
Introduction

Debating the Personalization of Politics and Electoral Systems

Electoral systems are among the most studied elements of democratic politics. Armies of scholars have delineated their types, assessed their effects, and, at least in more recent years, probed their origins. The overwhelming bulk of this research has focused on how electoral systems relate to inter-party competition, particularly the degree to which they encourage a spread of power across a range of parties or its concentration in the hands of just a few. As Shugart (2001b: 25) points out, however, electoral rules vary along two crucial dimensions. The inter-party dimension—the spread of power across parties—is one. But the intra-party dimension—the distribution of power within parties—is the other. This second dimension has received very little attention: as Colomer (2011) says, it is ‘the neglected dimension of electoral systems’.

In the past, that imbalance of focus may have been justified. In the early post-war decades, parties dominated democratic politics: party memberships were high; most voters had clear party identities; parties dominated government in all major democracies. But politics in most democracies is changing: party memberships are widely collapsing; party identities are weakening; many voters appear increasingly to find the whole notion of party-based democracy anathema.

Research—particularly research into electoral reform—has been slow to catch up with this real-world shift. Most studies in this field continue to define electoral reform in ways that take account only of degrees of proportionality. They presume, therefore, that inter-party competition is all that matters. As voters disengage from parties, however, it is reasonable to suppose that they might care less about how their votes translate into partisan seat shares and more about other aspects of electoral outcomes. In particular, they might care more about *who* fills those seats and the degree to which they can influence this. And this might, in turn, influence the dynamics of electoral reform.

That, at least, is the thinking underlying the question that we seek to answer in this book: Has the changing nature of democratic politics led to change in

the nature of electoral reform processes and, in consequence, to a growing *personalization* of electoral institutions?

We introduce our thinking in this first chapter through five steps. First, we explore in greater depth the changing nature of contemporary democracy—particularly the decline of traditional political parties. Second, we examine the meaning of the personalization of politics. Third, we explore specifically the personalization of electoral systems: what it is and why we might expect it to be happening. Fourth, we set out our specific expectations regarding the direction and processes of electoral system change. Finally, we outline the structure of our book as a whole.

1.1 THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRACIES AND THE DECLINE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Most studies of the personalization of politics start from the same premises: politics is changing; democracies are being transformed; the traditional patterns observed and described until the 1960s in the democratic politics of Western Europe and beyond are no longer valid (Cain, Dalton, and Scarrow 2003; McAllister 2007; Blondel and Thiébault 2009; Karvonen 2010). The traditional model against which such arguments compare the present is inspired by the work of Stein Rokkan and Seymour Martin Lipset (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). The central idea of that work was that politics was dominated by structural cleavages between groups within society. The nature of these cleavages varied from country to country, but included class-based, religious, urban/rural, and centre/periphery divisions. Mass parties organized along the lines of these cleavages. They dominated the political scene, but were also deeply rooted in society. They often developed networks of social and economic organizations that encapsulated citizens within a political camp. The ties between parties and citizens were therefore strong and durable. Party identities were salient. Most importantly, politics was stable and electoral volatility was low, as voting was mostly about expressing one's unchanging political and social identity. Lipset and Rokkan even developed the idea of the 'freezing' of political cleavages that emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and that still structured politics in the 1950s and 1960s.

Similar reasoning is present in the classics of electoral studies from that era in the United States. The Columbia School described voting as the result of structural factors: social class, religion, and urban/rural residence (Berelson et al. 1954). A few years later, in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960), the Michigan School brought in the concept of party identification as the main determinant of the vote. And party identification was said to be very stable

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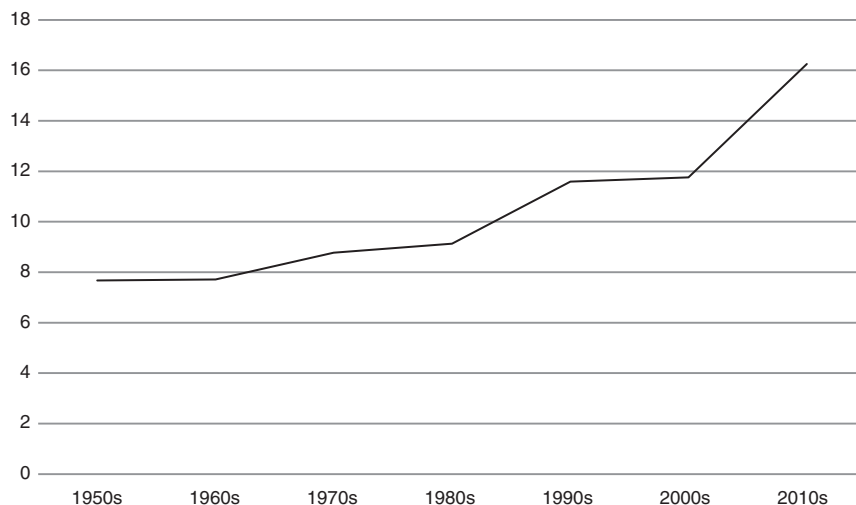


FIGURE 1.1 Electoral Volatility in European Democracies, 1950s–2010s

Note: Mean value by decade of Pedersen’s Index of Electoral Volatility (Pedersen 1979) across sixteen European countries that have been democratic since at least 1950.

Source: Authors’ calculations based on data in Dassonneville (2015).

over time as it was the result of a long process of political socialization transmitted within families and among friends. Again, politics was described as stable, socially determined, and party-based.

Whether these models were ever more than ideal-types is not the topic of this book. But since the mid-1960s they have increasingly been recognized as inaccurate. The triggering event was the observation of growing electoral volatility. In a famous article, Pedersen pointed out a significant increase in electoral volatility in several European countries since the mid-1960s (Pedersen 1979). Though there has been some controversy over whether volatility is indeed on the rise everywhere, it is now widely accepted that, overall, voters are less loyal to a single party than once they were (Mair 2005, 2013: 29–34). As Figure 1.1 shows, electoral volatility across Europe’s sixteen long-standing democracies has been rising continuously, decade by decade, since the 1950s.

Stemming from this observation, a vast literature on electoral dealignment has developed since the 1980s (e.g., Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck 1984; McAllister and Rose 1986; Franklin, Mackie, and Valen 1992; Evans 1999; van der Brug et al. 2009). These studies show at the individual level that, since the late 1970s and early 1980s, partisan loyalties have declined and party identification has lost importance in voters’ decisions on election day (Crewe and Denver 1985; Schmitt and Holmberg 1995; Dalton 2000; Fiorina 2002;

Webb 2002). The consequence is growing importance for new factors driving voting behaviour—and the plural is important here, as no single new model has emerged. Rather, a multiplicity of elements have been shown to intervene in voters' minds, including candidates, issues, group identity, strategy, the state of the economy, and government performance (e.g., Miller and Shanks 1996; Lewis-Beck and Paldam 2000; Rose 2000). Concomitantly, most parties in most countries have lost members (van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke 2011), and the structural links that some parties, especially social democratic ones, had with social organizations such as trade unions have weakened.

A related phenomenon is often said to be growing scepticism among the public towards politics. Public support for politics may have various objects. Easton famously distinguishes three levels: the political community, the regime, and political authorities (Easton 1965). On the first and second levels, there is no clear evidence of decline: support for the national community and for democracy as such is not generally falling (Klingemann 1999; Dalton 2008: 248–50). But many scholars have argued that we may observe diminishing support for particular representative institutions, especially for political parties (Dalton 2004; Dalton and Weldon 2005). The evidence is clear in the US (Wattenberg 1998; Dalton 2013). In Europe, there is more debate, as support for political institutions varies from country to country and survey to survey (Marien 2011; Norris 2011a: 57–82). But falling support for political parties and calls for a reduced role for political parties in the functioning of democracy seem to be widely present. Analysing a range of survey questions across a range of countries, both Dalton and Weldon (2005) and Webb (2002) show high and generally rising levels of anti-party sentiment. Citizens are calling for a reduced role of political parties in the functioning of democracy.

These transformations—growing electoral volatility, electoral dealignment, declining parties, and falling public support for parties—have triggered debates and research among political scientists on what new patterns could emerge and define democratic politics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Among the various paths explored, one that has gained attention is the idea of a personalization of politics. The assumption is that individual politicians become more prominent as political parties and other collective organizations and identities decline.

1.2 THE PERSONALIZATION OF POLITICS: MULTIFACETED CONCEPT, DEBATED REALITY

Having outlined the basis on which studies of personalization have emerged, our next task is to identify what is being discussed when the concept of

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‘personalization’ is mobilized in political science research. Much clarification is required. Reading through the literature on the topic, two things quickly appear. First, personalization can mean very different things to different authors. As van Holsteyn and Andeweg (2010: 628) note, ‘There is confusion about the concept of personalization.’ What sphere of politics is being personalized and which politicians are said to have gained importance varies greatly. Second, a debate has emerged in recent years as to whether the personalization hypothesis is really supported empirically.

The first thing to clarify is who the actors of personalization are. Karvonen defines personalization as ‘the notion that individual political actors have become more prominent at the expense of parties and collective identities’ (Karvonen 2010: 4). But these actors can be either political leaders or politicians in general. Thus, in studies of the personalization of voting behaviour, some analysts examine the degree to which perceptions of party leaders motivate voting decisions (Clarke et al. 2004; Clarke, Kornberg, and Scotto 2009; Aarts et al. 2011; Bittner 2011; Costa Lobo, and Curtice 2015), while a few others look at the impact of local politicians (Norton and Wood 1990; Caprara 2007; Marsh 2007; Mattes and Milazzo 2014). Similarly, in studies of personalization in media coverage of politics, some focus on coverage of party leaders (Mughan 2000; Langer 2007), others on coverage of all candidates (van Aelst et al. 2008). Theorizing this distinction, Andeweg and van Holsteyn (2011) refer to first-order (leader) versus second-order (candidate) personalization, while Balmas and her colleagues differentiate between centralized and decentralized personalization: ‘Centralized personalization implies that power flows upwards from the group (e.g. political party, cabinet) to a single leader (e.g. party leader, prime minister, president)’; ‘Decentralized personalization means that power flows downwards from the group to individual politicians who are not party or executive leaders (e.g. candidates, members of parliament, ministers)’ (Balmas et al. 2014: 37). In studies of media personalization, van Aelst and his colleagues distinguish between generalized personalization, affecting all politicians, and concentrated personalization that only concerns political leaders (van Aelst et al. 2012).

The second element of diversity within the existing literature concerns what sphere of politics is being personalized. Most attention is given to three spheres: (1) parties and government; (2) elections; and (3) the media. The first and third of these lie somewhat beyond our concerns here, so we treat them briefly.

With regard to the first sphere, Poguntke and Webb (2005), building on work by Foley (2000) and others, analyse what they call the ‘presidentialization’ of parliamentary democracies: the increasing empowerment of leaders both in government and in political parties. The traditional intermediary structures of political parties, such as delegate conventions, constituency party organizations, and parliamentary party groups have lost power and

influence. Leaders now steer their parties with more autonomy than some decades ago, an outcome that has often been achieved by empowering disorganized rank-and-file party members over organized mid-level elites (Katz and Mair 1995: 20–1; Hazan and Rahat 2010; Cross and Katz 2013; Pilet and Cross 2014). Blondel and Thiébault (2009) compare the growing power of political leaders in wide-ranging contexts and draw conclusions almost identical to those of Poguntke and Webb.

Regarding the third sphere—the media—television broadcasting has, by definition, increased the visibility of individual politicians: it is necessary to put a face to the party message when it appears on screen, whereas non-personalized messages were much easier to convey in the written press (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). Many studies code references made to parties and to individual politicians in the media during electoral and between election campaigns (Oegema and Kleinnijenhuis 2000). Others focus on the privatization of politics—‘the shifting boundaries between the public and the private’ (van Aelst et al. 2012: 205)—and the fact that the media now report not only politicians’ political activities, but also their private lives (Langer 2007; Reinemann and Wilke 2007).

Our own concerns focus on the second sphere of politics in which personalization is said to be taking place: the dynamics of elections. As explained, the factors that were traditionally said to drive voting have gradually lost significance. Among the new factors posited to have taken their place, the personal qualities of leaders and candidates have been important.

The founding studies of the Columbia School in the 1950s examined the effect of candidates and their campaigns in presidential elections in the United States (Berelson et al. 1954), but concluded that, compared to structural factors such as social class or religion, personalities had a limited impact. The role of personality was said to be even more limited in non-presidential systems (Butler and Stokes 1969). By the 1980s, however, analysis of the role of politicians in voting behaviour was rising again. Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina’s *The Personal Vote* (1987) analysed patterns in both the United States and the United Kingdom, while Wattenberg’s *The Rise of Candidate-Centred Politics* (1991) focused on the former, and several other studies (Norton and Wood 1990; Norris, Vallance, and Lovenduski 1992; Wood and Norton 1992) examined the latter. Following these examples, many scholars have paid growing attention to the weight of candidates’ personalities on the vote. Some look at the impact of party leaders (Kaase 1994; Clarke et al. 2004; Curtice and Holmberg 2005; Clarke, Kornberg, and Scotto 2009), others at candidates in general (Marsh 2007; Garzia 2012).

As Balmas and colleagues (2014: 38) observe, personalization may, in any of these spheres, involve change at the level of institutions as well as behaviours. Examples include the direct election of the prime minister (Maddens and Fiers 2004)—as was briefly used in Israel and has been indirectly

implemented in Italy since 2005—and of local mayors (Magre and Bertrana 2007). The personalization of electoral systems—our focus here—clearly belongs to this category.

The final aspect of the debates over the personalization of politics that deserves attention concerns the strength of the empirical evidence that such personalization is in fact happening. Most scholars initially agreed that the trend was clear and indisputable. For Hayes and McAllister (1997: 3), for example, it was clear that ‘election outcomes are now, more than any time in the past, determined by voters’ assessments of party leaders’. More recently, however, several authors have been more sceptical. Most notably, Karvonen reviews the available evidence and concludes that it ‘does not support the notion that there has been a clear and pervasive trend towards personalization among parliamentary democracies’ (Karvonen 2010: 101).

Similar scepticism may be found in each of the spheres of politics just outlined. Aarts, Blais and Schmitt (2011) find that the growth in party leaders’ influence over voting has been, first, rather limited and, second, not universal. While Garzia (2012: 182) finds that ‘the electoral effect of leader evaluations appears much stronger than is often observed’, Holmberg and Oscarsson (2011) conclude that the effect of leaders on the vote is marginal. Contradictory findings are also found in studies of personalization in the media (van Aelst et al. 2012). While McAllister (2007) finds increasing media attention given to candidates in France, Austria, the US, and the UK, Kriesi (2012), looking at coverage of electoral campaigns in six European countries (Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) between 1972 and 2007, finds evidence of growing attention for individual politicians only in the Netherlands. In none of its facets can we claim without hesitation that the personalization thesis is verified; equally, in none can it be rejected. Clearly, this field of study deserves further empirical investigation.

1.3 THE PERSONALIZATION OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Personalization may affect political institutions as well as political behaviours, and one such institution is the electoral system. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, Shugart (2001b: 25) delineates two key dimensions of variation among electoral systems: the inter-party dimension, which relates to the distribution of seats across parties, and the intra-party dimension, concerning the distribution of seats among candidates within parties. Political science has focused overwhelmingly on the first of these dimensions: indeed, the effect of the electoral system upon the number of parties is one of the most

intensively researched issues in political science (e.g., Duverger 1954; Rae 1967; Riker 1982; Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Lijphart 1994; Cox 1997; Blais and Massicotte 2002; Clark and Golder 2006).

Attention to the second dimension has been much more limited, but it has nevertheless been a theme throughout the history of electoral system studies. In the nineteenth century, Thomas Hare set out an early form of what later came to be known as the single transferable vote (STV) electoral system, and argued it would promote ‘personal representation’ as opposed to the dominance of two monolithic party blocs (Hare 1873 [1859]: xxxvi). Though the primary focus of Hoag and Hallett’s classic inter-war study of electoral systems was on proportionality, they also devoted attention to choice among candidates. Indeed, they rejected list-based forms of proportional representation (PR) on this basis:

Though in every way superior to the old majority methods, the list systems of proportional representation are all defective in one important particular. Though they give each political element the right number of representatives, they do not necessarily elect the right persons. (Hoag and Hallett 1926: 72)

Writing just a few years later, Herman Finer argued against all forms of PR, partly because they generated too many parties, but also because multi-member districts, in his view, necessarily gave excessive power to party leaders (Finer 1932: 646, 917–25). In the post-war era, Lakeman and Lambert (1955: 24) identified ‘the election of representatives whose personal qualities best fit them for the function of government’ as one of the four criteria by which any electoral system should be judged.

Among purely scholarly accounts, the first that we are aware of to have given detailed consideration to the intra-party dimension is Richard Katz’s *A Theory of Parties and Electoral Systems*. Katz argued that the degree to which an election focused on candidates rather than parties was determined in part by the degree of intra-party choice available to voters and in part by the number of seats in each district (the district magnitude) (Katz 1980: 20, 30–34). He subsequently pursued this line of research further (Katz 1985). Nevertheless, he was right to observe that: ‘The tendency to think of election results in purely partisan terms has meant that very little research has been done on questions relating to intraparty preference voting’ (Katz 1985: 87).

1985 was, indeed, something of a red-letter year for studies of the personal dimension of electoral systems, with two further valuable studies also published (Bogdanor 1985; Marsh 1985). Since then, a small trickle of books and articles has continued (e.g., Bowler and Farrell 1993; Wessels 1999; Colomer 2011). Most famous is Carey and Shugart’s model of the influence of electoral rules on candidates’ incentives to cultivate their personal reputation. These authors posited that candidates have two resources to pursue election—their

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party's reputation and their personal reputation—and that the relative weight given to these depends on the electoral system (Carey and Shugart 1995). They also laid out a way of categorizing the personalization of electoral systems, which we discuss further in Chapter 2.

All of these works adopt, in the language of Balmas and colleagues (2014), a decentralized conception of personalization: they focus on whether electoral institutions give independence to individual candidates. Given that this is the tradition of research upon which we build, this is the focus that we adopt here too.

Despite the growing body of work that examines the personalization of electoral systems in this sense, the only study we are aware of that seeks systematically to examine whether there is any cross-national trend towards greater personalization of electoral systems is contained within Karvonen's more general study of the personalization of politics (Karvonen 2010: 35–40). Karvonen finds mixed evidence: he finds that some reforms have increased personalization while others have reduced it. He suggests the evidence fits Shugart's suggestion (Shugart 2001b) that there is not a general trend towards greater personalization, but rather a tendency to converge on the middle ground of the inter-party spectrum: 'Several party-centred systems have become somewhat more candidate-centred, while some candidate-centred systems have become more party-centred' (Karvonen 2010: 40). But he also emphasizes that, given limited evidence, this must 'remain a cautious conclusion' (Karvonen 2010: 40).

While Karvonen's analysis is useful, we believe that the matter of electoral system personalization deserves further attention. First, the degree of personalization in the electoral system matters: it shapes the fundamental democratic choices that are available to voters, and it may influence how politicians behave and how citizens and politicians relate to each other. Whether the degree of personalization is changing, what determines such changes, and what effects these changes have are, therefore, all issues that matter too.

Second, the changes described in section 1.1 with regard to how citizens relate to the world of politics and, particularly, to political parties suggest an expectation that the popular attractiveness of more personalized electoral institutions should have increased. While most voters in the past may have had a clear party identification that they were content to express at the ballot box, that is much less true today. A growing preference for being able to choose among individual candidates might therefore be expected.

Third, popular attitudes towards electoral institutions can be expected to influence the incidence and direction of electoral reforms. A growing public preference for choice among candidates should therefore translate into influence over the electoral institutions that are chosen. This point deserves a little more attention before we move on.

Early comparative work on electoral system choice typically focused heavily on politicians: politicians were assumed to control the electoral system; and

electoral reform would occur only if sufficiently many politicians found change to be in their power-seeking interests (e.g., Benoit 2004; Colomer 2004a, 2005). From this perspective, public disengagement from political parties would not be expected to have much impact on the politics of electoral reform: public attitudes, on this account, are just not relevant to outcomes.

As research into electoral reform has developed, however, the role of other actors has increasingly been recognized (e.g., Katz 2005, 2011; Rahat 2008; Renwick 2010, 2011a; Norris 2011b). Quintal recognized long ago (Quintal 1970: 755) that potential electoral reformers must attend to ‘the costs of voter affect’: that enacting reforms that voters dislike or failing to pursue reforms that voters demand could cost politicians support and hence power. This idea, long largely ignored, was revived in Reed and Thies’s distinction (2001) between ‘outcome-contingent’ and ‘act-contingent’ aspects of decision-making. Politicians focused on outcome-contingent considerations assess which electoral rules will best translate their existing levels of popular support into power. Politicians taking account of act-contingent factors, by contrast, consider how their actions in respect of electoral reform may affect their levels of support. They may fear electoral punishment if they enact reforms that the public oppose or if they fail to enact reforms that the public demand; and they may hope for electoral reward if they do the opposite.

This implies that, even if politicians do largely maintain control over the electoral system, they must attend to public opinion when thinking about reform. As Dalton (2004: 181) puts it, ‘a growing number of contemporary citizens are disenchanted with the political parties, and these sentiments are generating support for reforms to improve the system of representative democracy. This creates fertile ground for elites and other political actors to suggest institutional reform and experimentation.’ Existing evidence suggests that, indeed, the prevalence of reforms prompted at least in part by public disapproval or disengagement has been rising (Renwick 2011a; Bedock 2014).

That is not to say, of course, that the role of politicians in electoral reform can be ignored. Power-seeking politicians continue, at times, to enact reforms without regard to public opinion, and, even where public opinion does matter, politicians are likely to do all they can to limit the extent of the reforms that are passed. This must shape our expectations for the sorts of trends that we will observe across Parts I and II of this book.

1.4 EXPECTATIONS

In light of the preceding discussion, we have three core expectations for real-world patterns in the personalization of electoral systems. First, we expect to

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see the emergence of a trend towards greater personalization of European electoral systems over recent decades. The conditions that we posit as having underlain this trend—the decline in traditional cleavages and in voters’ attachment to political parties—began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s and have continued to intensify since then (Webb et al. 2002). We therefore expect electoral systems to follow a similar trajectory.

As noted in section 1.3, an alternative to this hypothesis is offered by Shugart (2001b). According to what we shall refer to as the ‘Shugart hypothesis’, there is no general trend towards greater personalization. Rather, any electoral system that is extreme—on either the inter- or the intra-party dimension—tends to generate problems that lead to reform, creating a tendency towards convergence on more moderate systems. On this logic, while party-centric systems are likely to become more personalized, equally, highly candidate-centric systems are likely to become less so. Our own hypothesis is that this understates the strength of the mechanisms unleashed by the turn away from political parties.

Second, we expect the processes underlying personalizing reforms to reflect the pressure of public disengagement from and disillusionment with traditional partisan politics. As we noted in section 1.3, it is now widely acknowledged that public opinion, as well as the interests of politicians, can influence processes of electoral system change and continuity. Indeed, as one of us has argued elsewhere (Renwick 2011a), we can conceive of a continuum of processes, from those that are controlled entirely by members of the public and civil society (mass imposition) to those controlled entirely by politicians (elite imposition). The mass imposition end of this continuum is, in truth, only a theoretical possibility: politicians are always involved to some degree. But we need to allow for three intermediate steps along the continuum.

First, elite–mass interaction may occur where strong impetus for electoral reform comes from the public. A severe scandal or crisis of governance may lead to a loss of faith in existing political institutions. If supporters of electoral reform manage to persuade large swathes of the public that the existing electoral arrangements are, at least in part, to blame for the problem, and that changing these arrangements would help tackle the problem, then the politicians in power can be forced, for act-contingent reasons, to accept reform, even if they do not want it. Such strong public focus on the electoral system is rare, but it underlay three major electoral reforms in long-established democracies in the 1990s: in Italy, Japan, and New Zealand (Renwick 2010).

A second form of elite–mass interaction involves more passive popular impetus. Here, there may be no specific public attention given to the electoral system, but public disaffection with the state of politics and with the established political elite may cause politicians to seek out possible responses. Whether in the hope of genuinely re-engaging voters with politics and restoring their own legitimacy and popularity, or simply in order to look like they

understand voters' frustrations and are trying to do something about these, politicians may respond to public disaffection by promising reforms, including electoral reforms. In such cases, the politicians retain much more control over what the reforms are, but the fact that reform occurs is attributable to the state of public opinion.

A final kind of reform process occurs where politicians initiate the reform, but public opinion constrains the sorts of reform that can be enacted. The politicians in power may calculate that a different electoral system from the status quo would maximally promote their interests. But if politicians fear voters would punish such self-interested behaviour at the ballot box, they may choose, on act-contingent grounds, to tone down the reforms or avoid change altogether.

Given that the background condition generating our expectation of electoral system personalization is a general and gradual growth in disillusionment with politics and disengagement from political parties, we expect the trend towards personalization to be underpinned primarily by the second and third mechanisms: we expect politicians to offer limited personalizing reforms as a way of mollifying public opinion; and we expect it to be increasingly difficult for politicians to get away with reforms that push in the opposite direction and take power out of voters' hands. Specific scandals may occasionally provoke reforms of the first type as well, but these are likely to remain rare.

Stemming from our expectations regarding process, our third and final expectation relates to the scale and impact of the reforms that are enacted. On the one hand, if personalizing reforms are introduced simply to create the impression that politicians are responding to popular disaffection, those reforms are likely to be small in scale and have little impact on election outcomes and the distribution of power between voters and party elites. On the other hand, if politicians genuinely want to tackle the causes of popular disaffection and restore their own standing in public regard, they may recognize that minor reforms, by raising expectations that are subsequently dashed, could be counterproductive, and therefore pursue a more radical path. Given the short-termism of politics and the natural tendency of politicians to treat changes to the rules through which they win election with caution, we expect reforms of the former type to predominate over the latter. Thus, we expect that much of any trend towards personalization will be more smoke than fire. Nevertheless, whether apparent tinkering with details can generate deep effects over the longer term is an important issue that deserves careful attention.

1.5 OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The book is organized into three parts. Part I focuses on whether the trend towards greater personalization of the electoral system that we predict has in

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fact taken place. We begin this analysis in Chapter 2, by defining more precisely what exactly we mean by electoral system personalization and by setting out in detail our operationalization of this concept. Then, in Chapter 3, we present findings from our detailed survey of electoral system change in Europe between 1945 and 2009. This shows a clear trend towards greater personalization of electoral institutions that may have begun in the late 1980s and that gathered pace considerably in the 1990s and 2000s. This part of the book therefore confirms our first expectation.

Part II then turns to the question of why electoral system personalization has occurred. We have posited that such personalization is rooted in changing modes of public engagement with politics, mediated by politicians who are concerned to advance their own electoral advantage and public prestige. Chapter 4 works this proposition up into specific hypotheses and then tests these hypotheses through quantitative analysis. Chapters 5 to 8 then add depth through detailed case-based process tracing. Chapter 5 sets the scene by examining the sources of variation among Europe's original democratic electoral systems, chosen in the early twentieth century and during subsequent waves of democratization. Chapter 6 looks at reforms to existing electoral institutions between 1945 and 1989, examining the proposition that, in this early period, parties and calculations of inter-party advantage dominated. Chapters 7 and 8 then assess the hypothesis that the politics of electoral reform has changed since the 1980s. We find that, indeed, reform processes today are much more likely to attend to public attitudes towards politics and a perceived public desire for greater influence over the candidates elected. Our expectations regarding the sources of growing electoral system personalization are thus confirmed.

Finally, Part III analyses the effects of these reforms: Have they actually made any difference to political behaviours and outcomes? Chapter 9 focuses on possible immediate effects on elections themselves: on the degree to which voters express candidate preferences and the degree to which these preferences determine election outcomes. Chapter 10 then considers wider effects. Many reforms have been introduced in the apparent hope that they will revive voters' engagement with and perceptions of politics, so we focus on whether reforms have affected electoral participation and satisfaction with democracy. It is sometimes also said that reforms will have desirable intermediate effects—for example, on the composition of legislatures and the behaviour of politicians. Such posited effects are difficult to measure, but we examine evidence on one: whether greater personalization of the electoral rules has opened up political recruitment beyond those favoured by traditional party channels. We find that many reforms have had substantial immediate effects upon elections. But we find no evidence of deeper effects on the functioning of democracy.

Widespread personalization of electoral rules has thus occurred. Furthermore, the evidence we present suggests that this process is ongoing. It is

strongly rooted in public disengagement from traditional party politics. On the other hand, the depth of the change—at least so far—is debatable. We explore in the Conclusion what these findings mean for the nature of these reforms and for the changing character of democratic politics more broadly.