Does Systemic Competition Affect Government Responsiveness?

An Analysis of the Social Policy Category in Six Advanced Democracies

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Abstract. This paper investigates the relationship between electoral competition and government responsiveness and tests it in six advanced democracies (Canada, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and the US). Its purpose is twofold. On one side, it provides an empirical application of the theoretical framework on electoral competition developed by Bartolini (1999, 2000). According to this framework, competition is broken up in four components: (1) electoral contestability, (2) electoral availability, (3) decidability of the offer, and (4) incumbent vulnerability. On the other side, the paper aims to understand whether the components of competition affect responsiveness, which is defined as the correspondence between citizens' preferences (using the 'most important problem' question) and government social expenditure. The analysis converges on two main findings: on the one hand, electoral competitiveness, as actual component of incumbent vulnerability, seems not to have any impact on responsiveness; on the other hand, citizens' preferences seems not to affect government expenditure in the social policy category.

Introduction[1]

Does electoral competition have an impact on responsiveness of governments to citizens' preferences? This is the research question at the basis of this paper and this is clearly an empirical question. However, the starting point is a normative one linking democratic procedures to democratic substance. It actually stems on the normative statement that competition is good for democracy; in other words, that the former might have beneficial effects on the latter. This proposition is clearly underlined by a part of the contemporary democratic theory (Dahl 1956, 1971; Downs 1957; Manin, Przeworski, and S. C. Stokes 1999; Pitkin 1967; Powell 2000). Yet, although theoretically there is such an agreement that competition matters for responsiveness it is very debated whether competition has an impact on responsiveness on the empirical ground.

Empirical analyses linking dynamic representation and political institutions are still rare. Only a few studies introduce the institutional component to dynamic models (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995; Wlezien and Soroka 2012). Even if we include the works on both dyadic and collective representation we see that usually competition is analysed as competitiveness. For example, the long standing literature on the so-called 'marginality hypothesis' remains controversial (for the debate see Griffin 2006). According to this hypothesis, it is contested whether Congress representatives would be more responsive in the marginal districts, i.e. the more competitive ones. However, whether it is empirically true or not, this is insufficient for an analysis on government responsiveness for two reasons. First, the marginality hypothesis is an example of dyadic representation, that is, it places at the constituency level linking constituents and their representatives. Second, it deals only with district competitiveness, and electoral competitiveness is not the unique element of electoral competition that might affect responsiveness.

I wittingly exclude all those studies related to congruence – starting from Huber and Powell (1994) – as the correspondence between citizens' issue preferences and party position on those issues, for congruence measures ideological positions rather than responsiveness. Indeed, as also Powell (2000) recognises, with congruence we are

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comparing only differences in general orientations, and we are definitely not looking at specific policies or at implementation of policy positions.

This paper builds on the theoretical framework on electoral competition developed by Bartolini (1999, 2000). This framework represents the state of the art on the study of the concept of competition in politics. Here, electoral competition is conceived multidimensionally, that is, it is broken up in several dimensions or components interacting one another. A similar effort had been produced previously by Strøm (1989, 1992), whom also analysed competition in a multidimensional way. However, Bartolini's conceptualisation goes further in the sense that he provides indications on how the components of competition interact with each other – identifying trade-offs among dimensions and splitting those dimensions into actual and potential components – and around the relationship between competition and responsiveness. Nevertheless, perhaps because of its complexity, it still remains a theoretical framework.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is twofold. On the one hand, I provide a preliminary empirical application of this framework, drawing attention only on the actual or systemic components of competition. On the other hand, I am interested in testing whether these components of electoral competition have an impact on government responsiveness to citizens' preferences. To do so, I run pooled time-series cross-section analysis including six advanced democracies: Canada, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first two sections illustrate the framework of electoral competition adopted and the concept of responsiveness as opinion-policy nexus. As a relationship-wise concept, responsiveness is defined as the correspondence between citizens' preferences and government actions. If the third section introduces hypotheses and measures, the fourth section is devoted to describe the data and methods. The results are presented in the fifth section. The conclusions summarise the analysis and set the premises for future research.

The Framework of Electoral Competition

In order to study the relationship between electoral competition and responsiveness, the main empirical dimensions of competition need to be singled out. Sartori and Strøm first distinguish between competition and one of its properties. For Sartori (2005, 194),

'*competition is a structure*, or a rule of the game [while] *competitiveness is a particular state of the game*'. The latter 'presupposes competition [...] and is something to be measured in outcome [...]. Thus competitiveness is one of the properties or attributes of competition' (ibid.). Strøm echoes Sartori's meaning of competitiveness and develops it as the aggregate uncertainty of electoral contests as perceived by party leaders. Specifically, competitiveness is the degree to which electoral results are expected to vary across the set of feasible policy positions. The more electoral outcomes are expected to vary across policy positions, the more competitive the election' (Strøm 1990, 582). According to this definition, electoral competitiveness brings in both an actual and a potential component.

Attempting to disentangle the intricate distinction between democracy and competition, D'Alimonte introduces other dimensions of competition. According to him (D'Alimonte 1989, 304-5), conditions of competition are pluralism, namely, the presence of at least two candidates, and a quota of available voters determinant for the electoral success. Consequently, if there are no available (or less identified) voters no competition occurs. Furthermore, to define a party system as competitive it is required a net cleavage between government and opposition, that is, political offer has to be clear to the electors. The condition of freedom for parties to present candidates and programmes, and the condition of freedom for electors to choose them, does not identify democracy with competition, but rather with 'an open politico-electoral market in which the freedom of access is guaranteed both from the demand side (the electors) and the supply side (the parties)' (ibid., 303). It is now becoming clearer that competitiveness is not the only one property of competition. Rather, D'Alimonte implicitly suggests other three components: (1) a quota of available voters, (2) a clear political offer, and (3) the openness of the electoral market.

According to a minimal definition of democracy (see Dahl 1971), we know that a set of conditions are required: (1) the presence of more than one party, (2) a system of free and plural information, and (3) free, fair, recurrent and competitive elections. Consequently, is competition a necessary condition of democratic elections? Actually, in order to have democratic elections we need much less, namely, the possibility to enter the race or to compete, in other words, D'Alimonte's politico-electoral market. This is what has been called electoral contestability (Strøm 1989, 1992) and here is where democracy and competition overlap. Therefore, contestability is both a condition of democracy and competition. However, although there might be a possible empirical

overlap among their indicators, contestability and competitiveness are theoretically different. The former is the potential or opportunity to take part in competitive interactions, the latter is the intensity of competition itself (Bartolini 1996, 218-9).

These aspects are also taken into account by the economic theories of political competition. Anthony Downs's legacy results extraordinarily prolific giving birth to important fields of study of political competition from an economic perspective. However, those theories rest on narrow assumptions about actors' motives, preferences and information that cannot be discussed here. Nevertheless, although the empirical flaw of their assumptions (for an overview see Grofman 2004), there is a close correspondence between the key postulates of spatial theories of competition and the purpose of having at disposal an empirical multidimensional framework of electoral competition able to deal with responsiveness. In other words, the merit of the economic models of competition is that they highlighted the unintended responsive effect of electoral competition.

This unintended responsive effect of competition is achieved by introducing Friedrich's (1963) 'mechanism of anticipated reactions'. Only if politicians are worried about the reactions of voters they will be 'constantly piloted by the anticipation of those reactions' (Sartori 1977, 350). Yet this mechanism of democracy is an indirect mechanism since 'there is no sense in which the people's will is translated directly into law' (Miller 1983, 134). Therefore, politicians are 'obliged to respond to the electorate's preferences *by anticipation*' (ibid.), and this is the key for understanding why competition is relevant. If politicians want to improve their chance of reelection[2], they are led to sympathetically respond to their potential voters' demands.

This is the theoretical premise behind the framework of competition proposed by Stefano Bartolini[3]. Following Bartolini (1999, 450-4), in order to maximize responsiveness to citizens' preferences, there are four necessary conditions of competition, working backward from responsiveness: (1) contestability of the elections, (2) electoral availability, (3) decidability of the offer, and (4) incumbent vulnerability. If electoral sanctions are what drive politicians to respond to the electors, the more the incumbents perceive themselves vulnerable the better such a mechanism will perform. In turn, the necessary condition of incumbents' vulnerability is that voters are willing to punish and reward, that is, to modify their electoral choice. What motivates the

[2] Of course, politicians might have also other goals rather than reelection, as Strøm (1990), for instance, suggested.

[3] For a critique of his framework see Ieraci (1999) and Pappalardo (2005).

available voters to act for or against the incumbent is the differentiation of the offer and the consequent perception of different outcomes. So, if products are not differentiated or their difference is not perceived, voters can punish or reward at random and no responsiveness will be achieved (ibid.).

Although it still remains a theoretical exercise, Bartolini's framework systematises a set of concepts used and employed in a scattered and disjointed way and shows how the dimensions interact with each other and how they are interdependent. Since competition lies on trade-offs between its conditions, this leads him to talk in terms of a mix of each dimension, instead of more or less competition. Therefore, perfect competition in politics cannot be reached and all its conditions cannot be maximised simultaneously, and even if we could maximise each dimension it should not be desirable, but rather detrimental (see Bartolini 2000, 59-60).

Responsiveness as Opinion-Policy Nexus

Responsiveness is a relationship-wise concept, that is, it implies a connection between citizens and politicians. This connection has been fundamentally studied under three perspectives: as (1) dyadic representation, (2) collective representation, and (3) dynamic representation. In this section I will concentrate mostly on those studies in which responsiveness is linked to electoral competition. As it will be shown, most of these works focus only on electoral competitiveness.

The opinion-policy nexus has initially been studied in the US context at the local level as *dyadic representation*. The starting point is Miller and Stokes' (1963) seminal work. The object of their study is the relationship between representatives of the Congress and the preferences of their constituents. What they do is to see the correspondence between the average constituent position and the representative's position using interviews and roll call behaviour.

Building on Miller and Stokes, Bartels (1991) asks why there is representation even when candidates are not reliably sanctioned for their past behaviour through a loss of support in elections. Using US defence appropriation during Reagan administration, Bartels is able to predict the ideal amount of defence spending for each representative. More interesting from my perspective is that his results do not support the hypothesis according to which a competitive constituent is more likely to lead to candidate

responsiveness. Nevertheless, these findings are case specific since he considers defence as the only policy domain in a specific legislature. Conversely, looking at question periods in Canada, Soroka, Penner, and Blidook (2009) find that, although Canada has the same electoral system as the US, electoral connection matters and fighting for votes increases dyadic representation.

In his famous speech to the electors of Bristol in 1774, Burke contrasts the idea of mandatory representation claiming that representatives in Parliament should represent not the local interests, but rather the interest of the nation as a whole. So, if we assume that Burke's virtual representation works then we do no longer need dyadic representation as everyone's opinion can be represented. In other words, we move from dyadic representation to *collective representation*. According to Weissberg (1978, 547), the latter is likely to be more accurate than the former as a majority of constituencies will always be represented by a legislative voting. More than that, Weissberg argues another point relevant for this discussion, that is, 'representation of citizen preferences will occur independently of an electoral connection between member of Congress and a constituent' (ibid.). Again, On the one hand, I recall that the author is talking about elections for representatives; the situation might be different when we move to competition for government. On the other hand, policy is an aggregate level outcome therefore there is no sense for talking about policy in dyadic representation. Roll call votes can be a proxy, but they are not policy.

A different way to look at collective representation is what Monroe (1979) calls *consistency* between polling preferences for or against an issue and policy outcomes. Monroe finds that about two-thirds of the cases demonstrate consistency and that it varies among areas of substantive policy. The idea is that a higher support for change is more likely to lead to a higher change in policy outcomes. However, it is hard to see whether the opinion or the policy moves first. This approach relies on the advantage that only one question is required for each policy[4]. Page and Shapiro (1983) use the term *congruence* to estimate changes in public opinion. The novelty of their work in respect to the previous studies on collective representation lies on the shift from 'one moment' in public opinion to 'changes' in public opinion. With two points in time one is more able to assess which comes first between opinion and policy.

[4] Brooks (1985) looks at the opposite of consistency, which is frustration or *inconsistency*, and develops a comparison among the US, Canada and the UK. Testing the electoral connection hypothesis for which representatives are more likely to be responsive when elections are approaching, Brooks (ibid., 258) finds that democratic frustration is higher in election years than in non-election years.

Now, the main question is: what drives what? In other words, once we incorporate the temporal component we can talk in terms of *dynamic representation*. Stimson, Mackuen and Erikson's 1995; see also Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002) seminal work can be seen as the first effort to introduce a dynamic feature in the study of representation and responsiveness. Public opinion moves meaningfully over time, government officials sense this movement, those officials alter their behaviour in response to the sensed movement (ibid.). Here policy responsiveness acts through two mechanisms: (1) elections change the government's political composition, which is then reflected in new policy (*electoral turnover*) and (2) policymakers calculate future (mainly electoral) implications of current public views and act accordingly (*rational anticipation*). The advantage is that the authors make clear that there are two avenues, one acts through parties (partisanship of government) while the other is a dynamic direct component. So, public opinion influences election outcomes and both have an impact on public policy.

However, the state of the art on dynamic representation lies on the works of Christopher Wlezien and Stuart Soroka. A responsive public behaves much like a thermostat (Wlezien 1995), that is, the public adjusts its preferences for 'more' or 'less' policy in response to what policymakers do. When policy increases (decreases), the preference for more policy decreases (increases) (Franklin and Wlezien 1997; Soroka and Wlezien 2010; Wlezien 2004). Here, 'the opinion-policy relationship suggests not just that policymakers respond to the public, but that the public adjusts its preferences over time in reaction to policy change' (Soroka and Wlezien 2004). Therefore, to avoid conceptual overlap the authors make a distinction between *policy representation*, whether and how policy follows public preferences, and *public responsiveness*, whether preferences react to policy itself. The data used include comparable measure of budgetary policy and public preferences for spending in various policy domains over time, in Canada, the UK and the US.

When political institutions are added to dynamic representation the picture becomes extremely complex. Only a few studies introduce the institutional component to dynamic models. In their comparative study on Denmark, the UK and the US, Hobolt and Klemmensen (2008) are interested in those factors that might have an impact on government responsiveness. The authors classify responsiveness in *rhetorical*, when analysing speeches, and *effective*, when dealing with government expenditures. Citizens' preferences are captured using the so-called 'most important problem' (MIP) question. Assuming that issue salience is a key component of political competition,

Hobolt and Klemmensen select two main institutional factors. On the one hand, electoral contestability is defined as the uncertainty facing the executive in electoral contexts; on the other hand, executive discretion refers to the constraints faced by the executive in the legislative process (ibid., 312). Institutional features such as direct election of the executive, whether the electoral system is plurality or proportional, whether separation of powers occurs, and whether a conflict of interest between the executive and the legislature is present are tested in their hypotheses. However, the most interesting hypothesis is the one regarding the electoral uncertainty: the greater the uncertainty about future electoral contests, the higher the responsiveness of the executive (ibid., 314).

More recently, Wlezien and Soroka (2012) introduced the institutional component in the connection between their thermostatic model and three kinds of institutions: (1) the parliamentary/presidential dimension, (2) the central/federal dimension, and (3) the proportional/majoritarian dimension of the electoral system. Although they find a moderating effect of institutions, however, in line with Golder and Stramski (2010), they seem to agree that we don't know today which is the best electoral system for representation/responsiveness and this constitutes a real challenge for future research. However, beyond the dichotomous competition between plurality/proportional electoral systems, on one side, and majoritarian/proportional vision of democracy, on the other, only a few studies are focused on the relationship between electoral competition and government responsiveness and this is exactly the gap this study is interested in.

Research Design

The aim of this paper is to investigate whether electoral competition, broken up into four dimensions (i.e. contestability, availability, decidability and vulnerability) affects government responsiveness, where the latter is defined as the correspondence between citizens' preferences and government activity. For this reason, each dimension of competition might impact on responsiveness in a different way.

Tab. 1. *Dimensions of electoral competition and status*

Dimension	Status
Contestability	Necessary condition of Pluralism
Availability	Necessary condition of Decidability and Vulnerability
Decidability	Necessary condition of Responsiveness
Vulnerability	Necessary condition of Responsiveness

Source: Adapted from Bartolini (2000, 56).

As Table 1 summarises, not all the dimensions show a direct impact on responsiveness. Basically each dimension of competition includes both an actual and a potential component. For this is part of a larger research still in progress, this paper focuses only on the actual or systemic components of the dimensions of competition.

Indeed, contestability and availability are supposed to have an indirect influence, since the former is a necessary but not sufficient condition for pluralism, while the latter is a necessary but not sufficient condition for both decidability and vulnerability. Electoral contestability indicates the opportunity to compete and is where democracy and competition overlap. In order to get access to competition, parties have to face several kinds of barriers. In principle, as Bartolini (1999, 458) recalls, any actual barrier is an incentive to collusion among the incumbents, therefore, an opportunity for reducing responsiveness. In general, high barriers may discourage new entries; this may also instil a perception of safeness among the incumbent political elite and lead to engage in collusive behaviour at the expense of responsiveness. However, low barriers may allow excessive fragmentation of the political offer and the party system and possibly lead to political chaos. More than that, an increase in representation does not necessarily mean an increase in responsiveness too. As it appears clear, the impact of contestability on responsiveness is ambiguous and might not be direct.

In this paper I focus only on the representation barriers, for the electoral system might play a significant role. Indeed, the proportionality of an electoral system can give an idea of both the aggregate disproportionality in the translation of votes into seats and the

fragmentation of the party system. Although I expect an indirect effect of the disproportionality of the electoral system on responsiveness, because of the ambiguity underlying contestability, it is hard to predict the direction of such effect. It is not clear whether a more disproportional electoral system leads to higher/lower levels of government responsiveness. Therefore, my first hypothesis is cautious in the sense that it predicts only that there might be an impact of the disproportionality of the electoral system without specifying any direction:

Hypothesis 1. The disproportionality of the electoral system is likely to have an (indirect) effect on government responsiveness to citizens' preferences.

As well as contestability, electoral availability is assumed not to influence responsiveness directly, but it is supposed to be a necessary condition for both electoral decidability and incumbent vulnerability. Theoretically, in respect to the former, the availability-decidability interaction is given by the fact that available voters are motivated by the differentiation of the political offer (and the consequent perception of different potential outcomes); instead, the availability-vulnerability interaction relies on the willingness of voters to modify their electoral choice.

The interaction among the dimensions of competition is a substantive part of my research, however in this paper I will focus only on the possible effects of those dimensions on responsiveness. Now, I expect an indirect action of electoral availability on responsiveness, as it is what leads voters to switch their vote and also makes politicians feel themselves vulnerable. The only one available systemic measure of availability is given by the electoral volatility hence my second hypothesis will take this shape:

Hypothesis 2. High levels of electoral volatility are indirectly more likely to lead to higher levels of government responsiveness.

Decidability and vulnerability are the dimensions of competition most related to responsiveness. The theoretical justification behind the link between decidability and responsiveness lies on the fact that if the electoral offer is not clear and differentiated, voters can punish or reward at random at the expense of responsiveness. In this sense, decidability performs the facilitating function of signalling or making intelligible, as Bartolini would say, to the incumbents the reactions of voters. For this reason, I expect that:

Hypothesis 3. The more differentiated the electoral offer, the higher responsiveness.

The issue is to disentangle what electoral offer really means. If we conceive the electoral offer as the number of parties competing at the elections or the number of parties present in parliament we end up considering a kind of fragmentation of the political offer, which is a way of facing the question. However, we would not be able to see whether the offer is differentiated or not and we would end up reasoning in terms of electoral contestability rather than electoral decidability. Hence, the question would be not 'how many parties' but 'what do parties offer'.

Incumbent vulnerability is at the core of the connection between responsiveness and competition and a hypothesis concerning this property of competition is usually the most frequent in such studies. If the mechanism of democracy stems on the potential electoral sanctions or, in other words, on the will of being reelected, if the incumbent aims to achieve this goal he will need to anticipate sympathetically voters' preferences. This mechanism will perform better if the incumbent perceives himself vulnerable. An actual measure of vulnerability would adopt an indicator of electoral uncertainty in terms of closeness of the electoral result. Therefore, my fourth hypothesis will be:

Hypothesis 4. The more uncertain the electoral result, more likely the government will be responsive to its citizens' preferences.

The actual or systemic components of electoral competition are summarised in Table 2.

Tab. 2. *Systemic components of electoral competition*

Dimension	Systemic Component
Contestability	Disproportionality of the electoral system
Availability	Electoral volatility
Decidability	Differentiation of the political offer
Vulnerability	Uncertainty of the electoral result

Data and Methods

The hypotheses presented in the previous section will be tested in six advanced democracies: Canada (1988-2004), Germany (1987-2009), Spain (1986-2009), Sweden (1988-2009), the United Kingdom (1988-2009), and the United States (1980-2004). Case selection is due to mainly two reasons. On one side, these countries vary in the type of electoral system. Although there is a kind of disagreement, Germany is considered by most scholars a mixed-member system (see the volume edited by Shugart and Wattenberg 2001), but also Chiaramonte 2005 and Massicotte and Blais 1999). Canada, the UK and the US are a majoritarian electoral system while Spain and Sweden are both proportional, but they differ in the electoral formula. Including the US in the sample can be unacceptable for many comparativists due to the fact that it is not a parliamentary democracy and for some reasons is often seen as an exceptional case. However, this paper looks at government responsiveness and the US has already been included in these studies (see Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008 and Soroka and Wlezien 2010).

On the other side, dynamic representation requires several points in time under which analysing responsiveness, defined as the correspondence between citizens' preferences and government activity. To capture the former I use the 'most important problem/issue' survey question (MIP/MII). Unfortunately, whether for the US long time-series are not difficult to collect, for the European countries the problem exists, and it is evident when dealing with electoral competition. Eurobarometer data are available for all European countries, however they are provided from 2003 only. For this reason, I rely on national polling institutes providing this question in the six countries in the sample. Canada, Germany, Sweden and the US provide only the first most important problem/issue spot by respondents, while the UK and Spain provide the two and three most important problems/issues combined, respectively. In this case we cannot disentangle the first from the second/third choice. To partly solve this issue, I turned the values of the MIP/MII in these two countries into percentage values so that at the end the sum of the MIP/MII answers for every year becomes 100, as it is in the other countries in which only the first answer is reported separately. This correction would make the MIP/MII values more comparable across countries.

Besides their big advantage in terms of availability and comparability, the MIP and MII questions might be problematic for other reasons. First of all, an issue may not be a

problem, in the sense that if an issue is not problematic cannot be turned into a problem. An issue is a problem, as Wlezien (2005, 559) wrote, if we are not getting the policy we want. Therefore, issues and problems might be fundamentally different things. Secondly, the MIP and MII questions add an attribute to problems/issues, which is their importance. Generally speaking, importance is often conflated with salience. However, a problem/issue may be important, but not salient if it is not reflected in the media. More than that, another issue relies on the salience itself. When the list of issues is given in advance, some issues that can be salient for a particular country do not appear at all. Thirdly, the MIP and MII questions ask respondents to spot the 'most' important problem/issue. In some cases, respondents can reveal not only the first, but also the second and sometimes the third most important problem, depending on the survey (I already tried to solve this above).

Practically, MIP/MII responses capture variation in problem status. It may be the case that 'this variation is highly correlated with importance over time, in which case simply using MIP would be appropriate' (ibid., 570). Alternatively, it may also be the case that 'this variation is largely uncorrelated with changes in importance over time, in which case using MIP would not be right' (ibid.). In other words, 'at best, then importance and measured salience are two related, but different things. At worst, problems and issues are two fundamentally different things' (ibid., 575). The conclusion that Wlezien draws is that MIP responses simply tell us little, if anything, about the importance of issues (ibid.).

To sum up, while comparing MIP and MII responses it has to be clear that they mean the same for respondents. Jennings and Wlezien (2011, 548) find that MIP and MII series 'capture many of the same things, both at particular points in time and over time'. What they cannot rule out is the connection between problem status and importance, however both may indicate public 'attention' (ibid., 554-5). In my case, I prioritise comparability at the expense of issue salience, in the sense that for comparative reasons the same policy domains must be chosen in advance for all the countries included in the analysis. What I rather need is a measure of people preferences thus it can be not of great importance whether a problem/issue is more or less salient.

A more serious limitation of the MIP/MII question is the lack of directionality. Respondents are asked only to tell which is the most relevant issue for them. So, for instance, if one says that taxes are her most important problem, she is not given the opportunity to say whether she wants more taxes or less taxes, or if she prefers higher

taxes for the rich or lower taxes for the poor. Unfortunately, this is a problem that will find no solution.

To measure government activity I look at the government expenditure by policy function. The effect of electoral competition on government spending is still ambiguous (Barrilleaux, Holbrook, and Langer 2002; Boyne 1998; Carmines 1974), and so it might be interesting to test it. Data on government expenditure suffer from two main disadvantages. One is their flatness, as they do not register huge changes over time, though it still might be curious to see whether this change is due to a change in citizens' preferences or to something else. The other drawback is that sometimes government expenditures only tell how much money the government spends for each policy category, but it is unclear how they are distributed and redistributed (moreover, they cover a limited type of policy, for they include basically distributive and redistributive policies). This is a limit that these data have in common with the MIP/MII question and we cannot do much about it.

Tab. 3. *Descriptive statistics of responsiveness variables*

	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Expenditure in health	135	6.24	1.08	3.8	8.6
Expenditure in social protection and welfare	135	15.31	4.92	8.5	29
Citizens' preferences in health	113	9.19	7.95	0.12	34.66
Citizens' preferences in social protection and welfare	125	26.02	18.59	1.54	82.2

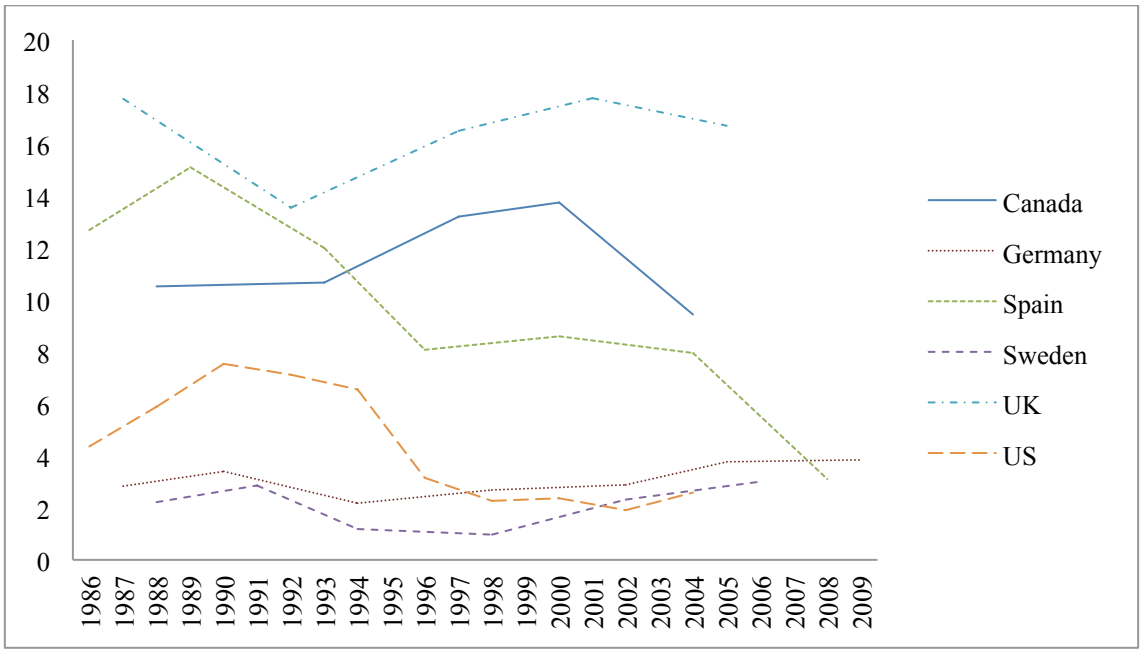
Sources: See Appendix responsiveness sources.

Data on government expenditure are available from IMF and Eurostat for a quite reasonable period of time, however the datasets present a lot of missing values over time and across countries. Unfortunately, the two sources cannot be easily integrated one another, for variables are constructed differently. For this reason, I rely on the OECD social expenditure dataset providing expenditures in the social protection and welfare policy categories from 1980 on. Since some countries may spend more than others just because of their size, as unit I use expenditures as a percentage of GDP (as also suggested by Garrett and Mitchell 2001). This choice is also helpful while interpreting the coefficients especially because also MIP/MII data are in percentage values. To match expenditures with citizens' preferences I break them up into two

policy categories: (1) health and (2) social protection and welfare[5]. Data on citizens' preferences and government expenditures are summarised in Table 3.

The systemic components of electoral competition are measured as follows. Representation barriers mostly focus on the electoral system and here I look at the disproportionality of electoral system using Gallagher's (1991) least squares index (LSq). Figure 1 shows the trend of disproportionality for our countries. While for Germany and Sweden, the most proportional cases, there is a kind of linear trend over time showing low levels of disproportionality, in the UK and Canada it is quite high and stable, except for a visible decrease in the 1992 and 2000 elections, respectively. Spain and the US show a more similar curve, with the exception that in Spain the disproportionality reaches higher levels than in the US[6]. However, both follow a declining trajectory getting to the same levels as Germany and Sweden.

Fig. 1. *Disproportionality of electoral system (LSq index)*



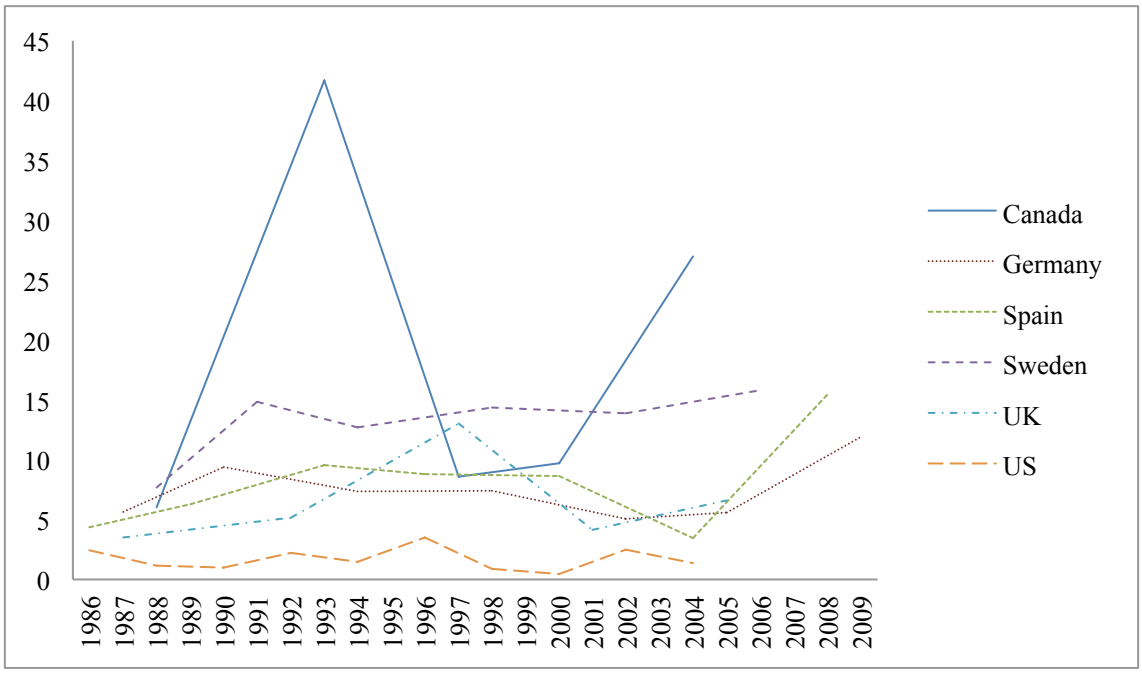
The actual component of electoral availability is given by the electoral volatility. According to Bartolini's framework, in order to have electoral competitiveness (and incumbent vulnerability) what we need is a quota of available voters willing to switch their vote. *A posteriori*, this quota is captured by the electoral volatility from one

[5] Social protection and welfare is the sum of the following categories: old age, survivors, incapacity related, family, active labour market programmes, unemployment, housing, and other social policy areas.

[6] In the US, the index is computed also for mid-term elections. This applies as well to the total volatility index, the bipartitism index and the electoral closeness, but not for the differentiation of the electoral offer for which CMP data are used. For Germany the measures are computed on the basis of the first vote.

election to another. Since I am interested in volatility at systemic level, I use the measure of 'total volatility' developed by Bartolini and Mair (1990). The index is constructed by summing up the absolute differences between the percentage of votes in election *t* and the percentage of votes in election *t+1*. The sum is then divided by two in order to avoid double counting, for gains for one party mean losses for another or more than one party. Values of volatility are computed for each election and the index varies between 0 and 100. Figure 2 provides an overview of the electoral volatility in our six countries. No real trend appears in the figure, yet what is clear is that volatility increases everywhere in the 2000s, except for the US where the level is the lowest and a decline is perceived in 2002 mid-term elections. Nonetheless, Canada registers the highest levels followed by Sweden whereas Germany and Spain share a similar path.

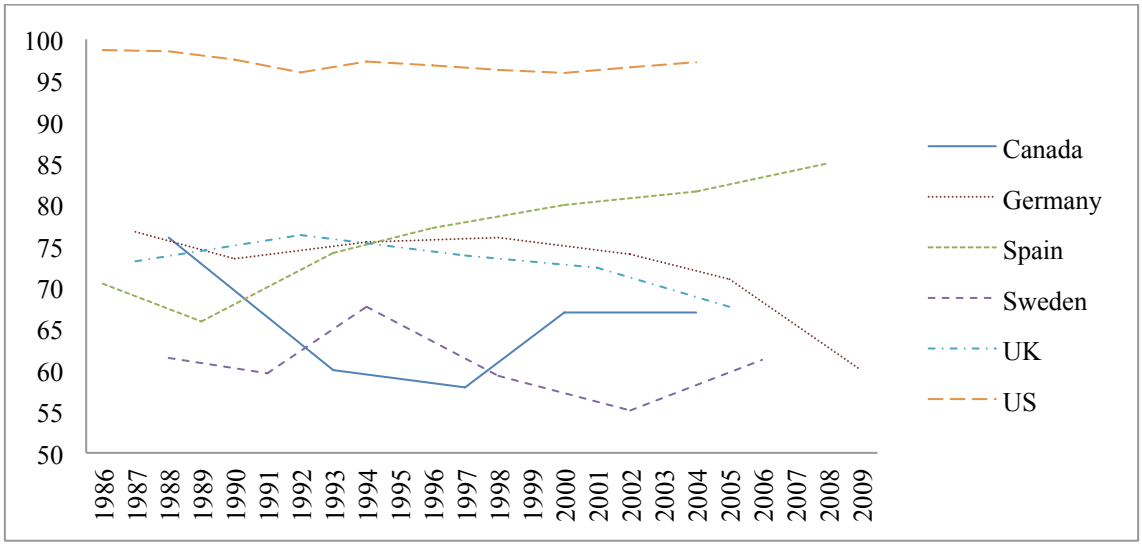
Fig. 2. *Total volatility*



The decidability of the electoral offer might be conceived in two opposite ways, one relying on the party system, the other based on the electoral offer in terms of issues. On the one hand, the presence of bipolarism or bipartitism can be seen as an indicator of clarity of the political offer. If most of the votes are channelled in the two major coalitions or parties, this can be understood as a distinctness of the party system. Yet, on the other hand, this does not necessarily mean that the electoral offer is differentiated among the two major coalitions or parties. According to the former position, the decidability of the offer would be clearly higher in the US where Democrats and

Republicans take over 95 percent of the votes and in Spain where the two main parties took even 85 percent of the votes in 2008. This is clearer in Figure 3, where the index of bipartitism measures the sum of votes percentage received by the two biggest opposing parties. A measure of bipartitism would be more appropriate than a measure of bipolarism for in the sample only in Sweden in 2006 (and 2010) there were two main electoral coalitions (Alliance for Sweden and Red-Greens) running for the government and in Spain in 1986, where the PSOE competed against an AP-PDP-PL coalition. Germany held a quite high level of bipartitism until 1998 whereas the electoral power of the Conservative and Labour parties in the UK starts declining in 1992. Although Canada has a plurality system, the curve of the distribution of votes takes a U shape reaching its lowest level in 1997. It is interesting that the British two-party system registers lower levels of bipartitism than the Spanish multi-party system, but this is probably due to the strong disproportional forces of its electoral system.

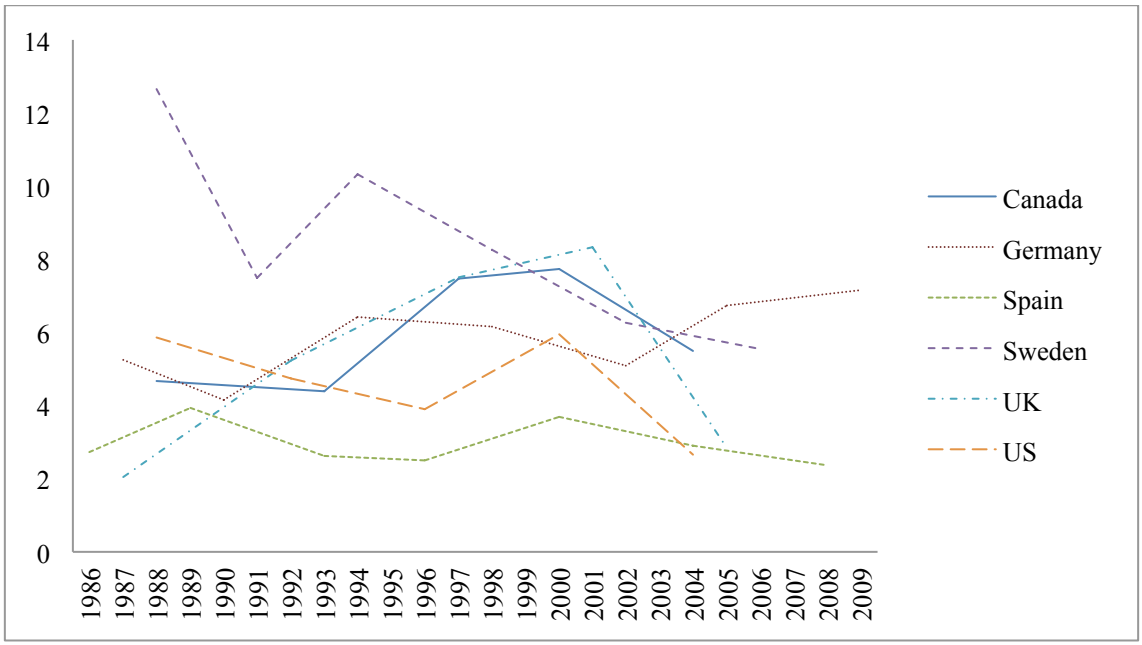
Fig. 3. *Bipartitism (votes share)*



If the former interpretation of decidability were true, we would expect higher levels of responsiveness in the US and lower levels of responsiveness in Canada and Sweden. Yet this is not the whole story. What matters for decidability is especially the differentiation of the political offer across policy categories. As a measure of differentiation of the electoral offer I compute the standard deviation from the mean of all the party positions provided for each election using the Comparative Manifesto

Project (CMP) data in social protection and welfare[7]. The idea is the higher the standard deviation the more differentiated the electoral offer among parties.

Fig. 4. *Differentiation of the political offer for social protection and welfare*



Source: Volkens et al. (2012).

Figure 4 shows the levels of differentiation of the political offer for social protection and welfare. A clear pattern is not simple to be found and the political offer in this policy category varies differently across parties. Only in Spain it seems to be low and stable over time while in the UK parties seem to register a constant increase over the 1980s and 1990s, which drops down dramatically in the 2001 elections.

If we are interested in incumbent vulnerability on the basis of past records, then a measure of closeness of electoral result should take into account the existence of government coalitions in European countries. If the government is a single-party government, as usually happens in Canada, Spain, the UK and the US (in some cases in Spain there is a single-party minority government), the measure will be the difference in votes share between the party in government and the biggest party in opposition. When a coalition government occurs, the measure will compute the difference between the post-election incumbent government and the biggest party in opposition. On these bases, Sweden and Germany are trickier than the others.

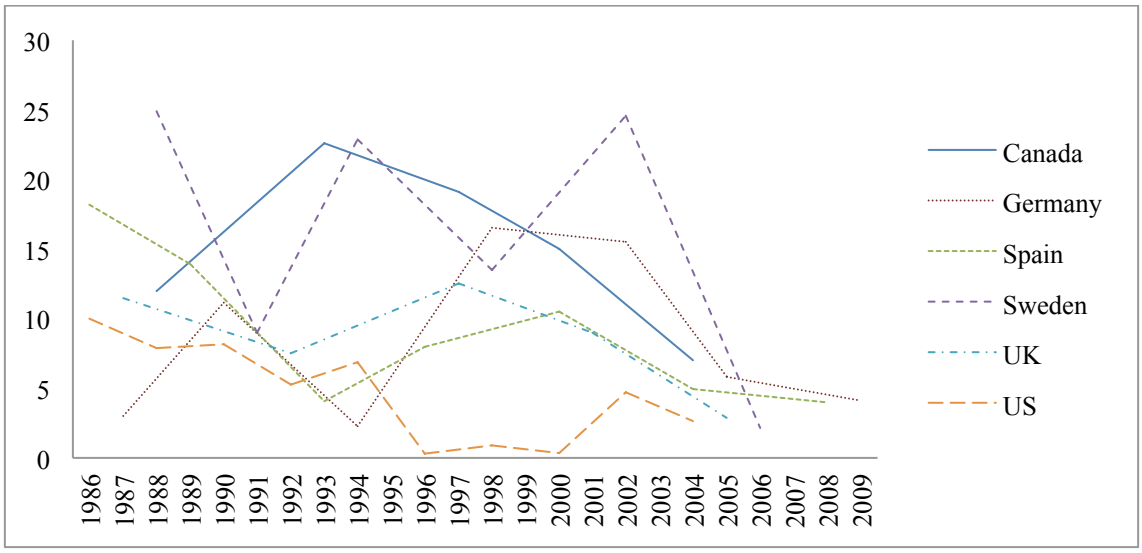
[7] Following the CMP codebook, what I call 'social protection and welfare' corresponds to the variable 'welfare', which is the sum of the variables 'per503' (social justice) and 'per504' (welfare state expansion). This variable includes also health.

The Swedish party system can be divided into two blocs: a socialist bloc, including Social Democrats and Left Party, and a non-socialist or bourgeois bloc, containing the agrarian-based Centre Party, the Liberals and the conservative Moderates. The Greens in 1988 and the Christian Democrats in 1991 enter the system and join the two blocs later (Aylott and Bolin 2007, 623). According to the Party Government Data Set (PGDS) built by Woldendorp and colleagues, considering our period of reference and only post-election governments, Sweden faces four Social Democrats minority governments, one multi-party minority government led by the Moderates, and one minimal winning coalition government led by the Moderates as well. So, if the government is a single-party minority government, the closeness between the party in government and its main challenger will be computed. In case of a coalition government, as happens in Sweden in 2006, the closeness will be the difference between the parties in the coalition government and the parties in the main opposing electoral coalition (in this case Alliance for Sweden and Red-Greens).

The gross coalition in Germany represents the major drawback while calculating a measure of closeness. If, on one side, it is true that CDU and SPD ideally embody the main right-wing and left-wing parties, on the other side, we are interested in the incumbent government. Therefore, if both are in the same government, they should be considered incumbent in the same way. However, one might also look at the strength relationships between the two. An alternative theoretical argument should be that both parties dislike gross coalition. First, one of them will most likely loose electoral support, for one is still perceived as the smaller and weaker part of the coalition. Second, even if one is the stronger part in the coalition, such a situation will force it to more compromises than would be in a minimal willing coalition. Therefore, even the stronger part looks forward another coalition after the next election. According to this argument, coalition partners still perceive each other as the strongest contenders and, for this reason, measuring the closeness between the two has sense.

Data on electoral closeness are shown in Figure 6. As electoral competitiveness is essentially election-dependent no clear pattern emerges. Simply some elections are more competitive than others.

Fig. 6. *Electoral closeness*



I aim to test the hypotheses presented above using time-series cross-section (TSCS) data. I assume that the error term is heteroskedastic, that is, the variance of the error term differs cross values of the independent variables (it depends on the independent variables), and that error terms are contemporaneously correlated across panels. For this reason I run an OLS panel-corrected standard errors (PCSE) model (Beck and Katz 1995). Beck and Katz suggest that the number of units should range between 10 and 100 while the time period should vary between 20 and 50 years for unit. Since the data satisfy only the second criterion as I have only 6 countries, I present other model specifications to compare the results with[8].

The dependent variables are public expenditure in health and public expenditure in social protection and welfare. The first necessary specification is to include in the model the lag of the dependent variable (Beck and Katz 1996). Lagging dependent variables lies on two reasons, one methodological and one theoretical. The methodological reason is to deal with autocorrelation, for observation at time *t* can depend on observation at time *t-1*. In other words, there is no time independence and this is a common issue with all time-series data. This is especially true for expenditure data considered as path dependent (Garrett and Mitchell 2001). The other reason is theoretical and is related to causality. Lagging a variable is important to establish the time order. Following the same logic, also citizens' preferences at time *t-1* might have an influence on

[8] The panel is unbalanced as some observations are missing in the MIP/MII data.

expenditures at time *t*. For this reason, as also Soroka and Wlezien (2005) suggest, I use the lag variable for the MIP/MII as citizens side of the responsiveness relationship.
In order to capture the effect of electoral competition on responsiveness I created an interaction term between the two directly related components of competition (the differentiation of the political offer and the closeness of electoral results) and the citizens' preferences. Since, according to the theory, electoral contestability and electoral availability would not be necessary condition for responsiveness, I added the disproportionality of electoral system and the total volatility measure as independent variables only. I also included the bipartitism measure in order to check whether countries where the two main opposing parties gain most of the votes are more responsive than countries in which the vote share is more balanced along the party system. Finally, I controlled for the election year dummy, for government might be more responsive during the election year than elsewhere (e.g. see Persson and Tabellini 2000). Variables are centred (or standardized) in order to be better comparable.

Results

Findings are summarised in Table 4 and Table 5 for health and social protection, respectively. The tables present eight different model specifications and results are quite stable across the models. All of them except Model 3 include the lag variable of expenditure, which is highly significant meaning that the biggest factor to predict today's spending are decisions made in previous years (in this case, in the previous year). Citizens' preferences captured by the MIP/MII data have no impact at all on both expenditures in health and social protection and welfare (except in one case), so a change in expenditures is not explained by a change in preferences. This is a really interesting point because it poses the question of whether government expenditures are a good predictor of responsiveness, challenging Soroka and Wlezien's work in the following way. If we change way to measure citizens' preferences, which is different from citizens' spending intentions, expenditures are no longer a strong predicting factor of responsiveness. This has sense for they are strongly path dependent and, as the results show here, they are dependent on past expenditures.

Tab. 4. *Electoral competition and responsiveness on health*

Specification	1 PCSE (1)	2 DKSE	3 PCSE (AR1)	4 PCSE FE
Dependent Variable	Public Expenditure on Health			
Lagged Expenditure	0.9794***	0.9794***		0.9466***
Health	(0.027)	(0.028)		(0.032)
Lagged MIP Health	-0.0147	-0.0147	-0.0187	-0.0246**
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.015)	(0.011)
Disproportionality ES	-0.00020	-.00020	-0.0853***	-0.0078
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.019)	(0.013)
Total Volatility	-0.0103***	-0.0103**	-0.0118**	-0.0111***
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.003)
Bipartitism (v)	-0.0015	-0.0015	-0.0444***	0.0023
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.008)	(0.006)
Differentiation	-0.0203*	-0.0203	-0.0115	-0.0292**
Political Offer	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.012)
Electoral Closeness	-0.0029	-0.0029	-0.0055	-0.0039
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.004)
MIP×Disproportionality				
MIP×Volatility				
MIP×Bipartitism				
MIP×Differentiation	0.0028*	0.0028*	0.0021	0.0043**
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
MIP×Closeness	-0.00035	-0.00035	0.0000	-0.00019
	(0.0005)	(0.0005)	(0.001)	(0.0005)
Election Year	-0.0419	-0.0419	-0.0462	-0.0384
	(0.043)	(0.046)	(0.041)	(0.042)
Germany				-0.0874
				(0.110)
Spain				-0.2846***
				(0.087)
Sweden				-0.0649
				(0.163)
United Kingdom				-0.0374
				(0.085)
Unites States				-0.2576**
				(0.128)
Constant	0.2167***	0.2167*	0.1119	0.3754***
	(0.072)	(0.107)	(0.16)	(0.091)
Observations	108	108	112	108
Countries	6	6	6	6
r-squared	0.9513	0.9513	0.1782	0.9533

Notes: Models 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8 are regressions using Panel Corrected Standard Errors; Model 2 using Driscoll-Kraay Standard Errors; Model 3 using Panel Corrected Standard Errors with AR1 autocorrelation specification; Model 4 using Panel Corrected Standard Errors with country fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses. * < 0.10, **<0.05, ***<0.01.

Tab. 4. *Continue*

Specification	5 PCSE (2)	6 PCSE (3)	7 PCSE (4)	8 PCSE (5)
Dependent Variable		Public Expenditure on Health		
Lagged Expenditure	0.9811***	0.9706***	0.9794***	0.9724***
Health	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.030)
Lagged MIP Health	-0.0144	-0.0160	-0.0147	-0.0157
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Disproportionality ES	0.000023	-0.0029	-0.00022	-0.0028
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.006)
Total Volatility	-0.0103***	-0.0102***	-0.0103***	-0.0106***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Bipartitism (v)	-0.0013	-0.0023	-0.0015	-0.0023
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Differentiation	-0.0205*	-0.0235**	-0.0203*	-0.0234**
Political Offer	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.012)
Electoral Closeness	-0.0028	-0.0025	-0.0030	-0.0025
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
MIP×Disproportionality		0.00054		0.00053
		(0.0005)		(0.0005)
MIP×Volatility			-0.0000048	-0.000074
			(0.0003)	(0.0003)
MIP×Bipartitism	-0.000059			-0.000075
	(0.0002)			(0.0003)
MIP×Differentiation	0.0028*	0.0031*	0.0028*	0.0031*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
MIP×Closeness	-0.00042	-0.00035	-0.00035	-0.00042
	(0.0006)	(0.0005)	(0.0005)	(0.0006)
Election Year	-0.0417	-0.0422	-0.0418	-0.0415
	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)
Germany				
Spain				
Sweden				
United Kingdom				
Unites States				
Constant	0.2168***	0.2283***	0.2165***	0.2265***
	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.073)	(0.072)
Observations	108	108	108	108
Countries	6	6	6	6
r-squared	0.9513	0.9515	0.9513	0.9515

Notes: Models 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8 are regressions using Panel Corrected Standard Errors; Model 2 using Driscoll-Kraay Standard Errors; Model 3 using Panel Corrected Standard Errors with AR1 autocorrelation specification; Model 4 using Panel Corrected Standard Errors with country fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses. * < 0.10, **<0.05, ***<0.01.

Tab. 5. *Electoral competition and responsiveness on social protection and welfare*

Specification	1 PCSE (1)	2 DKSE	3 PCSE (AR1)	4 PCSE FE
Dependent Variable	Public Expenditure on Social Protection and Welfare			
Lagged Expenditure	1.0022***	1.0022***		1.0114***
Social Protection	(0.020)	(0.035)		(0.063)
Lagged MIP	0.0079	0.0079	-0.0259	0.0024
Social Protection	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.017)	(0.014)
Disproportionality ES	-0.0183	-0.0183	-0.2810***	-0.0355
	(0.012)	(0.017)	(0.045)	(0.031)
Total Volatility	-0.0117*	-0.0117	-0.0152	-0.0116
	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.019)	(0.008)
Bipartitism (v)	-0.0162*	-0.0162	-0.1378***	0.0172
	(0.009)	(0.015)	(0.028)	(0.014)
Differentiation	-0.0779***	-0.0779**	0.0444	-0.0907**
Political Offer	(0.027)	(0.034)	(0.049)	(0.039)
Electoral Closeness	-0.0173	-0.0173	-0.0129	-0.0150
	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.012)
MIP×Disproportionality				
MIP×Volatility				
MIP×Bipartitism				
MIP×Differentiation	-0.0033*	-0.0033**	0.0053**	-0.0038*
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.002)
MIP×Closeness	0.00011	0.00011	0.000083	0.00045
	(0.0004)	(0.0003)	(0.0005)	(0.0005)
Election Year	.0443	0.0443	-0.0817	0.0855
	(0.104)	(0.083)	(0.076)	(0.108)
Germany				-0.2126
				(0.402)
Spain				-0.6855*
				(0.378)
Sweden				-0.2941
				(0.788)
United Kingdom				-0.2832
				(0.303)
Unites States				-1.5717***
				(0.420)
Constant	0.4815***	0.4815	-0.8559*	1.0661***
	(0.173)	(0.292)	(0.503)	(0.397)
Observations	120	120	124	120
Countries	6	6	6	6
r-squared	0.9828	0.9828	0.2140	0.9845

Notes: Models 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8 are regressions using Panel Corrected Standard Errors; Model 2 using Driscoll-Kraay Standard Errors; Model 3 using Panel Corrected Standard Errors with AR1 autocorrelation specification; Model 4 using Panel Corrected Standard Errors with country fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses. * < 0.10, **<0.05, ***<0.01.

Tab. 5. *Continue*

Specification	5 PCSE (2)	6 PCSE (3)	7 PCSE (4)	8 PCSE (5)
Dependent Variable	Public Expenditure on Social Protection and Welfare			
Lagged Expenditure	0.9745***	0.9866***	0.9996***	0.9716***
Social Protection	(0.022)	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.022)
Lagged MIP	-0.0036	0.0266**	0.0167	0.00037
Social Protection	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Disproportionality ES	-0.0291**	0.0197	-0.0164	-0.0382***
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.012)	(0.014)
Total Volatility	-0.0023	-0.0101	0.0309	-0.0014
	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.020)	(0.009)
Bipartitism (v)	-0.0016	-0.0196**	-0.0097	-0.0063
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.009)	0.011
Differentiation	-0.0325	-0.1059***	-0.0712***	-0.0611*
Political Offer	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.034)
Electoral Closeness	-0.0169	-0.0101	-0.0147	-0.0119
	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.011)
MIP×Disproportionality		-0.0022***		-.0014*
		(0.0006)		(0.0007)
MIP×Volatility			-0.0012**	-0.00024
			(0.0005)	(0.0006)
MIP×Bipartitism	0.0015***			0.00107*
	(0.0005)			(0.0005)
MIP×Differentiation	-0.0011	-0.0047***	-0.0033*	-0.0025
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
MIP×Closeness	0.00043	0.000044	0.00032	0.00034
	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0005)	(0.0004)
Election Year	0.0351	0.0626	0.0186	0.0438
	(0.100)	(0.100)	(0.103)	(0.100)
Germany				
Spain				
Sweden				
United Kingdom				
Unites States				
Constant	0.3241*	1.0344***	0.7375***	0.4358**
	(0.168)	(0.212)	(0.218)	(0.182)
Observations	120	120	120	120
Countries	6	6	6	6
r-squared	0.9838	0.9835	0.9831	0.9841

Notes: Models 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8 are regressions using Panel Corrected Standard Errors; Model 2 using Driscoll-Kraay Standard Errors; Model 3 using Panel Corrected Standard Errors with AR1 autocorrelation specification; Model 4 using Panel Corrected Standard Errors with country fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses. * < 0.10, **<0.05, ***<0.01.

Going back to the hypotheses on electoral competition, I was expecting a positive impact on responsiveness of electoral availability, electoral decidability and incumbent vulnerability, while the effect of electoral contestability was a bit more ambiguous. According to the theory, I was also expecting a more direct relationship between both decidability and vulnerability and responsiveness. The major finding is that incumbent vulnerability, in its actual dimension of electoral closeness, has no impact at all on responsiveness. In other words, electoral competitiveness does not matter when responsiveness is measured this way. For this reason, Hypothesis 4 is contradicted by these results.

Another stable finding is the role of the political offer. In general, the more differentiated the offer, the lower the change in expenditure and the level of responsiveness. Hypothesis 3 was expecting exactly the opposite. However, the concept of decidability is much more complex than the differentiation of the political offer might suggest. In fact, retrieving the theory, the combination that better describes decidability is the one in which party stance on an issue is clear and the issue is divisive. In general, contestability and availability have different effects depending on the interaction with the other components of competition. However, the hypotheses concerning these dimensions of competition should not be completely dismissed, for I was expecting an *indirect* effect on responsiveness. Let us consider the disproportionality of electoral system as indicator of contestability. In general, there is a negative impact of the disproportionality on government expenditure, that is, higher the disproportionality, lower the expenditure. However, this is significant only in Model 3. This is simply an alternative to using the lagged dependent variable, related to the fact that there might be correlation of a time-series with its own past and future values. Disproportionality becomes significant, only for social protection, when adding the interaction term between preferences and bipartitism (Models 5 and 8).

Electoral volatility is negative and significant only for health, but not for social protection, meaning that when volatility increases health expenditure decreases. It seems to be that stability in the party system is important for spending decisions. However, to better explain this relationship further research would be needed. If electoral volatility matters for health expenditure, it is not relevant for responsiveness. Its interaction with citizens' preferences is significant only for social protection (Model 7) when added to the basic model (1), but becomes not significant when all interactions with the components of competition are included (Model 8).

As additional control, the bipartitism measure is also included and is usually not significant, but it turns out to be negatively significant when the interaction term with the disproportionality is included (but only for social protection). Apparently, when the bipartitism interaction is added, electoral volatility becomes no longer significant. Even in these cases, the relationship among the dimensions of competition matters and this certainly requires more attention than the one that has been given here.

Conclusions

Does electoral competition matter for government responsiveness to citizens' preferences? This was the starting question at the basis of this paper. The answer, especially after the analysis, is that depends on how both concepts are measured. The paper looks at electoral competition in a multidimensional perspective – competition is broken up in four dimensions: (1) contestability, (2) availability, (3) decidability, and (4) vulnerability – and draws attention on the actual components of such dimensions. On the other side, responsiveness is defined as the correspondence between citizens' preferences and government activity. While the former is captured by the 'most important problem/issue' question, the latter is measured as public expenditure. Two policy categories are considered – health and social protection and welfare – in six advanced democracies in the last 25 years: Canada, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and the US.

The analysis shows five main findings that can be summarised as follows. First, due to their path dependent component, government expenditures are not a great predictor of responsiveness. Rather, present expenditures are well explained by past expenditures. Second, and related to the previous point, citizens' preferences have actually no impact on government expenditures. However, as the level of responsiveness differs among policy categories, it might be the case that citizens' preferences will have an influence on other kinds of expenditures. Third, electoral competitiveness does not matter at all for responsiveness. Nevertheless, I could not consider in this paper the potential aspect of incumbent vulnerability, which might be much more relevant than its actual component. Fourth, the differentiation of the political offer has a negative effect, even though low, on both responsiveness and government expenditure. Fifth, electoral

volatility has a negative impact on public social expenditures, meaning that the more unstable the party system, the less the expenditures.

When considering the other dimensions of competition, their impact is a kind of ambiguous and varies depending on the interaction among themselves. For instance, in a few cases the disproportionality of electoral system and the level of bipartitism have a negative effect on responsiveness. Since plurality systems are more likely to have more disproportional electoral systems and higher levels of bipartitism, this might suggest that these systems perform worse than the proportional ones in terms of responsiveness. Yet the analysis is based on only six cases, therefore this argument is still weak.

As this paper is part of a greater work, the interesting developments go into two directions. On one side, the relationship between electoral competition and government responsiveness requires long time-series, especially for citizen's preferences, for two reasons. One is that the effect of competition may perform better with a reasonably high number of elections; the other reason lies on the dynamic component of responsiveness itself. Consequently, beyond the difficulty to find long time-series data, we also need variance across countries and hence the number of cases should be increased.

On the other side, competition might have a stronger impact when its potential components are considered or when responsiveness is measured looking at different government activities. In other words, there is still a lot of work to be done out there.

Appendix Responsiveness Sources

‘Most Important Problem/Issue Question’

Canada

Environics Focus Canada (Canadian Opinion Research Archive)

Germany

Politbarometer (GESIS)

Spain

Barómetros de Opinion (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas)

Sweden

National-SOM (Swedish National Data Service)

United Kingdom

Long Term Trends: The Most Important Issue Facing Britain Today (Ipsos MORI)

United States

Gallup’s Most Important Problem (Policy Agendas Project)

‘Government Expenditure’

OECD Social Expenditure Database

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