WHY TWO PARTIES?

THIRD PARTIES, MEDIAN VOTERS, DUVERGER’S LAW, AND STRUCTURAL CONCERNS
DUVERGER’S LAW

Part societal cleavages

- Capital v. workers
- Wealthy vs. less wealthy
- owners vs. producers

- Dichotomous divisions = two main political forces
DUVERGER’S LAW

Part institutional, part behavioral

- Psychological issues
- Single Member Districts
Duverger’s Law

Psychological / behavioral:
- fear of wasted vote
- vote second choice to avoid least preferred candidate from winning
- When do people vote for “third” party in US presidential elections?
THIRD PARTIES IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

1948

- Truman (D) 49.5% 303
- Dewey (R) 45.1% 189
- Thurmond (SR) 2.4% 39
- H. Wallace (P) 2.4%
- N. Thomas (S) 0.3%

- Change 12K votes, no EC majority
THIRDPARTIESINPRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS

1968

• Nixon (R) 43.4% 301
• Humphrey (D) 42.7% 191
• G. Wallace (AIP) 13.5% 46

• Change 41K votes in 3 states no EC majority
THIRD PARTIES IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

1980

- Reagan (R) 50.7% 489
- Carter (D) 41.0% 49
- Anderson (I) 6.6%
- Clarke (L) 1.1%

- Change 41K votes in 3 states no EC majority
THIRD PARTIES IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

1992

- Clinton (D) 43.0% 370
- GHW Bush (R) 37.5% 168
- Perot (I) 18.9%
- Marou (L) 0.2%

- Change 300K votes in 10 states, Bush wins
THIRD PARTIES IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

1996

- Clinton (D) 49.2% 379
- Dole (R) 40.1% 159
- Perot (Ref) 8.4%
- Nader (G) 0.7%
- Browne (L) 0.5%
THIRD PARTIES IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

2000

- Gore (D) 48.3% 271
- GW Bush (R) 47.9% 266
- Nader (G) 2.7%
- Buchanan (Ref) 0.4%
- Browne (L) 0.4%

- 200 votes in FL, Gore wins
DUVERGER’S LAW

Psychological / behavioral:
  • When do people vote for “third” party in US presidential elections?

  • Protest voting
    • Angry at both major party choices, don’t care about contest
    • Depends on context
    • Lower order (Sec of State, Lt. Gov) contests
    • Uncontested races
DUVERGER’S LAW

Psychological / behavioral:
• When do people vote for “third” party in US presidential elections?

• Sincere voting
  • True believer in the minor party
    • Just not much of this
    • US Libertarians, Greens
Psychological / behavioral:

• When do people vote for “third” party in US presidential elections?
• Strategic voting
  • Higher when fear of wasted vote is greatest
  • Lower if state not close in Pres. Contest
• Information demands:
  • How do people know if race is close?
DUVERGER’S LAW

Psychological / behavioral:
- Strategic voting (Burden)
- Perot 1992
  - Final polls showed less support than actual votes
- Perot 1995
  - Final polls showed less support than actual votes
- Nader 2000
  - As election day grew close, support for Nader declined
    - More so in closest states
THIRD PARTIES IN US

Did Nader elect Bush in 2000?
Did Perot elect Clinton in 1996?
Did Wallace elect Nixon in 1968?

Who might run in 2016?

Vote ‘stealing’ vs. vote mobilizing
DUVERGER’S LAW: WHY ONLY 2 MAJOR PARTIES?

Institutional Forces

- Electoral Systems that facilitate 2 party systems
  Single Member Simple Plurality
    - US, UK, Canada, India
  Majoritarian
    - France, Australia (lower house)
DUVERGER’S LAW

Institutional
  • Electoral systems that facilitate multi-party systems

Proportional Representation
  • List PR, Single Transferable Vote (STV)

Mixed Systems
  • MMP (Germany, NZ) Mexico
DUVERGER’S LAW

Laws of physics vs. laws of social science
What evidence?

• Over 100 ‘democracies’ to study
• Lots of variation in electoral systems
Most studies show SMSP systems have about 2 parties
DUVERGER’S LAW

OK, so it’s not a “law”

Other factors drive number of parties in system

Are the mostly institutional, or social / cultural?
WHY TWO PARTIES

Institutional

- Electoral formula (PR vs. plurality)
  - threshold (if PR)
- Number of districts (US = 435, UK = 650)
- District Magnitude
  - number of representatives per district
- Assembly size (# D * DM)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of parties(E)</th>
<th># parties(P)</th>
<th>majorities?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plurality (7)</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majoritarian (5)</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR (D’ Hondt) (32)</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT IS LOST / GAINED?

Plurality / Majoritarian systems

- Manufactured Majorities
  - Majority party in legislature did not win majority of votes
- In US House elections
  - 1998: GOP 48.5% = 51.3 % of seats
  - 2000: GOP 47.9% = 51.2 % of seats
  - 2002: GOP 50.4% = 52.6 % of seats
  - 2004: GOP 48.7 % = 53.3% of seats
  - 2004: Dem 49.0%  = 46.4 % of seats
WHAT IS LOST/GAINED

Plurality / majoritarian

• Disproportionality
  • Votes not translated into seats proportionally
  • Bias toward winner, larger parties

• Ex: US Senate
  • 2002
    • GOP 50.2% vote = 67.6 % of seats
WHAT IS GAINED / LOST

Plurality / majoritarian

Turnout

• multi-party systems have higher turnout
• not clear why this is
  • more parties = more mobilization?
  • more choices = more interest?
  • effect limited to Europe?
WHAT IS GAINED/LOST

Fairness?

Stability of government (greater under plurality (?)

Minority representation, representation of women (?)
EXCEPTIONS TO DUVERGER’S LAW

Where doesn’t it work, and why?
Why some plurality systems w/ multiple parties?

- Canada now
- The US in the 19th Century
- The UK (sort of)
EXCEPTIONS TO DUVERGER’S LAW

Why multi-parties where they aren’t supposed to be?

Assembly size

Regionalism / Federalism
THIRD-PARTY POLITICS IN THE US

Types of ‘third’ parties

• Doctrinal
  • “small bands of dedicated souls”
  • not playing the game to win

• Prohibition Party, Right to Life Party, Libertarians (?), Greens, Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Labor, Taxpayers Party, etc.
THIRD-PARTY POLITICS IN US

Types of Third parties

• Transient
  • Parties that tap into major social cleavage that major parties miss
  • Often regional basis
  • Major parties eventually absorb the issue

• Greenbacks, People’s Party, Populists,
THIRD-PARTY POLITICS IN THE US

Types of Third Parties

- Secessionist
  - Major figure leaves established party to start new party
  - Transient, but not regional / issue based

- TR and Bull – Moose party; George Wallace and American Independent Party, John Anderson (1980)
THIRD-PARTY POLITICS IN US

Types of third parties

- ‘independent’ candidate organizations
  - Attempt at party-building by outsider candidates

THIRD-PARTY POLITICS

Barriers to Third Parties in US:

• See Duverger’s Law
• Assembly Size (US Congress tiny)
• Ballot Access Laws
  • Rules governing territory on Nov. ballot
  • USSC: states have ‘legitimate interest in state laws protecting two party system’
THIRD-PARTY POLITICS IN US

Ballot Access Laws
Set by State legislators

• Catch 22
• Minor party must post X% in statewide race to have access for their candidate in next election
  • 1% some places,
BALLOT ACCESS

US Presidential Elections
If no existing access, petition
Minor party vs. ‘independent’
Varies greatly by state

- 1000 signatures <-> 10% of votes cast in last election
- CA = 178,000 sigs; NC 60,000; GA 50,000
BALLOT ACCESS

How get on for 2016

• Start last year
• Use ballot slots of existing parties
• Run in different states under different party names (Constitution Party, Taxpayer Party, Libertarian Party)
• Run in some states as independent, some as under party line
SUPPORT FOR THIRD-PARTY POLITICS

In United States

- keep 2 party system  38%
- no parties  28%
- more parties  34%
SUPPORT FOR THIRD-PARTY POLITICS

Support PR for US Congress?

• US 44% yes, 49% no
• WA 56% yes, 40% no

Who?

• independents who ‘lean’ D or R
• not strong liberal Ds
• not strong liberal Rs
• Men
• people who distrust government
DID NADER ELECT BUSH

2000 US Presidential election
Gore won pop. vote
Lost FL, lost electoral college
Nader 90,000 votes in FL

Vote stealing vs. mobilization
Can we assume that minor party voters would have supported major party candidate?

Can we assume minor party voters would have voted?
DID NADER ELECT BUSH?

In a two-way race (2000 polls)
if 2, who?: actual vote

- Gore 47.7%
- Bush 21.9%
- Abstain 30.5%

- 42% of Buchanan voters would have abstained
PROSPECTS

For multi-party politics in US

Dim, but...

• regional divisions emerge
• major party splits
• Institutional change
  • at state or local level?
  • via ballot measures?
COMPETITION FOR VOTES

WHY THIRD PARTIES FAIL
Two mobile vendors locate on a boardwalk (selling the same stuff at the same prices).

Customers are uniformly distributed along the beach.
Customer decision rule: spatial proximity (minimize walking distance).
Customer demand is inelastic (they the same amounts regardless of how far they have to walk).

On average, customers must walk 1/8 of the beach.

Vendors are rational and strategic actors, seeking to maximize their sales.
Initially vendors are located at .25 and .75 and split the market 50-50%.
Is this an equilibrium?
Blue [Red] can invade Red’s [Blue’s] market share by “moving towards the center.”

But of course Red [Blue] can regain its previous market share by matching Blue’s “move towards the center.”

Indeed, Red can more than match Blue move and gain some of Blue’s original customers.

When is “equilibrium” achieved?
Final outcome is a “convergent equilibrium.”
Each vendor ends up with his original 50% share of customers.

*On average*, customers are worse off (must walk ¼ of the beach).
Harold Hotelling ("Stability in Competition," *Economic Journal*, March 1929) analyzed how such strategic considerations often led competing stores like Woolworth’s and Kresge to locate almost adjacent to each other in the middle of town, even though consumers would be better off if they located on the opposite sides of town so that most customers would be closer to the closest store.

In general, Hotelling complained that "buyers are confronted with an excessive sameness."
In a famous side comment, Hotelling suggested the same principle applied to political competition.

So general is this tendency that it appears in the most diverse fields of competitive activity,... In politics it is strikingly exemplified. The competition for votes between the Republican and Democratic parties does not lead to a clear drawing of issues, an adoption of two strongly contrasted positions between which the voter may choose. Instead, each party strives to make its platform as much like the other's as possible. Any radical departure would lose many votes, even though it might lead to stronger commendation of the party by some who would vote for it anyhow. Each candidate “pussyfoots,” replies ambiguously to questions, refuses to take a definite stand in any controversy for fear of losing votes. Real differences, if they ever exist, fade gradually with time though the issues may be as important as ever. The Democratic party, once opposed to protective tariffs, moves gradually to a position almost, but not quite, identical with that of the Republicans. It need have no fear of fanatical free traders, since they will still prefer it to the Republican party, and its advocacy of a continued high tariff will bring it the money and votes of some intermediate groups.
Thirty years later another economist Anthony Downs (An Economic Theory of Democracy, 1957) Hotelling’s idea quoted above and turned it into what now generally referred to as the Downsian model of two-party competition.

Suppose that voters are distributed (with respect to their first preferences or “ideal points”) over an ideological spectrum that ranges from the far left to the far right.

• Typically voters may be concentrated near the middle of the ideological road, but the Downsian model need not assume this.

Voters evaluate candidates/parties in terms of ideo-logical proximity.

Each voter votes for whichever party is closer to his or her ideal point.
Two parties are also situated on this ideological spectrum, perhaps one initially at a distinctly leftwing position and the other initially at a distinctly rightwing position.

Third parties cannot successfully enter the electoral arena,
- primarily because of Duverger’s Law; and
- maybe also because of
  - “start-up costs”;
  - lack of a familiar “brand name,” and
  - ballot access problems

Parties aim to maximize their voting support and adjust their ideological positions in order to attract more votes.
The Downsian model of two-party system competition has the following basic implication.

- A competitive two-party system entails *party convergence*, i.e., both parties tend to offer similar middle-of-the-road policies to the electorate (both as election promises and as actual policies carried out when the party holds office).

From this, several corollaries follow.

- In a competitive two-party system, voters do not greatly care which party wins the election (since they offer convergent, not divergent, policies).
- In a competitive two-party system, elections are typically close, with neither party getting much more or less than 50% of the vote.
- In a competitive two-party system, there is frequent alternation in party control of government (that is not, however, accompanied by big changes in government policy).
THE MEDIAN VOTER

There is a theoretically precise definition of “the middle of the road” to which the parties converge.

This “middle of the road” corresponds to the most preferred position of the median voter (relative to whom half the voters are more left-wing and half the voters are more rightwing).

This position is the Condorcet winner that can beat all other positions on the ideological spectrum.

• In a two-party system, all potential elections are straight fights.
• In a straight fight between the median position any position to its left [right], the median position is supported by the median voter and all voters to his or her right [left].
• Therefore a party located at the position of the median voter cannot be beaten in an election no matter where the other party locates along the ideological spectrum.
• Therefore both parties seek to occupy this “unbeatable” ideological position.
QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DOWNSIAN MODEL

Suppose both parties themselves have ideological or policy preferences. Does party convergence still result?

It has been assumed that all voters vote (for the ideologically closest party).

• Is this assumption compatible with convergent equilibrium?
• What would change if turnout was less than 100%?
• How might the likelihood of voting be a function of party positions?

The Downsian model takes it as a given that there are only two parties?

• How would the logic of party competition change if additional parties could readily enter the competition?
The Downsian model is (perhaps) persuasive in explaining why parties in a two-party system tend to stay pretty close to the middle of the ideological road.

- Even when their historical origins and most loyal supporters are very distinctive, e.g., the British Conservative Party with its roots in the aristocracy and the British Labour Party with its roots in the working class and trade unions.

Nevertheless, in practice such parties never converge completely (i.e., to the point of being literally indistinguishable) and sometimes they actually do diverge quite a bit (e.g., U.S. parties today are said to be quite “polarized”).

What are some factors (not taken account of in the simple Downsian model) that may keep the parties in a two party system from converging as much as the Downsian logic suggests?