Electoral Institutions, Political Organization, and Party Development

French and German Socialists and Mass Politics

Marcus Kreuzer

The literature on European socialist parties places great emphasis on the mechanics of political exclusion and inclusion to explain their development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Scholars have noted that the early integration of British and French workers in the political process contributed to their ideological moderation and acceptance of the liberal constitutional order. Conversely, other scholars have looked to exclusion of German and Austrian workers from political participation to explain their negative integration around highly ideological and bureaucratized socialist parties. These theses on the positive and negative integration of socialist parties belong to a larger macrohistorical literature on political development that correlates distinct political characteristics at a later point in time with historical antecedents.

This article probes more deeply into the macrohistorical correlations on which existing explanations of socialist parties rest. It explicates one important causal mechanism that structures the interaction between political parties and their social and political environment and that intervenes between structural determinants of party behavior and actual decisions of parties: electoral procedures and their impact on the logistical infrastructure and governance mechanisms of parties. By focusing on the organizational consequences of electoral procedures, the innovative capacity of parties can be analyzed, and their development can be explained in terms of the interaction between structural constraints and intentional actions. The incorporation of institutional variables thus permits a fuller understanding of the causal links between structure and agency and avoids explanations of the behavior of parties in terms of large-scale structural correlations.

However, electoral mechanisms are only necessary but not sufficient conditions of the organization of parties and their resulting innovative capacity. Institutions merely constrain or induce political action that also is influenced by noninstitutional factors. Frequently, such noninstitutional factors are contingent and therefore must be described in an atheoretical manner. Yet the mechanical qualities of institutions and their durability relative to other political determinants allow important generalizations about their consequences. The task of analyzing these consequences in a
highly specified context has informed the work of various historical institutionalists in whose footsteps this article follows.4

This article advances an institutional explanation to address a shortcoming in the macrohistorical explanations of the Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière (SFIo) and the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD). Prevailing explanations account for the two parties’ organizational and ideological characteristics by correlating them with certain salient characteristics of French and German democratization. They relate the SPD’s organizational and ideological ossification to Germany’s belated democratization, weak bourgeoisie, civic deficit, and prolonged political repression.5 In turn, they correlate the SFIO’s open organization and ideological pragmatism with France’s early democratization, strong bourgeoisie, and liberal political culture.6 By matching distinct party features with specific historical antecedents, such macrohistorical explanations become overly exceptionalist, overlook alternative possible outcomes, and provide incomplete accounts about the role that the SFIO and SPD played in their countries’ democratizations.

**Shortcomings of Existing Explanations**

More recent, less macrohistorical studies have challenged prevailing portraits of the SPD’s negative political integration and the SFIO’s positive integration. These studies generally reveal that existing explanations have overestimated the differences between the SPD and SFIO and underestimated their similarities. They particularly point to important similarities between the two parties prior to 1914 and a sharp divergence in their ideological and organizational development after 1918.

These recent and more differentiated studies do not suggest that the SFIO and SPD and the respective working classes they represented were identical. They point to important differences with respect to the size and institutionalization of unions and their relationships to parties. The socioeconomic context of the two countries’ working-class movements also differed. France’s smaller firms, decentralized and immobile labor market, and long tradition of local and informal unionization differed from Germany’s large, state-sponsored firms, mobile and national labor market, and efforts of disciplined and nationalized unionization.7 These and other differences must be considered in order to account for the distinct features of the French and German working-class movements. However, the differences between the two labor movements become less pronounced when we focus more narrowly on the SFIO and SPD as electoral organizations.

The development of the SFIO and SPD before the first world war exhibited two important similarities.8 First, the organization of both parties developed in relatively uniform fashion, particularly after 1900. Their governance mechanisms allowed a significant degree of internal debate which was not yet stifled by their growing
administrative apparatus. Only after the lifting of the (anti-) Socialist Laws in 1891 and restrictive association laws in 1900 did the SPD begin to build an extensive and nationwide organization. Its organizational growth thus roughly coincides with the merger of France's various socialist factions into the SFIO in 1904. The SFIO's open governance structure also allowed the representation of factional disputes and rank-and-file participation. The one aspect in which the SFIO differed noticeably from the SPD was its smaller bureaucracy and membership. Second, the strategic and programmatic development of both the SFIO and SPD was highly fluid and fueled by the factional disputes between reformists and revolutionaries. The former advocated a more pragmatic course aimed to maximize votes, while the latter sought to resist such electoral pressures by emphasizing radical and long-term principles.

The parallels in the SFIO's and SPD's development closely reflect two shared historical legacies: the early introduction of universal adult male suffrage in France in 1870 and in Germany in 1871 and the long-standing repression of the working class in both countries. Yet while both countries shared these legacies, each legacy had distinct consequences that conflicted with the other. The early enfranchisement of workers had an important integrative effect and engaged the SFIO and SPD in mass politics before they had become significant parties and far earlier than other European socialist parties. Universal adult male suffrage particularly strengthened the efforts of reformists to build a participatory organization, advocate an incremental, nonrevolutionary road to socialism, and maximize the left's electoral potential. The long-standing repression, in contrast, countered the integrative effects of the franchise. Police repression, electoral manipulation, a partisan church, and continuing economic inequalities led radicals to view universal suffrage as a false gift that changed little about the existing forms of domination. In the revolutionaries' view, socialists required a centrally organized, mass-based, and ideologically principled party that would be immune to short-term electoralist temptations.

Many existing explanations overlook the simultaneous but conflicting influence that the new franchise and old forms of domination exerted on the SFIO's and SPD's development. These explanations emphasize one factor alone rather than the complex interplay between both of them. Explanations of the SPD, for example, concentrate on its repression and general political exclusion in Imperial Germany. This political experience serves to explain the SPD's negative political integration and its formation as a social ghetto party. The thesis of the SPD's negative integration before 1914, in turn, is used to account for its organizational and ideological ossification during the Weimar Republic. Conversely, many accounts of the SFIO highlight the early opportunities for political participation and contestation in France. They argue that these opportunities contributed to the SFIO's positive integration within the existing political order as well as to its development as a pragmatic and electoralist party. The thesis of the SFIO's positive integration, in turn, serves to account for its participatory organization, strategic flexibility, and ideological plural-
ism during the interwar period.\textsuperscript{14}

While neither the positive nor the negative integration thesis is incorrect, both are incomplete. The negative integration thesis focuses too exclusively on Germany's Socialist Law (1878–90), restrictive association law (in place until 1900), and police harassment. German socialists certainly were repressed, and this experience shaped their development before 1914. Yet it is a simplification to equate political repression with ideological radicalization and ossification. The SPD and unions pursued on various occasions a cautious and moderate strategy in order to minimize any pretext for the German state to repress them.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, the SPD's radicalization also was countered by its participation within an occasionally still partisan Rechtsstaat, partially sovereign parliament, and free elections with universal adult male suffrage.\textsuperscript{16} These possibilities for political contestation despite all their limitations had an unquestionable integrative effect that existing explanations overlook.\textsuperscript{17}

Conversely, the positive integration thesis concentrates too exclusively on France's democratic pedigrees. It overlooks the government's intense repression of the French labor movement. During the Paris Commune of 1871, 20,000 to 30,000 socialists were executed and 30,000 to 40,000 legally prosecuted, many sent into colonial exile.\textsuperscript{18} Socialist organizations also were outlawed by the Dufour Law (1872–76). Thereafter, the French police was as cavalier as its Prussian counterpart in upholding the civil and political rights of socialists.\textsuperscript{19} Such repression together with continued clerical influence radicalized various French socialists in ways the positive integration thesis ignores. The negative and positive integration theses are adequate to explain post hoc the SPD's and SFIO's distinct qualities in the 1930s. But they can not account ex ante for their organizational and behavioral development, particularly before 1914.

The positive and negative integration theses, then, can not explain the SPD's and SFIO's divergent developments after 1918. The SFIO continued to evolve along its prewar path. Its bureaucracy remained small, its governance structure open, and its ideological outlook pluralistic. The SPD, in contrast, departed sharply from its prewar trajectory. Party congresses no longer witnessed lively ideological debates but instead passed orthodox political platforms. The SPD's administration became more bureaucratized, and its governance mechanisms provided party members with increasingly fewer opportunities to participate.

These empirical shortcomings of the positive and negative integration theses are closely related to their theoretical deficiencies. Both theses treat political parties as single unitary actors rather than as collective actors. They overlook the fact that parties consist of leaders, the grass-roots, and factions who frequently have conflicting interests but are also embedded in a joint organization. Moreover, existing explanations are overly structural and make no allowance for intentional actions and possible alternative outcomes. Because of these shortcomings, the existing macrohistorical explanations are unable to account for the paradox that the SPD and SFIO
became more unlike each other at exactly the moment when Germany’s final democratization made the two countries’ political orders more alike.

Institutional Determinants of Party Organization

An institutional explanation elucidates more fully than macrohistorical accounts the divergent developments of the SFIO and SPD during the interwar period. France and Germany both had the same double ballot system until 1919, when Germany introduced one of the purest forms of proportional representation ever used. This institutional change had profound repercussions on the SPD’s innovative capacity. Individual electoral procedures (rather than entire electoral systems) structured the internal decision making of the SFIO and SPD, their administrative apparatus, and their relationships with voters.

Besides shaping the organization of parties, electoral procedures also structure the strategic interaction between parties. This article does not deal with these more direct behavioral consequences of electoral mechanisms but instead concentrates on their organizational consequences. These organizational consequences were particularly important in the case of the SPD and SFIO since both had elaborate and highly formalized organizations. Organizational consequences of electoral procedures also have been largely ignored in both the literature on political parties and electoral systems.20

Logistical Infrastructure

For electoral success, a party requires an effective logistical infrastructure that can enroll members, coordinate local and national organs, and communicate with voters. Logistical infrastructures vary in terms of the number of salaried functionaries, the multiplicity of administrative units, and their degree of centralization. They particularly vary across socialist, liberal, and conservative parties because they reflect actors’ different financial resources, political norms, and historical experiences. However, such factors are relatively constant for socialist, liberal, and conservative parties across countries. Cross-national organizational differences of the same party type consequently should be explicable in terms of less contingent variables. Three electoral mechanisms—physical district size, district magnitude, and ballot structure—provide the basis for such a less contingent explanation. These mechanisms create recurring and hence generalizable organizational exigencies which permit systematic explanation of the SFIO’s and SPD’s divergent developments.

Physical District Size and District Magnitude   The physical district size (the average number of registered voters per district) and district magnitude (the average num-
ber of seats per district) create distinct electioneering requirements to which a party has to adapt its logistical infrastructure. These electoral mechanisms are likely to constrain a party’s innovative capacity if they require a large and centralized administrative apparatus. Conversely, they tend to preserve a party’s adaptability if they limit the need for salaried party functionaries and decentralize a party’s administrative units.

Electoral districts in the Weimar Republic and the Third Republic varied enough to distinctly shape the SPD’s and SFIO’s logistical infrastructure. The average size of Weimar’s thirty-five electoral districts fluctuated around 1,200,000 registered voters, while the Third Republic’s 600 electoral districts fluctuated around 18,000. Weimar’s multimember districts had an average district magnitude of eighteen compared to the district magnitude of one for the Third Republic’s single member districts. Weimar’s districts thus were sixty-six times larger and seventeen times less numerous than the districts in the Third Republic.

The SPD already had an extensive party administration before the first world war, even though it was far less centralized and bureaucratized than the prevailing macrohistorical explanations contend. Its organization was still quite rudimentary in 1905, at which point a new party statute laid the groundwork for the SPD’s rapid organizational growth. The statute designated local district organizations as the party’s organizational anchor. Their influence became somewhat constrained in southwestern Germany by the growing importance of regional and Länderr (state-level) organizations. Yet, despite the SPD’s organizational growth after 1905, its logistical infrastructure remained decentralized and limited in size.

This infrastructure quickly changed after 1918. The new electoral districts corresponded largely to regional administrative districts (Regierungsbezirke) that were already in place before 1918 and served as the basis of the SPD’s prewar regional organizations. The political significance and logistical responsibility of these regional organizations greatly increased after 1918 at the expense of the old local party branches that were centered around the former 440 districts. The SPD expanded its bureaucracy to cope with the new administrative demands that resulted from the new districts’ greater size. By the 1930s, permanent and salaried functionaries numbering between 20,000 and 30,000 replaced local volunteers in order to effectively administer the larger membership and auxiliary organizations in each district. Functionaries also were increasingly necessary to coordinate regionwide election campaigns. The national executive financed this administrative expansion by increasing its share of party dues from 20 to 25 percent and levying a 20 percent tax on the profits of party enterprises such as newspapers and consumer cooperatives.

This growing logistical infrastructure had important bureaucratizing consequences. Functionaries owed their allegiance to party leaders who promoted and employed them. In 1920, for example, the SPD’s national executive paid twenty percent of all regional party functionaries and decided all promotions. Party functionaries also occupied unelected positions and consequently were unaccountable to
regular party members. Their growing importance thus obstructed grass-roots' participation, strengthened the hands of party leaders, and made the expression of internal dissent more difficult.

The size of Weimar's districts also contributed to the SPD's organizational centralization. The SPD adapted its administrative structure to the new, large electoral districts by consolidating its former 440 local organizations into thirty-five new regional ones. The resulting organizational centralization removed important checks and balances on the national party executive and bureaucracy. Hunt noted that "in 1919 the entire structure of the SPD's organization was altered to fit the electioneering demands of the Weimar [electoral] system, an alteration which incidentally encouraged the decline of intra-party democracy." The large new districts thus eliminated the liberalizing effects of the old single member districts and had new bureaucratizing consequences.

The French electoral system remained unchanged except for the 1919 and 1924 elections, which were held under a peculiar hybrid system of PR-like electoral lists with a plurality-like *apparentement* modification. The *apparentement* rule awarded lists receiving more than fifty percent of votes all seats and consequently encouraged electoral alliances. If no list won a majority, seats would be allocated proportionally. This electoral system reduced the number of electoral districts from six hundred to eighty-seven and temporarily concentrated the SFIO's decision making. However, it did not fundamentally alter its organization as it was seen from the outset as an unworkable interim compromise between the defendants of the double ballot system and advocates of proportional representation.

The SFIO's logistical infrastructure consequently continued to reflect the logistical exigencies of France's double ballot system. Its roughly 600 small districts significantly lowered the cost of campaigning and organizing members and required a less permanent and smaller party administration. They made a candidate's notability and private contacts a far more important organizational resource than professional functionaries or organized mass members. Small districts also lessened the SFIO's need to recruit numerous dues-paying members who could financially support a large bureaucracy. The small districts also encouraged a localistic and personalistic relation between voters and politicians. These relations in turn constrained the establishment of a centralized and ideological mass organization. The organizational effects of the small districts shielded the SFIO from having to build the large party bureaucracy that the electoral exigencies of mass democracy increasingly demanded.

The Third Republic's small districts assured that elections could be effectively run with the help of volunteer members. The SFIO's surprisingly quick recovery after the schism at Tours in 1920 attests to the lesser importance of a large party administration in the Third Republic than in the Weimar Republic. At Tours, the SFIO lost three-quarters of its 180,000 members; entire departmental organizations left; even the party newspaper *L'Humanité* fell under Communist control. The
remaining rump SFIO consisted mostly of fifty-five deputies (out of sixty-eight) who quickly rebuilt the party and won 105 seats in 1924.36 This recovery was made possible largely by the notability and personal contacts of the deputies who remained in the party rather than by a rapid reorganization effort.

The Third Republic’s small districts also facilitated the SFIO’s organizational decentralization. Their small size and sheer number necessitated numerous local party branches and kept the national organization decentralized, less hierarchical, and less powerful. The local district branches were subdivided in ninety-two departmental federations. These federations frequently helped the smallest district branches in nominating their candidates and formulating electoral strategies.37

**Ballot Structure**

Ballot structure refers to the type of choice that the electoral law offers voters in choosing electoral candidates. It varies in the number and type of electoral choices it extends to voters. The literature distinguishes between categoric and ordinal ballots. The former requires voters to make a rigid, single choice among individual candidates or party lists. Ordinal ballots, in contrast, are a feature of certain PR lists. They allow voters to fine-tune their choices by expressing preferences for a particular party as well as the candidates’ ranking on the list.38 They permit interparty and intraparty preference voting.39 Run-off ballots are included as an ordinal-like feature of the ballot structure because they permit revoting and hence provide voters with the possibility to differentiate their preferences more than with categoric ballots but not to the same extent as with regular ordinal ballots.40

Ordinal ballots shift considerable control over the election of candidates from party leaders to voters because voters’ regular option of choosing among party lists is complemented by the ability to rank individual candidates. The resulting intraparty competition decentralizes the logistical infrastructure of parties as candidates require their personal electoral machines. This effect can not be fully analyzed here since neither the French nor German ballots were ordinal.41 The only ordinal feature of the two countries’ electoral systems was the double ballot in France. It required a candidate who failed to win a majority on the first ballot to go on to a plurality run-off election. The double ballot has an ordinal quality in the sense that it provides voters with the possibility to sincerely express their first preference on the initial ballot before making a final, strategic choice on the second ballot. While the possibility of revoting does not permit an ordinal ranking, it nevertheless allows a more differentiated choice than do plurality systems and regular PR with a categorical ballot.42

The organizational effect of the double ballot is largely a by-product of the bargaining among candidates which commonly occurs between the two election rounds. Run-off elections lead to the active formation of local alliances as candidates with little or no chance to win withdraw and endorse others on the second ballot.43 The necessity for candidates of different parties to cooperate locally on the second ballot together with the difficulties in nationally coordinating such cooperation shielded
the SFIO's decentralized logistical infrastructure from the pressures for a more centralized party that the increasing nationalization of mass politics created.

The SFIO's party executive sought to form national alliances with other parties. It tried to trade the withdrawal of its poorly performing first round candidates in one district for the withdrawal of poorly performing candidates of another party (usually the liberal Parti Radical) in a different district. Yet, with the exception of the Popular Front in 1936, the complexity of the political conditions in various districts and the difficulty of locally enforcing national agreements repeatedly led to the failure of national alliance efforts. Some local SFIO organizations, for example, were reluctant to cooperate with the Radicals if Communists already had considerable support in their districts. They feared that such alliances would strengthen the Communists' claim of being the only true representative of the working class.⁴⁴ On other occasions the SFIO and its potential allies had to agree on joint first-round candidates to avoid first-round victories of especially strong conservative candidates. The widely differing political situations in 600 local districts and the need to cooperate on the second ballot created decisions that were too complex to be decided nationally. The SFIO consequently left these decisions to the local or regional party branches and thereby preserved their political importance and autonomy vis-à-vis the national executive and party bureaucrats.⁴⁵

During its short existence, the categorical ballot of the 1919–24 electoral system contributed to the centralization of the SFIO's alliance efforts. The greater necessity for cooperation created by the apparentement provision and the more limited choice offered to voters by the ordinal ballot structure strengthened the hand of the national leadership to enforce national alliance directives in local organizations. This hybrid PR/plurality system required slightly different alliances than the double ballot system. The apparentement provision awarded all seats to the list that won more than 50 percent of the vote. It thus required that parties cooperate by forming joint party lists rather than by coordinating their second round withdrawals. The SFIO, for example, had few difficulties in implementing a nationwide and uniform alliance strategy. In 1919 its party congress passed the famous Bracke motion which forbade socialist candidates from forming joint lists. The devastating results of this go-it-alone strategy led the party to relax the Bracke motion in 1923. It now permitted regional party branches to propose joint lists with the Parti Radical under three conditions: such alliances had to contribute to the defeat of conservative Bloc National lists, the SFIO had to abstain from presenting any joint programs, and the party's executive body, the Commission Administrative Permanente (CAP), had to approve every alliance.⁴⁶ The centralization and strict enforcement of these conditions stood in stark contrast to the autonomy that local organizations enjoyed under the double ballot system. Such a disciplined and nationwide alliance strategy became once again unfeasible after 1924, and the decisions on alliances reverted back to regional and district branches.

Weimar's categoric ballot limited voter choices to fixed candidate lists. Voters
could not express their preferences for individual candidates, whose list ranking remained entirely unaffected by the electoral process. The categoric ballot thus did not require any differentiation of the SPD’s logistical infrastructure. Such a differentiation could have given individual candidates or local branches greater autonomy from the national party executive.

**Governance Mechanisms**

Party statutes implicitly recognize party governance as something distinct from the logistical infrastructure by delegating to party congresses the role of formulating electoral platforms, filling executive offices, and sometimes even recruiting electoral candidates. Most scholars, however, consider the governance mechanisms of parties to be inconsequential legal formalities which do little to counterbalance the resource, information, and resulting power asymmetries that exist between party leaders and regular members.

This dismissal of formal governance mechanisms and internal party decision making overlooks three important points. First, it ignores important benefits that accrue to leaders from recruiting a large membership and involving it in the party’s affairs. Many scholars draw the incorrect conclusion that power-maximizing leaders will automatically minimize membership recruitment and participation. Second, parties are collective actors. They consist of leaders, followers, functionaries, and deputies whose frequently conflicting interests need to be resolved though some formalized decision-making arrangements. Third, and more important, the leaders’ power-maximizing efforts frequently are constrained by the effects that electoral procedures have on the horizontal and vertical distribution of power within parties. These institutional constraints restrict the ability of leaders to unilaterally impose their wishes and frequently require them to bargain or subject conflicting interests to decision-making rules.

**Physical District Size and Party Congress** The SPD’s party congresses were formally as democratic as those of the SFIO, but their actual functioning differed because of the way congressional delegates were selected. This delegate selection can not be as readily linked to electoral mechanisms as other organizational characteristics of parties. It is rather indirectly affected by the consequences that the physical district size has on the logistical infrastructure. The following relationship can be stipulated. The importance of party members in selecting congressional delegates is inversely related to the size of party bureaucracy required by the physical district size. In electoral systems with large districts, the party bureaucracy will be more extensive and therefore will be more likely to control the selection of congressional delegates. And since salaried functionaries are more readily controlled by the leader-
ship than are activists, party congresses will be more compliant with the wishes of the party executive.48

This ossifying effect of large districts was clearly visible in Weimar Germany. After 1918 the SPD's congresses became increasingly choreographed and symbolic rituals. They lacked the lively debates and contested votes of earlier years.49 Prior to 1918 the executive already exerted considerable control over congresses. But this influence was itself facilitated by the old districting rather than the SPD's alleged negative integration. The old districting overrepresented rural districts at the expense of urban ones and led to the disproportionate selection of conservative, rural delegates who were deferential to national leaders. The more outspoken and radical delegates from urban districts, in turn, remained underrepresented at the congresses.50

After 1918 the executive's control of party congresses became even firmer and more direct than it had been before the first world war. This tighter control was the consequence of Weimar's large physical district size and the expanded party bureaucracy it required. With their increased number, party functionaries now began to dominate regional party bureaucracies and congresses. Consequently, they could arrange the selection of compliant delegates who were loyal to the national leadership. The national leaders rewarded party functionaries for their loyalty by promoting them and even selected them as electoral candidates.51 Such manipulation of the delegate selection process was a distinct departure from the prewar period, when it was controlled by local district organizations.52

This cooptation of delegates undermined the significance of congresses and prevented the renewal of leaders and policies. One scholar noted that the "election to the executive, while formally democratic, amounted in practice to a disguised system of cooptation where leaders held their office indefinitely and hand-picked their successors." The continuity of the SPD's executive (between 1919 and 1930 only twenty-one individuals served in its eighteen positions) underscored how ineffectively party congresses represented the rank and file. As a result, party leaders were frequently criticized by their members for being too old, for behaving like bourgeois politicians, or for being autocratic.53

The noticeable weakening of the SPD's internal factions after 1918 further underscored the declining importance of congresses.54 Apart from the small and largely insignificant Klassenkampf-Gruppe, the SPD had no factions with distinct regional strongholds or clearly articulated positions.55 Not even the remainder of the radical Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent Social Democratic Party, USPD) retained a distinct ideological and organizational profile after it rejoined the SPD in 1922. This absence of cohesive factions removed any pressure on the national leadership to engage in serious policy debates.

The SPD's ossified governance mechanisms hampered its response to the Nazis and Communists. Their electoral gains in the early 1930s failed to ignite any discussions at party congresses about how the SPD should respond.56 Interestingly enough,
the rise of the Nazis motivated various grass-roots members to propose reforms of the SPD’s electoral strategy. But the leadership failed to respond. Harsch noted a striking “contrast between the slow reaction at the top of the SPD and the relatively precocious response of provincial activists and lower functionaries who witnessed Nazi extraparliamentary activity at close hand and compared its quantity and innovations with SPD sluggishness and routine.”

The leadership’s apathy led its rank and file to go outside the party’s existing organizational structures to respond to the Nazis. The grass-roots participated in the Reichsbanner, the SPD’s semiautonomous paramilitary organization, to stage large antifascist demonstrations. The Reichsbanner, in turn, joined with socialist and nonsocialist unions in December 1931 to form the Iron Front, an antifascist umbrella organization that also solicited the support of bourgeois groups. The extraorganizational efforts of the rank and file were received with considerable skepticism by party leaders, who were suspicious of organizations they did not fully control. Various initiatives were advanced at congresses to democratize the governance mechanisms, open up party newspapers to debates, and make leadership selection more competitive. Yet all these reform efforts were easily dismissed by the leadership through its control of party congresses.

The liveliness of the SFIO’s congresses stood in stark contrast to the dullness of the SPD’s congresses. Congresses played a central role in the SFIO’s governance, and their importance remained undiminished throughout the interwar period. They formulated policies, kept leaders and deputies accountable, nominated and elected all important party officers, represented a wide range of political views, and submitted all motions to genuinely contested votes. The question of membership in the Third International, for example, pitted activists who wanted to join it against deputies who objected to Lenin’s stringent twenty-one demands. The rank and file carried the day at the Congress of Tours in 1920 by deciding to join the Third International and set up the Parti Communiste Français (PCF). The leaders were left behind with a rump party that recuperated with surprising speed.

Party congresses also controlled whether the party should participate in coalition governments. The 1929 and 1933 congresses rejected the coalition offers from the Parti Radical, and in 1936 and 1937 the party congresses approved participation in the Popular Front. The congresses also rebuked efforts by party leaders to centralize the party’s decision making even though the party executive claimed that such changes were necessary to compete more effectively. A ginger centralization effort by Blum in 1928 was rejected, as was the more concerted effort by the neo-socialist faction in 1930–31.

The importance of the SFIO’s national party congresses owes much to the autonomy of departmental party branches in selecting congressional delegates. Party leaders had little influence over the decisions of the ninety-two departmental congresses which chose the delegates in proportion to their membership size. The control of
departmental congresses, in turn, depended on who controlled the delegate selection in the local district organizations.  

The autonomy of congresses at each decision-making level owed much to France's small physical district sizes. The SFIO's local district branches were simply too small to support or require an extensive party bureaucracy. They were run mostly by volunteers who entered politics more out of personal conviction than for material gain. These volunteers consequently were difficult to control by party leaders and were more independent in their selection of congressional delegates.

The inability of party leaders to control regional and local party branches manifested itself in the diversity of the SFIO's factions. Its two left-wing factions, the Gauche Révolutionnaire and Bataille Socialiste, centrists around Faure and Blum, and the conservative neo-socialists all had clear ideological profiles, cohesive membership, and frequently regional strongholds. Their differences were the driving force behind the personnel and policy disputes at party congresses.

By constraining the size of the SFIO's logistical infrastructure, small districts made it difficult for party leaders to discipline these factions at congresses. The leadership simply lacked the necessary promotional incentives and disciplinary leverage to control the ninety-two departmental and 600 district organizations that provided the factions' support base. The SFIO executive, for example, tried in 1937 to silence its radical Gauche Révolutionnaire after it refused to stop publicly criticizing the congresses' decisions. After being formally expelled, the faction merely renamed itself and remained in the party. The leadership simply had too little control over the faction's stronghold in the Parisian departmental federation to enforce its decision. The Gauche Révolutionnaire finally left in 1938 after its ambitious leader F. Pivert decided to form his own party.

The SFIO split on two other occasions. In 1920, its left wing formed the PCF, and in 1931 the neo-socialists broke away to form the Parti Socialiste de France—Union Jean Jaurès (PSdF). The infrequency of such splits is surprising given the intensity of the SFIO's internal party disputes, and it testifies to the capacity of the party's governance mechanisms to resolve conflicts. By submitting internal differences to democratic voting procedures, the SFIO lessened the risk of schisms because it gave each faction an equal chance to voice its concerns. The prospect of winning a congressional majority meant that factions would be more likely to woo delegates than to leave the party. In short, the democratic governance mechanisms lowered the cost for factions to advance their goals within the party and lessened the likelihood that they would bear the costs of exiting to pursue them outside the party. The SFIO's party democracy also gave its decisions greater legitimacy and made compliance more likely. It created the sort of uncertainty and procedural fairness, which democratic theorists point to as increasing a minority's compliance with unfavorable majority decisions. Party democracy thus allowed the SFIO to accommodate a wide variety of different ideological factions without disintegrating into a series of small splinter parties.
District Magnitude, Adjustment Seats, and Candidate Recruitment  The recruitment of electoral candidates is a crucial element in the governance of parties because it decides political careers and affects the distribution of power between leaders and party members. Schattschneider boldly asserted that "the nature of the nomination procedures determines the nature of the party; he who makes the nominations is the owner of the party."68

Before the first world war, the SPD's local district organizations were formally and actually in charge of recruiting electoral candidates. Their autonomy was limited only in southwestern Germany where regional and state-level organizations informally sought to influence the district branches.69 After 1918 Weimar's large district magnitude contributed in three ways to the centralization of candidate recruitment. First, the large district magnitude required the nomination, selection, and ranking of multiple candidates. The complexity of this triple task entailed its delegation to special committees where candidates were chosen without grass-roots participation. Second, the large districts reduced the absolute number of recruitment sites. The 440 recruitment sites from before 1914 were replaced by only thirty-five sites after 1918. A more centralized candidate recruitment constrains grass-roots participation and facilitates the efforts of leaders to reselect themselves as well as loyal candidates. In the case of the SPD, it limited leadership turnover and fostered the emergence of career politicians.70 Third, the availability of safe seats fostered a quota system for allocating seats among the party's various constituencies. While such safe seats had the potential to assure the representation of minority groups, they actually had the opposite effect in the SPD. Candidates from the five million strong Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (General German Federation of Trade Unions, ADGB), for example, constituted a quarter of the SPD's parliamentary group. These union representatives came to view their seats as rewards for their organization's cooperation with the SPD. Efforts by one district organization to promote new and more energetic candidates rather than reselect union candidates led to an uproar. The SPD's national leadership assuaged the union by placing the displaced candidate on the safe national adjustment list.71

The availability of safe seats led to the entrenchment of the party's traditional constituencies and impeded the recruitment smaller or newer ones.72 As a result, only 19.4 percent of the SPD's deputies on average were newly elected, whereas 50.4 percent of all SFIO deputies were newcomers.73 This low turnover indicated that the SPD did not use its control over the nomination process to represent new and diverse interests. For example, it adopted a new agricultural plan in 1927 to attract more farmers, but by 1930 its ossified nomination process managed to elect only a single farm representative.74

The candidates' behavior provided further illustration of the ossifying effects of Weimar's large district magnitude. Since candidates knew that their electoral
prospects depended heavily on their list ranking, they concentrated on pleasing party leaders (who ranked them) rather than voters. The electoral list removed deputies so far from the actual electoral process that many had distinguished political careers without ever having shown any political initiative or innovativeness. Furthermore, it made loyalty rather than electability the criterion for candidate selection. It literally divorced candidates from their task to represent voters and made them subservient to party functionaries and leaders who decided their nomination.

The SPD's inert response to Hitler's successful personality cult underlines how Weimar's large district magnitude removed leaders from practical considerations of electioneering. Hitler's success led to suggestions within the party to downplay its didactic electoral message and give greater emphasis to candidates' personalities. Party functionaries at various levels vehemently opposed this proposal. They feared that charismatic new upstarts could threaten the seniority they accumulated over long years of loyal but unimaginative party service.75

Weimar's national adjustment seats further reinforced the control that the SPD exerted over candidate recruitment. National adjustment seats played an important role since they accounted for roughly 26 percent of all allocated seats. Adjustment seats served to allocate additional seats by nationally pooling all the wasted votes that a party received in the thirty-five districts. The adjustment mechanism counted local votes towards a national list for which voters did not directly vote. It gave the SPD leadership control over approximately twenty seats (14 percent of its seat total) which were even safer than high list rankings. These seats were the arithmetic by-product of Weimar's adjustment formula rather than the expression of direct voter preferences.76 They allowed the SPD to control seats over which voters exerted even less choice than those allocated by regular fixed lists. The safety of the adjustment seats made them a prized possession among party leaders.77

Single member districts in the Third Republic, in contrast, facilitated grass-roots involvement in candidate recruitment. First, single member districts simplified the nomination of candidates before they were actually selected to stand for elections. The screening and short-listing of would-be candidates became more transparent since there was only one candidate to select rather than several ones who also had to be ranked. This transparency limited the importance of leaders and increased the potential for grass-roots involvement. Second, the Third Republic's 600 single member districts also widened the involvement of SFIO members by decentralizing candidate recruitment to local district organizations.78 Third, single member districts offered fewer safe seats, which diminished job security and the prospects for career politicians. Elected SFIO candidates had a much higher turnover than their SPD counterparts, and SFIO deputies were much more likely to be defeated and to retire. Frequent defeats thus increased the opportunity for party members to select new candidates. The absence of safe seats meant that SFIO candidates were much more attuned to their constituencies than SPD candidates. They were more entrepreneurial...
and innovative since their political fates were closely tied to their political skills. They did not depend on a large professionalized electoral machine or the good graces of their leaders. The SFIO’s deputies’ behavior illustrates that they ultimately were accountable to a wider number of people than SPD candidates.

Conclusion

The preceding institutional argument adds in two ways to the existing macrohistorical explanations and institutional analysis. First, the consideration of institutional factors permits a more differentiated explanation of the SPD’s and SFIO’s political development. The two parties no longer have to be treated as single unitary actors whose behavior is exclusively determined by socioeconomic structures or historical legacies. They can instead be treated as collective actors whose internal decision making is explicable in terms of how electoral procedures affect the internal distribution of power. An institutional argument also provides a more systematic explanation of why the SFIO and SPD diverged in their behavior even though their political environments became more alike after 1918. An institutionalist explanation thus is more differentiated and less reductionist than existing ones because it spells out the causal mechanism through which structural changes are translated into the intentional actions of parties.

Second, the differentiation made possible by an institutional explanation does not come at the expense of an atheoretical and idiographic explanation. The organizational consequences of electoral procedures constitute institutional regularities which extend beyond contingent factors. Institutional regularities, for example, are generalizable beyond historical contingencies because institutions frequently are more durable than other political determinants. They also hold across national particularities because similar institutions are used in many countries. An institutional explanation thus helps to isolate recurring and generalizable factors that existing explanations overlook. Yet the theoretical knowledge that electoral procedures have constant, machine-like organizational consequences does not translate into law-like generalizations. Instead, these generalizations have to be complemented with atheoretical and descriptive specifications about the actors and their historical context. In short, institutional explanations are most compelling when institutions are used as intervening instead of independent variables.

NOTES

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8. The SFIO emerged only in 1904 from various earlier socialist formations. For the sake of simplicity, I will talk about the SFIO when referring to the general development of French socialists from the 1870s onwards.


11. For a nuanced account of the nineteenth century socialist movement and critique of its mostly excep-


13. Mommsen; Groh; Lepsius; Roth.

14. Lipset, “Radicalism or Reformism”; Bergounioux and Grunberg; Ziebura.


16. The German Reichstag had the right to debate and assent to bills, but it did not select governments or initiate legislation. The emperor-appointed governments found their bills increasingly stifled because of insufficient parliamentary support. Suval, p. 32; Gordon Craig, *Germany 1866–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 39–49, 143–72.


22. France introduced female suffrage only in 1945, contributing to the Third Republic’s extremely small physical district size. By comparison, Britain between 1918 and 1938 had on average 42,000 registered voters per district.


24. Various historians have qualified Michels iron law of oligarchy, which he formulated in 1915. Nipperdey, pp. 334, 389–90, for example, points out that Michels exaggerated the SPD’s ossification by using a highly participatory conception of democracy to evaluate its organization. Similar points are made by Schorske, ch. 5; and Dieter Buse, “Party Leadership and Mechanisms of Unity: The Crisis of the German Social Democratic Party Reconsidered, 1919–14,” *Journal of Modern History*, 62 (September 1990), 477–503.


Carolina Press, 1993), p. 29. Unfortunately, no reliable figures could be found for the size of the prewar bureaucracy. Nipperdey, p. 327, reports 100 salaried employees in all the district organizations in 1913. He does not mention the figures for regional and national organizations.

30. Hunt, p. 46.
31. Ibid.
32. Apparentement is the French word for electoral alliance. Since this mechanism has been most prominently used in France, the literature has adopted the French term. The best description of the 1919–24 electoral system can be found in Donald Wileman, “What the Market Will Bear: The French Cartel Elections of 1924," Journal of Contemporary History, 29 (July 1994), 484–85.
39. The following discussion will not differentiate among the many different procedures for intraparty preference voting. It does not consider the single transferable vote (STV) and the Finnish system, which differ significantly from the more common preference voting mechanisms. For a survey of these mechanisms, see Richard Katz, “Intraparty Preference Voting,” in Bernard Grofman and Arend Lijphart, eds., The Electoral Laws and Their Political Consequences (New York: Agathon Press, 1986), pp. 85–103.
41. Its clearest manifestation can be found in the old Italian, Chilean, and Japanese electoral systems. These systems gave voters the possibility to differentiate preferences for candidates of the same party and led to intraparty competition and factionalism. Individual candidates established their own support base within their parties as they tried to distinguish themselves from their fellow list candidates. As undesirable as such intraparty competition might be for party discipline, it significantly liberalized internal decision making. Katz, A Theory of Party, pp. 105–13; Gerald Curtis, Electoral Campaigning Japanese Style (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 10–13, 31–37; Arturo Valenzuela, The Democratic Breakdown of Regimes: Chile (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 9–10.
42. Sartori, Comparative Constitutional Engineering, pp. 11–12, 63–65.
44. Judt, Marxism and the French Left, pp. 146–47.
46. Ibid.
50. Schorske, pp. 136–44.
51. Hunt, p. 78.
52. Nipperdey, p. 352.
53. Hunt, p. 70; Harsch, pp. 142–43.
54. For the livelier prewar congresses see Schorske, chs. 6–8.
56. Schaefer, p. 137; Harsch, pp. 97, 63.
57. Harsch, p. 63.
58. Ibid., pp. 169–90.
61. Lindeman, for example, attributes this stunning defeat (3,208 yes votes to 1,002 no votes) to two factors. He makes much of the ability of Frossard and Cachin (the two SFIO delegates to and ardent advocates of the Third International), together with Loriot’s *Comité pour la Troisième Internationale*, to convince the party’s membership. Yet he also claims that delegates seemed less concerned about the issue of joining the Third International and more intent on expressing their disaffection with the leadership’s support for the war and growing influence over party affairs. Albert Lindeman, *The Red Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 222–25, 73.
71. Harsch, pp. 20–21, 213.
72. Pyta, p. 448.
74. Schaefer, p. 274; Pyta, pp. 393–94.
75. Pyta, pp. 446–68.
76. They were one of the most controversial elements of Weimar’s electoral system and were unsuccessfully challenged in court for violating the constitutional right to direct elections. Eberhard Schanbacher, *Parlamentarische Wahlen und Wahlsystem in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1982), chs. 4, 8. Calculations based on Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich (various years).