlezien, 2015).

Then, in the third subchapter, I discuss the proposed mechanisms, looking at empirical evidence that allows us to isolate any effects. The purpose of this is to find out if it really is the hypothesized mechanisms in particular that is responsible for the variations between different electoral systems. I find relatively strong mechanistic evidence for party magnitude and sincere voting, while there are more mixed findings for the other mechanisms.

Lastly, I discuss policy outcomes and the way these may influence political equality in the fourth and last subchapter. The purpose of this subchapter is to take into account how differences in policy outcomes in proportional and majoritarian systems may influence political equality, even if both seems to be equally responsive to their voters. Here I present the argument that poverty and economic inequality tend to be lower under proportional representation systems and that this may indirectly lead to higher political equality (Brady et al., 2016, p. 125).

7.1 Does Electoral Systems Influence Descriptive Representation?

The research question posits that there is a relationship between electoral systems and political equality. This relationship might arise due to several mechanisms, five of which are discussed in this paper. Two of these relate to the descriptive representation of citizens, while three of these relate to the substantive representation of voters and whether these voters are different from the citizenry in general. The sum of these mechanisms are expected to produce the highest level of political equality in party list proportional representation systems compared to other electoral systems.

The empirical evidence in the literature generally strengthens the proposed relationship between party list proportional representation in particular and improved descriptive representation of underrepresented groups. Several comparative statistical studies looking at multiple democracies find an association between proportional representation and an improved representation of women, even when accounting for other variables in multivariate analyses (McAllister & Studlar, 2002; Rule, 1994).

There are also case studies of countries undergoing electoral reform supporting this causal relationship. Italy implemented an electoral reform in 2005, making the electoral system more proportional, which increased the amount of women representatives by five percent, while subnational legislatures who were not affected by the reform saw comparatively smaller

increases (Profeta & Woodhouse, 2022). As mentioned in the results chapter, there also seem to be an increase in the representation of traditionally marginalized groups like maori people and women following the electoral reform in New Zealand (Church & McLeay, 2003; Xanthaki, 2009).

There might however be interaction effects with other institutions and norms, making this relationship inconsistent and context dependent. There is some evidence that the importance of electoral systems decreases the longer a political system remains democratic, with gender norms becoming the more important explanation over time (Tremblay, 2007).

A study using qualitative comparative analysis on a set of western countries and sub-Saharan African countries, found that proportional representation systems were not sufficient in the sub-Saharan African countries nor necessary in the western countries in causing better representation of women in parliament (Krook, 2010).

This equifinality, is expected according to the theoretical framework discussed the subchapters on descriptive representation, as electoral systems are only thought to mediate the influence of gender norms and other institutions on women's representation. The power of party elites in selecting candidates is not relevant to the question of women's representation if these elites does not discriminate based on gender (Matland, 1993). Thus, electoral systems seems to be relevant when there is a mismatch between the demand for women's representation and the actual representation of women.

There are generally fewer studies on other underrepresented groups, such as the working class. Still, a similar association of greater descriptive representation under proportional representation may also be plausible regarding these groups. One small-N study on six south Asian parliaments suggest that both women, the youth and the working class is better represented in proportional systems (Joshi, 2015).

Doing a similar analysis looking at working class representation, Carnes and Lupu did not find the same pattern among OECD countries, suggesting that there might be confounders making any causal effects difficult to isolate (Carnes & Lupu, 2023, pp. 188-189). There is, however also some evidence from the introduction of proportional representation in 1918. Comparing the proportion of working-class representatives before and after the reform, the proportion increased from less than ten percent before to about fifteen to seventeen percent after (Pilotti, 2015).

This variability of results might indicate similar equifinality as seems to be the case in the representation of women. Proportional representation might not be a sufficient nor necessary condition for a sufficient degree of representation of the working class. If there is an interaction effect between the electoral system and factors like women's status, the strength of women's movements and the strength of left parties that determine the representation of women, there might also hypothetically be an interaction effect between electoral systems, labor unions and left wing parties (Krook, 2010).

Such an interaction effect could be supported by several associations. There seems to be a positive correlation between union density and working class representatives, where a higher union density is associated with more working class representatives (Carnes, 2016). There also seems to be more working-class representatives in leftwing parties than in other parties (Carnes & Lupu, 2023, p. 194).

Lastly, Scandinavian countries are characterized by exceptionally high union density, strong left-wing parties and a comparatively high representation of the working class (Carnes & Lupu, 2023, p. 185). Still, the evidence might be too weak to conclude decisively and is only suggesting an association.

7.2 Does Electoral Systems Influence Substantive Representation and Responsiveness?

Although proportional representation likely increases the representation of women and maybe also increases the representation of the working class in the contemporary “unfinished democracies”, this does not automatically result in increased substantive representation (Rule, 1994). Looking at the empirical literature on substantive representation and government responsiveness, the results and empirical associations are more mixed than the literature on descriptive representation.

7.2.1 The Substantive Representation of Marginalized Groups

Looking at the substantive representation of specific underrepresented groups, like women and the poor, there is a clear tendency of improved representation. Taking a comparative, cross

national perspective, countries with higher district magnitudes seem to underrepresent the poor significantly less and women marginally less on left-right policy (Bernauer et al., 2015).

Studies on bill legislation also supports the notion that proportional representation systems improve the substantive representation of marginalized groups. Evidence from South Korea, which utilizes a mixed member system with both single member districts and a proportionally elected national multimember district, not only indicates that proportionally elected women representatives are better at substantially representing women voters, but this is also true for their male colleagues (Kweon & Ryan, 2022).

This finding is supported by evidence from Germany, which similarly utilizes a mixed member system. German parliamentary representatives elected from competitive single member districts use less time on women's rights issues, than other representatives (Hömann, 2020). This might both have an advantage with a parliamentary focus on the policy requests of the median voter, but it also implies that the perspectives of specific groups are not represented sufficiently, limiting parliamentary debates and to some degree monopolizing agenda-setting power.

7.2.2 Indicators of Governmental Responsiveness

When looking at indicators of government responsiveness to the median voter, the evidence becomes somewhat more uncertain. Looking at the mixed member system in Germany, representatives are almost twice as likely to respond to emails from voters when elected in a single member district (Breunig et al., 2022). This may indicate different role perceptions, but it also may indicate accountability and the degree to which the representatives are guaranteed reelection. This illustrates the tradeoff between representing the median voter and representing a certain voter block in particular.

When looking at the responsiveness of the executive, however, proportional representation systems might have an advantage. Comparing the opening speeches in parliament in the UK and Denmark, by the Queen on behalf of the government in the UK and by the prime minister in Denmark, the speeches by the Danish prime minister seems to be more responsive to the saliency of issues among voters (Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2005). Because the two countries are relatively similar, but with different electoral systems, with the UK utilizing a majoritarian system and Denmark a proportional one, this may indicate that proportional representation systems produce more responsive executives.

Responsiveness of political speeches does not equate to responsive policy formation however. Looking at the relationship between issue saliency among voters and public spending, Danish governments were relatively unaffected by changes in opinion, with the exception of education and healthcare (Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2008). Danish governments thus seem to be more aware of opinion shifts than UK governments, indicated by the responsiveness in the speeches, but without this having an effect on policy responsiveness.

This disconnect may simply be due to representatives engaging in what has been termed “disagreement discounting” of the opinions of voters. Representatives may rationalize their own unresponsiveness to voters by justification such as voters not being fully informed about an issue (Butler & Dynes, 2016). Governmental rhetoric is easy to change when public opinion changes, making such justifications unnecessary, while policy shifts might conflict with party ideology or other considerations.

7.2.4 Comparing Voters and Representatives on Left-Right Scales

Comparing voters self-placement on a left-right scale with voters placements of parties, using the comparative study of electoral systems data set, also indicate no difference between proportional and majoritarian systems (Blais & Bodet, 2006). The fact that both voters and parties’ ideological placements come from the evaluations of voters, makes the two more comparable. At the same time, only one majoritarian and two plurality systems were included, with the independent variable focusing on the disproportionality of the party system (Blais & Bodet, 2006).

Similar studies also looking at the disproportionality of the party system found similar effects (Ferland, 2016). Proportional systems do however seem to promote more representative legislatures. According to one study using a rather novel method of many to many and many to one congruence, found that majoritarian systems were statistically better at representing the ideological variation in the population (Golder & Lloyd, 2014; Golder & Stramski, 2010).

There is also a time aspect to consider. Some evidence indicate that government congruence with its voters seems to have increased over time in majoritarian systems compared to proportional systems, with proportional systems having an initial advantage that has disappeared over time (Bingham Powell, 2009; Budge & McDonald, 2007).

It is unknown why this is the case, it may be due to an increasingly fractionalized party systems in many proportional systems, which may introduce more veto players into legislative bargaining (Best, 2013). There may also be a diminishing impact of electoral systems on the representation of women over time, where majoritarian systems may catch up as cultural values change (Krook, 2010).

7.2.3 Governmental Responsiveness in Tax and Spending

A relatively comprehensive study looking at public spending found no significant difference between proportional or majoritarian systems, with the exception of marginally better congruence in health and old age pension spending in majoritarian systems and culture in proportional systems (Ferland, 2021). An advantage of this study is that it measured congruence by how many respondents were content with the spending level on a policy area, not wanting either higher or lower spending. This study also included 22 countries, strengthening the conclusion. It also takes the whole political system at large into account, instead of the executive or representatives.

Another study design that has been used is measuring voters on an ideological left-right scale, to see whether ideological trends have a consequence for social spending. This study design was used on 17 western democracies, which found that proportional representation systems although generally responsive, may be less responsive after strong rightwing ideological shifts among voters, compared with majoritarian systems (Coman, 2015). This may be due to coalition parties reluctantly acting as veto players on spending cuts that affects their own voters.

There are other studies on the effects of coalition government on responsiveness. Utilizing a similar study design of measuring left-right voter movements and welfare spending, shows that one party governments in proportional representation systems are more responsive to ideological changes among voters than coalition governments (Ferland, 2020). There is a similar finding indicating that party system fractionalization decreases inter-election government responsiveness almost exponentially (Soroka & Wlezien, 2015).

7.2.4 Government Responsiveness in Policy Implementation

There is to my knowledge two studies looking at policy implementation in different electoral systems. Rasmussen et.al., looked at whether specific policies were implemented or not and

how popular these were, and showed small differences between the 31 European democracies included (Rasmussen et al., 2019). It tested for several institutions like parliamentarism, electoral system and bicameralism and only found significant negative effects of bicameralism.

The other study looking at policy implementation, compared Germany, The UK and Denmark and found that the presence of more coalitional partners did not prevent effective government responsiveness to voter demands (Toshkov et al., 2020). This contrasts with the findings discussed earlier indicating the opposite (Ferland, 2020). Whether this is due to differences in the data or the methodology is unclear, but responding to budgetary demands may be more difficult than responding to policy demands due to budgetary limitations.

To summarize, government responsiveness to the median voter may be somewhat similar under different electoral systems, with a few exceptions. Proportional representation systems seem to be worse at responding to calls for budget cuts among voters and significant ideological changes among voters between elections when they produce fractionalized party systems and coalition governments. At the same time, proportional representation systems seem to be better at substantively representing politically marginalized groups such as the poor. In general, however, electoral systems does not appear to produce drastic effects (Blais & Bodet, 2006).

7.3 Are the Proposed Mechanisms Plausible?

Here I go through the five proposed mechanisms. This is valuable because of the importance of validating and confirming causal mechanisms in determining if there really is a causal association and not just a spurious correlation or an association (Falleti & Lynch, 2009). Because of this, I have a focus on confirming that the mechanisms have isolated effects that can make them more plausible.

7.3.1 Selection Mechanisms

Although the relationship between electoral system rules and candidate selection mechanisms may not have garnered enough attention from scholars relative to how big of an impact it has on politics, there are some studies looking at it (Hazan & Voerman, 2006).

One of the studied effects of electoral systems are whether lists are blocked or not in party list systems. A study looking at this using the comparative candidate survey covering 37 parties in three countries with blocked lists and three with nonblocked lists, found that parties are more likely to use primaries in non-blocked party list systems (Pamies & Cordero, 2024). They defined non-blocked as systems where voters can cumulate or influence the final order of the party list.

There are also one study looking at the influence of district magnitudes. Although there seems to be an association between higher district magnitudes and more exclusive selection mechanisms, this association disappears when controlling for other variables (Shomer, 2014). When the same study used simple classification of different electoral systems, it found that parties in open list proportional representation, alternative vote and single transferable vote systems had more inclusive selection mechanisms than parties in closed list proportional representation (Shomer, 2014).

There might also be an influence of the competitiveness of elections, another of the mechanisms discussed in this thesis. Defining competitiveness as the distance between the two biggest parties, competitive elections seem to incentivize parties to hold more exclusive selection mechanisms, making open primaries or primaries in general less likely (Bermúdez & Cordero, 2017). If proportional systems produce more competitive elections compared to majoritarian systems, then it may be plausible to infer that they incentivize exclusive selection mechanisms.

The effects electoral systems seem to have on the inclusivity of selection mechanisms might have several political consequences. Looking at the introduction of open primaries in the US, one of the most inclusive selection mechanisms, open primaries, may improve the representation of younger age groups and possibly also increase the overrepresentation of the wealthy in some contexts (Kaufmann et al., 2003).

Looking at a multiparty context within a proportional representation system, a study on Icelandic politics found more inconsistent results. Although open primaries led to a higher amount of young people being elected to parliament as in the US case, it also led to a lower amount of women to be selected for competitive seats of the party list (Indriðason & Kristinsson, 2015). This may not reduce the amount of women elected to parliament, which may point toward differential effects on the proportion of women selected to competitive versus noncompetitive districts. (Indriðason & Kristinsson, 2015)

Looking at the substantive representation of voters, there are also some inconsistencies among the empirical results in the literature. One study on US primaries found that open primaries may advantage radical candidates at the cost of centrist candidates, which may be problematic if the representation of the median voter is the goal (Ahler et al., 2016). The authors argue that this might be due to voters failing to distinguish between candidates based on ideology.

Still, studies out of multiparty contexts find that open primaries may have a moderating effect on candidates ideological positions. This has been found to be the case both in Mexico which may be because open primaries may necessitate coalition building or compromise across party fractions (Bruhn, 2012). Another explanation may be parties in multiparty systems may be more ideologically specialized, compared to big tent centrist parties typically found in two party systems (Blais & Bodet, 2006). Because of this, there may be a higher likelihood of ideological moderation in proportional systems due to more inclusive candidate selection mechanisms.

7.3.2 Party Magnitude

As previously discussed, there seems to be a strong empirical link between district magnitude and the representation of women. Whether this link is due to party magnitudes or other mechanisms that are also influenced by district magnitude is harder to determine (Lucardi & Micozzi, 2022). One study on German party-systems indicates that the strength of minor parties may depress women's representation in municipal elections, which may strengthen party magnitudes as a plausible mechanism because of the smaller party magnitude observed with smaller parties (Fortin-Rittberger et al., 2019).

Another study looking at the relationship between district magnitude and the number of parties in Norwegian parliamentary elections from 1953 to 1989 found temporal effects of party magnitude, where it had the strongest impact when the amount of women representatives were under 10 percent, with a diminishing influence after a stabilization around 35 percent (Matland, 1993). The same study found weaker results for district magnitude alone, suggesting that it is party magnitude that is the causal factor at play.

Still, as party magnitudes may be associated with an improved representation of women before cultural gender norms have changed or as they are changing, this might mean that this associated increase of women representatives might have a relatively small impact on

legislative behavior of representatives. However, this does not seem to be the case considering the positive effects of gender quotas, which also increases the representation of women without changes in gender norms (Clayton, 2021; Htun et al., 2013; Wang, 2023). Thus, it is likely that party magnitudes have substantial effects on both descriptive and substantive representation, but with these effects varying through time.

There are also theoretical expectations about government responsiveness, as mentioned in the theory chapter. Representatives may be more responsive in cases where the party magnitude is lower, because of stronger incentives due to more concentrated responsibility, making voters more able to hold their representatives accountable in the ballot booth (Carey & Hix, 2011).

It is difficult to measure the impact of party magnitudes on responsiveness, but district magnitude may be a good proxy. Most of the evidence on district magnitudes and responsiveness is based on Swiss cantons, because of extensive voting records in the Swiss parliament, availability of public voting records in national referendums and differing district magnitudes between different cantons. Matching the voting patterns of representatives in parliament and of voters in referendums, generally show an increasing responsiveness for lower magnitude districts (Portmann et al., 2012).

There might be some caveats to this, however. There is some evidence, also from Switzerland using the same methodology, that there may be a u-shaped relationship, with both high magnitude and single member districts showing lower responsiveness than low magnitude multimember districts, which may be attributed to low magnitude districts minimizing disproportionality and allowing smaller parties to attain some representation (Carey & Hix, 2013). This is a good example of how difficult it is to determine whether the effects are due to party magnitude or whether they are due to party competition or disproportionately.

7.3.3 Sincere Voting

Another of the mechanisms is a hypothesized increase in sincere voting under proportional systems. Although there are some tendencies of clustering of parties on the electoral compass, in particular with parties clustering on the culturally conservative economic right and culturally liberal economic left, proportional systems still tend to cover the electoral compass better than majoritarian systems (Rosset & Kurella, 2021).

In addition to this, one experimental study on 212 subjects, showed increasing tendencies of sincere voting with increasing district magnitude. The study divided the participants into four groups, where some participated in simulated elections in single member districts, others in two and three member districts and lastly some in fully proportional districts (Hix et al., 2017).

Still, this experiment does not account for the increased likelihood of coalition government under proportional representation systems. There is some evidence that voters take potential coalition partners into consideration: results from Austria, Germany, Israel and the Netherlands indicates that around one in ten vote choices are difficult to rationalize, indicating sincere voting (Riambau, 2018).

Comparing majoritarian and proportional electoral systems, one study found surprising similarities between voters in the two systems. This study found significant amounts of voters preferring smaller parties where likely to defect to larger parties in proportional systems and similarly voters who voted for their preferred small party in majoritarian elections regardless of winning chance (Abramson et al., 2010). A part of this similarity could be explained by the different reasons for strategic voting in the two systems. For example, voters in proportional systems could engage in portfolio voting or policy balancing strategies, which would be unlikely to take place in majoritarian systems (Kedar, 2005).

7.3.4 Competitiveness of Districts

The degree to which districts are competitive may also be a plausible mechanism. It is thought that party list proportional representation systems produce fewer uncompetitive districts, increasing the competitiveness on average. Arguably, the best empirical evidence for this mechanism comes from a reform in Norwegian municipalities, where all the municipalities that was using majoritarian elections were forced to adopt proportional representation, leading to higher turnout (Skorge, 2023; Teele, 2023) This evidence is strengthened by the fact that there were municipalities already utilizing proportional representation not experiencing a similar increase in turnout, making other nationally relevant events or trends unlikely.

There is also evidence of geographically concentrated support for certain ideologies, making some circuits guaranteed wins for parties (Rodden, 2006). This could make the eventual impact of the selection mechanism in place more influential, as it could give some candidates from

uncompetitive circuits more competition from other ideologically appealing candidates in the circuit.

Although regression analyses supports the association between proportional representation and higher turnout, it is more uncertain whether this is caused by differences in competitiveness specifically (Blais & Bodet, 2006). Looking at the mobilizational efforts of parties, measured as how many respondents report being contacted by a political party or candidate, parties in proportional representation systems seem to invest less in mobilizational efforts (Rainey, 2015). The beneficial effects of proportional systems might then be due to other mechanisms or due to confounders.

7.3.5 Negative Campaigning

Proportional systems are also thought to disincentivize negative campaigning, especially harsh negative campaigning. This is thought to be due to the necessity of coalition governments and parliamentary bargaining in parliament between different parties to enact legislation. The argument is, as mentioned in the theory chapter, that negative campaigning might delegitimize post-election cooperation or create bargaining costs (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010).

The empirical evidence seems to support the argument that proportional representation systems disincentivizes negative campaigning. Looking at party election broadcasts in the UK, US, Germany and the Netherlands between 1980 and 2006, showed that traits attacks were generally higher in the US and UK, which mostly have two-party systems (Walter, 2014c). In addition to this, as mentioned in the results chapter, there also seems to be a decrease in negative campaigning after the implementation of MMP in New Zealand (Ridout & Walter, 2015).

Still, proportional representation systems tend to enable populist radical right parties to gain representation and parliamentary relevancy, which might offset these effects, at least in some contexts as these seem to tend to resort to negative campaigning to a bigger degree than other parties (Becher et al., 2023; Valli & Nai, 2022).

These parties are often placed in a cordon sanitaire by other parliamentary parties and may otherwise not seek to participate in a coalition, meaning that this does not necessarily disprove the mechanism of future coalition bargaining disincentivizing negative campaigning (Downs, 2002).

The link between negative campaigning and turnout remains more unclear. One field experiment studying the effects of negative ads on turnout saw positive effects, meaning increasing turnout among voters exposed to the ads (Niven, 2006). This may make sense in general, as rational parties would not resort to ineffective or detrimental campaigning tactics. Still, there seems to be circumstances where this is not the case and negative campaigning reduces turnout.

The time voters are exposed to negative campaigning seems to have an impact on whether it is mobilizing or demobilizing. One study distinguishing whether the negative attack ads were distributed late or early before an election, and found that the former were associated with increased turnout and the latter with decreased turnout (Krupnikov, 2011). The author argue that this may be due to whether voters already have decided on a candidate or not.

There are also some studies arguing that whether a policy position or a personal trait is attacked, could make a difference (Kahn & Kenney, 1999). One of these studies on American college undergraduates, exposed students to different newspaper articles, varying in negativity and whether it was policy or personality focused, and asked them to rate the probability of them voting on a seven point scale (Min, 2004). The study found mobilizational effects from policy focused negative attack ads, while personality focused attack ads significantly depressed the students intent to vote.

If proportional representation systems mostly disincentivize harsh personality focused negative campaigning in particular, then this might explain some of the aforementioned differences between proportional and majoritarian systems in turnout. Still, the literature is too conflicting and inconsistent to conclude decisively (Haselmayer, 2019; Lau & Pomper, 2001).

7.4 Electoral Systems and Policy Outcomes

Electoral systems do not only translate voter demands into substantive and descriptive representation in legislatures, but they also seem to independently have an impact on public policy independent of voter demands. This may indirectly influence the levels of political equality in a democratic society. In particular, proportional representation systems seem to be associated with increased welfare spending and decreased poverty and inequality (Brady et al., 2016, p. 125).

A part of this difference is thought to be due to how middle-class voters and center-left parties react to conditions of increasing income inequality. As discussed in the theory chapter, the formation of multiparty systems generally allow for parties that explicitly represent and cater to specific voter groups, like middle class and poor voters. This reduces the commitment problem different political fractions face, leading to more cooperation between middle class and poor voters, and thus a higher likelihood of center-left governance (Iversen & Soskice, 2006).

Multiparty governments also seem to promote greater competition for poor voters. In majoritarian systems, increasing inequality seems to depress turnout among the poor, but the presence of one or more leftwing parties explicitly targeting the poor seems to incentivize center-left parties to compete for these voters too, somewhat muting this effect of inequality on turnout (Anderson & Beramendi, 2012).

Both of these two aspects of multiparty government may lead proportional representation systems to redistribute more in the face of increasing income inequality compared to majoritarian systems. Because of this, when facing increasing inequality and calls for increased redistribution, center-left parties in multiparty systems may be more likely to appeal to the poor, to some degree shift to the left in their tax policy, while at the same time maintaining their appeal among centrist middle class voters, which may partly explain the higher turnout and the implementation of redistributive welfare policies in proportional systems (Austen-Smith, 2000; Becher, 2016; Iversen & Soskice, 2006; Persson & Tabellini, 2004).

This may not only influence the redistributive policies of center-left parties exclusively. Evidence from the implementation of proportional representation in Norwegian municipalities showed an increase in redistributive spending that was not due to higher seat shares for the main center-left party (Paulsen, 2022). In this case, other centrist or center-right parties might have been incentivized to mobilize the poor in a similar fashion as center-left parties are thought to be.

Although economic and political equality is not the same thing, the two values may influence each other. High economic inequality generally seems to lead to a decline in support for democracy, civic engagement and interpersonal trust, which are generally thought to be important attitudes for universal democracy to work (Andersen, 2012; Uslander & Brown, 2005). In addition to this it seems to decrease the responsiveness of political manifestoes to the

opinions of the poor, which is intuitive as money can be used to influence the political system (Houle, 2018; Rosset et al., 2013).

Proportional systems may then seem to both be associated with lower economic inequality, but also reducing the consequences of this inequality on democratic behaviors such as turnout. This then shows that electoral systems interact with other societal institutions and the wider society in ways that the median voter framework does not manage to describe sufficiently.

7.5 Economic Confounders

Several of these findings may be influenced by confounders, thus weakening the possibilities to draw robust causal inferences. One of the main confounders in electoral system research is the structure of the economy. Especially the strength of labor unions and the labor movement in the beginning of the 20th century, might have had a disproportionate influence over the choice of electoral systems. The argument is that in countries with majoritarian systems, where there were strong labor parties challenging a divided right, these rightwing parties were incentivized to adopt proportional representation (Wills-Otero, 2009).

There is considerable disagreement on this hypothesis, as some scholars argue that proportional representation systems were adopted not by rightwing parties with antipathies towards the labor movement, but rather by rightwing parties that saw benefits of cooperative agreements between capital and labor, like collective bargaining (Cusack et al., 2007). The background of this collective interest, these scholars argue, is that these countries had locally coordinated economies before the advent of industrialization.

Because of this, the adoption of both proportional representation and collective bargaining might be considered a continuation of this historic local coordination (Cusack et al., 2010). This historical association might be a part of the explanation for why countries with proportional representation systems seems to redistribute more and why they seem to be better at mobilizing and representing marginalized groups as discussed in the previous subchapters.

Labor unions have been shown to counteract the unequal responsiveness of legislators to high income individuals and to mobilize low-income individuals to partake in the political process (Becher & Stegmueller, 2021; Lamare, 2016). They also tend to compress the wage structure,

reducing income inequality, thus reducing its negative impacts on political equality (Ahlquist, 2017). Lastly they have historically been indirectly represented in politics through explicit links with social democratic parties, which may have contributed to an increased representation of the working class (Piazza, 2001).

Still, there are several examples of good evidence from studies where the risk of confounders is relatively small. This is especially the case with studies from constitutional changes. As discussed previously, the implementation of proportional representation in Italy and Switzerland was associated with improved representation of women and the working class (Pilotti, 2015; Profeta & Woodhouse, 2022). Similarly, the implementation of proportional representation among Norwegian municipalities seem to have led to higher turnout, especially for women who at the time could be categorized as peripheral voters (Teele, 2023).

8. Summary and Conclusion

In the introduction and background chapters I have introduced evidence of political inequality and unequal responsiveness, which runs contrary to democratic ideals and expectations. Then, in the search for institutional configurations that reduce this inequality, I discussed several mechanisms that may be related to electoral systems in the theory chapter. In the results chapter and literature review chapter I presented and discussed both own and others empirical results on the relationship between political equality and electoral systems.

In this chapter, I first conclude on and summarize the five hypotheses. I conclude that there is good evidence for most of them and that they likely has an impact on political equality. Then I conclude on the research question. Here I conclude that the literature generally indicates that there is a relationship between electoral systems and political equality in general, but that there more specifically seems to be advantages that party list proportional representation systems hold over other systems. The synthetic control result also support this association.

Then, I lastly look at limitations of the thesis and point out some weaknesses in the literature, with recommendations for further research. Here I conclude that regarding research gaps, there are two in particular that should be of interest: which variables might influence the significant underrepresentation of the working class and the poor and to solve the contradictions between the literature on policy responsiveness and the rest of the literature.

8.1 Concluding on the Hypotheses

In general, there does seem to be a relationship between some electoral system configurations and an increase in political equality. District magnitude and election formulas in particular, which constitute key differences between different electoral systems, together seems to influence both descriptive and substantive representation through the proposed mechanisms.

Regarding the first hypothesis, regarding selection mechanisms, there does seem to be an association between more inclusive selection mechanisms and open list proportional representation, single transferable vote and alternative vote systems (Shomer, 2014). Competitive districts also seem to incentivize more exclusive selection mechanisms (Bermúdez & Cordero, 2017).

There also seems to be an impact of more inclusive selection mechanisms. Open primaries especially, is generally associated with a better descriptive representation of younger age groups (Indriðason & Kristinsson, 2015). In terms of substantive representation, the findings are more conflicting, as the party system may influence whether they promote ideological congruence with the median voter or not (Ahler et al., 2016; Bruhn, 2012).

Multimember districts with competing party lists seem to produce better outcomes for the representation of women and maybe also other underrepresented groups than single member districts with competing candidates (McAllister & Studlar, 2002; Rule, 1994). This may allow for political power to be distributed more equally among different demographic groups, as these gain agenda setting power, as the politics of presence argument predicts (Wängnerud, 2000).

This strengthens the second hypothesis that party list proportional representation improves the descriptive representation of underrepresented groups through party lists. Particularly the evidence discussed in the literature review from the effects of party magnitudes in Norway strengthens this hypothesis, as it makes it more plausible that this mechanism has isolated effects on descriptive representation (Matland, 1993).

Strengthening this hypothesis further, is the fact that the theory is plausible: party elites should be more able to ensure the representation of underrepresented groups without this coming at their own cost and with it gaining them through ticket balancing (Matland, 1993; Salmond, 2006).

The third hypothesis predicts that there should be a higher degree of sincere voting at elections in proportional representation systems compared to elections in majoritarian systems. This hypothesis is somewhat more difficult to conclude on, as strategic voter behavior can be somewhat complex. Especially so since voters may behave quite similarly, with both sincere and strategic voting behavior seems comparable in different systems (Abramson et al., 2010).

Still, there are strong theoretical reasons that the danger of wasting votes under a majoritarian system of government may make it more difficult to vote sincerely (Anckar, 1997). There is also an argument to be made that multiparty systems under proportional representation covers the electorate more extensively, especially regarding post materialist issues like green politics and immigration (Marthaler, 2008; Rosset & Kurella, 2021).

The conclusion on this could be that sincere voting is qualitatively different in the different electoral systems. It could be that the voter has more possibilities for voting strategically in proportional systems, making them better at promoting their interest through the ballot booth. Examples of this are portfolio voting and (Kedar, 2005). Still, the lack of good comparisons that take this into consideration makes it difficult to conclude decisively whether this mechanism and its proposed effects can be confirmed or not.

The fourth hypothesis predicts an increase on average in the competitiveness of districts in proportional representation systems. This hypothesis is based on the observation that there are several uncompetitive districts in majoritarian systems using single member districts, and that this might make representatives less responsive (Cox et al., 2020). The evidence previously mentioned on the effects of the introduction of proportional representation in Norwegian municipalities provides the best empirical support for this hypothesis, as it shows an increase of turnout in the reformed municipalities (Teele, 2023).

Still, looking at mobilizational efforts of (Kaufmann et al., 2003) parties show that contrary to this finding, majoritarian systems seem to be better at reaching out to voters in mobilizational efforts (Rainey, 2015). Whether this is due to an already increased turnout due to another feature of proportional representation systems or whether the competitiveness of the most competitive districts outweighs the least competitive districts is difficult to conclude. It should also be noted that the representatives from the most competitive districts may represent voters from other districts as well through what is called surrogate representation, increasing responsiveness (Mansbridge, 2003).

The fifth hypothesis predicts a lower degree of harsh negative campaigning, and that this reduces its hypothesized negative effect on turnout. There is generally empirical support for proportional representation systems disincentivizing harsh negative campaigning. Not only does harsh negative campaigning seem to be lower when comparing proportional and majoritarian countries, but there is also some evidence that the introduction of MMP in New Zealand also reduced negative campaigning (Ridout & Walter, 2015; Walter, 2014c).

Whether negative campaigning depresses or increases voter turnout seems to be context dependent. As discussed in the literature review chapter, it seems most likely that policy focused negative campaigning increases turnout, but that it may demobilize voters when this becomes harsh and trait focused or when voters are exposed to it after changing their mind (Krupnikov,

2011; Min, 2004; Niven, 2006). Still, it seems plausible that multiparty systems, when they necessitate cooperation and coalition government, reduces harsh campaigning and thus its demobilizing effects on turnout (Walter, 2014b).

8.2 Concluding on the Research Question

The evidence on the hypothesized mechanisms thus either seems to support the causal relationships, or in the case of sincere voting and the competitiveness of districts seems inconclusive. Due to the mechanistic nature of this evidence, this may be the most scientifically robust argument for an impact of electoral systems (Falleti & Lynch, 2009).

The evidence on descriptive representation also generally seems to support an association between electoral systems and political equality. In particular, party list proportional representation may increase the representation of women and possibly other groups (Joshi, 2015; Rule, 1994). The evidence is also strong that this does have an impact on policy outcomes and legislative behavior, strengthening the politics of presence argument (Htun et al., 2013).

Policy outcomes also supports a relationship between political equality and electoral systems. Poverty and excessive economic inequality is detrimental to political inequality, especially looking at the political participation of the poor, and electoral systems tend to redistribute more (Austen-Smith, 2000; Rosset et al., 2013).

Looking at the synthetic control models, both the main model and the robustness check models indicate positive effects of the reform, indicating that Mixed Member Proportional systems may produce higher levels of political equality than majoritarian systems do. This increase was substantial compared to the counterfactual, outside the uncertainty intervals for most of the years and the change seems to have resulted in a new long-term baseline.

In light of all this, it is somewhat surprising that the literature on responsiveness seems to have concluded that electoral systems do not have a substantial impact (Blais & Bodet, 2006). Although responsiveness to the median voter and to marginalized groups are not necessarily the same, it is expected that if preferences in the population are normally distributed and biased towards a subset of the population, improving the substantive and descriptive representation of marginalized groups should contribute in counteracting this bias (Oprea et al., 2024).

This surprising finding might be due to several causes. What these studies think of as the median voter does not necessarily equate to the actual median voter. Survey research and any research requiring respondents, may encounter bias in which population groups are represented in the sample (Summers & Hammonds, 1969).

There is also a problem with categorizing electoral systems. Several of these studies have measured a generally diverse and different set of electoral systems according to disproportionality scores, which fails to take into account factors such as party magnitudes and veto players, which should in theory play an important role (Coman, 2015; Golder & Stramski, 2010; Matland, 1993). Still, it is puzzling that there is minimal variation between studies, not just on electoral systems, but on other institutions as well (Ferland, 2021; Rasmussen et al., 2019). This might indicate a substantial research gap.

All in all, the weight of the evidence confirms that electoral systems may be used to reduce political inequalities, being one of many tools that may do so. Both multimember districts and proportional allocation formulas may be effective in this regard at influencing the mentioned mechanisms, even if this does not reflect in the current responsiveness literature.

8.4 Limitations and Future Research

Although it is a multimethod thesis, with somewhat complementary methods, both literature reviews and the synthetic control method have their limitations. The synthetic control models in this paper only looks at a general index of political equality. This makes it difficult to trace and confirm the mechanisms (Collier, 2011). Although this may be compensated for by the literature review, but this assumes that findings are generalizable across cases and studies (Ferguson, 2004).

There are several significant research gaps in the contemporary literature. One of these is the severe lack of studies and data on the descriptive representation of the working class and the poor. These groups are severely underrepresented in most democracies, and it is difficult to improve the situation without good data and causal knowledge (Carnes & Lupu, 2023, p. 185).

Future research should also try to solve the contradictions between the literature on policy responsiveness and other parts of the literature, which disagrees on whether electoral systems

do have an effect (Blais & Bodet, 2006). In particular, there should be more attention to the effects of district magnitude and its consequences, as a more interesting comparison could be low magnitude proportional representation and majoritarian systems (Carey & Hix, 2011).

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