Social Divisions, Political Sophistication, and Political Equality in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

Although there are various conceptualizations of political sophistication and political knowledge extant in the literature, almost all of the indicators of these concepts show clear correlations with education. Further, education usually correlates with social stratification. Thus, the political presentation of the socially and/or economically disadvantaged may be hampered to the degree that political knowledge and political sophistication distorts political choices and attitudes. On the other hand, the political heuristics literature has often stressed the role of the political environment for making heuristics useful or available at all. For this reason, the same gradient in political knowledge and political sophistication in a democracy's population need not always lead to the same discrepancy in the quality of political representation of different social classes.

This paper explores the connection between social inequality, political sophistication and knowledge, and political attitudes in a comparative perspective. It those aspects of social and political systems that facilitate the use of political cues — how party organizations, the structure of party competition, the the degree of organization of the population by trades unions, and the structure of the educational system can help alleviating the averse effects of knowledge deficiencies of certain parts of the population and thus promote political equality. The empirical analyses of the paper show that the system of government and individual trade union membership impinge on the level and the evenness of the distribution of practical aspects of political sophistication, namely of naming political issues, locating parties political positions, and knowing more or less basic political facts.

1 Introduction: The Problem of Political Inequality

Political equality and *enlightened understanding* are, according to Dahl (1998), two of the essential ingredients of a system of government that deserves to be called a democracy. Nevertheless, it is probably one of the best-established facts in political science that the populations even of modern-day democracies seem to fall short from the ideal of enlightened understanding. The notation of this fact dates back to the classical election studies of the "Columbia School" where Berelson et al. state that

> The democratic citizen is expected to be well informed about affairs. He is supposed to know what the issues are, what their history is, what the relevant facts are, what alternatives are proposed, what the party stands for, what the likely consequences are. By such standards the voter falls short. (Berelson *et al.* 1954: 308)

Yet this is not a fact of a somewhat distant past, but rather still in 2000 Philip E. Converse states that "that where political information is concerned, the mean level is very low but the variance is very high" (Converse 2000: 331). That low levels of political information and understanding are still prevalent and are more than a mere curiosity has recently shown in a *Perspective on Politics* article by Bartels, in which he shows that most middle class American citizens agree to tax cuts of the Bush administration for reasons of economic self-interest — although these tax-cuts arguably favor wealthy citizens and are (at least indirectly) disadvantageous for the middle class and although many citizens think that economic inequality has increased and that this is a bad thing (Bartels 2005).

Scholars such as Converse himself have tried to reconcile the fact of low levels of political sophistication and knowledge in the populace with the obvious viability of modern democracies by the "miracle of aggregation that helps transmute a sow's ear into a silk purse" (Converse 1990: 383): Since errors in political judgment made because of a lack in political sophistication are random, these errors cancel out if one moves from the level of the individual to the level of the population and looks at population aggregates and averages of political judgments and opinions — a line of thought that seems to be warranted by the Condorcet-Jury Theorem (Boland 1989). Along these lines e.g. Page and Shapiro have tried to show that, at least at collective level, public opinion is "rational"

(Page and Shapiro 1992). Thus, electoral results and the reactions of governments to the results of opinion polls may very well serve to assure an effective representation of an enlightened public (cf. Wlezien 1995; Erikson *et al.* 2002), and responsiveness of governments to public opinion as measured by polls may be used as a yardstick of the "degree of democracy" in a respective country (Soroka and Wlezien 2008).

Yet there is considerable evidence that there is no miracle of aggregation: Errors in political judgment do not cancel out by aggregation since they are not simply random, they are biased in specific ways. For example, Althaus (2003) has shown that there are systematic differences between informed and uninformed opinions and that aggregated opinions are consequently "lopsided" relative to fully informed opinions. Caplan (2007) even goes as far as to suggest the reduction of democratic government relative to the market, justifying this reductin by marked differences between opinions about economic policy given by random samples of citizens in polls and in surveys of economics PhDs. While in Caplan's perspective the public seems to be in economic matters more interventionist than advisable from economic theory, in Bartels' view the American public at large seem to be less interventionist than is good for the average citizen: they favor tax-cuts that have hardly an effect on their pocket books but result in reductions of government services provided for them (Bartels 2005).

Worse yet, errors in political judgements caused by information deficiencies are not just biased. Rather, information deficiencies themselves may be *caused* by certain more or less misguided preconceptions: When it comes e.g. to assessing the amount of welfare payments, many respondents in an opinion survey reported by Kuklinski *et al.* (2000) are the more confident in their assessments the more they overestimate the amount of welfare payments, where this overestimation is higher the more opposed they are to welfare payments. While these results as such do not do not prove that preconceptions impinge on such assessments, this is at least suggested by Zaller's RAS model of opinion formation (Zaller 1992): Strong attitudes such as about welfare payments may work as a filter of information received and accepted by citizens. Information not in line with strongly felt attitudes are discarded whereas information in accordance with such attitudes

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are selectively searched for and accepted for "bolstering" such attitudes. Kuklinski et al. also argue that heuristics are not as innocent as supposed by those who see them as a means to overcome information deficiencies (Popkin 1991; Sniderman *et al.* 1991): Heuristics may be used to infer from strongly held attitudes to facts, or rather pseudo-facts, that agree to these attitudes.

But there are even more reasons why the miracle of aggregation does not work. Even in modern-day democracies populations are not only heterogeneous with respect to levels of information but also with respect to their social and economic situation. Further, political sophistication usually is strongly correlated with the level of education and the level of education is strongly correlated with the chance to have a qualified and well-paid job and thus with economic life-chances. If the economic and social situation of individuals is relevant for the political judgments they would make if they had full information, then systematic distortions of political judgments are not only a problem for the "rationality" of collective political opinion, but also a problem for the political representation of a socially and economically heterogeneous population. Simply put, those socially and economically disadvantaged are also disadvantaged in terms of political sophistication. By its relation to social inequality, the lack of "enlightened understanding" translates into a problem of political inequality.

2   Political Sophistication and Political Equality

Although they may or may not empirically correlated, it is useful from an analytical perspective to distinguish between the following aspects or dimensions of political sophistication:

- *Political conceptualization* refers to the ability to understand general political (including ideological) conference and to make inferences from these concepts, in conjunction with political facts, to political opinions, judgments, and choices, for example in the style of *modus ponens* or of other types of syllogisms. Converse's *constraint* of belief systems is obviously related to political conceptualization: If an individual

uses and understands a set of general political concepts she or he will come to the same derived or deduced opinions, judgments, and choices, provided that she or he takes into account the same pieces of factual information. There are, however, serious problems connected with measuring constraint and conceptualization in terms of correlations between political opinions over time or across political domains (Luskin 1987). Nevertheless, while strong correlations between political opinions may not necessarily indicate proper understanding of political concepts, measures of the use and understanding of political/ideological concepts as endorsed by Luskin and already introduced by Converse clearly tap this dimension of political sophistication. Since political conceptualization clearly is an intellectual capacity, it is most likely to show a very strong correlation with the level of education.

- *Factual knowledge about politics* is political knowledge in the sense of Delli Carpini and Keeter, defined as "the range of factual information about politics stored in long-term memory" (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996: 294). It seems that measurement of this dimension of political knowledge is quite straightforward: Just find out whether citizens can answer a question about political facts correctly or not. Apart from most general political facts, like what are the main political institutions of the respective country, who is the head of government, what are the powers associated with specific offices, etc. political knowledge may not be uni-dimensional: First, there are policy-specific facts of which only some of several more or less overlapping "issue publics" (Converse 1964) are aware of, second, reception of factual information may be very selective, if it is governed by directional rather than accuracy goals (Lodge and Taber 2000) — as demonstrated, for example, by the results of Kuklinski *et al.* (2000) and Redlawsk (2002). That notwithstanding, factual political knowledge can be expected to be correlated with the attention to news media but also with individuals' capacity to store knowledge in memory. But since retentiveness is also a precondition of success in the educational system, one may expect that factual political knowledge shows also a correlation with education.

- *Practical political knowledge* refers to individuals capacity to make those choices in the realm of politics that increase their own well-being broadly defined. That is, dependent on the individuals' current priorities, this may mean that their economic welfare is increased, but it mean also that values that they cherish are realized. Understood in such a broad sense practical political knowledge may also relevant for political choices not obviously directed at own's pocket book but, for example, for political choices that are related to one's religious beliefs or to ideals like liberty and equality as ethical principles. Practical political knowledge in this sense is quite similar to the concept of political knowledge put forward by Lupia and McCubbins (1998). They delineate knowledge in the sense of the ability to accurately assess the consequences of political choices from raw "information as data". They even reserve the term "knowledge" for this kind of political political knowledge. However, by focusing on the ability to assess the consequences of political choices they narrow the concept of practical political choices down to *instrumental* political choices and thus exclude practical political knowledge pertinent "value-rational" choices, that is, choices that are not oriented on possible consequences of choice options but on certain intrinsic qualities of choice options. One may argue wether there really are purely "value-rational" choices that are made without reference to the consequences of the choice. But that notwithstanding, the de-emphasis of the anticipation of consequences fits better to their claim that citizens need not be "ambulatory encyclopedias" in order to make reasonable political choices, and to the suggestion that "information as data" are neither necessary nor sufficient for such choices. Practical political knowledge maybe is best exemplified by *voting correctly* (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 1997).

A high level of political conceptualization in conjunction with a thorough knowledge of relevant political facts may be a sufficient condition for making reasonable political choices. But this is not a necessary condition. Reasonable choices may also rest, given that the appropriate circumstances are met, on heuristics, schemata, and cues. More so, with the high complexity of the subject matter of modern politics, it is highly unlikely, that those

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sufficient conditions are ever met. Politics has become or has always been characterized by a sort of cognitive division of labour. Even political leaders and heads of government cannot claim expertise on all of the matters they have to decide upon. As consequence, cognitive short-cuts, whether they come in the guise of heuristics, schemata, or cues, are ubiquitous. While Popkin (1991) stresses the value of cognitive short-cuts as a device to overcome informational deficiencies, Sniderman *et al.* (1991) state that it is not the use or non-use of cognitive short-cuts that distinguishes political sophisticates from political novices, but the number and types of heuristics they have at their disposal. Given recent evidence about the use of heuristics (Lau and Redlawsk 2001), one will have to add that it is also the accuracy of the use of heuristics that distinguishes sophisticates from novices: Inaccurate heuristics may lead citizens astray, as will extensive information searches if they lack the ability to direct their search and to weigh and process the information found.

The assumption that levels of political conceptualization and of levels of factual political knowledge are, due to their connection with levels of education, quite uneven distributed among a county's population gives only very little reason to doubt. Further, heuristics are not a "magical bullet" that helps overcome deficiencies in conceptualization and factual knowledge. Finally, throwing information to the unsophisticated will not necessary help them in making reasonable choices. That notwithstanding, overcoming the adverse effects of a lack of conceptualization and factual knowledge seems to be essential to alleviate political inequality. In order to find out how citizens can overcome their disadvantages in terms of political sophistication, and possibly also how the right policies may help citizens in overcoming these disadvantages one will need to leave to subject matter of cognitive psychology and move to the social and institutional aspects of opinion-leadership, persuasion and cue-taking.

3   The Role of the Political Context

The concept of *opinion leadership* was first introduced into the research on the formation of political opinions by Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee's seminal study "Voting" (Berelson

et al. 1954: 308). They used the concept of opinion leadership to describe and explain the phenomenon that the political homogeneity of social groups distinguished by properties like occupational status and religious denomination became politically the more homogeneous the nearer they approached a presidential election in time. This homogeneity was not caused by an amorphous "group pressure", but rather by a network of political communications. Typically, voters undecided about their candidate choice would, when confronted with an increasing inflow of campaign information, turn to those who they considered as politically more knowledgeable than themselves and would adopt their suggestions. These opinion leaders, however, usually would not just come to these suggestions as isolated exponents of expertise. but rather would themselves, in turn, seek advice from others that they considered as even more politically expedient than themselves. Thus Berelson *et al.* (1954) suggest that "there must be unending circuits of leadership relationships running through the community, like a nerve system through the body" (Berelson *et al.* 1954: 109).

Downs later interpreted such orientation of political choices at the suggestions of opinion leaders as one of the mechanisms that voters may use to reduce information costs, that is, to come to adequate political choices without extensive and costly searches for information (Downs 1957). Building on Downs' considerations of uncertainty and information costs, Lupia and McCubbins (1998) made clear that these lead to information asymmetries not only between government and the people, but also between executive and legislative branches of government and between government executives and bureaucrats. They further argue that both successful delegation and monitoring requires learning from others, which usually involves *persuasion*. In order to be persuaded, an individual needs to perceive the persuader as both knowledgeable and trustworthy. A sufficient condition to be perceived as trustworthy is that the persuader is perceived as having common interests with the persuaded. However, the presence of common interests can be substituted by external conditions such as the possibility of verification, penalties for lying or error, or costs incurred for the persuader by the act of persuasion (Lupia and McCubbins 1998: 55). But of course, learning from others not only requires persuasion, it also requires

that persuasion is enlightening, that the information, suggestions, or cues provided are in fact conductive to choices that increase the persuaded's well-being. The conditions for enlightenment, nevertheless mirror those of persuasion: If the persuader is *in fact* knowledgeable and has common interests with the persuaded, or if there are in fact facilities for verification or penalties for lying, then conditions for enlightenment are met (Lupia and McCubbins 1998: 69). Conditions like the possibility of verification or penalties for lying typically are implemented in some institutional form, as are e.g. penalties for lying in court. In the field of politics, a free and independent press provides means for verification and the possibility that politicians who do not heed there pledges can be voted out of office provides penalties for lying. But almost equally important is the partisan nature of politics: If there are parties that develop coherent political stances over time, if they develop political "brand names" it is easier for voters to assess whether there is a link of common interests and if there are "peak associations" with coherent objectives it is easier to take cues from their endorsements of politicians and parties (Lupia and McCubbins 1998: 206,225).

As argued above, taking cues is especially important for those with lower levels of political sophistication, that is, with lower levels of political of conceptualization and factual knowledge and less many heuristics at their disposal. Given that political sophistication is correlated with education and thus with social class, it is to be expected that especially people belonging to the "blue collar" classes will have to rely on cues. This leads to the following hypotheses about political equality and political sophistication:

1. Other things being equal, in parliamentary systems the the ability of name the most important issue of an election is more evenly distributed in the citizenry than in a presidential system.

2. Other things being equal, in parliamentary systems the the ability assess the general political positions of parties is more evenly distributed in the citizenry than in a presidential system.

In comparative politics it is often assumed that a parliamentary system is associated with coherent party organizations and disciplined party factions in parliament (Hague and Harrop 2001), since the election of a government depends on these as well as the coordination between executive and legislative activities. Conversely, presidential systems exhibit weaker party organization and a higher degree of "personalization" of politics. Individual candidates can, given they have the appropriate resources, run for office as head of government, that is as, president or for office in a legislature independent from party organizations. Further, a presidential government can govern with "shifting majorities" as their position is less dependent on the confidence of the legislature. Therefore, in presidential systems, there are less incentives to form coherent "political brands" than in parliamentary systems and, consequently, the information costs for identifying the most important issues are higher for those with lower levels of political conceptualization and political factual knowledge.

While the relation between parliamentarism and the strength of party organization is a standard assumption in comparative politics the role of the electoral systems is more ambiguous. One may argue that in political systems of the "Westminster" type, which combine a parliamentary system of government with a majoritarian system for parliamentary elections, it is easier for voter to credit or blame parties in government for their actions. On the other hand, plurality systems give a stronger incentives for parties to "broaden their appeal". In these systems, the attainment of policy goals by gaining government office almost exclusively depends on gaining a large share of the votes, which may convince parties to reach out for votes beyond traditional supporters. Consequently, the content of parties' "brand names" will blur as they vie for the "median voter". Conversely, in countries with proportional list electoral systems the number of parties that find representation in parliament is likely to be higher and governments are more likely to be coalition governments (Lijphart 1999). The prospect of forming a coalition, however, means that it is neither necessary nor sufficient to gain a plurality of citizens' votes to become part of government, but rather that it depends on bargaining in the process of government. Thus parties can easier afford to retain a coherent political position.

Consequently, it is easier for voters with lower levels of political conceptualization and factual knowledge to identify what parties stand for. These considerations motivate the following two competing hypotheses:

3.a Other things being equal, in Westminster-type parliamentary systems, the ability to name the most important issue of an election is *more* evenly distributed in the citizenry than in parliamentary systems with PR electoral systems.

3.b Other things being equal, in Westminster-type parliamentary systems, the ability to name the most important issue of an election is *less* evenly distributed in the citizenry than in parliamentary systems with PR electoral systems.

4.a Other things being equal, in Westminster-type parliamentary systems, the ability to assess parties' general political positions is *more* evenly distributed in the citizenry than in parliamentary systems with PR electoral systems.

4.b Other things being equal, in Westminster-type parliamentary systems, the ability to assess parties' general political positions is *less* evenly distributed in the citizenry than in parliamentary systems with PR electoral systems.

The preceding hypothesis mainly deal with the effects of the coherence of parties' "brand names" on the sophistication aspects of political equality. But also interest organizations may play a role as cue-givers. One kind of such organizations are trade unions or their peak associations. By their very nature, they represent one side in conflicts of interests between wage workers and owners of capital. Thus political cues given by trades unions may especially persuasive because of a high degree of "clarity of interest" (Lupia and McCubbins 1998: 207) such that their endorsements of certain political candidates may even compensate for a lack of political "brand names" obtainable from parties. Such endorsements will of course find more publicity in a country with a higher degree of unionization of the workforce. This motivates the following hypothesis:

5. Other things being equal, the higher the trade union density in a given country, the more even distributed is the ability to name the most important issue in an election.

6. Other things being equal, the higher the trade union density in a given country, the more evenly distributed is the ability to to assess parties' general political positions.

Beside giving cues by endorsing or opposing specific candidates or parties, trade unions may also play another role: Union members may avail themselves to their colleagues as opinion leaders and find more opportunities for seeking the advice of more experienced and political sophisticated union members. Thus, union members may form some of the "central pathways" of the "nervous system" of opinion leadership that runs through the "body" especially of wage laborer communties (cf. Berelson *et al.* 1954: 109). This may have consequences for the ability of individuals in these communities for their ability to make reasonable political choice. They can get information more easily or they can get cues that allow them to avoid searching and processing information. This leads to the following hypotheses:

7. Other things being equal, members of trade unions are more likely to name the most important issue in an election.

8. Other things being equal, members of trade unions are more likely to to assess parties' general political positions.

9. Other things being equal, trade union members have more factual political knowledge than non-members of the same educational level.

4 Analysis

In the following, the hypotheses introduced in the preceding section are tested on the base of data from the second module of the *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems* CSES (2007). This data set combines survey data on political attitudes, political behavior, political knowledge from electoral studies with data on properties of political systems of several contemporary democracies. The second module comprises 38 countries, including Central and Eastern European new democracies and new democracies from Latin America and

Asia. The analyses conducted for this paper, however, concentrate on the 21 established democracies to make use of a most-similar-systems design (Przeworski and Teune 1970).

[Table 1 about here.]

Table 1 presents results on the ability to name an issue as the most important one for the current election. In most of the contributing survey studies, respondents were asked about what they perceived as the major topic or issue of the election in an open format. From the answers to this question recorded in the data, a binary variable was constructed for the models presented in table 1 that obtained the value 0 if respondents volunteered to admit that they did not know the answer, gave a diffuse answer or said that there was no most important issue; and 1 for a valid answer. Model 1 in table 1 is a generalized linear mixed model (Snijders and Bosker 1999; Jiang 2007) with this binary variable as response and with the main and first order interaction effects of education and the type of governmental system (presidential/mixed/parliamentary). The education variable in the CSES data set has 8 categories, ranging from "no schooling" up to "university undergraduate degree completed", however not all categories were used in all study contribution surveys. In the analyses reported in this and the next tables, this variable is treated as interval-scaled. Thus the main effect represents how the log-odds of giving a valid answer to the main issue question increases on average if to adjacent categories of this variables, e.g. if "incomplete secondary" and "secondary completed" are compared.[1] The type of a countries' system of government is determined on the way the head of government is selected. If the head of government is identical to the head of state and is elected independently from the legislature, the political system is classified as "presidential". If the head of government is a prime minister who is either elected by the legislature or depends on the legislature's confidence, the political system is classified as "parliamentary". In other cases, the political system is classified as "mixed". The political system type is treated as categorical, so the models contains coefficients that refer to the contrasts between its categories.

The main effect of education describes the unevenness of the distribution of the ability to name a main issue for the current election. The higher the (absolute) value

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[1]This variable is also centered on the category "secondary completed".

of the corresponding coefficient, the higher the degree of inequality in this respect. The main effect of the political system type compares presidential systems and mixed and parliamentary systems in terms of their consequences for that ability. The interaction effect of the education and the political system type variables then corresponds to one of the hypotheses stated at the end of the preceding section: It expresses how the political system type has an impact on the inequality with respect to the ability to name a main issue. In addition to the effects of education and of system of government, the model contains random intercept effects and random slope effects of education that vary with the identifiers of the contributed surveys. They express how the dependent variable and how the effect of education on the dependent variable, respectively, vary across contries, net of the other effects present in the models.

The estimates of the coefficients of Model 1 clearly support the first hypothesis of the previous section, the hypothesis that in parliamentary systems the ability to name the most important issue in a general election is more evenly distributed than in presidential systems: The main effect of education is statistically significant and positive, while the interaction effect of education with the contrast between parliamentary and presidential systems is statistically significant negative and of same order of magnitude as the main effect of education. Thus in parliamentary systems the effect of education is clearly smaller than in presidential systems.

While Model 1 focuses on the effect of the type of the system of government, Model 2 focuses on the type of the electoral system in countries with parliamentary or mixed system of government. It contrasts "Westminster-type" systems, where citizens exclusively vote for an individual candidate for the parliamentary seat that represents their electoral district, usually in form of a first-past-the-post system, with party-list systems, where voters cast their ballot not for individual candidates but for candidate lists presented to them by political parties. The electoral system type variable used in this model has the categories "direct election of candidates", "election via party lists" and "mixed", the latter referring to systems in which voters can simultaneously cast a ballot for an individual candidate *and* a party list. Model 2 thus corresponds to hypotheses 3.a and 3.b. Neither of

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these hypotheses is supported by the estimates for this model, however, since none of the coefficients are statistically significant.

Hypothesis 5 does not fare better than hypotheses 3.a and 3.b: If the effect of unionization and the interaction effect of unionization with education are added to Model 1, one reaches Model 3, where unionization means the proportion of a country's population that is member of trade union. Unionization here is measured by the proportion of the respondents in each contribution survey of the CSES that report to be member of a trade union or that another member of the household is a member of a trade union. On this base, hypothesis 5 does not find any support. Neither the main effect of unionization nor its interaction effect with education have a coefficient estimates of statistical significance or substantial size.

In contrast to hypotheses 3.a, 3.b, and 5, hypothesis 7 does find support by the results of the analyses. Model 4 in table 1 corresponds to this hypothesis in that it is built by adding union membership to Model 1. Union membership refers here to whether the respondents or someone from their household is a member of a trade union. It is a simple dichotomous variable whose effect compares the ability of union member respondents or respondents with a unionized member of their household with those respondents for which this is not the case. The estimate of the corresponding coefficient is statistically significant and positive, however not as large as the main effect coefficient of education. Other things being equal, union members or their household mates are more likely to be able to name a most important issue of an election than non-members. But the difference between unionized respondents to non-unionized respondents is only a quarter of the difference between two adjacent categories of educational level.

[Table 2 about here.]

The models reported in table 2 consider the ability to more or less correctly assess parties' general political positions. This ability is measured on the base of the left/right position that respondents assign to the two most successful parties in the current election. The left/right position is measured on a scale that runs from zero ("left") to ten ("right").

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The sample averages of these assessed positions then are used as a yardstick for the "correct" left/right position. If respondents locate a party on the left of the center while the "correct" position is on the right, or if they locate a party on the right of the center while the "correct" position is on the left, or if they locate a party on or near the center (the three center positions 4, 5, 6 of the scale) while the "correct" position is more to the left or to the right, or if they answer they cannot locate a party, they are categorized as giving an incorrect assessment of this party, otherwise if there is a location given for the party, they are categorized as giving a correct assessment. Since the assessments of the positions of two parties are considered for each respondent, the number of correct position assessments is a variable with binomial distribution at denominator 2.[2] Models 5 through 8 in table 2 are constructed, apart from the dependent variable, in the same way as Models 1 through 4 in table 2, so it suffices to discuss the implications of their estimates for the hypotheses introduced in the preceding section.

Model 5 corresponds to hypothesis 2 in that it contains main and interaction effects of education and system on government on the accuracy of left/right placement of parties. The hypothesis that in parliamentary systems the ability to give accurate left/right locations is more evenly distributed in the population does not find support. The coefficients representing the interaction effects of education with system of government are small and statistically insignificant. However, the system of government does have an effect on accuracy of left/right locations. The main effect coefficients are large and statically significant. The direction of the coefficients indicate that in parliamentary and mixed systems, citizens are more likely to give accurate left/right positions of the two largest parties than in presidential systems. Also, neither hypothesis 4.a and 4.b are borne out by the estimates of Model 6. The interaction effects of electoral system type with education are estimated as small and statistically insignificant. Nevertheless, the electoral system does have a statistically significant effect. Thus from the direction of the coefficient estimate for the list/direct vote contrast one may conclude that in countries with list systems

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[2]The number of parties the respondents were asked to locate varies much from survey to survey, from three (USA) to 9 (e.g. Belgium and France). To allow for "fair" comparisons across countries, only the two largest parties are considered – in the U.S. third party candidates rarely find the amount of publicity as candidates of the Democrats and the Republicans.

respondents are more likely to give accurate assessments of parties' political positions than in countries with candidate vote systems. The results for Models 7 and 8 mirror the results for Models 3 and 4 of table 1. Unionization of a country's population neither has a statistically significant main effect nor interaction effect, but the effect of respondents' union membership is statistically significant with a small but positive coefficient estimate. Yet again, the size of the coefficient is only a fraction of the size of the coefficient of the main effect of education. That is, unionization helps individuals a little bit, but not as much as education, to locate parties accurately. Thus, hypothesis 8 finds only moderate support.

[Table 3 about here.]

The testing of the hypothesis stated in the previous section is completed by the models presented in table 3, which deal with respondents' factual knowledge about politics. In almost all electoral studies that contribute to the CSES, at least three questions about various political matters were asked to the respondents. The dependent variable of the models in table 3 are the number of correct answers to these questions.[3] Consequently the dependent variable takes the form of binomial distributed count data with denominator 3. Again, the models in this table have the same structure as the models in table 1, with difference only in the dependent variable. Models 9 and 10 do not correspond to any of the hypotheses of the preceding section however, they only serve as to identify, whether political system variables and education are relevent control variables. As the estimates of model 9 and 10 show, education is clearly an important control variable for a model of political knowledge, a hardly suprising result given the considerations of the second section. Somewhat more suprising is the significant interaction effect of education with the type of system of government: Political knowledge seems to be more evenly distributed in mixed and parliamentary systems than in presidential systems. This is a result not anticipated in the theoretical considerations of preceding section, where it is was only suggested that it is easier to compensate for missing political information in parliamentary systems than in presidential systems. The type of elections used in countries with mixed

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[3]The answer "don't know" is not treated as a missing value here but as an incorrect answer.

or parliamentary systems however, does not exhibit this kind of effect, again, mirroring the results found in tables 1 and table 2. Models 11 and 12, however, have a direct bearing on hypotheses 8 and 9, where hypothesis 9 finds support while hypothesis 8 does not: In Model 11, neither a statistically main nor interaction effect of the unionization of the citizenry is found. In Model 12, the main effect of union membership obtains a statistically significant coefficient estimate, which is positive, but is smaller than the effect of education. Nevertheless, in Model 12 the effect of union membership as compared to the effect of education is larger than in Models 4 and 8. While in models 4 and 8, the coefficient of union membership amounts only to one sixth of that of education, in model 12 it is one third.

5   Conclusion

The present paper deals with the question about the relation between political sophistication and political equality. As was argued in the literature cited in the first section, the "miracle of aggregation" cannot be relied on to produce collectively rational political judgments and choices, since errors in judgment and choice caused by a lack of information are not completely at random. From the point of view of democratic theory this is aggravated by the fact that those who are in an economic or social disadvantaged situation usually also are in a relative lack of political sophistication. If democratic politics are also meant to ameliorate the lot of the disadvantaged and if political equality not only in a formal but also in substantial sense is substantial for democracy, then this is a problem. If effectively influencing politics is bound to political sophistication and if some groups of the citizenry lack it more than others, they are implicitly discriminated against.

However the discussion in the second section suggests that there may be ways for compensating for the lack of certain aspects of political sophistication, namely of political conceptualization and of factual political knowledge. Indeed, if a complete understanding of matters of political choice is the standard, almost everybody needs to compensate. Heuristics, schemata, and judgmental short-cuts in general were suggested in the literature

as means of such compensation. Yet again, as more recent literature suggests, such devices will cannot serve to do away inequalities in political sophistication. What distinguishes sophisticates from others is not the use or non-use of heuristics and schemata, but the number and accuracy of heuristics in use. Thus, cognitive psychology cannot give the answer on how to overcome political inequality caused by uneven distribution of political sophistication.

Taking political cues and suggestions from appropriate opinion leaders seems a feasible way for politically less sophisticated out of their disadvantages as argued in the third section. But the availability of trustworthy and knowledgeable opinion-leaders can be considered as a quite variable feature of social and political systems. Also, it has been argued that the degree to which heuristics work depends heavily on the political environment. Based on such considerations, the present paper examines some aspects of the political system and the social structure that may impinge on the chances of those disadvantaged in terms of political sophistication to overcome their limitations. One consistent result is that in countries with parliamentary systems the ability to identify a most important issue of an election and the knowledge of political facts is more evenly distributed than in countries with presidential systems and that in countries with parliamentary systems. Further, the accuracy of respondents' locations of parties on left/right scales is on average higher than in countries with presidential systems. Also, while the level of unionization of a country's population does not seem to have an effect, individual's membership in a trade union seems to help them in identifying political issues, in locating parties on the left/right scale and to obtain political facts.

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Table 1: Identification of an issue of a current election by respondents from 21 democracies

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Coefficients:				
(Intercept)	3.242	6.290***	4.000	3.214
	(2.978)	(1.477)	(2.865)	(2.954)
Education	0.701***	0.146	0.726***	0.699***
	(0.163)	(0.119)	(0.163)	(0.165)
Mixed/presidential	1.382		1.400	1.361
	(3.476)		(3.290)	(3.448)
Parliamentary/presidential	1.798		2.680	1.762
	(3.061)		(2.965)	(3.036)
Education × mixed/presidential	−0.302		−0.303	−0.304
	(0.182)		(0.179)	(0.185)
Education × parliamentary/presidential	−0.545**		−0.508**	−0.545**
	(0.167)		(0.171)	(0.170)
Mixed/direct		−1.557		
		(2.165)		
List/direct		−1.610		
		(1.718)		
Education × mixed/direct		0.174		
		(0.158)		
Education × list/direct		0.075		
		(0.131)		
Unionization			−0.045	
			(0.030)	
Education × unionization			−0.002	
			(0.002)	
Member of union				0.177**
				(0.058)
Components of variance:				
Var(intercept)	8.828	9.382	7.901	8.684
Var(education)	0.010	0.021	0.009	0.010
Log-likelihood	−6288.6	−6176.9	−6287.2	−5855.0
Deviance	12577.3	12353.9	12574.5	11710.1
N	33883	32818	33883	32614

Note: PQL estimates and standard errors of a generalized linear mixed model with a binary dependent variable, based on data of Module 2 of CSES. $*** = p < 0.001$, $** = p < 0.01$, $* = p < 0.05$. The CSES contributing election studies used for estimation are Australia (2004), Belgium (2003), Canada (2004), Denmark (2001), Finland (2003), France (2002), Germany (2002 telephone), Germany (2002 mail-back), Iceland (2003), Ireland (2002), Israel (2003), Italy (2006), Japan (2004), Netherlands (2002), New Zealand (2002), Norway (2001), Portugal (2002), Portugal (2005), Spain (2004), Sweden (2002), Switzerland (2003), Great Britain (2005), United States (2004). Model 2 is based only on countries that do not have presidential systems of government, that is, excluding the United States.

Table 2: Accurately left/right placements of the two most successful parties in a current election by respondents from 19 democracies

	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Coefficients:				
(Intercept)	−0.051	0.952***	−0.161	−0.062
	(0.472)	(0.168)	(0.460)	(0.466)
Education	0.388***	0.237***	0.381***	0.387***
	(0.106)	(0.048)	(0.108)	(0.109)
Mixed/presidential	1.322*		1.310*	1.332*
	(0.545)		(0.523)	(0.538)
Parliamentary/presidential	1.378**		1.239**	1.368**
	(0.486)		(0.477)	(0.479)
Education × mixed/presidential	−0.173		−0.174	−0.175
	(0.122)		(0.122)	(0.125)
Education × parliamentary/presidential	−0.149		−0.159	−0.146
	(0.109)		(0.112)	(0.112)
Mixed/direct		−0.010		
		(0.275)		
List/direct		0.613**		
		(0.200)		
Education × mixed/direct		0.027		
		(0.079)		
Education × list/direct		−0.008		
		(0.058)		
Unionization			0.006	
			(0.005)	
Education × unionization			0.000	
			(0.001)	
Member of union				0.054*
				(0.024)
Components of variance:				
Var(intercept)	0.219	0.139	0.201	0.213
Var(education)	0.010	0.011	0.010	0.011
Log-likelihood	−22891.8	−21762.7	−22890.7	−22150.8
Deviance	45783.5	43525.4	45781.5	44301.7
N	61472	59340	61472	59182

Note: PQL estimates and standard errors of a generalized linear mixed model with a binomial dependent variable (with 2 as denominator), based on data of Module 2 of CSES. $*** = p < 0.001$, $** = p < 0.01$, $* = p < 0.05$. The CSES contributing election studies used for estimation are Australia (2004), Canada (2004), Denmark (2001), Finland (2003), France (2002), Germany (2002 telephone), Germany (2002 mail-back), Iceland (2003), Ireland (2002), Israel (2003), Italy (2006), Netherlands (2002), New Zealand (2002), Norway (2001), Portugal (2002), Portugal (2005), Spain (2004), Sweden (2002), Switzerland (2003), Great Britain (2005), United States (2004). The Belgian and Israel studies do not contain data on respondents' placements of parties. Model 6 is based only on countries that do not have presidential systems of government, that is, excluding the United States.

Table 3: Ability to answer questions on political facts correctly of respondents from 19 democracies.

	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Coefficients:				
(Intercept)	−0.093	0.170	−0.175	−0.115
	(0.422)	(0.178)	(0.426)	(0.433)
Education	0.391***	0.176***	0.396***	0.391***
	(0.084)	(0.032)	(0.086)	(0.083)
Mixed/presidential	0.324		0.316	0.325
	(0.486)		(0.478)	(0.499)
Parliamentary/presidential	0.224		0.145	0.197
	(0.434)		(0.438)	(0.446)
Education × mixed/presidential	−0.190*		−0.189*	−0.195*
	(0.096)		(0.096)	(0.096)
Education × parliamentary/presidential	−0.191*		−0.186*	−0.191*
	(0.086)		(0.088)	(0.086)
Mixed/direct		−0.402		
		(0.291)		
List/direct		0.070		
		(0.215)		
Education × mixed/direct		−0.063		
		(0.051)		
Education × list/direct		0.060		
		(0.038)		
Unionization			0.005	
			(0.006)	
Education × unionization			−0.000	
			(0.001)	
Member of union				0.125***
				(0.017)
Components of variance:				
Var(intercept)	0.175	0.157	0.169	0.185
Var(education)	0.006	0.005	0.006	0.006
Log-likelihood	−22634.5	−21775.8	−22634.0	−21392.5
Deviance	45268.9	43551.7	45268.1	42784.9
N	90060	86862	90060	85890

Note: PQL estimates and standard errors of a generalized linear mixed model with a binomial dependent variable (with 3 as denominator), based on data of Module 2 of CSES. $*** = p < 0.001$, $** = p < 0.01$, $* = p < 0.05$. The CSES contributing election studies used for estimation are Australia (2004), Belgium (2003), Canada (2004), Finland (2003), France (2002), Germany (2002 telephone), Ireland (2002), Israel (2003), Italy (2006), Japan (2004), Netherlands (2002), New Zealand (2002), Norway (2001), Portugal (2002), Portugal (2005), Spain (2004), Sweden (2002), Switzerland (2003), Great Britain (2005), United States (2004). The Danisch, German mail-back, and Icelandic surveys do not contain knowledge questions as used in the models. Model 10 is based only on countries that do not have presidential systems of government.