

Parties, Party Systems, and Party Competition

A **political party** can be thought of as a group of people that includes those who hold office and those who help get and keep them there.

Political parties serve four main purposes:

1. Structure the political world
2. Recruitment and socialization of political elite
3. Mobilization of the masses
4. The link between rulers and the ruled

Party Systems

A **nonpartisan democracy** has no official political parties.

A **single-party system** is one in which only one political party is legally allowed to hold power.

A **one-party dominant system** is one in which multiple parties may legally operate but in which only one particular party has a realistic chance of gaining power.

A **two-party system** is one in which only two major political parties have a realistic chance of holding power.

A **multiparty system** is one in which more than two parties have a realistic chance of holding power.

The **effective number of parties** is a measure that captures both the number and the size of the parties in a country.

The measure weights larger parties greater than smaller parties.

The **effective number of electoral parties** is a measure of the number of parties that win votes: $\frac{1}{\sum v_i^2}$.

The **effective number of legislative parties** is a measure of the number of parties that win seats: $\frac{1}{\sum s_i^2}$.

Types of Political Parties

Where do parties come from?

The **primordial, or bottom-up, view** of party formation treats parties as the natural representatives of people who share common interests.

Parties form to represent the interests of natural divisions or social cleavages in society.

The **instrumental, or top-down, view** of party formation treats parties as teams of office seekers and focuses on the role played by political elites and entrepreneurs.

Political parties are created by individuals who, perhaps because of certain informational advantages, are able to discern an opportunity to represent a previously unrepresented interest.

These political entrepreneurs may even help citizens become aware that such an interest exists.

Why are some party systems divided primarily along ethnic lines, while others are divided mainly along class, religious, linguistic, or regional ones?

One of the roles of parties is to represent social cleavages.

- Urban-rural cleavage
- Confessional cleavage
- Secular-clerical cleavage
- Class cleavage
- Post-materialist cleavage
- Ethnic and linguistic cleavages

Populism

There are three necessary components to populism:

1. People-centrism
2. Anti-pluralism
3. Moralized politics

Populism has no programmatic content of its own.

It's more of a discursive 'wrapper' that can be attached to a wide range of ideologies across the left-right divide.

It's the 'host' ideologies such as nationalism or environmentalism that are 'wrapped' in populist discourse that give populism its actual policy content.

When attached to nationalism, we get a right-wing and exclusionary populism that targets immigrants and ethnic minorities as enemies of the people.

When attached to socialism or environmentalism, we get a more left-wing and often inclusionary populism that typically views economic elites and capitalism as the source of society's problems.

Populism is used by parties on the left, the center, and the right.

Populism is a strategy that all parties can adopt.

Populism isn't a distinct ideological party family.

Instead, we have socialist, conservative, liberal and other parties that sometimes find it strategic to adopt populist rhetoric to sell their policies and sometimes find it strategic not to do so.

Theorizing about Politicized Cleavages

Individuals have a repertoire of **attributes** – religion, language, class, gender etc. – that makes them eligible for membership in some **identity category**.

An **attribute** is a characteristic that qualifies an individual for membership in an identity category.

- Attributes are given and self-evident.

An **identity category** is a social group in which an individual can place themselves.

- Identity categories are socially constructed.

Attributes and Possible Combinations of Attributes in a Hypothetical Country

	French speaker	Dutch speaker
Northerner	a	b
Southerner	c	d

Note: Letters indicate the proportion of the population embodying each possible combination of attributes.

Potential Identity Categories in a Hypothetical Country

Potential identity category	Size
Northerner	$a + b$
Southerner	$c + d$
French speaker	$a + c$
Dutch speaker	$b + d$
Northerner and French speaker	a
Northerner and Dutch speaker	b
Southerner and French speaker	c
Southerner and Dutch speaker	d
Everyone	$a + b + c + d$

How attributes map onto actual identity categories depends on the distribution and correlation of those attributes.

A country with uncorrelated attributes has **cross-cutting attributes** (cleavages).

A country with correlated attributes has **reinforcing attributes** (cleavages).

Cross-Cutting Attributes

	French speaker	Dutch speaker
Northerner	0.25	0.25
Southerner	0.25	0.25

North vs. South and French-speaking vs. Dutch-speaking are as equally likely to be activated as French-speaking Northerner, Dutch-speaking Northerner, French-speaking Southerner, or Dutch-speaking Southerner.

Reinforcing Attributes

	French speaker	Dutch speaker
Northerner	0.03	0.57
Southerner	0.36	0.04

The identity categories that are likely to be activated are Dutch-speaking Northerners and French-speaking Southerners.

Electoral rules also influence which cleavages become politicized.

A Hypothetical Distribution of Attributes

	French speaker	Dutch speaker
Northerner	0.40	0.10
Southerner	0.40	0.10

Country A: Gaining national office requires 50% of the vote.

Country B: Gaining national office requires 60% of the vote.

A Hypothetical Distribution of Attributes

	French speaker	Dutch speaker
Northerner	0.40	0.10
Southerner	0.40	0.10

Country A (50%): North vs. South (regional cleavage).

Country B (60%): French vs. Dutch (linguistic cleavage).

The distribution of cleavages also matters.

Country C: Gaining national office requires 60% of the vote.

	French speaker	Dutch speaker
Northerner	0.40	0.10
Southerner	0.40	0.10

French vs. Dutch (linguistic cleavage).

The distribution of cleavages also matters.

Country D: Gaining national office requires 60% of the vote.

	French speaker	Dutch speaker
Northerner	0.25	0.35
Southerner	0.25	0.15

North vs. South (regional cleavage).

Zambia and Malawi

$\frac{2}{3}$ of Chewas and Tumbukas live in Malawi, and $\frac{1}{3}$ live in Zambia.

Puzzle:

- **Malawi:** Chewas and Tumbukas are arch political enemies.
- **Zambia:** Chewas and Tumbukas are political allies.



There are recognizable cultural differences between Chewas and Tumbukas.

- Chewas speak Chichewa, while Tumbukas speak Chitumbuka.
- Chewas dance nyau, while Tumbukas dance vinbuza.
- Chewa parents want a chicken for their daughter, while Tumbuka parents want seven cows.

Would a member of your ethnic group vote for a presidential candidate from the other ethnic group?

- Zambia: 21% said “No”.
- Malawi: 61% said “No”.

Would you marry a member from the other ethnic group?

- Zambia: 24% said “No”.
- Malawi: 55% said “No”.

Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia and enemies in Malawi.

Why?

The two countries employ the same electoral system – SMDP.

They have both had similar party systems.

They're both former British colonies.

Malawi

- Chewas (57%) and Tumbukas (12%).
- Given their size and electoral system, it made sense to politicize the Chewa-Tumbuka division.
- Malawi Congress Party (MCP) was seen as the Chewa party.
- Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) was seen as the Tumbuka party.

Zambia

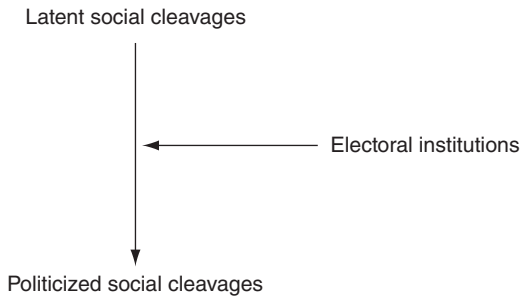
- Chewas (7%) and Tumbukas (4%).
- Given their size and electoral system, it didn't make sense to politicize the Chewa-Tumbuka division.
- The division was between the Easterners (Chewas and Tumbukas), Northerners, Westerners, and Southerners.
- Chewas and Tumbukas had to work together if they hoped to win political power.

The logic of political competition focuses voter and elite attention on some cleavages and not others.

Politicians seek to build political coalitions that allow them to win power.

Not all cultural and ethnic divisions become politicized.

Politicized Cleavages and the Role of Electoral Institutions



The Number of Political Parties

Why do some countries have many parties and others have few?

Duverger's Theory

Social divisions are the primary driving force behind the formation of parties.

Electoral institutions influence how social divisions are translated into political parties.

Social cleavages matter.

The more social cleavages there are and the more that they're cross-cutting, the greater the demand for distinctive representation and the greater the demand for political parties.

Cross-Cutting Cleavages in Country A

	Catholic	Protestant
Rich	25	25
Poor	25	25

High demand for political parties.

Reinforcing Cleavages in Country A

	Catholic	Protestant
Rich	0	50
Poor	50	0

Low demand for political parties.

Electoral institutions matter.

Social cleavages create the demand for political parties.

But electoral institutions determine whether this latent demand for representation leads to the formation of new parties.

Majoritarian or non-proportional electoral systems act as a brake on the tendency for social cleavages to be translated into new parties.

Electoral institutions influence party system size through two mechanisms.

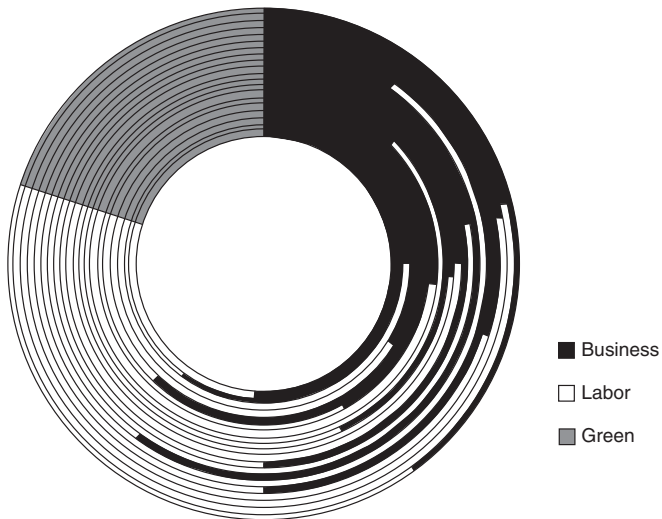
1. The mechanical effect of electoral laws.
2. The strategic effect of electoral laws.

Mechanical effect of electoral laws.

The mechanical effect of electoral laws refers to the way votes are translated into seats.

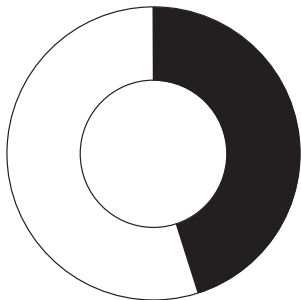
When electoral systems are disproportional, the mechanical effect punishes small parties and rewards large parties.

Duvergerland: A Hypothetical Country using an SMDP Electoral System

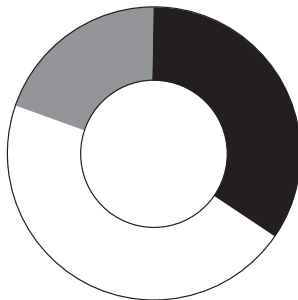


Distribution of Seats under SMDP and PR Electoral Rules

a. SMDP



b. PR



■ Business
□ Labor
■ Green

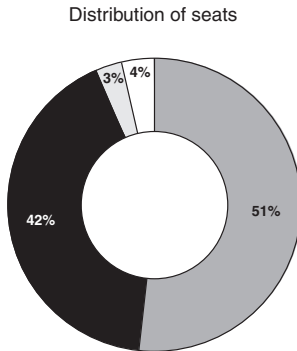
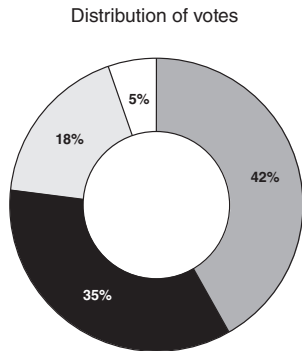
St. Ives Constituency, United Kingdom, 1992

	Votes	% of Vote
David Harris (Conservative)	24,528	42.9
Andrew George (Liberal Democrat)	22,883	40.1
Stephen Warr (Labour)	9,144	16.0
Graham Stevens (Liberal)	577	1.0
Harris is elected		

National Election Results, United Kingdom, 1992

	Votes	Seats
Conservative	41.9	51.6
Labour	34.9	41.6
Liberal Democrats	17.8	3.1
Others	5.4	3.7
Total	100	100

Distribution of Votes and Seats in UK Elections, 1992



- Conservative
- Labour
- Liberal Democrats
- Other

Strategic effect of electoral laws.

The strategic effect of electoral laws refers to how the way in which votes are translated into seats influences the **strategic behavior** of voters and political elites.

When electoral systems are disproportional, their mechanical effect can be expected to punish small parties and reward large parties.

As a result, voters have an incentive to engage in **strategic voting** and political elites have an incentive to engage in **strategic entry**.

1. **Strategic voting** essentially means voting for your most preferred candidate or party that has a realistic chance of winning.
2. **Strategic entry** refers to whether political elites choose to enter the political scene under the label of their most preferred party or under the label of their most preferred party that has a realistic chance of winning.

St. Ives Constituency, United Kingdom, 1992

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Preference ordering: Labour > Liberal Democrat > Conservative

- Sincere voting: Labour
- Strategic voting: Liberal Democrat

Imagine you're an aspiring political entrepreneur who has an interest in environmental politics.

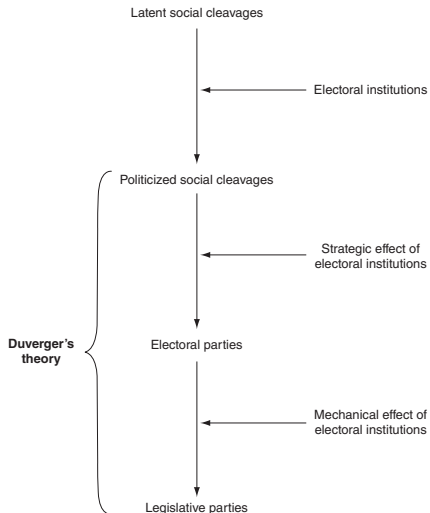
If you lived in Duvergerland with an SMDP electoral system, which party would you join – greens, labor, or business?

Imagine you're an aspiring political entrepreneur who has an interest in environmental politics.

If you lived in Duvergerland with an SMDP electoral system, which party would you join – greens, labor, or business?

Strategic entry means that small parties are less likely to attract high-quality candidates and funding, or even form in the first place, in a country with a disproportional electoral system.

Party Systems: Social Cleavages and the Modifying Effects of Electoral Institutions



The Interplay of Social Heterogeneity and Electoral System Proportionality on Party System Size

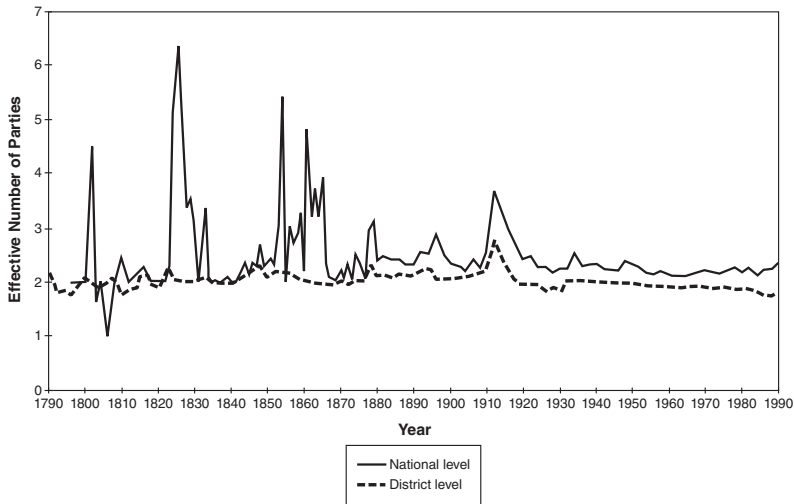
	Electoral System Permissiveness		
		Low (SMDP)	High (PR)
Social Heterogeneity	High	Few parties	Many parties
	Low	Few parties	Few parties

Technically, Duverger's theory only holds at the district level.

There can be more parties competing nationally than there are, on average, competing in each district.

A party system is **nationalized** if the local and national party systems are of similar size.

Number of Parties at the National and District Levels in the US, 1790-1990



What affects the nationalization of party systems?

- Fiscal centralization.
- Political centralization.
- Concurrent presidential elections.
- National cleavage patterns.

Party Competition

Policy

Parties often compete with each other by offering different policy packages.

Parties compete by moving in the policy space in an attempt to attract voters.

Spatial models typically assume that voters engage in **proximity voting** where they vote for the party located closest to them.

Most spatial models assume a one-dimensional 'left-right' policy space.

With two parties, the median voter theorem predicts that parties converge on the position of the median voter.

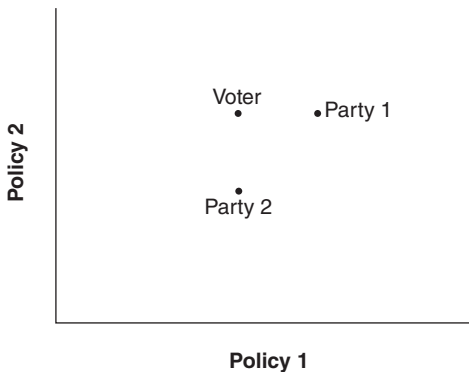
As the number of parties increase, parties are expected to disperse out in the policy space.

Parties in a multiparty system offer voters a variety of distinct ideological choices.

The spatial model can be extended to a multidimensional policy space.

However, the concept of 'distance' is more complicated as voters may care about some policy dimensions more than others.

Distance in a Two-Dimensional Spatial Model



Parties can compete not only by changing their policy position but also by changing how much voters care about the different policy dimensions.

Issue Competition

Issue competition is when parties compete by trying to strategically shape how much voters care about different issues.

Parties emphasize some issues more than others in their campaign communications.

They try to influence **issue salience**.

A **high yield issue** is one on which a party is united and where the party's position is widely shared in the electorate.

A **low yield issue** is one on which a party is internally divided and where the party's position enjoys only limited electoral support.

Parties will emphasize high yield issues rather than low yield issues.

According to **issue ownership theory**, parties should emphasize issues they 'own' rather than issues that are owned by other parties.

A party **owns** an issue if voters perceive it to be more competent or credible at dealing with it.

Issue competition predicts that parties won't engage in head-to-head policy contests where they talk about their competing positions on the same issue.

Instead, they'll focus their campaigns on different issues that they think are most beneficial to themselves or potentially detrimental to their opponents.

Issue entrepreneurship occurs when parties appeal to voters by emphasizing new issues.

Challenger parties tend to engage in issue entrepreneurship more than established mainstream parties.

Established mainstream parties can adopt **three strategies** when responding to new parties:

1. Dismissive strategy.
2. Accommodative strategy.
3. Adversarial strategy.

Valence Competition

Voters don't just care about policy preferences at election time.

They also care about the non-policy characteristics of parties such as their competence, integrity, trustworthiness, leader quality, and experience.

These non-policy characteristics are called **valence issues**.

Valence issues are things that most people agree on, and which usually have to do with the effectiveness of policy delivery.

Voters prefer high valence parties to low valence parties.

Parties invest resources to improve their valence among voters.

Valence is especially important when it comes to policies on which parties hold similar positions.

Most parties promise economic growth, lower crime, better schools, and improved healthcare.

While parties can't engage in significant policy competition when they hold the same policy positions, they can engage in valence competition where they try to convince voters they're generally more competent, trustworthy, and capable than their opponents.

Policy competition, issue competition, and valence competition all fall under the heading of **programmatic politics**.

Programmatic politics:

- Ideologically consistent and coherent policy platforms.
- Parties attempt to implement their policy platforms in office.
- Policy delivery is governed by formalized and public rules.
- The delivery of goods and services is typically provided by an impersonal and nonpartisan bureaucracy.
- The receipt of goods and services isn't contingent on the provision of political support.

Parties can also compete by engaging in nonprogrammatic politics.

The key feature of nonprogrammatic politics is that the delivery of goods and services is discretionary and not based on formalized rules that have been made public.

Parties don't develop detailed policy platforms to appeal to voters.

Instead, they compete with each other to win electoral support by using their discretion to provide goods and services to particular groups and individuals.

Clientelistic Politics

Clientelistic politics is a form of nonprogrammatic politics where the distribution of goods and services is made conditional on the provision of political favors by the recipients.

When clientelistic benefits are targeted at voters, we often talk about **vote buying** or **turnout buying**.

For clientelism to work as a form of **quid pro quo**, parties require a lot of fine-grained information.

One solution to this informational problem is to employ individuals called **brokers** to be their agents in local communities.

Brokers tend to be powerful local notables who, due to their networked position in a community, claim to have the information that parties desire.

Brokers target party resources to their followers and clients.

In return for the benefits, brokers request that their clients provide some sort of political favor such as participating in a rally or voting for a particular party.

Competing brokers who wish to be 'hired' by parties try to outdo each other by building larger and more reliable client networks.

Brokers essentially 'sell' their client networks to parties in return for resources, which, among other things, can be used to build and maintain a local power base.

Parties face a **principal-agent problem** with respect to their brokers.

Parties want their resources to be targeted to **swing voters**.

But brokers tend to give too many resources to **party loyalists** because they're 'cheaper' to buy.

The result is a distribution of clientelistic benefits that's inefficient from the party's perspective.

There's a **credible commitment problem** at the heart of clientelistic politics.

How can voters credibly commit to follow through on their promise to provide political favors?

Brokers can help, but only to some extent.

The introduction of the secret ballot incentivized a shift away from **vote buying** towards **turnout buying**.

Parties and brokers also try to convince voters that the secret ballot isn't as secret as they think it is.

Parties can also use the nature of the clientelistic benefits they distribute to align voter interests with their interests.

The provision of public sector jobs, for example, can create incentives for recipients to keep the ruling party in power for fear that another party or regime will replace them with their own supporters.

Programmatic and nonprogrammatic politics are two alternative strategies that parties can use to win electoral and other support.

From the perspective of parties or politicians, they each come with certain inefficiencies.

Programmatic politics becomes relatively more efficient as countries develop.