Does institutional performance affect people’s sense of whether their political system is legitimate? Does the economy influence voter support for incumbent governments? Do citizens’ policy preferences shape their vote choice? Do domestic institutions affect whether citizens are willing to transfer authority to supranational and international institutions? These are all questions social scientists have asked for some time. As it turns out, more often than not the answer is a resounding “it depends.” Specifically, political scientists have come to realize that the answers to these questions depend on understanding the interaction of countries’ macro-characteristics and individual differences among citizens.

Relying on so-called multi-level models, which combine information about individuals and the contexts to which they are exposed, scholars of behavioral politics have started to comprehend more systematically than ever before the conditions under which the relations mentioned above exist or are strengthened and weakened (Kedar and Shively 2005). As I describe below, such models are a growth industry in the comparative study of behavioral politics because of advances in scholarly understandings of institutions and context as well as significant advances in statistical

* I am grateful to André Blais, Shaun Bowler, Ray Duch, Matt Gabel, John Huber, Orit Kedar, Michael McDonald, and Phil Shively for their many helpful suggestions.
techniques that allow the analysis of exciting new survey data that cover much of the
globe. Returning to the questions posed above, we know, for example, that the
impact of corruption on system support is conditional on whether citizens are
supporters of the incumbent government (Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Seligson
2002), that the economy has a stronger impact on voters when institutions produce
clear responsibility for policy making (Powell and Whitten 1993), and that citizens
will be more likely to support transfers of authority away from national institutions if
inferior performance of national institutions is coupled with high opinions of
supranational ones (Rohrschneider 2002). In this chapter, I review the growing
literature on the nexus of macro-level structures and individual behavior that these
studies are part of with an eye toward the effects that macro-level institutions
and contexts have on citizen behavior as well as how political institutions and
the environment in which citizens form opinions and act mediate the effects of
individual-level factors on citizen behavior.

1 The Comparative Study of Structures and Political Behavior: Citizens in Context

People do not live in a vacuum. They form attitudes and make choices in
variable environments, which come in the form of formal institutional rules that
govern people’s behavior or in the form of differential economic, social, and political
conditions that shape people’s interpretations and actions. In a very basic way, then,
context and behavior are intimately connected, and this connection is at the heart of
political life in at least two fundamental ways: first, formal and informal rules affect
people’s political behavior, and people’s preferences, attitudes, and behavior affect
the establishment and functioning of such rules. Second, citizens are exposed to
variable social, political, and economic environments that they are called upon to
understand and interpret and that they may seek to shape based on these under-
standings and interpretations.

While the influences of context on individuals should be obvious, students of
comparative politics traditionally have paid less attention to contextual than to
individual-level factors in explanations of citizen attitudes and behavior (but see,
for example, Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978). The reasons for this are varied, but they are
likely to include the historical leadership role and the intellectual underpinnings of
the behavioral revolution in survey research, in which the American National
Election Studies (ANES) at the University of Michigan have played an important
role for shaping scholarly debates about politics and citizen behavior for many years.
The Michigan researchers relied upon psychological concepts as primary explanatory factors. This approach focused attention on the actions of citizens as autonomous individuals, without much regard for the political context of their neighborhoods, communities, or work environments. In the ensuing decades, the Michigan approach to understanding citizen politics dominated scholarly debates. Moreover, because of the dominance of American political science and the institutionalization of the ANES, this approach was exported to various corners of American and international universities (see the chapter by Kittilson in this volume). These efforts played a critical role in establishing an international infrastructure of research institutes, data archives, and researchers versed in the science of survey research and following the Michigan paradigm. Yet, despite this internationalization of survey research, explicitly cross-national surveys that included comparable measures and that were collected at similar points in time for many years were quite rare.1

Starting in the 1980s, however, much of this changed, and several collaborative cross-national survey projects were initiated (see the chapter by Kittilson in this volume). The expansion and proliferation of cross-national survey projects coincided with several particularly auspicious trends in the real world and in the world of ideas. In the real world, the rapid expansion of electoral democracies around the world in the 1980s and 1990s provided a significantly enlarged universe of country cases that could be studied with an eye toward democratic institutions, processes, behaviors, and attitudes, and where surveys could be conducted reliably and repeatedly. Moreover, this period saw significant advances in desktop computing technologies and, more recently, statistical techniques appropriate for conducting cross-national and multi-level research (Steenbergen and Jones 2002).

In the world of ideas, the 1980s and 1990s saw a renewed focus on institutional questions across political science, with new theories that could be tested with better data. In addition, there was a renewed interest in developing a more sophisticated understanding of contextual theories of political behavior (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Zuckerman 2005). As a result of this confluence of factors, the comparative study of behavioral politics has been significantly shaped in recent years by the emphasis on institutions in comparative politics and on context in behavioral research, a greater number of democracies around the world in which to test arguments cross-nationally, better and more varied cross-national comparable data, and finally advances in statistical techniques (multi-level or hierarchical modeling) along with increased computational ease. Most significantly, this has led to an upsurge in scholarship that combines the (cross-national) study of institutions and other macro-political features with individual-level data and concerns about individual behavior.

That is, there is now a renewed and systematic attempt to connect the experiences people have as participants in the political process and how they interact with the constraints any particular political system or situation provides. And this has had implications for the role of institutions and structures in studies of political behavior and, in turn, for our understanding of institutions.

1 Notable exceptions include Almond and Verba’s Civic Culture study or Barnes, Kaase, et al.’s Political Action study, for example.
2 Modeling Structures and Behavior

People form opinions and make decisions in specific and frequently dissimilar political, economic, and social contexts (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Zuckerman 2005). These contexts vary from the immediate social environment to macro-level structures at the level of countries or even beyond (Anderson and Paskeviciute 2005; Beck et al. 2002). And following what has now become a common definition of an institution as any socially imposed constraint upon human behavior, institutions are the “rules of the game” for human interaction (North 1981) that do not have to be formal or written rules but can also include informal constraints, such as widely accepted norms of behavior that have long been the focus of cultural theories of politics.

At the meso-level, recent years have seen a revival of scholarship into the connection between individuals’ social environments and political behavior with a focus on how people obtain information from social others and how people’s discussion networks shape their understanding of and participation in the political world around them (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004). While this research has been based predominantly on data collected in the United States, scholars have applied the basic insights from this research to understanding behavior in other countries as well (Huckfeldt, Ikeda, and Pappi 2005).

Predominantly, however, the comparative study of behavioral politics has seen investigations of macro-level contexts or structures. These usually come in one of two forms: institutions and structural conditions. Aside from being variable across space and time, these contexts are commonly the product of social choices human societies make. Moreover, they typically produce differential costs and incentives for differently situated individuals. For instance, in one national context it may be more difficult to vote or to participate in politics in other ways. Moreover, these environments have variable and non-neutral consequences for different kinds of people and so provide individuals with incentives and conditions for viewing the world and behaving in particular and distinct ways. Put simply, then, even in the same national context, the environment may affect different people differently.

Such a picture of the interaction between structures and behavior presumes several things. First, that politics is about the interaction of people’s values and the rules and conditions that govern the implementation of those values; second, that the rules and realities in which citizens make choices are themselves a function of people’s values (Riker 1980). Put another way: contexts are critical for understanding the decisions people make because they affect different people differently, and people’s decisions, in turn, shape the nature, shape, and stability of these contexts.

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2 For example, electoral rules or the rules governing executive-legislative relations are frequently investigated features of the institutional environment, while countries’ levels of corruption or ethnic heterogeneity are examples of the macro-contexts in which citizens find themselves.
over the years, much has been written about how formal institutions affect mass political behavior—be it turnout, vote choice, or participation generally—by shaping the incentives of citizens to act in certain ways, and similar amounts of attention have been paid to the question of how macro-level contexts affect the resources and incentives of citizens to act in the political arena. Examples of this kind of approach are now common in the comparative study of political behavior.

Perhaps the most extensively researched area has dealt with the question of how electoral systems shape voter behavior. To mention some of the most prominent examples, students of electoral systems have long maintained that voters’ choices are conditioned by the political context and electoral rules (Duverger 1954; Cox 1997). A plethora of studies have found that different electoral rules produce systematic differences in election outcomes (number of parties, success of certain kinds of candidates, electoral volatility, etc.) (e.g. Lijphart 1990; Rae 1967).

And there is ample evidence in other, related areas to suggest that individuals are constrained actors within particular, and variable, political environments. For example, turnout is said to be low in the United States because registration requirements are cumbersome (Powell 1986), more proportional electoral systems are said to generate incentives that favor multi-party systems and strategic voting (Cox 1997), political participation in some countries is said to be low because corruption undermines citizens’ beliefs that their participation matters (Bravo and Hojman 2003), and informal understandings of the relationships between, say, legislators and constituencies are said to shape voters’ choices (Cox, Rosenbluth, and Thies 1998).

The analytical strategies underlying the examples given above presume that macro-contexts are exogenous; that is, external to individual political behavior. Moreover, such a view takes the political environment—be it institutional or broadly contextual—as static. Another way to think about this is to say that the relationship between citizen behavior and context is assumed to run from context to behavior. Thus, the most common approach takes some aspect of behavior as the dependent variable and a structural feature of a polity as the independent variable, and assumes that the latter is exogenous and stable. What is more, the effect of contextual factors is typically examined as if it were direct. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there are reasons to question the assumptions that underlie this approach. Here I will focus on the notion that institutions have direct effects on behavior since it is likely that any effect we find for contexts is only an average for the population as a whole that hides significant heterogeneity in people’s behavior. The next section discusses these issues in more detail.

3 While I will mostly follow these assumptions of exogeneity and stability here, I also wish to note that some students of politics and behavior have sought to proceed from alternative premises, namely that institutions may perhaps be neither exogenous nor in equilibrium. A number of studies have investigated the institutional choices societies make—for example, with the help of referendums or founding elections—and a rich research tradition has examined what shapes changes in the macro-context citizens live in.
3 Effects of Structures on Voter Behavior: Conceptual and Methodological Issues

Structures can affect voters in three basic ways: directly, indirectly, and interactively (or contingently). 4 By direct effects, I mean that citizens’ decisions are affected by the incentives the rules or context provide. For example, rational choice models of voter turnout presume that voters consider the costs and benefits of going to the polls and that turnout is expected to be lower when the costs are greater. Among the most frequently studied institutional constraints that impose costs on voters are registration requirements and the timing of elections. Part of the costs imposed by such rules comes in the form of time—when voting takes more time, voters will participate less. Thus, in a study of data from the United States, Gimpel and Schuknecht (2003) found, for example, that citizens who have to travel longer distances to reach their polling station are less likely to vote, with a five-mile increase in distance from the polling station leading to a more than 2 percent decrease in voter turnout. And through simulations based on Canadian data, Blais found that increasing the time involved in voting from 15–30 minutes to 45 minutes reduced turnout by about 2 percent among regular voters (Blais 2000, 89). In this set-up, structural features directly affect the costs of participation—in this example, the time-costs of going to the polls. One way to consider this relationship is displayed with the help of fictitious data in Figure 31.1. As the cost of voting increases, the probability of turnout decreases.

At first glance, many comparative studies of political behavior seem to resemble such a simple “direct effects” model, at least empirically. Yet, upon closer inspection, even if they investigate the impact of institutional features on behavior as if it were direct, many studies of the effects of structures on behavior turn out to be either models of indirect or contingent effects when considered up close.

Theoretically speaking, indirect effects imply that structures affect some intervening variable, which, in turn, is the immediate cause of the dependent variable. For example, we could hypothesize that electoral rules—say, a high electoral threshold—affect the formation of particular parties by producing differential incentives for political entrepreneurs, whose behavior via the resulting formation of particular parties and thus the supply of choices, in turn, affects voter choices. Or, to use another example, the degree or kind of ethnic heterogeneity in a country may affect citizens’ identification with their ethnic group or their views of other groups, which, in turn, affect whether they engage in peaceful or violent political action.

In the former example, institutions will be correlated with vote choice as if they had direct effects on behavior. In truth, however, electoral rules affect the calculations

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4 For an excellent introduction to the politics of context, see Huckfeldt (1986).
and behaviors of political elites, which, in turn, affect citizen choices. And in the latter example, social structures will be correlated with behavior as well, and the mechanism by which this occurs is that social structures affect the attitudes of citizens about their ethnic group, which in turn affect their behavior. The main point here is that, theoretically and empirically speaking, we view structure as having consequences, but that these consequences have secondary, or indirect effects on behavior rather than direct ones.

In addition to such indirect effects, structures can have contingent effects. This means that the effect of some structural feature on voter behavior is strengthened or weakened, depending on the presence of some third variable. Alternatively, structure can be the intervening variable that helps determine the relative impact an independent variable may have on the dependent variable, where the independent variable can be an individual-level factor.

These contingent effects can be presented visually with fictitious data as shown in Figure 31.2. Panel (a) shows both an individual as well as a contextual effect. At the individual level, voters with many resources are always more likely to vote than voters with few resources, regardless of institutional context, as shown by the gap between the dashed and solid lines. At the macro-level, people in countries where the cost of voting is high are less likely to vote than people in countries where the cost of voting is low. Finally, the graph also shows that each variable’s effect depends on the other. People with few resources are much less likely to vote if they live in a country where the cost of voting is high than if they live in a country where the cost of voting.

![Probability of turnout vs. Cost of voting](image-url)
is low. Conversely, individuals with many resources are only slightly less likely to vote in countries where the cost of voting is high. Put another way: the turnout gap between individuals with many and few resources is particularly pronounced in countries where the cost of voting is high.

Fig. 31.2 Interactive Effects of Institutions and Individual Characteristics on Turnout
Alternatively, as the fictitious data in panel (b) show, at the individual level, an individual’s resources enhance the probability of turnout across the board. Similarly, at the level of countries, turnout is higher in countries where the cost of voting is low, as evidenced by the gap between the dashed and solid lines. At the same time, however, the extent to which a country’s cost of voting affects the individual voter’s probability of turning out is contingent on an individual’s level of resources: the institutional context (cost of voting) has a much more powerful effect among individuals with few resources than individuals rich in resources.

In multivariate analyses, these designs are typically analyzed with interaction terms (or analogous analytic strategies, such as split sample estimations or so-called two-step estimations). Typically, such models involve a relatively small number of macro-units (typically countries) and a large number of micro-observations (typically individual respondents) per macro-unit. Analyses of such micro-macro interactions constitute an area of comparative behavioral scholarship where researchers have made significant progress over the past few years and more work is being done every day.

Such interactions are ubiquitous not only in work on behavioral politics, but in comparative politics more generally. Usually, this has to do with important theoretical considerations: “Even where variables are not explicitly nested, they will be implicitly so in theory, as in questions about the relationship between democracy and economic development; though these are both macro-level variables, all arguments about their relationship involve assumptions about how various subsystem players (labor, capital, the military, etc.) interact under varying system-level conditions. Comparative politics, dealing as it does with how politics operates in varying political systems, appears by its very nature to be multi-level. Indeed, one could reasonably claim that all Comparative Politics is multi-level” (Kedar and Shively 2005).

This would imply that behavioral politics, especially when conducted from a comparative perspective, is inherently contingent. A few examples may help explain the logic of this approach and the kinds of powerful insights it can generate. Perhaps the area where analyses of interactions between structures and voting have been most widespread is in scholarship on economic voting, but other areas (on voting behavior more generally and political legitimacy) have seen their fair share of multi-level analyses as well. In the following sections I will provide an overview of some of the research in these areas to demonstrate how scholars have productively analyzed the interaction of structures and behavior.

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5 For good introductions regarding the methodological issues involved, see Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2005); Steenbergen and Jones (2002), and Western (1998) as well as the papers in the special issue of Political Analysis, 13 (4), 2005.

6 Not all of this work is or has to be cross-national in nature. It is equally possible to examine cross-regional differences as contextual influences. While there are fewer studies that exploit cross-regional variation, these generally follow the same logic. An example is Jesuit (2003).
4 Interactions of Structures and Behavior in Research on Economic Voting

In recent years, a number of studies have focused on how the nature of a country’s representative structures interacts with the willingness of voters to punish governments for bad economic performance. Most of this literature argues that the impact of a bad economy hinges on the ability of voters to assign responsibility to governments for economic performance. This ability has come to be thought of as being affected by structural features of politics, which act as institutional barriers that make it difficult for voters to obtain the necessary information about the representative’s activities.

Institutions thus either facilitate or hamper citizens’ ability to reward or punish governments. Institutions allow representatives to shift blame—an example is the frequent practice of coalition government in the continental European countries—and the complexity of political institutions makes it difficult for voters to figure out which one among the possibly honest officeholders or parties is to blame for a bad economy. As a result, the impact of the economy—in the form of evaluations of the economy, for example—on voting behavior for or against the government is expected to vary in strength and perhaps even direction, depending on the institutional context that varies across countries.7

Exactly how this may work has been the subject of much research (Anderson 2000; Dorussen and Taylor 2001; Norpoth 2001; Paldam 1991; Powell and Whitten 1993; Rudolph 2003; Samuels 2004). In revising the traditional model of economic voting, attempts to incorporate politics more explicitly in these models were pushed along by the publication of a paper by G. Bingham Powell and Guy Whitten (1993). Powell and Whitten classified political systems into those where government policy responsibility is clear and those where it is not, based on factors such as one-party versus multi-party rule, decision-making powers for opposition parties in parliament, or party cohesion. They found that economic voting effects were stronger in those countries that had clearer levels of responsibility (see also Royed, Leyden, and Borrelli 2000 for a dissenting view).8

Another view of how political context may mediate the relationship between economy and government support suggests that clarity of responsibility also varies over time within (and across) countries because of election outcomes that change the

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7 An additional factor has been added by Pacek and Radcliff (1995b) who find that more extensive welfare states cushion impact of a bad economy on the vote. In addition, scholars recently have begun to examine the impact of the international economic environment on economic voting (cf. Hellwig 2002).

8 Recently, Samuels (2004) has pushed the Powell and Whitten classification to include the distinction between presidentialism vs parliamentaryism (as well as the existence of concurrent or non-concurrent presidential and legislative elections). He finds that the impact of clarity of responsibility on presidential election outcomes is conditional upon whether legislative elections are held concurrently.
balance of power and elite bargaining, both of which periodically reshape the political context in which voters seek to affix credit and blame (Anderson 1995a; Bengtsson 2004; Nadeau, Niemi, and Yoshinaka 2002). For example, democracies shift the power to govern and enact policy at more or less regular intervals by way of the electoral process. And every election offers different choices to changing electorates (Bengtsson 2004). Elections and inter-election events also shuffle the cards of government and—depending on the political system—they install new actors, change the partisan composition of governing coalitions, or confirm political parties and executives in office with an expanded (reduced) or large (small) mandate. Thus, even when formal institutions do not change or vary, the extent to which voters are able to assign responsibility to political actors changes because of the political dynamics created by electoral systems, party systems, process of government formation, and the like (Anderson 1995a, 2000).

Finally, this new contextual branch of economic voting research has documented that the ability of voters to retain or throw incumbents out of office is also contingent on the presence of credible alternatives. Thus, clarity of responsibility really matters only when voters perceive that there are viable alternatives to the current incumbents (Sanders 1991). Yet, unsurprisingly, perhaps, the extent to which voters have such or perceive such choices varies considerably, and this, as we well know, is the result of a country’s structural features and political dynamics (Anderson 1995b).

Fragmented party systems, volatile party systems, or party systems dominated by one dominant party should make it more difficult for voters to identify a clear alternative to the incumbent government (Anderson 2000; Paldam 1991). In such countries there tends to be greater uncertainty about the likely shape of an alternative future government that will form after the election has been held, and this results in a diminished likelihood that voters will turn out the incumbent government even when economic conditions are bad (Anderson 2000).

The contextual model of economic voting has been expanded in theoretical complexity as well as in geographic reach. Samuels (2004), for example, considers economic voting in presidential regimes, which are quite common in Latin America and eastern Europe, and the role of concurrently held presidential and parliamentary elections. And contextual factors have been used to understand what some have considered “anomalies” in economic voting outside of the advanced industrialized societies, including Africa, Asia, and Latin America as well as the transition states of eastern Europe (Pacek and Radcliff 1995a; Posner and Simon 2002; Remmer 1993; Stokes 1996; Tucker 2005; Weyland 1998).

For a different version of how context affects the economy-support relationship, see Duch and Stevenson (2005) who differentiate among systems depending on whether they tend to experience exogenous shocks or competence shocks. The theory implies that the economy will matter more to the voter’s expected utility calculations when the variance in administrative competence across politicians is large relative to the variance in exogenous economic shocks. Under these conditions, movement in the economy (which is observed by the voter) is a good signal of the competence of incumbents (which is not directly observed).
While the different approaches to understanding contingent effects from an institutional or contextual perspective differ—some focus on formal features of a political system while others focus on the political context of the day, some focus on incumbents while others consider the alternatives voters have—they all view voters as willing to reward and punish, but being thwarted by contextual conditions that prevent the truthful translation of policy evaluations into a vote because of difficulty to assign responsibility to the right actor or the lack of alternative choices. Following the discussion in the previous section, then, the relations among the key variables are viewed as both indirect and contingent. The effects of a bad economy on vote choice are indirect in that they work through voters’ willingness to reward and punish the government. The impact of voters’ motivations to reward and punish, in turn, is contingent on political structures. Cumulatively, this body of research demonstrates that the relationship between the state of the economy and voter behavior is highly conditional at the cross-national (or cross-institutional) level or cross-temporally. Thus, democratic institutions and political contexts frequently serve to weaken the impact of economic conditions on voting behavior and election outcomes in systematic ways.

While I have framed this discussion in terms of research on economic voting, the general argument should apply to issue-based voting more generally. Depending on the issue voters happen to care most about—be it the environment, health, education, or foreign policy—the general logic should work here as well: Macro-level conditions should affect voters’ choices via voters’ understandings and motivations to reward and punish, and these, in turn, can be expected to affect voters’ choices differently, depending on the political structures that exist in a country.

4.1 Extensions and Other Ways of Incorporating Institutions

The basic insight of this work—that differences in representational structure matter for how voters behave and that they matter in contingent ways—has been pursued in other domains as well. For example, Huber, Kornell, and Leoni (2005) examine the relationship between institutional features and partisan attachment across twenty-five new and established democracies around the globe. They find that institutions that encourage retrospective clarity of responsibility foster the formation of party attachments. Moreover, institutional context has differential effects: features of political systems that make it more difficult to form party attachments have their biggest impact on individuals who have the fewest cognitive resources.

Addressing different questions in a similar way, Kedar (2005) examines how institutional context conditions the relationship between voter goals and voter behavior. Based on evidence from two highly majoritarian democracies and two very consensual ones, she finds that voters incorporate the way institutions convert votes to policy into their choices. Since policy is often the result of institutionalized multi-party bargaining and since votes are thus watered down by power sharing,
voters often compensate for this by supporting parties whose positions differ from (and are often more extreme than) their own.

In related studies, Klingemann and Wessels (2000) and Gschwend (2003) examine the likelihood that individuals will vote sincerely or strategically. They find that voters’ tendency to vote sincerely or strategically is dependent on district magnitude, proportionality, allocation rules, and party system (supply). In particular, they argue that sincere voting is more likely among individuals living in countries with electoral systems characterized by large district magnitude and a high degree of proportionality.

To give yet another example of the kinds of insights multi-level approaches can generate, electoral institutions and the outcomes they produce can lead to reinterpretations of what we know about the effect of institutions on voter behavior. For example, Brockington (2004) and Jusko and Shivley (2005) examine the effect of party systems and coalition government on voter turnout—a question that has received significant attention in the behavioral literature—to see if the impact of party systems differ for different kinds of voters. Consistent with much previous research on the effects of proportional representation on turnout, they find that, for high-information voters, participation in elections rises as the number of parties in the system increases. Thus, among these voters, more choice improves participation rates. However, for citizens with more limited political information, increases in the number of parties in party systems depresses voting turnout. This leads to the ironic conclusion that PR, which is intended to lead to a more fair representation system, increases the information gap by complicating political choices and thus disenfranchises the less informed relative to the better informed.

These examples demonstrate that the systematic incorporation of well-known institutional features into models of political behavior can produce novel insights and help resolve well-known theoretical puzzles or empirical debates—Why does a bad economy sometimes lead voters to throw governments out of office but sometimes does not? Why is turnout higher in some proportional representation systems than others? Why do scholars find support both for proximity and directional models of voting?—and add a richness that models based on direct and unconditional effects do not possess.

5 Interactions of Vote Choice and Structures in Research on Legitimacy: Reversing the Causal Arrow

While most work in behavioral politics seeks to explain behavior with the help of attitudinal constructs (or attitudes with other attitudes), recent research focuses on vote choice as the independent variable. This research examines the consequences of
voters’ decisions, how these affect voters, and how these effects are mediated by political institutions; or, alternatively, how contextual factors affect people’s attitudes differently, depending on how they voted.

This approach has been most fully developed in the area of political legitimacy. Here, scholars have examined how election outcomes—whether voters cast their ballot for the party or parties in office after the election or those in the opposition—and the nature of representative institutions affect voters’ subsequent attitudes and behavior. This stream of scholarship investigates the role institutions play in mediating the sense of loss or victory citizens feel. Findings to date indicate that losers’ incentives to develop low levels of support for the political system are significantly affected by a country’s political context. This means that institutions have a role in blunting or exacerbating the rougher edge of losing or the thrill of success.

This research starts with the assumption that losing produces negative attitudes towards politics while winning does the opposite (Anderson et al. 2005). And winning and losing, once experienced, are expected to affect subsequent attitudes. Political institutions, in turn, are important because they shape the responses of winners and losers. This means that the extent to which citizen attitudes toward democratic institutions, and by implication the potential for protest or unrest among the losers, for example, are channeled by a country’s particular political context (Anderson and Guillory 1997). Individuals who belong to the political minority have more negative attitudes toward government than those in the majority if institutions are designed such that losses have particularly weighty consequences (Anderson et al. 2005).

For example, different democratic systems determine the extent to which the winners may do what they want and what rights the losers have to prevent unfettered majority rule (Colomer 2001). Institutions thus determine the rules of the game and how much of a say citizens have in selecting the new government—that is, the specify the process by which losers are created—but secondly, and as importantly, they also determine how power is exercised. The basic theoretical model implies that the impact of the election outcome on winners’ and losers’ attitudes and behaviors is constrained by attitudes and institutional arrangements. Thus, again, the relations among the basic set of variables is viewed as contingent: the impact of an individual-level factor (the attitudes associated with winning and losing) on beliefs about the legitimacy of the political system is conditional upon the context in which winning and losing are given meaning.\footnote{Support for the empirical leverage of this individual-level distinction has been found with data from around the globe, ranging from western Europe, to the post-communist states, Latin America, Asia, and Africa (Anderson et al. 2005; Cho 2004; Karp and Bowler 2001; Stebe 2003).}

\footnote{11 A related and growing literature examines how being among the winners or losers of elections affect other attitudes, as well as how winner-loser status affects the impact of macro-factors on behavior. Thus, Anderson and Tverdova (2003) find, for example, that the negative impact of corruption on support for democratic institutions is stronger among losers and muted among winners, and Anderson, Mendes, and Tverdova (2004) find that perceptions of the economy improve systematically as a result of being on the winning side in elections.}
6 Multi-level Models and Multi-level Governance: Citizens and the European Union

Finally, an area of scholarship that seems almost ideally suited to the exploration of multi-level models is the emerging EU polity. Not only do political scientists have an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the EU as a political system and citizens’ attitudes and behavior regarding the EU, but there also are extensive sources of data to analyze the differences in contexts and voter behavior across the member states of the Union. What is more, there is considerable variation in institutional and other structures across the current twenty-five member states that facilitate cross-national analyses.

Perhaps the most extensively developed aspect of multi-level scholarship on EU politics deals with understanding citizen support for various aspects of EU integration, including membership in the Union, support for further integration (widening and deepening), or various policy-specific aspects of integration. While early studies of support for integration examined mostly macro-level characteristics as predictors (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993), recent research examines the individual-level determinants of integration with a focus on domestic politics (Anderson 1998; Hooghe and Marks 2005). Yet, exactly how domestic politics in EU member states affect individuals’ willingness to support further integration is still uncertain. While some research stresses the importance of some variables over others—say, identity vs instrumental motivations (cf. Hooghe and Marks 2005)—others model the interactions among individual-level factors and member states’ structural features to explain variations in public opinion.

Variously, this scholarship focuses on how domestic (and hence cross-nationally variable) political or economic structures affect different people’s propensity to exhibit supportive attitudes and behaviors toward the EU. On the political side of things, Rohrschneider (2002) finds that, when citizens perceive that they are unrepresented in the EU, their support for the EU is reduced. More importantly, this reduction is especially strong in nations with well-functioning domestic institutions. In this formulation, the impact of attitudes about the quality of representation on support for Europe is contingent upon the quality of domestic institutions.

Along parallel lines, Christin (2005) examines attitudes about the EU in central and east European countries and finds an interaction between individual-level attitudes about domestic reforms and macro-level variables. When domestic macro-political and economic performance is weak, citizens’ views on domestic reforms are not particularly powerful predictors of opinions about the EU. However, if the performance of the country is good, those who have favorable attitudes towards the free market or democracy exhibit significantly more positive attitudes towards the EU than those who have negative attitudes. This understanding is based on contingent
relations as well: attitudes about markets and democracy are stronger or weaker determinants of support for the EU, depending on whether macroeconomic and political performance is good.

On the political economy front, researchers have also identified important cross-level interactions within the EU. Specifically, recent studies demonstrate the interactive effects between individuals’ skill endowments and the nature of the (macro-)political economy on attitudes about the EU. At the individual level, skill endowments are a particularly potent predictor of support for European integration, with lower-skilled citizens particularly likely to have more negative evaluations of the EU (Gabel 1998). Going one step further and embedding individuals with different skills in different political economies, Brinegar and Jolly (2005) find that low-skilled workers in countries with high-skill economies exhibit significantly less support for European integration, and respondents with higher education in low-skill-endowment countries support European integration less than low-skilled workers. This suggests that cross-national differences in economic institutions and economic structures condition the importance of human capital in shaping attitudes towards European integration.

Finally, some work is investigating the interdependence among national differences, differences across political parties, and individual citizens (cf. Steenbergen and Jones 2002). This research models the process of opinion formation within and across member states by focusing on the frequency or nature of the messages sent by party elites to citizens about the EU. Examining the relative impact of instrumental motivations vs identity on support for the EU, Hooghe and Marks (2005), for example, investigate how the political consequences of identity are contested and shaped in national contexts. They find that the more national elites are divided, the more citizens are likely to be cued to oppose European integration, and this effect is particularly pronounced among citizens who see themselves as exclusively national.

7 Discussion

Institutions have long figured prominently in the study of politics, and the idea that (cross-national) differences in political contexts are powerful forces in shaping citizen behavior is nothing new. Almost thirty years ago, Verba, Nie, and Kim’s (1978) study of citizen participation in seven developed and developing countries examined the extent to which institutional constraints amplified and attenuated individuals’ propensities to be politically engaged. Despite their pathbreaking effort, however, contextual explanations of political behavior have only recently grown in importance in the comparative study of how citizens think and act.

In part, this trend toward constructing explanations that connect macro- and micro-levels of analysis is undoubtedly due to the increasing availability of large
cross-national survey data sets that allow for the integration of individual behavior and institutional or contextual features as well as the improved statistical and computing tools to analyze such data efficiently. In addition, the movement toward multi-level theories of behavioral politics is in no small measure due to the renewed emphasis on and sophisticated understanding of political institutions and their consequences, as well as a more advanced understanding of contextual theories of political behavior.

Scholars’ growing ease of connecting micro- and macro-levels of analysis holds significant promise for integrating the study of behavioral politics with other areas of political science scholarship by linking institutions and behavior or by developing and testing more complex models of the interaction of elite behavior and party behavior with the study of citizen politics. In addition, this area of inquiry holds much promise for integrating the all-too frequent study of established democracies with research on emerging and transitioning democracies, as well as the institutionalization of multi-level polities such as the European Union or interactions among international politics, subnational politics, and citizen behavior.

In this chapter, I focus on two particular kinds of interactions of structures and behavior that I label contingent: first, cases where individual-level factors have differential effects, depending on the institutional environment; second, cases where the structural features of a polity have differential effects, depending on individual or other structural factors. Viewing individual voters as embedded in and interacting with the institutional and structural contexts in which they live and act is relatively new in the comparative study of behavioral politics. But significant research streams aimed at both the methodology of investigating such multi-level relationships as well as the substance of particular sets of questions have been developed over the past decade. These are particularly extensive in the areas of economic voting and political legitimacy, and there are related but currently less extensive efforts underway in the areas of electoral turnout and vote choice as well as political behavior in the European Union as an emerging supranational polity.

These endeavors carry with them distinct and frequently unstated assumptions about the political world that are worth keeping in mind. Importantly, they assume that the structural contexts are exogenous and stable. While these assumptions may be safe under many conditions, on occasion they are liable to be controversial. In fact, one of the perhaps more interesting yet undeveloped research areas in this subfield of political science could be the rigorous analysis of the conditions under which these assumptions are safe or should be challenged.

Moreover, an important assumption concerns the stability of contextual features over time. While political science is mostly a quasi-experimental science, there are, on occasion, situations that allow scholars of institutions to take advantage of “natural experiments” to investigate their claims. One fruitful area, for example, concerns the role of electoral systems in shaping or being shaped by political behavior. Some scholars have traveled down this path—some studies, for example, have sought to understand how New Zealand’s voters reacted to the changes in electoral rules in that country (Banducci, Donovan, and Karp 1999; Karp and Bowler...
2001), and in particular how different kinds of voters were affected differently by alternative electoral system designs. Others have examined the impact of voter behavior on institutional change in an experimental setting (Bowler and Donovan 2004), and there are liable to be many instances where institutional change affects voters and voters themselves seek to effect such change. The fluidity or stability of structures—and concomitantly the exogeneity and endogeneity of institutions—is particularly likely to differ systematically in old versus new democracies, with the presumption of greater endogeneity or at least potential for it in newer democracies.

This area of scholarship holds much untapped promise, but several questions remain: The first question, naturally, is whether and how institutions and structural features of polities matter for citizen behavior. Given that research to date has focused mainly on voters’ electoral choices and decisions to participate in elections, this first generation of scholarship needs to establish which institutions matter, and what kinds of behavior they matter for. One can easily imagine a proliferation of studies that examine the interactive effects of institutional features and individual-level factors, but absent some more general theories about the interactions of structures and voting, such efforts are unlikely to yield cumulative understandings of either institutions or behavior. A second, but also critical, question is how much institutions matter in which domains and how much they matter relative to individual-level factors. To establish that institutions matter and how is one thing—to establish that they make a significant difference and by how much they do so is quite another but also essential matter.

At the end of the day, what is particularly noteworthy about cross-level investigations of behavioral politics is that they hold the promise of producing a more nuanced and contextualized understanding of political life by connecting hitherto unconnected streams of scholarship in the areas of institutions, political economy, policy, and behavior and allowing us a better and more complex empirical and theoretical handle on the hows and whys of citizen politics.

References


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