

PSC 160

Campaigns and Elections: A Global Perspective

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Lecture 8: Partisanship and Other Theories of Voting Behavior
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Class Outline

1. Socio-Psychological Theories of Vote Choice
2. Rational Theories of Vote Choice
3. In-class reading: Dalton
4. Partisan Dealignment & Its Consequences

Socio-Psychological Theories of Vote Choice

The Columbia School I

- ▶ Developed in early 1940s, influential in early post-war period
- ▶ Emphasized importance of **social characteristics** for vote choice
 - ▶ E.g., religion, class
 - ▶ Voter preferences relatively stable over time
 - ▶ Implies campaign effects are minimal
 - ▶ Panel study of voters in Erie County, Ohio, found only 54 of 600 respondents changed their vote choice during the campaign (Lazarsfeld et al., 1940)
- ▶ Impt figures: Paul Lazarsfeld and colleagues at Columbia's Bureau of Applied Social Research

The Columbia School II

Berelson et al., *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign* (1954): panel study focusing on Elmira, New York

Main conclusions:

- ▶ Social networks forge link between characteristics like religion and class, and vote choice
- ▶ Relatively homogenous social groups (friends, family, co-workers) reinforced voters' initial preferences during campaign
- ▶ As a consequence, voters' preferences very stable despite campaign efforts

The Columbia School III

“For many voters political preferences may better be considered analogous to cultural tastes – in music, literature, recreational activities, dress, ethics, speech, social behavior. . . Both have their origin in ethnic, sectional, class, and family traditions. Both exhibit stability and resistance to change for individuals but flexibility and adjustment over generations for the society as a whole. Both seem to be matters of sentiment and disposition rather than ‘reasoned preferences.’ While both are responsive to changed conditions and unusual stimuli, they are relatively invulnerable to direct argumentation and vulnerable to indirect social influences.”

– Berelson et al. (1954), p. 310–311

The Columbia School IV

Influential on thinking of sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset

- ▶ Evident in Lipset and Rokkan (1967) – how?
- ▶ Lipset, *Political Man* (1960): attempt to explain variation in support for fascism, communism and democracy
- ▶ Looked to social structure for an explanation
 - ▶ If large and stable bloc of middle class citizens: democracy
 - ▶ If workers, small business owners, other economically insecure groups dominant: communism or fascism
 - ▶ ‘Working-class authoritarianism’ – remember this?
- ▶ Introduced concept of **cross-cutting cleavages**
 - ▶ individual voters may be *cross-pressured* if they belong to many social groups

The Michigan School I

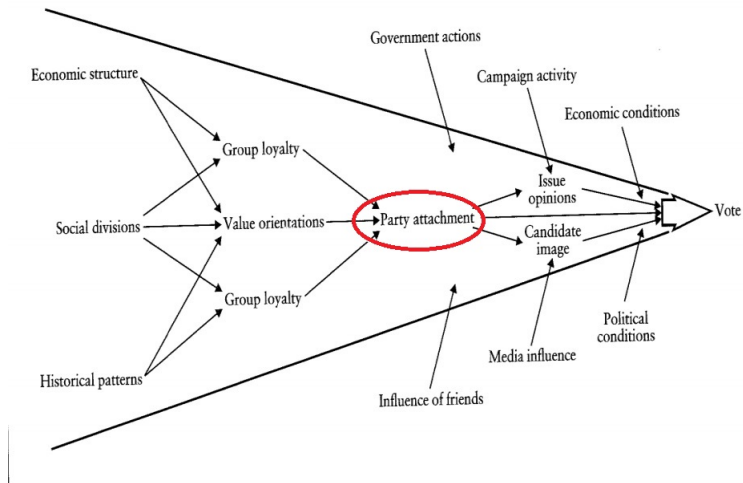
- ▶ Emerged in the 1950s in response to the sociological focus of the Columbia researchers
- ▶ Seminal text: *The American Voter* (1960), by Campbell, Miller, Converse and Stokes
 - ▶ What determined vote choice in 1952, 1956 US pres. elections?
 - ▶ Relied on nationally representative surveys, not local studies
 - ▶ Emphasized importance of both long- and short-term factors

The Michigan School II

Saw long- and short-term influences interacting in a **funnel of causality** leading to vote choice

- ▶ Party attachment, or party ID, key determinant of vote choice
 - ▶ Deep psychological attachment
 - ▶ Inherited from one's parents
 - ▶ Reinforced by within-family socialization
 - ▶ Highly stable over one's lifetime
- ▶ Party ID shaped by socio-structural factors like class, religion
- ▶ In turn, forms a **perceptual screen** that colors an individual's responses on political issues
 - ▶ E.g., policy positions, candidate ratings, party performance
- ▶ ≠ Ideology!

The Funnel of Causality



The Michigan School III

Thus, reconcile Republican Eisenhower's landslide victories with continuing attachment of plurality of 1950s Americans to Democrats:

"[I]t is not true that attitudes toward the several elements of politics are only reflections of party loyalty or group memberships or of other factors that may lead to perceptual distortion. . . attitudes toward the objects of politics, varying through time, can explain short-term fluctuations in partisan division of the vote, whereas party loyalties and social characteristics, which are relatively inert through time, account but poorly for these shifts."

Campbell et al., *The American Voter* (1960), p. 60

Rational Theories of Vote Choice

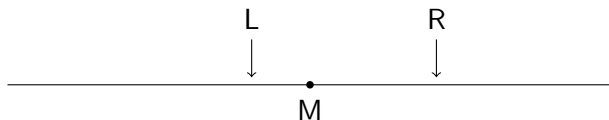
Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) I

Introduced the spatial model of voting (a.k.a. proximity voting) to political science

Key features:

- ▶ Citizens are **rational**
 - ▶ Each citizen will vote for the candidate that provides her with the highest **expected utility**
 - ▶ (Does this mean that citizens must vote selfishly?)
- ▶ Issue positions can be represented as points on a unidimensional scale
- ▶ Candidates are office-seeking, not policy motivated

Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) II



Who wins? What should R do? L do?

Critique of Downs #1: Stokes (1963)

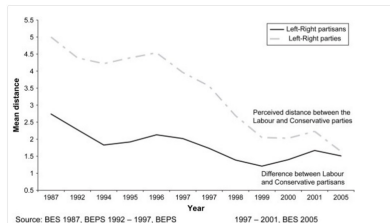
“The ground over which parties contend is not a space in the sense that Main Street or a transcontinental railroad is. Treating it as if it were introduces assumptions about the unidimensionality of the space, the stability of its structure, the existence of ordered dimensions and the common frame of reference of parties and the electorate that are only poorly supported by available evidence from real political systems.”

Stokes (1963), p. 369–70

Critique of Downs #1: Stokes (1963) – cont'd

- ▶ Multiple issue dimensions, on which voter preferences frequently uncorrelated
 - ▶ E.g., welfare spending, foreign policy
- ▶ Most voters cannot locate themselves on a left-right dimension, let alone locate parties (also Converse 1964) [More](#)
- ▶ Stokes' alternative: the **valence** model of party competition
 - ▶ Most issues in politics are 'valence issues' on which voters and parties agree on the desired outcome
 - ▶ E.g., economic growth, political corruption
 - ▶ Instead, voters disagree over who is best able to *handle* each issue, and choose between parties on this basis

One Attempt at Reconciliation...



Source: BES 1987, BEPS 1992 – 1997, BEPS

1997 – 2001, BES 2005

Fig. 1.

Perceived distance between the Labour and Conservative Parties and self-placement distance between Labour and Conservative identifiers on the left-right dimension.

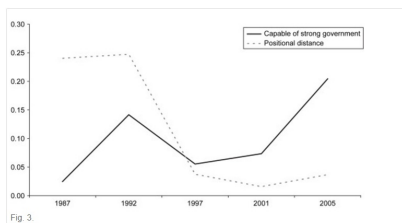


Fig. 3.

Changes in marginal effect of left-right distance and strong government scores upon incumbent vote choice. Source: BES cross-sections, BES (1987) ($N = 2141$), BES (1992) ($N = 1051$), BES (1997) ($N = 1934$), BES (2001) ($N = 1406$), BES (2005) ($N = 1000$).

Source: Green and Hobolt (2008)

Critique of Downs #2: Budge and Farlie (1977)

“How do parties approach voters? A common view is that they stage a ‘great debate’ in which government spokesmen defend their programmes on the important questions of the day, while the opposition criticise[s] them and argues that its own preferred policies are better. The actual evidence offers only limited endorsement for this view. Far from discussing details of their opponent’s plans, parties tend in their public pronouncements to ignore them so far as possible, and to deflect popular attention to other policies which have not been mentioned by their rivals.”

Budge and Farlie (1977), p. 23

Critique of Downs #2: Budge and Farlie (1977) – cont'd

- ▶ Party issue positions fixed in the short term
- ▶ Parties 'own' an issue if they are preferred by (most) voters on the issue (also Petrocik 1996)
- ▶ Parties are able to influence the importance of issues for voters through their emphasis
- ▶ Parties compete through selective emphasis on favorable issues
- ▶ The outcome of an election depends on the importance of issues to voters

Critiques of Downs #3: Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989)

- ▶ Voters' policy preferences have two components: **direction** and **intensity**
- ▶ Voters prefer the party that most *strongly* commits to a position on their side of an issue
 - ▶ Do not distinguish between party position and emphasis on an issue
 - ▶ No such thing as a 'centrist' position on an issue; neutrality = not taking a position on an issue
- ▶ 'Region of acceptability': 'extremist' candidates penalized by voters

Critiques of Downs #3: Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989) – cont'd

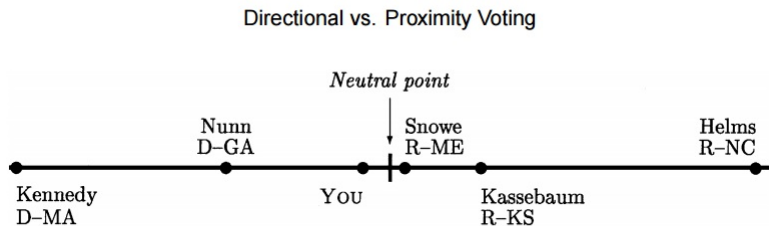


Fig. 1 Senators on an ideological dimension: the dimension ranges from the most liberal at the left to the most conservative at the right. A few senators and “YOU” are located as filled circles on the dimension. The small vertical bar at the middle represents the neutral point required under directional theory.

Dalton: Decline of Party Identifications

Partisan Dealignment & Its Consequences

The Nature of Partisanship

“When we examine the evidence on the manner in which party attachment develops and changes during the lifetime of the individual citizen, we find a picture characterized more by stability than by change—not by rigid, immutable fixation on one party rather than the other, but by a persistent adherence and a resistance to contrary influence.”

Campbell et al., *The American Voter* (1960), p. 146

Trends in Partisan Dealignment

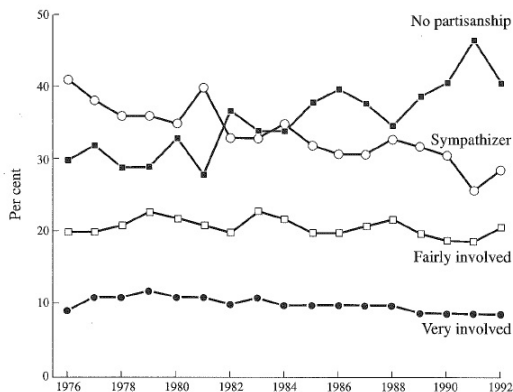


FIG. 2.1. Partisan Attachment in Europe, 1976–1992

Source: 1972–96 Eurobarometer cumulative file.

Source: Dalton (2005)

Explaining Partisan Dealignment I

Increasing voter dissatisfaction with party performance?

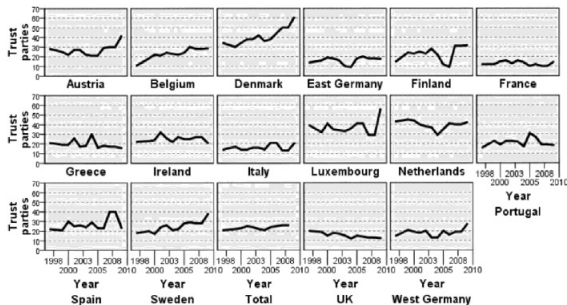


FIGURE 4.7. European trust in political parties, 1998–2009. “I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it. Political parties.” Chart shows proportion responding ‘Tend to trust.’ Source: Eurobarometer surveys 1998–2009 downloaded from Gesis ZACAT.

Source: Norris (2011)

Explaining Partisan Dealignment II

Cognitive mobilization theory (Dalton 2005):

- ▶ Increasing educational access, availability of pol. information in the mass media
- ▶ Increased voter sophistication
- ▶ Decreased **functional** value of partisanship

What evidence does Dalton provide for his theory? Are you persuaded?

Consequences of Partisan Dealignment I

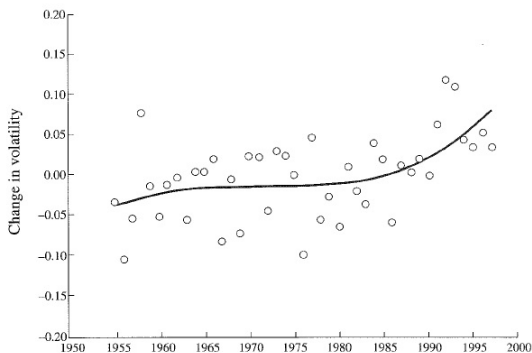


FIG. 3.1. Trends in Electoral Volatility within Eighteen Advanced Industrial Democracies, 1950–1997

Note: The results are based on all legislative elections for our 18 core advanced industrial democracies, from the second post-war election until 1997. The figure plots the change in volatility from the average of the first two elections within each nation. The figure pools the national data by year and then plots the best-fit trend line produced by Curve Expert 1.3.

Source: Mackie and Rose 1991; *Electoral Studies* 1992–7.

Consequences of Partisan Dealignment II

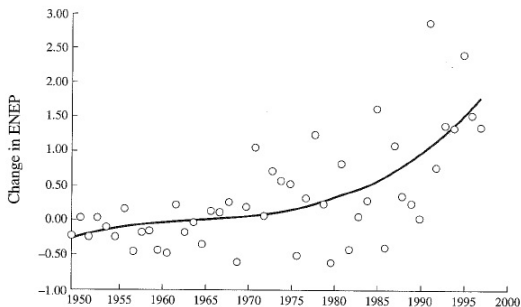


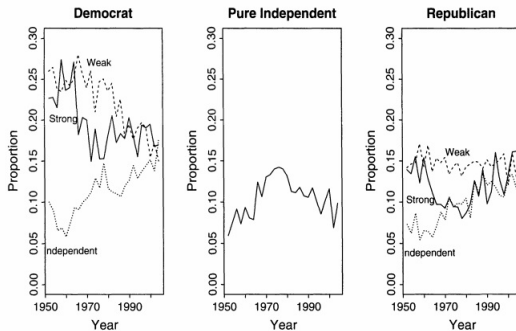
FIG. 3.2. Trends in the Effective Number of Parties in Twenty-one Advanced Industrial Democracies, 1945–1997

Note: Change represents any observation subtracted from the mean of that nation's first two post-war lower house elections. These scores were then pooled and averaged by year and plotted. Best-fit trend line produced by Curve Expert 1.3.

Source: Mackie and Rose 1991; *Electoral Studies* 1992–7.

A New American Voter?

FIGURE 2 Plot of responses to the seven-point NES partisan self-placement item.



Explained by growing ideological polarization, not parental socialization
Source: Bafumi and Shapiro (2009)

Discussion

1. What do these different theories disagree on?
2. How would you **empirically** discriminate between these different theories of voting behavior?
3. Which do you think is the most convincing theory of voting behavior, and why?

Next Class: The Economic Vote

To read before tomorrow: Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 'Economic Determinants of Electoral Outcomes'

Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993)

Table 2. Description of Items in the 1990–91 NES Surveys

Variable	Variable No. (NES)	% Correct	% Incorrect or Incomplete	% "Don't Know"
<i>People:</i>				
Quayle	v395	84	1	14
Gorbachev	v398	71	14	15
Thatcher	v399	53	29	18
Name one candidate (and his/her party) for U.S. House	v111	23	11	66
Mandela	v400	17	51	32
Foley	v401	12	10	78
Rehnquist	v397	5	19	76
Mitchell	v396	3	12	85
<i>Party:</i>				
Relative ideological location of the two parties	v413; v414	57	25	18
Party with most seats in the House	v402	55	16	29
Relative location of parties on defense spending	v443; v444	52	23	25
Party with most seats in the Senate	v403	47	17	36
Relative location of parties on federal spending	v456; v457	45	26	29
Relative location of parties on aid to blacks	v449; v450	42	30	28