Analyzing Elections:

How Elections Rule American Politics

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Acknowledgments

This book would not have been written without the inducements of Stephen Dunn at Norton and Ken Shepsle. I am genuinely grateful that they asked me to write this book as I found it an enormously valuable experience – allowing me to put together for myself how I understand the American electoral system works and to be better able to communicate this understanding to my students. I also wish to thank my coauthors on other projects, notably Daniel Diermier, Elisabeth Gerber, Roger Myerson Kenneth Williams, and Rick Wilson, for their patience while I put things aside to complete this project. My research with Liz, Ken, Roger, and Larry Kenny, has served as the principal building blocks for this book. As a result, you will see a lot of citations to their work and our joint work in the material that follows. Without my collaborations with them, this book (at least with me as the author) would not exist. Other coauthors also are due thanks for the benefits of collaboration – notably Tom Husted, Kristin Kanthak, and Tom Rietz. I also especially thank Keith Poole for helpful discussions about the nature of political choices while completing the final draft. I am appreciative of the students at University of Iowa and University of Houston who used earlier drafts of the manuscript in classes, letting me realize which concepts were most difficult and which were surprisingly easy. Finally, this book exists, as does all my work, because of the constant support of my mother, Mildred Bradford, the friendship of my sister, Renda Goss, and above all the patience of my daughters, Renda and Charlotte.
Preface

The discipline of political science is increasingly becoming more mathematical – both theoretically and empirically. A significant part of this change is also a greater use of applied rational choice models to understand American elections. These models have added greatly to our understanding of how the election process works by forcing us to think through theoretically the ways in which voters, candidates, political parties, and interest groups interact in our American electoral system. Yet, when we teach students about American elections, particularly undergraduates, we focus mainly on the empirical facts rather than the theory. The theories we work with are hard to explain because of the mathematics, in which our students rarely have training.

Most political science undergraduates, as many faculty members are painfully aware, believe that political science courses should be all “politics” and not much “science.” They are used to reading journalistic accounts of politics, and expect that this is what the discipline is about. Undergraduates, of course, are only reflecting the view of most of the non-academic public (who may be dimly aware of the modeling that goes on, but assume that this is not a very useful group ala articles they read in magazines such as The New Republic). It is far easier to confirm this view than to challenge it – particularly if faculty members are rewarded based on teaching performance measured primarily by student evaluations (and are in Liberal Arts colleges).

The disconnect might be tolerable if it did not have serious consequences for the discipline. Many of our graduate students are undergraduate political science majors who suffer quite rude awakenings when they enter first year graduate methods (and if they are lucky, formal modeling) classes. Undergraduates with more mathematical interests, who might be attracted to political science and even decide to engage in graduate study, end up in economics’ undergraduate and graduate classes and programs. If these students had been exposed to a different undergraduate political science, we might find them in our classes and programs. Furthermore, we might find that our students, if exposed to these theories may actually find them as interesting as the journalistic accounts they think political science is. Finally, the lay public might appreciate more the way in which our election system works if we made more efforts to communicate our knowledge to them in accessible ways. It is not just students that we need to reach, but their parents, brothers, sisters, and children.

And we have something to share. The advance in formal theoretical work on elections does provide new and interesting insights into how elections work that can help inform the public as we engage in important debates about proposed changes. For example, theoretical work on campaign contributions and how interest groups are involved in elections, helps us understand better how contributions may drive election results even if they have little actual effect on voters or policy. Or, recent research on different candidate nomination procedures helps us understand how these differences can affect the ability of major party candidates to win elections. Most particularly, this new research provides a framework through which we can understand how our electoral institutions shape and influence election outcomes and American politics. We are often changing our electoral system and if we, as a public, have a better comprehension of the ways in which this system works, we can make more informed choices.
What is the solution? One solution is to figure out ways of changing undergraduate teaching of political science so that these courses are different. It is my opinion that political science faculty members want to teach current theories but are stymied by a lack of available teaching material – i.e. books. The articles and most of the books that we use in advanced graduate classes are not suitable for undergraduate (and many first and second year graduate students given that most of our graduate students come from the same background). We need books that bridge the gap.

We also can provide the non-academic public with readable and, hopefully, somewhat entertaining, presentations of the material as well, like the popular and fun book by Avinash Dixit and Barry Nalebuff on game theory, *Thinking Strategically: The Competitive Edge in Business, Politics, and Everyday Life.* Many future “hard” scientists became first interested in their subject when they read popular science books. V. S. Ramachandran, in his preface to the recent bestseller, *Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind*, reports that:

“Dr. Francis Crick of the Salk Institute tells me that Erwin Schrödinger’s popular book *What Is Life?* contained a few speculative remarks on how heredity might be based on a chemical and that this had a profound impact on his intellectual development culminating in his unraveling the genetic code together with James Watson. Many a Nobel Prize—winning physician embarked on a research career after reading Paul de Kruif’s *The Microbe Hunters*, which was published in 1926. My own interest in scientific research dates back to my early teens, when I read books by George Gamow, Lewis Thomas, and Peter Medawar, and the flame is being kept alive by a new generation of writers—Oliver Sacks, Stephen Jay Gould, Carl Sagan, Dan Dennett, Richard Gregory, Richard Dawkins, Paul Davies, Colin Blakemore and Steven Pinker.”

I was thrilled when Stephen Dunn and Ken Shepsle approached me to help write such a book for the field of American elections. I almost immediately set out to try to write a review of this very vast applied theoretical literature in a manner I hope can be used by advanced undergraduate and first and second year graduate students. In this book, I have tried to present the theory as it exists currently in as simple terms as possible but as accurately as possible. I have tried to blend in the “real world” of politics, that so interests students initially (as well as myself), through examples and simple empirical “baby tests” of the theories. This book is more of a textbook than Ramachandran’s book or Dixit and Nalebuff’s, but I also hope that it can appeal to a wide audience of those interested in some of the latest research on American elections. Since it is mainly a textbook, it also offers some study questions and exercises at the end of each chapter as well as set out summaries and definitions that attempt to encapsulate some of the major ideas and concepts in each chapter.

In writing the book, I discovered that I ended doing more than just a review of the existing literature for students. I found that I needed to organize it – that I needed to put

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it together in a way that made sense to me. I found that I wanted to say something about how the whole process works — that I had a particular “argument” to make about American elections and the American electoral system. Part of that argument is manifested in the subtitle to this book, “How Elections Rule American Politics” — that is, our electoral institutional system is the organizing principle of American politics. It shapes the way we view policies as liberal or conservative, who wins in policy choices and who loses, the strength of our major political parties, and the stability of our government over time.

When we typically think of the study of elections we almost bring in institutions as an after thought — focusing generally on the behavior of the individual actors — voters, candidates, party elites, and interest groups — rather than the structure in which they interact. While the “new institutionalism” has led to a focus on the institutional structure of Congress, executive-legislative relations, parliamentary politics, researchers who work on American elections are still thought of as behavioralists, not institutionalists. Largely this is because the major institutional feature of our election system — our use of plurality rule, winner-take-all elections — doesn’t vary significantly across the states and hasn’t changed much over time. Yet it profoundly affects the way in which we organize our politics and in order to understand American politics we need to understand why this is so. Ignoring the role of our electoral institutions means that we miss important factors in the way our American political system works.

Furthermore, there are features of our electoral institutions that do differ considerably both historically and regionally. These variations help us understand both changes in American politics over time and regionally. Finally, our American electoral institutions are constantly in flux — varying as those who are left out of winning coalitions seek ways to affect the process by which winning coalitions are formed — which primarily happens during elections.

In this book, I attempt to put these pieces together. First, I explain how this dominant feature of American elections, plurality rule, so significantly shapes American politics. This is the gist of the first five chapters of the book. In chapter 1, I present a basic overview of the importance of American elections in politics. Chapter 2 considers voter choices over a given set of candidates, the reasons why coordination into two major parties or electoral coalitions is desirable in a plurality rule system, and how that might be facilitated by other aspects of our system. Chapter 3 introduces two-candidate competition and the forces for convergence when policy is unidimensional and voter preferences are single-peaked. However, we find that candidates do not generally converge and that something is missing, political parties.

Chapter 4 adds parties to the mix, showing how when candidates must be nominated by political parties in primaries and they are uncertain about the policy preferences of the general electorate, these candidates will diverge leading to particular party positions that are distinct. Chapter 5 expands the analysis to the problem of choice in more than one dimension and shows how our electoral system can provide some short run stability over policy in the face of forces of instability. We also see in chapter 5, how our electoral system works to allow for long run changes in policy as dissidents and insurgents work through the party system.

An important missing piece from these five chapters is the explicit role played by interest groups. In chapter 6, I round out the overall framework of the American election
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system by investigating the way in which interest groups and campaign contributions influence elections and resulting policy choices. The remaining chapters deal with some of the complexities of the general process of American elections and with how the process has changed over time and varies across the states. In chapter 7, I explore the causes and effects of voter turnout decisions, chapter 8 considers how our electoral system works when voters do not have full information about candidates or policy choices, and chapter 9 examines more expansively how different electoral rules have affected American political party competition over time and regionally. In chapter 10, I discuss the importance of studying electoral institutions for understanding proposed and current changes in our elections and for making predictions in American politics.

Some might question the ordering of the material. Probably a controversial choice is to delay discussing the thorny issue of why people vote until chapter 7. To paraphrase what Paul Abramson said when I first told him about this project, a rational choice book on elections has to deal with the question of why people vote. I do deal with it – since it was a subject of my dissertation and a number of my research articles, it is certainly not a subject I have shied away from. But I also believe that if we begin with the turnout decision it colors the way that you look at voting in general. If we conclude, as many do, that voting is an irrational, non-strategic act, then it becomes hard to see the strategic nature of voting in general. We become trapped in a behavioralist view of voters as responding simply to stimuli, rather than acting as rational, intelligent individuals. We adopt the hubris of the super knowing academic toward the innocent and childlike voter. As I told one of my classes recently, the rational choice approach may simplify voters sometimes when we model them, but the behavioralist approach stupefies them.

Unless we free the voters in our academic theories of elections to act strategically and allow for an understanding of American voting as a strategic choice, we cannot understand fully how our electoral system works. This is probably one of the big reasons why we fail to think of the study of American elections as institutional. For this reason, I begin first with looking at the strategic behavior of voters when they do vote, how American electoral institutions shape those strategies, and then tackle why they vote at all.

There is a lot left out of this book that I wish were in it. For example, I believe that there is a fundamental relationship between economic and political forces that affects party policy positions and how our election system works. But this book does not attempt to draw that connection. Much more could be written about different types of elections, i.e. presidential, congressional, state and local, judicial, initiatives and referenda, etc. How our electoral system has and has not allowed for the incorporation of minority groups is also a major subject. However, each of these areas can be a book in itself and in some cases some very fine books exist already that present some of this material at an accessible level for students and the lay public.

In presenting the material, and in an attempt to be clear and non-technical, I have not engaged in a comprehensive, complete survey of the literature. Rather, my goal has been to present a framework that is clear and represents how I see the electoral system working in American politics. For example, there are many competing theoretical explanations for the polarization we see in American political parties. I have presented a view that I believe has the most theoretical and empirical support. There are other
perspectives and I suspect that some of these other causes that have been proposed are also relevant. At the end of each chapter, I have a section called For Further Reading, where I mention sources for some of the alternative theories to those presented in the chapter.

The chapters that come present concepts that come from mathematical models and there is a lot of theory for an undergraduate textbook or a book for the lay public. This theory is almost always simplifications and examples drawn from the vast formal literature on the electoral process. I have attempted to present this material as simply as I can while being honest with the existing “hard” theory. No one should interpret the theoretical work here as substitutes for the real thing. At the end of each chapter, in the For Further Reading sections, I give the sources for the theory presented.

I have also tried, as I noted earlier, to use a lot of real world cases, examples, and some simple data analyses as sort of “baby tests” of some of the theory. Usually the simple data analysis comes from work of researchers who have conducted more careful statistical analyses testing the theories I have simplified. Again, no one should interpret the empirical work here as substitutes for the real thing. Again, in the For Further Reading sections I try to give sources for carefully done, more scientific, empirical studies related to the theory presented in the chapter.

I implore everyone to read and study as much of the literature I simplify (both theoretical and empirical) as possible. This book should be a stepping-stone, not a wall. It is possible, and maybe probable, that I have under- or over-stated in my conclusions about these literatures and made some serious errors. But I have attempted as best as I can to be honest with the literatures as I understand them. I challenge everyone to go to these literatures and test me. If this book leads to more students reading this literature and, as a consequence, proving me wrong, then I would have succeeded better than if my words are taken as gospel.
Part I: How Voters, Candidates, Parties, and Interest Groups Interact in Elections

Chapter 1: Elections Rule American Politics

Two Stories of House Building

Gomillion’s House

In 1939, a contractor approached Charles Gomillion offering to build him a house. While Gomillion could afford a new house, and wanted one, he wanted something more fundamental than a house. He had lived in Tuskegee, Alabama since 1934, and had been born a citizen of the United States, yet he had been unable to register to vote. As a black professor at the Tuskegee Institute, he could afford to pay the poll tax, which kept most blacks from voting in Alabama. But the Macon County Board of Registrars, who would have to approve his application, required two white registered voters vouch for a potential voter’s suitability. And even then, the Registrars had a great deal of discretion in determining whether a potential voter met the literacy and property requirements. Gomillion had only one voucher, a dry goods merchant. So, Gomillion agreed to the contract for the house if the contractor, who was white, appeared before the Board of Registrars and the Registrars approved his voter registration application. Gomillion’s application was approved.³

Why was voting so important to Gomillion? When Gomillion arrived in Tuskegee in 1934, he became concerned about the area of Greenwood, a neighborhood where many Tuskegee Institute employees lived. As Norrell 1998 summarizes:

“The handsome homes and manicured lawns of Greenwood stood in stark contrast to the streets of the area, which were often unpaved and sometimes totally unimproved, and impassable in bad weather. But neither the city of Tuskegee nor the Macon County commissioners had made a real effort to improve them. . . . Gomillion asked why local government was unresponsive and quickly learned that white officials had no political reason to respond to black concerns. He discovered that only thirty-two blacks in Macon County voted; administrators at the Institute and the Veterans Administration hospital and a few businessmen made up the select few.” Gomillion “. . . believed that the solution to the problems of street and sanitation service in Greenwood lay in political participation. He also was convinced that the larger problem of discrimination in public education had to be addressed politically.”⁴

Gomillion figured that more blacks could register to vote by using their economic power. They could induce white voters to serve as vouchers by tying registration to the purchase of goods such as houses. Did the strategy work? Even before Gomillion was able to register himself, his efforts encouraging other blacks in Tuskegee to register succeeded in adding 40 voters to the rolls by 1938. In the election over the tax collector (a position with significant control over voter registration in the County) that year, these votes made a difference. The race was between incumbent W. S. Webb and challenger John Hugh Reynolds and was expected to be close:

“Both men realized that, in a county where there were only two thousand registered voters, the approximately seventy black voters could determine the outcome. Both wanted the black vote but they sought it in different ways. Webb 'wasn’t man enough to come out here and ask for it,' said one Institute voter later. ‘He tried to grab a man on the street and whisper in his ear.’ But Reynolds, ‘came right out there and talked with us - face to face. He told us he didn’t want no public endorsement and we knew why, but he did want our vote, and he promised to protect us if we gave it to him. He went to see every single Negro voter, and he got it.’ Reynolds won by twenty-two votes.”

Gomillion’s strategy led to the election of a candidate more sympathetic to black voters, as he had hoped. Bunche (writing in 1940) reported on the consequences for blacks of voting for Reynolds: “It is claimed that, in return for the black vote, the Negro has gotten better treatment in the courthouse. He is no longer pushed aside to make room for white customers but is taken in turn when he comes to pay his taxes. It has been possible to find whites to vouch for Negro registrants as a result of business contacts with them. Insurance agents, car salesmen, and so forth, are usually willing to vouch for black registrants for fear of losing Negro business.”

**Gingrich’s House**

In 1978, nearly 40 years later, Newt Gingrich, recently elected member of Congress from Georgia, was concerned about a different type of house, the House of Representatives of the United States Congress. He faced a House dominated by the Democratic Party whose members comprised a majority of the representatives. Fenno 1997 summarizes the relationship between majorities and minorities in the House: “The two crucial structural features of the majority-minority relationship are first that the majority party organizes and runs the House and second that the minority party adapts to the governing majority.” [page 9, italics in the original] The Democrats rarely consulted with Republicans on scheduling of legislation. The Democratic Party controlled the organization of the House; selected committee leaders, determined the jurisdiction of

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5 Norrell 1998, page 39, quoting Bunche, Ralph J., *The Political Status of the Negro in the Age of FDR*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973, page 392. Webb did try harder to encourage black voting in his favor on election day, but the effort came too late. Bunche 1973, page 283 (writing in 1940) states: “... the incumbent [Webb] saw – at three o’clock in the afternoon on election day – that he needed votes, and his supporters hired the Negro taxi in the town of Tuskegee to bring black voters to the polls. Negroes came for the ride, but they had already promised to vote for the man who now has the office [Reynolds].”

committees and their size, how staff resources were allocated and the internal procedures of committees.\(^7\)

Mickey Edwards, a Republican member of Congress compared his role with his Democratic counterpart, Dick Gephardt during the period:

“As a Democrat, [he] set agendas; as a Republican, I reacted to them. As a Democrat, [he] helped to set the terms for debate, deciding what, if any, amendments would be considered when legislation reached the House floor; as a Republican, I pleaded with the Rules Committee for a chance to offer alternatives. As Democrats, [he] and his party’s committee chairmen decided who would be allowed to testify before congressional committees and on what bills; as a Republican I had to fight to get conservative views heard.”\(^8\)

Shortly after he was elected to the House, Gingrich undertook to change this situation. “His overriding goal was to make the Republicans the majority party in the House. His instrumental goal was to change the party’s adaptation strategy from accommodation to confrontation.” \(^9\) He first forced accommodating Republicans from leadership positions. He then attacked Democratic leaders and the Democratic controlled House as an institution. These attacks within the House were not designed to get the Democratic majority within the House to incorporate Republican preferences. He used his scorched earth, confrontational strategy, to communicate with voters. He wanted to convince voters that the Democratic majority prevented the House from acting in the voters’ preferences and to induce voters to reject the Democratic incumbents at the polls.

In 1994, the voters responded and gave Republicans control of the House. \(^9\)

Herrnson 1998 page 24 reports:

“In 1994 conditions were ripe for the Republicans to pick up a significant number of congressional seats. Public hostility toward Washington, Democratic control of both the executive and legislative branches of the national government, and the Democrats’ historical association with the growth of federal programs and the bureaucracy put that party in a precarious position. Moreover, Clinton’s early missteps on health care reform, gays in the military, and tax cuts, and allegations of ethical misconduct by the president and his administration, served to energize Republican candidates and their supporters while demoralizing Democrats and their allies. Under Gingrich’s leadership, the Republicans capitalized on these circumstances by running a nationalized anti-Washington campaign…”

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As Fenno concludes, Gingrich’s achievement is “an incredible success story.” (1997, page 16)

**Lesson from the House Buildings of Gomillion and Gingrich: The Importance of Elections**

Both Gomillion and Gingrich’s actions illustrate how important they viewed election outcomes. Although Gomillion’s efforts to increase the influence of black voters in Tuskegee faced many more roadblocks in the years that followed, the end result (almost 40 years later) was a permanent change in the role of black voters in Tuskegee and throughout the nation. The advent of Republican control of Congress, as a consequence of the 1994 elections, led to change in the ideological composition of the House of Representatives (which we will discuss shortly), a confrontation over the budget with the president, and a temporary shut down of the entire government.

Gomillion and Gingrich recognized that elections dominate American politics. The election calendar deeply influences the timing of public policy choices; economic decisions are impacted by elections and electoral outcomes; fights over the right to vote and how votes are counted have historically resulted in some of our most serious political strife and significant court decisions; and a considerable amount of financial resources and expenditure of effort and time is engaged in the election process. Our elected officials seem constantly driven by the next election campaign and every political event is interpreted by the media in the context of current or future campaigns. Despite widespread cynicism about politics, low turnout, and claims of high voter apathy, almost every level of American society is involved in elections from Buddhist Nuns in southern California to dairy farmers in Vermont. Understanding how elections work is crucial for understanding American politics.

**The Role of Electoral Coalitions in American Politics**

**Coalitions in Politics: Winners and Losers**

How and why do elections rule American politics? It is through elections that Americans chiefly form the coalitions that determine public policies. In contrast to many parliamentary systems, where governments are often formed after elections in negotiations among multiple political parties, our governing coalitions are largely determined by election results.

Politics involves choices that affect everyone in a country. Inevitably, many will disagree over which choices a government will make in at least some of these policies. For example, when a government chooses how to tax individuals, perhaps whether to use income versus sales taxes, some citizens will prefer one option instead of the other (and some may prefer neither). Or when a government chooses the extent that it controls gun purchases or abortion rights or funding for education, there will be differences of opinion across the citizenry. In Tuskegee, for instance, the local government officials made choices about how to allocate public expenditures, whether to spend money on improving streets, or public schools, etc., and on who had the right to register to vote and participate politically. Not all the citizens of Tuskegee agreed on these issues.

Ultimately, then, when policy choices are made, there are “winners” and “losers.” In Tuskegee, before Gomillion began his voter registration drive, black voters were losers in the policy game. Gingrich was also not among the winners. When we study politics, we study how citizens end up either as winners or losers. Of course, everyone who is a winner isn’t alike and neither are the losers. The winners are generally a coalition of
people who have diverse preferences over policy, but all prefer the policy choice that the government has made to the available alternatives. The losers are similarly a coalition of people who have diverse preferences over policy but prefer available alternatives to the policy choice that the government makes. In Tuskegee black voters joined with Reynolds to form a winning coalition and Gingrich, who had been in a losing coalition in Congress, mobilized voters nationally to elect more Republican members so that he could be in a winning coalition within the Congress.

We call these coalitions because they are groups of people with diverse preferences over their ideal policy preferences, but who have a common shared preference about the policy choice the government makes given the government’s possible alternatives. For instance, in Tuskegee in the 1930s not all the white and black supporters behind Reynolds’ election campaign had the same eventual policy goals. Certainly a number of black voters behind Reynolds wanted full voting rights for all black citizens in Tuskegee and the greater role in government that this meant while many of the white voters were willing to give black voters better treatment in return for support only as long as this was limited to “small things” or “little local things.”

Reynolds himself did not believe that blacks should be given full rights of political participation in Tuskegee. From a 1939 interview with sociologist Gunnar Myrdal, Bunche (1974, page 394) summarizes Reynolds’ view of black voting:

“He states, quite definitely, that in the Veterans’ Hospital at Tuskegee and at the Institute itself there are more than a thousand Negroes who are much better qualified to vote than the average white voter in the county. He adds, however, that it would be a great misfortune if these Negroes were permitted to vote, stating that Tuskegee Institute had been traditionally very cautious about encouraging Negroes to vote, because Tuskegee realizes that its security depends upon maintaining the goodwill of the whites in the county. The tax collector declared flatly that in the event Tuskegee Negroes attempted to register in great numbers, Tuskegee would be destroyed — intimating that the whites in the community of Tuskegee and in the surrounding area would burn the institution down. He also added that all the whites would leave the town of Tuskegee should it become politically dominated by the Negroes and Tuskegee Institute.”

Given that Reynolds was in general opposed to black political participation on an equal level with whites in Tuskegee, why then did he court black voters and provide them with the “small things” or “little local things”? In the south in the late 1930s, Tuskegee was unusual. Customarily in southern counties the number of black voters who were able to overcome barriers to registration and voting was insignificant in deciding elections and often not allowed to participate in the official “whites-only” Democratic primaries (in Tuskegee and some other places in the south blacks were allowed to vote in the Democratic primaries). But as Bunche (1974, page 396) discusses, the closeness of the elections in Macon County made the black vote more important (coupled with the presence of educated activists such as Gomillion). Thus, although Reynolds may not have had the same ultimate goal as some of the black voters he courted (full black voter participation) and even saw such an outcome as a massive catastrophe for the County, he was willing to form a coalition with black voters by providing them some services and

10 Quoted by Bunche 1974, page 393.
support in order to get elected. The black voters also were willing to back Reynolds over Webb because at least through Reynolds registration was easier for some black voters and there was some improvement in the government services offered to blacks. Neither Reynolds nor Gomillion would be able to dictate policy exactly as they preferred, but in a successful coalition they could move policy closer to what they both preferred (for Reynolds election to office, for Gomillion better treatment for blacks than under Webb).

**Definitions:**

A **coalition** is a group of political actors with diverse preferences over ultimate or final policy outcomes, but who share a common preference about one or more of the policy choices before the government. A **winning coalition** is the group of political actors who prefer the current government policy choice or choices to the available alternatives. A **losing coalition** is the group of political actors who prefer available alternatives to the current government policy choice or choices.

**Electoral and Post Election Coalitions**

Thus, at some point, when governments make policies, citizens are divided into these winning and losing coalitions. From a simple perspective, in democracies coalitions can form at two different stages: before we select our elected officials (*electoral coalitions*) or after the officials have been selected (*post election coalitions*). Electoral coalitions form to elect candidates who are expected to make choices preferred by the coalition. Typically, we think of political parties as electoral coalitions; coalitions of voters who have a common “party” perspective on policy choices that the government faces and whose candidates are expected to make choices once elected that represent this party perspective. Both Gomillion and Gingrich formed electoral coalitions.

Ordinarily coalitions that form after elections are coalitions that combine parties; that is, cross party lines and involve members of several or more parties. Figure 1-1 illustrates the timing of the coalition process in democracies.

**Definitions:**

Electoral coalitions are coalitions formed to elect candidates who are expected to make choices preferred by the coalition. Political parties are typically electoral coalitions. Post election coalitions are coalitions formed after elections and typically cross party lines.

In American politics, most coalition formation is electoral – that is, the major winning electoral coalition is generally the dominant part of the winning post election coalition. This is what Gomillion and Gingrich recognized; that in order to become members of the winning post election coalition they needed first to be in a winning electoral coalition. Historically, citizens in the United States have formed two large broad-based electoral coalitions (our major parties, Democrats and Republicans) to elect officials in the government.
Post Election Coalitions and Government Decisions

However, sometimes, the coalitions that bargain post election over who will win or lose on policy choices are different from the electoral coalitions. This happened when conservative southern Democrats, for example, voted with some Republicans over civil rights issues in the 1950s and 1960s. Notice that this occurred even though for much of this period, a single party or electoral coalition dominated both the executive and legislative branches of government. Thus, the coalition of winners was actually smaller than the electoral coalition that had won most of the offices in the government. Over time, these conservative southern Democrats were replaced or actually became Republicans, and the electoral coalition began to reflect more the coalition of winners (and sometimes losers) in choosing government policy.

In Tuskegee, Alabama during the 1930s, Gomillion faced an electoral system dominated by just one political party, the Democratic Party. The electoral coalitions that formed were different factions within the Democratic Party. The “real” election contests were in choosing who the nominees were for the Democratic Party. Sometimes, in states or localities where the major national political parties dominate as in Alabama during this time period, the electoral coalitions that matter in these elections are factions within the dominant major political party.

Alternatively, occasionally the two major parties work in a “grand” coalition to make choices over policy where both parties agree about the proper alternatives such as in cases of international conflict as after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. And at times voters choose not to join the two major party coalitions in their choices at election time but to form third or minor parties (like the Progressives in the early 20th century) or support independent candidates (like John Anderson in 1980). Nevertheless, no minor party or independent candidate has ever been elected to the presidency or dominated post election winning coalitions in American politics.

Only once, when Teddy Roosevelt ran for president in 1912 as a Progressive, did a minor party candidate for president receive more than 25% of the vote. Moreover, when minor party or independent candidates are elected to lower level offices, they generally then join in a post election coalition with one of the major parties. For instance, Bernard Sanders, a Socialist member of the House of Representatives from Vermont has allied with the Democratic Party in most of his choices. Thus, despite these occasional differences between electoral coalitions and post election coalitions, the influence of electoral coalitions is significant in American politics. In American politics, electoral coalitions have a strong influence on the shape of the ultimate winning and losing coalitions that determine government policies.

In parliamentary systems, in contrast, a significant amount of cross party coalition formation occurs. That is, generally there are more than two electoral coalitions (political parties) and post election, some of these electoral coalitions form into a “governing coalition,” the winners. Sometimes minority parties have consequential roles in these governing coalitions. In a parliamentary system, a independent or minor party member such as Sanders, may play a crucial role or even a determining role in setting government policies.

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11 During this time Alabama’s Democratic Party also used “white primaries” to select nominees; nominees that were restricted to white voters only. However, the restriction to white voters was not strictly enforced. The white primary was declared unconstitutional in Smith v. Allwright, 1944.
policy, even though his party was not part of the dominant electoral coalition. Laver and Shepsle, 1996 summarize: “After the election has been held in most parliamentary democracies, it is often the case that no party will have won an overall majority.” (page 4).

Why Are Electoral Coalitions Dominant in US Politics?

The principal reason for the dominance of electoral coalition formation in American politics is the institutional structure of our electoral process. In particular, our widespread use of plurality rule or winner-take-all, first-past-the-post elections to select only one winner encourages voters, interest groups, and candidates to form into two large electoral coalitions (our major political parties). The proposition that plurality rule to select one winner leads to a dominance of two major parties is generally called Duverger’s Law.\(^\text{12}\)

**Definitions:**

Plurality rule elections are elections where the candidate who receives the most votes is declared the winner. Duverger's Law is the proposition that when an elected official is selected using plurality rule then there will be just two dominant electoral coalitions or political parties offering candidates for the office.

In many parliamentary systems, the electoral system does not force the same large electoral coalitions to form. In these systems, a candidate can be elected even if his or her vote totals are less than another candidate. How can that happen? In proportional representation systems, political parties are allocated a number of seats in the parliament essentially based on the votes they receive (there are limits and the rules are complex, but this is the simple effect).\(^\text{13}\) Even more interesting, occasionally the parties that then form together to make up the winners or the governing coalition in parliamentary democracies make up even less than a majority of the members of the parliament, what is called “minority government” in parliamentary systems.\(^\text{14}\)

Even candidates who are not the top vote receivers may be elected so that his or her party is proportionally represented within the parliament. Hence, small parties have less incentive to join with larger ones in bigger electoral coalitions in order to elect candidates and typically, there are more than two major political parties.

**Definition:** Proportional Representation election systems are ones where seats in a legislature are allocated according to the success of parties in elections so that even if a party does not win the most votes in an election, party members can be elected.


\(^{13}\) See Cox 1997 for a review of these rules.

Plurality rule is not the only reason why the two major parties tend to dominate electoral coalitions; other numerous institutional features in the American system advantage the two major parties and electoral coalition formation around them, including automatic ballot access for major party candidates; the campaign finance system which is more likely to aid the major party candidates; convention funding; and media practices. One important institutional ingredient, a powerful executive directly elected via a plurality rule system (which the electoral college approximates) also encourages two major party electoral coalitions.

As Cox 1997 argues, the presidential candidates “. . . have a pretty clear incentive to recruit supporters among the legislative candidates, and the legislators may have incentives to ride presidential coattails or court presidential favor. Presidential ambition may thus lead to the organization of legislators from each district into two nationwide electoral alliances, or parties.”\footnote{Cox, 1997, page 190.} We discuss further how these other electoral system features advantage the two major parties in dominating electoral coalitions in chapters 4, 5, and 9.

**Gingrich’s Failure and Divided Government**

Even though our electoral and governmental institutional system is designed to favor two dominant electoral coalitions and winning electoral coalitions typically are the dominant parts of winning post electoral coalitions, several features of our governmental system limit the ability of winning electoral coalitions to completely control post electoral coalitions. That is, our governmental institutions often force winning electoral coalitions to form winning post electoral coalitions that cross party lines (i.e. force the winning electoral coalition to form a winning post election coalition with the losing electoral coalition).

For one thing, our federal governmental system means that many government officials with significant decision making powers are chosen at the state and local level. If a national losing electoral coalition is successful in state and local races, to the extent that policy decisions require approval by state governments, the national winning coalition cannot ignore the preferences of the members of the national losing coalition (although the federal nature of our system has also varied over time). We discuss the role federalism plays in major party competition in chapter 5.

A more obvious limitation occurs through the separate election of the executive from the legislative branch. While sometimes one major party has managed to elect candidates such that the party controls both the president and the congress (and as Cox argues, presidents have incentives to do mobilize voters to do so), other times the two major parties must share control in what is called divided government.

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**Definition:** Divided government is when the President is a member of a different party from one or more of the Houses of Congress. When government is divided the political parties (electoral coalitions) must bargain over the public policy choices.
Gingrich faced divided government in 1994. Although he was able to successfully form a winning electoral coalition to secure a majority in the House of Representatives in 1994 and control of the House for the Republican party, a Democrat, Bill Clinton, was still in the White House. With the gain in 52 seats, the Republican party now had 230 members in the House with Democrats occupying 204 seats (Bernard Sanders of Vermont was elected as an Independent although he usually votes with Democrats). Yet new legislation required either a presidential signature or passage over a presidential veto which required a 2/3 majority (as well as passage in the Senate which also was in the control of Republicans). With only 53% of the votes in the House in Republican hands, if Gingrich wished to pass a measure, he needed support across party lines (Democratic members of Congress) or to form a coalition with Clinton.\footnote{Moreover, as Cameron, Charles, \textit{Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 notes Clinton was more moderate on some issues than Democrats in Congress and to secure a veto-proof majority was at that time perhaps more difficult than agreement with Clinton on policy (see page 258).}

However, Gingrich’s strategy of confrontation and partisanship which led to a successful retaking of the House from Democrats was not amenable to the compromise necessary in order to form post electoral winning coalitions which inevitably had to involve the president and/or Democrats in Congress in order to get legislation passed [see Fenno 1997 for a discussion of these strategies]. As a result, Gingrich was eventually replaced in his role as Republican leader for a Speaker of the House who was more willing to engage in compromise. Republicans did see some policy changes in the late 1990s after their take over of the House, but only with the support of Democratic members of Congress and/or the President (welfare reform, some tort reform, etc.) in a winning post election coalition.

Policy choices made by the government, when both parties have members who are serving in elected offices, is a result of the bargaining that goes on between the two major electoral coalitions, who represent different party perspectives on government policy choices. Since divided government is obviously a result of different electoral coalitions controlling the two branches, why would voters choose to support one electoral coalition to control one branch while allowing the other electoral coalition to control a different branch? We will consider this question in Chapter 4.

\textbf{Studying American Elections: Actors versus Institutions}

In the next chapter and the ones that follow, we investigate how electoral coalitions form and the roles played by actors and institutions. But before we begin our exploration, it is useful to consider the way in which we will study elections and electoral coalition formation. In our study, we will examine both the actors in elections and the institutions involved in the electoral process.

\textbf{Actors in American Elections}

The actors involved in American politics realize how important electoral coalition formation is in the ultimate determination of policy. Gomillion in 1934 recognized that unless white elected officials needed black votes to secure office they would not include them in their electoral coalitions; blacks would not see their preferences satisfied. So, to improve black neighborhoods and schools for black students, he started a drive to increase black voter registration and force candidates’ electoral coalitions to incorporate black voters.
Gingrich knew in 1978 that unless Republicans could control the majority of seats in the House of Representatives, he could not influence the legislation before the House. So, to control public policy, he began to build a larger electoral coalition under the umbrella of the Republican Party, an electoral coalition large enough to capture the majority of seats in the House.

In this book, we explore how these electoral coalitions are formed and how they rule American politics. In American elections, there are four types of actors: voters, candidates, parties, and interest groups. Voters decide which candidates (or options in direct democracy) to vote for and whether to vote at all. Candidates choose whether to run for office and policy positions to advocate in elections or once elected. Parties choose which candidates are their nominees and how to coordinate across many elections. Interest groups choose whether to provide candidates and/or parties with campaign contributions or to directly influence voters. Understanding how American elections work requires understanding each type of actor and how these actors interact within the electoral process. In the following chapters, we will discuss how voters, candidates, parties, and interest groups choose in American elections.

We will meet a lot of these actors and hear their stories. A lot of the people we will meet are elected officials like Tom Campbell in California, who changed his state’s primary system; Jeb Bush, who had to learn how to moderate on policy; Jesse Ventura, who challenged the entire major two party system and defeated it; Charles Goodell, who bucked his party’s policies on Vietnam; Joe Moakley, who took an unusual road to be a party leader; Edwin Edwards, who won the governorship because he was considered the lesser of two evils by some voters; William Crawford, who helped shape the party system for many years, yet is hardly known today; etc. But we will also talk about voters as well as interest group leaders like Betty Friedan, the feminist who helped mobilize women and Don Smith, a union leader in Detroit, Michigan.

Institutions in American Elections

Focusing only on the actors and their choices would give us an incomplete view of American elections and how they rule American politics. Our electoral institutions (the rules that determine who votes, the geographical areas represented by the elected officials, the ways in which votes are counted, which public officials are chosen through elections rather than appointment, whether elected officials in one branch of government must compromise with officials in another branch of government to choose policy) play crucial roles in how elections rule American politics. We have already discussed how our use of plurality rule and the existence of an independently elected executive are principal causes for the dominance of electoral coalition formation in winning post election coalition formation. But our electoral institutions also determine and effect the shape of our electoral coalitions. Differences in the electoral institutions over time and across the country have affected electoral coalitions in important ways. Without a thorough understanding of the role of electoral institutions, we cannot understand American elections. Each of the actors’ choices that we mentioned above and throughout the book are influenced profoundly by our electoral system.

How do differences in electoral institutions matter over time? Gomillion’s experience illustrates how rules regulating the process through which voters register affects which citizens are involved in forming electoral coalitions. Not until the elimination of the poll tax and literacy requirements (with the passage of the Voting
Rights Act of 1965), were all black citizens in Tuskegee able to join electoral coalitions. Thus, the existence of these requirements constrained Gomillion’s efforts to influence election outcomes.

There are other ways in which electoral institutions affect how elections rule American politics. Many of these institutional features vary across the states. For example, states vary in how parties choose nominees for offices. In some states parties select nominees in primaries that are closed to nonparty members, in other states parties allow all voters to participate. These differences can affect the types of electoral coalitions formed by parties and the policy positions of the parties’ nominees. In this book, we will explore these ways and others in which electoral institutions affect how elections rule American politics.

A Framework for Understanding Elections

Scholars of American politics have long appreciated that our electoral institutions play such a fundamental role. Nevertheless, only in the last half-century have researchers begun to build a formal framework for understanding how elections rule. Much of this work is very recent; research completed in the last 10 to 20 years. There has been an explosion of work on how voters, candidates, political parties, and interest groups interact through electoral institutions to determine American public policies. This research has greatly increased our understanding of how elections rule American politics.

Using Models to Understand American Politics

The framework we will use to understand how elections rule American politics involves using “models” of the election process. These models simplify and abstract away from many of minute details of elections. Suppose that our purpose was not to understand politics but to understand rivers and how to prevent floods. In order to build an understanding of rivers, we might construct a physical model of a river and examine how the water flows through our model river. However, our physical model of the river would have to ignore real world details of the river and make false assumptions about the river (i.e. about its size, for example). We will also omit some of the detail of the vegetation along the river. Our model will overlook some of the differences in colors of the vegetation, not show the architectural fine points of the bridges that cross the river. We will have to guess about how “real” fish or boats might be affected by water flows in the river. Our model can tell us some things, but not others.

Suppose our interest was not about the flow of water through the river at all, but the landscape of the riverbank and the architectural details of the buildings and bridges along the river. In that case, our model might not need water at all (may use a mirror or painted surface to represent the river) and focus instead on details a model analyzing the river flow ignores. In fact, using water to reproduce a flood would prevent the model from providing us with the information we need to evaluate the landscape and architectural details.

Models of elections are similar. We often focus on some details and ignore others so that we can evaluate the effects of the fine points that we concentrate on. So for example, we might examine how voters choose in an election while assuming that the candidates’ positions on the issues are fixed. Our models are stylized to represent general situations that can occur in American elections. By constructing models, we can generate explanations and make predictions about American elections.
One of the ways that we use our constructed models to generate explanations and make predictions is by varying parts of the models. For example, if our model is about river flow, then we would want to vary how much water flows through the model. If our model is about architectural details, then we might want to vary the details we examine. Similarly, in models of elections we sometimes take the same basic model and vary aspects. We look at a situation where there is three voters, then we add a voter to see how that affects our predictions. Or we look at situation where there are two candidates and we add a candidate. Or we compare how candidates may choose policy in a primary election that is restricted to party members with one that allows everyone to vote. By varying aspects of the model, we can understand better how changes in these aspects in the real world affect our analysis.

When we make these changes, we typically assume that this is the only thing that is being changed, that all the other aspects of the model are held constant. This is called the ceteris paribus assumption, for the Latin meaning all things constant. For example, we would vary the water flow keeping the rest of the model unchanged. Or the architectural details. Or in a model of an election, we may add a candidate but keep voters the same, or keep voters and candidates the same and change the primary rules. This allows us to be precise about cause and effect. We can then come up with theoretical predictions about how one thing may affect other things. If we change too many things at the same time, it is difficult to figure out what the cause and effect relationship is. For example, if we vary both the voters and numbers of candidates at the same time, and find that doing so changes who wins, we do not know if it is the variation in the voters or the variation in the candidates that caused this change.

A Rational Choice Approach

The framework of much current research on American elections has been built on what is popularly called a “rational choice” approach. Unfortunately, the term rational choice implies things it doesn’t mean and means things that aren’t obvious. What do we not mean by rational choice? We do not mean that everyone always makes “perfect” or “right” choices. Nor do we mean that people have brains like computers and consciously calculate every possible option. We mean something much more simple, that given the information and constraints that an individual has, she will make the choice that is most likely to meet the goals that she has.

For example, Gomillion had a choice about how to achieve his goal of public policy more reflective of black voter interests. He could have done nothing. But, he anticipated that this choice would not lead to policy in the interests of blacks. He could have engaged in violence, attacking white elected officials or threatening to do so unless these officials made different choices. Yet, this choice had a high potential cost as he could be prosecuted for taking illegal actions and sent to prison. Gomillion perceived that within the constraints on registration that existed, more black voters could register and have an effect on elections in the near future. Black voters could use their economic might, as Gomillion did with the white contractor who wanted to build him a house, to secure white vouchers and pass the Macon County Board of Registrars. Gomillion made the choice to work to increase black voter registration, a choice he believed could best achieve his goal given the information he had and the constraints he faced.

Similarly, Gingrich also could have chosen to accommodate with the majority and take what role the majority allowed him to have in public policy making within the
House. Certainly, Republicans in the House prior to Gingrich had generally taken an accommodating approach. But accommodation from Gingrich’s perspective yielded too little benefit. Gingrich was willing to give up short-term gains in policy from accommodation to achieve bigger long-term gains from future control of the majority.

It is interesting to consider why it is that Gingrich’s choice to confront the majority and seek electoral victory was different from the choices made by earlier Republicans, who had chosen the accommodation strategy. That is, Democrats controlled majorities in the House for 40 years before the election of 1994 and until the 1980s most Republicans chose to work with Democrats. Fenno 1997 (page 14) argues that early accommodationist Republicans, “. . . working in cross-party coalition with defecting conservative Democrats, won some legislative battles, and they prevailed inside the [Republican] party.” In the early years of the Democratic control of the House (the 1950s and 1960s), the winning post electoral coalitions, as we noted above, were different from the winning electoral coalitions and that helped Republicans. That is, the conservative southern Democrats voted with Republicans during these years.

Yet, continued control by the Democratic Party of the House changed the institutional structure through which the Republican minority worked. The Democratic majority began to re-write the rules of the House and to re-work the committee structure to decrease the influence of the Republican minority. Also, the majority of Democrats in the House worked to use the way they allocated power within the House to reward those members of the electoral coalition who were members of their Democratic dominated post election coalition (i.e. they took measures to punish the defecting conservative Democrats). By the time Gingrich was elected, accommodation no longer provided the same benefits to Republicans. Thus, changes in the institutional structure of the House led to a change in Republican choices.

Rational choice simply assumes that actors in politics like Gomillion and Gingrich consider these costs and benefits, and, given the information they have and the constraints they face, make the choices that best achieve their goals. These goals do not have to be selfish or self centered. Certainly, for both Gomillion and Gingrich, while achieving their goals would provide personal benefits, they also benefited others as well. The goals could be purely altruistic, benefiting others at the expense of the person making the choice. *Rational choice does not imply selfish choice.*

**Operationalizing Rational Choice**

How is the rational choice assumption used in the coming chapters? When political actors like Gomillion and Gingrich make choices, we assume that the actors have preferences over the outcomes that can result from their choices. That is, some outcomes they prefer to others and some outcomes they are indifferent between. For example, there were a number of possible outcomes facing Gomillion. One outcome would be for things to continue as they were, the “status quo” where blacks had some political power in Tuskegee, but not much. Another possible outcome was for blacks to have less political power than presently, while a third was for blacks to have more political power than presently. We assume that when Gomillion faced the available choices before him – doing nothing, taking violent action against white officials, getting

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blacks to use economic power to increase their ability to vote – he considered his preferences over these outcomes and made the choice that would give him the outcome he most preferred.

Rational choice means that the preferences of Gomillion are transitive; which means that if Gomillion prefers x to y and y to z, then he also prefers x to z. Similarly, if he is indifferent between x and y and indifferent between y and z, he is indifferent between x and z. For example, we might say that x represents blacks having more political power than presently, y represents blacks staying at the status quo level of power, and z represents blacks having less political power than presently. Gomillion, because he prefers more political power for blacks to less political power for blacks, has transitive preferences.

Note that Gomillion’s preferences could be transitive if he preferred y to x, x to z, and then z to x (i.e. he preferred the status quo first, more political power second, and less political power third). Gomillion’s preferences would be non-transitive if they looked something like this, he preferred x to y, y to z, and then z to x (he preferred blacks having more power to the status quo, the status quo to blacks having less political power, and blacks having less political power to blacks having more political power). If his preferences are like this, then it is impossible for us to order his preferences consistently – it is impossible for us to figure out which option he prefers most.

It is important to realize that this is not a value judgment about the preferences – that is, Gomillion’s preferences are rational whether he orders them with z first, then y, then x, or x first, then y, then z, or x first, then z, then y, etc. His preferences are rational as long as we can consistently order them in a logical fashion. As long as they are transitive, we say that his preferences are rational and that his choices based on those preferences are rational.

**Definition:** An individual’s preferences are transitive if when he prefers x to y and y to z, then he also prefers x to z. An individual is considered rational if he or she has transitive preferences.

Another way to think about Gomillion preferences over outcomes is that each outcome gives him some “satisfaction” or degree of “happiness.” Political scientists generally call the satisfaction utility. If he prefers x to y, then we say he receives more utility from x than y. If he is indifferent between x and y, then we say that x and y give him the same amount of utility. When we say that Gomillion makes the choice that would give him the outcome he most preferred, we say that he made the choice that could yield him the most utility – that he preferred the most – in this case, getting blacks to use economic power to increase their ability to vote. We say that Gomillion made the choice that maximized his utility, given the constraints that he faced and the information that he had. Because Gomillion is rational, has transitive preferences, then he can make this choice. We say that an actor makes a rational choice when he or she chooses alternatives in order to maximize his or her utility from the possible outcomes.

It is important to remember that the preferences of actors come first, and utility is just a way that we represent them. We do not say that Gomillion prefers a particular
choice because it has higher utility, but that he has higher utility because he prefers a particular choice.

**Definitions:** Utility is the satisfaction or happiness that political actors receive from outcomes. A political actor makes a rational choice when he or she chooses alternatives in order to maximize his or her utility from the possible outcomes.

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**How Rational is Rational Choice?**

**Problems with Rational Choice**

Nevertheless, making these choices can seem to require considerable intellectual capability, so much so that it seems odd to say that an individual, especially average voters in elections, can make these choices. Both Gomillion and Gingrich needed to consider what choices others might make in response to their choices. Gomillion had to estimate the likelihood that he could convince other blacks to register and that their economic power could induce whites to vouch for them. Gomillion believed that an increase in black voters would induce candidates for office like Webb and Reynolds in the 1938 tax collector election to include them in their electoral coalitions. Thus, he had to estimate how he expected these candidates to react to higher numbers of black voters.

Gingrich needed to estimate the ability of confrontation to induce voters to reject Democrats at the polls and the costs that such a strategy had on policy choices in the short-term. Thus, Gingrich had to form an idea of how voters’ choose and how his strategy would affect those choices as well as the Democratic reaction to his strategy.

These calculations are not easy and there is evidence that people do not always make the best estimations. Many white voters in Tuskegee believed that their control over voter registration would prevent blacks from influencing elections and were surprised by the outcome of the election in 1938. Correspondingly, many political pundits were similarly surprised by Gingrich’s and the Republicans’ success in 1994; so even experts on voter choices and elections made inaccurate predictions. Does the fact that the calculations are complex and that we have evidence that often individuals fail to make these calculations accurately mean that the rational choice approach is fundamentally flawed?

**Rationalizing Rational Choice**

It is important to recognize that the assumption that choices are made rationally is not a theory of how actors’ brains work. That is, when we assume that political actors, such as voters, candidates, party members, interest group members, choose rationally we do not assume that they necessarily actually do these calculations. The standard comparison is a tennis player responding to an incoming shot. The physics involved in the balls’ trajectory, the player’s swing, racket features, etc. is complex. When we watch tennis players, we do not expect that they are making these complex calculations as they swing at the ball. Many pro tennis players achieve much success before they finish high school and often do not go on to college. Yet, we fully expect that the players are attempting to meet the goal of winning and choosing swings in order to win even though they often are not students of complex physics. We expect their choices to be “as if” they
were making the complex physics calculations. Similarly, when we assume that political actors are choosing rationally, we do not assume that they make complex calculations that seem required, but they choose “as if” they do.

Sometimes a tennis player’s swing choice is wrong and she misses the ball or sends the ball in the wrong direction, despite the fact that she has attempted to choose a swing in order to meet her goal of winning. This can happen when the player’s swing is based on perceptions of ball paths that are incorrect or when something unexpected hurts the player’s ability such as a sudden muscle spasm. Correspondingly, occasionally political actors make choices that are not the best they can do despite the fact that they are attempting to meet their goals. For example, Gingrich was unable to act effectively once he achieved his electoral success because he misunderstood that he still needed to compromise with the Democratic party in order to achieve his policy goals – he misjudged the strength of Democratic control of the presidency. Actors, like Gingrich, may misperceive how other actors will choose or their choices may be affected by unexpected variables or forces. Actors behaving rationally can make mistakes.

Our using a rational choice approach, therefore, does not imply that we assume that the political actors necessarily make complex calculations or that their choices are without error. Furthermore, in our study of American elections we will investigate the effects of incomplete information, constraints on the abilities of actors to make what appears the best decision for them and how errors may affect outcomes. Our actors are not perfect or unaffected by these factors.

Advantages of the Rational Choice Approach

We use the rational choice approach because it allows us to understand how actors may respond to constraints and expectations about others’ behavior. Suppose that alternatively we assume that political actors do not act to meet goals but that their behavior is best explained by simply examining past behavior using empirical studies. That is, political scientists have for many years surveyed and studied the choices and actions of voters, candidates, interest groups, and parties in American politics. We have built a large amount of empirical knowledge, facts, about these choices. But facts by themselves cannot provide us with explanations. Facts by themselves cannot provide us with predictions. In order to explain or predict behavior, we need to have a framework that puts together these facts, a theoretical framework.

By assuming that actors like Gomillion and Gingrich have goals and are making choices in order to meet these goals given the constraints they face and the information they have, we are able to understand the process by which changes in these constraints or information affects their behavior. We can understand why it is that Gomillion chose to use economic power to increase black voter registration rather than violence. We can understand why Gingrich chose a more confrontational strategy in the House than Republican members during other periods of Democratic majority rule in the House.

We can also make predictions about how these constraints and information variables will affect future behavior of political actors. Suppose we want to consider how a change in candidate nomination procedures is likely to affect electoral outcomes. Currently presidential candidates are chosen by the major parties in an idiosyncratic state by state sequential process. Some have proposed that we change to a national primary or a set of regional primaries. Such a change should substantially affect the behavior of all the actors in the process of selecting presidents; voters, candidates, interest groups, and
parties are likely to make different choices. If we have an understanding of the motivations of these actors and how they make their choices in order to achieve their goals, then we can make predictions about how a change in our electoral institutions can change the electoral coalition formation process. Therefore, a theoretical framework built on our rational choice assumption allows us to build a more complete understanding of American elections both in terms of explaining what we observe and in predicting future behavior.

House Building Redux

This chapter began with stories of house building by Gomillion and Gingrich. Both stories, though, really dealt with how these actors wished to build electoral coalitions so that they could be part of the governing coalition - the winners in the post election coalition game. Both actors recognized that they needed to go to voters in order to do this. Understanding how voters choose is fundamental to understanding elections.

In the next chapter, we will begin to build an understanding of voter choices in elections. We begin our study with an unusual election in 1970, at the height of the Vietnam War, when a Republican turned against his party, leading to a very interesting three candidate election for the New York Senate. Our electoral coalition building stories are just beginning.

For Further Reading

{This section will be a brief summary of the important seminal sources for the material in this chapter.}

Exercises and Study Questions
Below are some of the examples of the types of exercises I will have for each chapter. I present some for this chapter and the next as examples.

1. Find a recent newspaper or newsmagazine article about an American election. Who are the members of the electoral coalitions in the story? How many electoral coalitions can you determine? How related are the coalitions to the major political parties?

2. Find a recent newspaper or newsmagazine article about an issue before the United States Congress. Who are the members of the post-election coalitions in the story? How many post-election coalitions can you determine? How related are the post-election coalitions to the major political parties?

3. Suppose that you wish to devise a physical model of the town or city in which you live in order to determine where a new highway that travels across town would be best located. What aspects of your town or city can you safely ignore? Why? What aspects must you include? Why? How could you use your model to answer the question posed? What things would you hold constant? What things would you vary?

4. Suppose now that someone asked you to use the model in #3 to determine where best to build a new elementary school. What aspects of the old model can you safely ignore? Why? What aspects must be added to the old model? Why? How could you use your model to answer the question posed? What things would you hold constant? What things would you vary?

5. Do you think that your preferences are rational? Why or why not? The preferences of people you know? Why or why not?
6. Suppose that an individual has the following preferences: he likes snow skiing more than ice hockey, he likes basketball more than baseball, he is indifferent between snow skiing and baseball, he likes baseball more than ice hockey, and he likes basketball more than snow skiing. Does he have transitive preferences? Is he rational? Can you construct a utility function that represents his preferences? Suppose that he had to pick a sport from the following set: snow skiing, ice hockey, and basketball. What would he pick? Suppose that he had to pick a sport from the following set: ice hockey, baseball, and basketball. What would he pick?

7. Suppose that an individual has the following preferences: he likes snow skiing more than ice hockey, he likes ice hockey more than basketball, he likes basketball more than baseball, he is indifferent between snow skiing and baseball, and he likes baseball more than ice hockey. Does he have transitive preferences? Is he rational? Can you construct a utility function that represents his preferences? Suppose that he had to pick a sport from the following set: snow skiing, ice hockey, and basketball. What would he pick? Suppose that he had to pick a sport from the following set: ice hockey, baseball, and basketball. What would he pick?
Chapter 2: How Voters Choose in American Elections

“The Christine Jorgensen of the Republican Party”

In 1970, voters in New York faced a dilemma. The Republican candidate for the Senate, Charles Goodell, wasn’t acting like a Republican. He was denouncing the Vietnam War and the Republican President Richard Nixon. A minor political party, called the Liberal Party, often viewed as to the left of Democrats in the state, had publicly given Goodell support. The Republican Vice-President, Spiro Agnew, called Goodell the “Christine Jorgensen of the Republican party,” in reference to the highly publicized sex-change operation that Ms. Jorgensen had just completed.18

But while the Liberal party had supported Goodell, the Democratic party had their own candidate, Richard Ottinger, and there was even a third candidate, James Buckley, running as a nominee of the another minor political party called the Conservative Party, who was publicly supported by a number of prominent Republicans. How were Republican voters supposed to vote in the election if their own national party leaders were denouncing the state party’s candidate and the official Republican candidate was receiving support from liberals? How were Democratic voters supposed to vote when liberal voters in their state were supporting the Republican candidate and not the Democratic candidate? How were voters who thought of themselves as more leftist liberals supposed to vote?

This chapter shows how voters choose in situations like this in American politics. But before addressing the New York race in more detail, we will first discuss voter choices in more “normal” American elections where Democrats and Republicans are more easily distinguishable and there are only two candidates.

Voter Choices in Plurality Rule Elections with Two Candidates

The Dominance of Plurality Rule Elections in American Politics

Virtually all elections in the United States are determined by plurality rule or are “winner-take-all.” That is, the candidate who has the most votes or is first-past-the-post wins. All members of Congress, both in the House of Representatives and the Senate, are selected by plurality rule. All governors are selected using this procedure and practically all other state and local elective offices are so determined. While our presidents are selected via the electoral college, electoral college votes are counted in the same manner – the candidate receiving the most is the winner.

In Chapter 1, we argued that plurality rule can lead to the dominance of just two major parties or electoral coalitions. In this chapter, we will explore why this might happen, why voters may choose to form into just two major electoral coalitions. However, we are going to find that this is not always the case. Sometimes voters find it rational to vote for third parties or independent candidates. We will discuss the determinants of voters’ choices; how they choose whether to vote for one of the major parties or to choose to vote for a minor party or independent candidate. We will consider

how electoral institutions (like majority requirements and campaign finance regulation) affect these choices and the role of campaigns and how campaign contributions, polls, and party decisions affect voter choices.

**The Rational Voter and Two Candidates**

As we discussed in chapter 1, we assume that voters make what we call “rational choices.” Specifically, we assume that voters have transitive preferences over the candidates and will want to cast their votes in order to lead to the best outcome. Suppose that there are only two candidates. We can think of the situation where each candidate is the nominee of one of the major parties. For instance, consider a voter named Charlotte choosing between the two major party candidates, Democrat Lawton Chiles and Republican “Jeb” (John Ellis) Bush, in the 1994 race for governor in Florida. Chiles was the incumbent governor; he was a moderate Democrat who had reduced spending increases, called for “right-sizing” the bureaucracy, and had begun welfare and education reforms. However, he had called for tax increases and his healthcare reform had been rejected by the state legislature. Bush, the son of former President George Bush, advocated full conservative reform. He called for fewer appeals for death row inmates and more executions; allowing school choice; and requiring voter approval for tax increases.

Charlotte’s preferences between these two candidates would depend on her preferences over these issues and the weights she places on these issues. Her preferences may also be influenced by other factors, such as her perception of the effectiveness of the two candidates. She may care about non-policy things about the candidates; i.e. she may like Chiles’ “cracker” roots (he grew up in central Florida) or Bush’s youth. For now, let’s just assume that she has preferences between the two candidates and she prefers Chiles. We say that her utility from the election of Chiles is greater than her utility from the election of Bush since she prefers Chiles to Bush.

How should Charlotte vote? Charlotte’s vote depends not only on her preferences represented by her utilities from each candidate winning, but on how she expects others to vote and what she expects the election outcome to be. If the election is close, then her vote will make a difference. As long as there is some possibility, even if very tiny, that Charlotte’s vote can affect the outcome of the election she should vote for Chiles. Since she prefers Chiles over Bush, she should always vote for him. Once she knows her preferences in this two-candidate race, her choice is easy. That is, voting for Bush can only increase Bush’s vote totals and help him win, something that would give her lower utility than a win by Chiles. We call voting for Chiles a *sincere* vote on her part, since Chiles is her most preferred choice of the two, gives her higher utility.

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19 According to Navarro, New York Times, November 4, 1998: Chiles “understood the need to appeal to rural whites when, in the last televised debate before the 1994 election, he warned his Republican opponent, Jeb Bush, ‘The old he-coon walks just before the light of day.’ The cracker saying was crystal clear here [northern Florida] but indecipherable to Bush, who moved to Miami in 1980, as well as to thousands watching the debate. Newspapers like The Miami Herald had to run articles explaining what he had meant, quoting in one a Hispanic man who said he had learned ‘how people feel when we speak Spanish.’ He-coon, it turned out, means the smart raccoon that waits until just before dawn to come out of hiding, when hunting dogs have tired of chasing younger, less-smart raccoons. ‘He-coon was a cracker saying I knew crackers would identify with,’ Chiles, 68, said in a recent interview.”
Definition: Sincere voting is when a voter votes for his or her most preferred candidate the candidate whose election will give the voter the highest utility.

Of course, Charlotte may choose not to vote at all, to abstain. For now, we will ignore that choice and assume that Charlotte always votes. [In chapter 7 we discuss the decision to vote or not, how voters make that decision, and how that decision affects electoral coalition formation.] In summary, when voters are faced with two candidates, they vote sincerely for their most preferred candidate.

Election Outcomes

Charlotte’s choice is just the first piece in understanding the election between Chiles and Bush. She is not the only voter in the election. In order to model the election we need to assume that these other voters also have preferences over the candidates, and that they will choose in order to maximize their utility, like Charlotte. The winner in the election, then, will be the candidate that receives the most votes. In a two-candidate race the winner will be the candidate who is the most preferred of the most voters. In 1994, Chiles was apparently this candidate; he won the election for governor in Florida with 51% of the vote to Bush’s 49% of the vote.

Voter Choices in Three Candidate Elections

New York’s 1970 Senate Race

As we can see, understanding voter choices in two-candidate elections can be easy. But what if there are more than two candidates? How do rational voters behave in three candidate elections? In the 1970 New York Senate race, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, voters faced just this situation. The incumbent was Republican Charles Goodell, who had been appointed to fill the vacancy after the assassination of Democratic Senator Robert Kennedy. In New York, there are other active political parties, particularly the Conservative and Liberal parties. New York law allows the parties to nominate the same candidates. That is, a candidate can run as both a Republican and a Conservative, for example.20 Typically, this is what happens in New York, the Conservative Party nominates the same candidate as the Republicans and the Liberals nominate the same candidate as the Democrats. Voters, then, most often have a choice between just two candidates and their choices are easy to examine as with Charlotte above.

However, in 1970 things were not as straightforward. The Republican candidate, Goodell, had decided to take a liberal stance on the Vietnam War and opposed Republican President Richard Nixon’s pro war policies. The Liberal Party, which also opposed the war, as a result, endorsed Goodell. But the Democrats chose a candidate from their party’s mainstream, Richard Ottinger. The Conservative Party, dissatisfied with Goodell, chose to nominee a third candidate who supported the Vietnam War, James Buckley, brother of conservative columnist William F. Buckley. As a result, there were

20 Candidates who run under more than one party label are called “fushion” candidates. New York state election law allows for candidates to run as fushion candidates a factor which some argue makes minor parties more politically viable.
two candidates who were perceived as liberals, Goodell and Ottinger, and one conservative candidate, Buckley. In a three-candidate race such as this one, determining how a voter will choose is not as easy as in two-candidate races.

**A Model of Voter Choice in a Three-Candidate Election**

A simple way to think of the situation in New York in 1970 is that there were basically three types of voters: voters whose first preference was Goodell (which we will call G voters), voters whose first preference was Ottinger (which we will call O voters), and voters whose first preference was Buckley (which we will call B voters). These voters’ utilities from the three candidates reflect these preferences. For example, assume that the three types of voters’ utilities from the three candidates are as given in Table 2-1.

**Table 2-1: Voter Utility from the Candidates by Voter Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voter Type</th>
<th>Utility from the Election of Goodell (in units of utility or utils)</th>
<th>Utility from the Election of Ottinger (in units of utility or utils)</th>
<th>Utility from the Election of Buckley (in units of utility or utils)</th>
<th>Number of Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G voters</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O voters</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B voters</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How do we interpret these utility numbers? They are representations in numbers of the voters’ preferences between the candidates. Thus, when we say that G voters receive 1 unit of utility or “util” from the election of Goodell, 0.75 units of utility or utils from the election of Ottinger, and 0 units of utility or utils from the election of Buckley, we simply mean that G voters receive the highest level of utility from the election of Goodell, the next highest from the election of Ottinger, and the least utility from the election of Buckley. The numbers are just representations of the preferences the voters have and the relative values they place on the election of the three candidates. Notice that the voters all have transitive preferences over the candidates.

G and O voters both prefer either Goodell or Ottinger to Buckley, while the B voters prefer Buckley and are largely indifferent between Goodell and Ottinger. Our model is designed to capture the idea that both Goodell and Ottinger are “liberals” and Buckley is a “conservative” on the issues that concern voters at the time. This does not mean that these voters are necessarily members of the Liberal or Conservative parties,
just that they prefer liberal positions on public policy if they are G or O voters and they prefer conservative positions on public policy if they are B voters.

**Voting in the Three-Candidate Race in New York**

We saw above that in two-candidate races, rational voters should vote sincerely for their most preferred candidates. Charlotte voted for Chiles as long as she believed that there was a probability, even if very tiny, that Chiles would be in a close race with Bush and her vote would make the difference in whether Chiles won or not. For B voters in the three-candidate race in New York, their voting choice is easy as well. That is, since B voters are indifferent between Goodell and Ottinger, then it is as if for them the race is like a two-candidate race. Either Buckley wins or someone else and they don’t care who the someone else is. Hence, they will always vote for Buckley as long as there is any chance, even if extremely small, that Buckley is in a close race to win the election. They have no reason to ever vote for Goodell or Ottinger (note that we will deal with the choice to abstain in chapter 7).

**Summary:** B voters will always vote for Buckley since they are indifferent between Goodell and Ottinger. As long as Buckley has even a very tiny chance of winning B voters should vote for him. B voters will therefore always vote sincerely.

However, things are different for G and O voters. First, consider G voters. They prefer either Goodell or Ottinger to Buckley. While they most prefer Goodell, if it is likely that Goodell has little of chance of winning and Ottinger does have a chance of winning, they will vote for Ottinger instead of Goodell. Similarly, if it is likely that Ottinger has little chance of winning and Goodell does have a chance of winning, O voters will vote for Goodell instead of Ottinger. That is, since there are more than two candidates in the race, some voters may find it preferable to vote *strategically* for their second preference rather than their first preference, if they perceive that their first preference has little chance of winning and their second preference has a good chance of winning.

**Definition:** Strategic voting is when a voter votes for a candidate who is not her first preference because he or she believes that she is more likely to have a preferable outcome by doing so.

**Election Outcomes in the Three-Candidate Race**

Figuring out what is likely to happen in a three-candidate race like the race in New York in 1970, because of the possibility of strategic voting, is not nearly as straightforward as in two-candidate races. That is, it is possible for all three candidates to win! How is that possible?
How Goodell Can Win

First, consider how Goodell might win. Goodell can win if voters expect that it is a close race between Goodell and Buckley – they are the top two candidates – and that Ottinger has no chance. As we already noted, B voters will always vote for Buckley. Does it make sense in this case for the G voters to vote sincerely? Yes, because if they expect that there is a close race between Goodell and Buckley and thus they should vote sincerely. Does it make it sense in this case for O voters to vote sincerely? No. They perceive that Ottinger has no chance and that it is a close race between Goodell and Buckley. Therefore O voters should vote strategically for Goodell. Buckley receives 40 votes, Goodell receives 60 votes, and Ottinger receives 0 votes. The election outcome does justify the voters’ expectations, Ottinger did have no chance of winning.

The voters are in a voting equilibrium, that is, each voter is making the best possible choice given what the other voters are doing and their expectations about the outcome. Moreover, their expectations about the election outcome, that the race is close it is between Goodell and Buckley and that Ottinger has no chance of winning, are justified by what actually happens.

Definition: A voting equilibrium is when voters’ choices are the best choices they can make given what other voters are choosing and their expectations about the outcome and their expectations about the outcome are justified by what actually happens.

How Ottinger Can Win

On the other hand, Ottinger could win in a similar way. That is, suppose that the voters think it is a close race between Ottinger and Buckley. G voters would then vote strategically for Ottinger and O voters would vote sincerely for him, giving him 60 votes to Buckley’s 40 votes. This is also a voting equilibrium because all three types of voters are making the best choices they can given what the other voters are doing and their expectations about the outcome are justified by what actually happens.

How Buckley Can Win

Finally, it is also possible for Buckley to win. Suppose that Buckley can win if both G and O voters vote sincerely for their first preference. In this case, Goodell and Ottinger both would receive 30 votes and Buckley would receive 40 votes. But would voting sincerely be a “best choice” in this case? Under these circumstances, both Goodell and Ottinger are equally likely to defeat Buckley, neither is perceived to have a greater chance of defeating Buckley than the other. Their supporters then, have no incentive to defect from their first preference and vote strategically for their second and Buckley wins. Table 2-2 summarizes the possible voting equilibria and how each type of voter would vote in each.
### Table 2-2: Voting Equilibria in the Three-Candidate Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electoral Coalitions</th>
<th>Voter Choices when Goodell wins</th>
<th>Voter Choices when Ottinger wins</th>
<th>Voter Choices when Buckley wins</th>
<th>Number of Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G voters</td>
<td>Vote sincerely for Goodell</td>
<td>Vote strategically for Ottinger</td>
<td>Vote sincerely for Goodell</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O voters</td>
<td>Vote strategically for Goodell</td>
<td>Vote sincerely for Ottinger</td>
<td>Vote sincerely for Ottinger</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B voters</td>
<td>Vote sincerely for Buckley</td>
<td>Vote sincerely for Buckley</td>
<td>Vote sincerely for Buckley</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Coalitions</td>
<td>Two electoral coalitions: G and O voters together support Goodell and B voters support Buckley</td>
<td>Two electoral coalitions: G and O voters together support Ottinger and B voters support Buckley</td>
<td>Three electoral coalitions: G voters support Goodell, O voters support Ottinger, and B voter support Buckley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Buckley can win because the supporters of Goodell and Ottinger face a problem of coordination. They would like to coordinate in a common electoral coalition on either Goodell or Ottinger. Unless they can do so, Buckley will win. It may seem strange that such a thing as a Buckley win could happen. Clearly, the supporters of Goodell and Ottinger, who outnumber the supporters of Buckley should be able to coordinate on one in an electoral coalition and defeat Buckley. In fact, such coordination is not always easy and in New York in 1970, it failed. Goodell received 24% of the vote, Ottinger received 37%, and Buckley won the Senate race with 39% of the vote.
The Importance of Coordination in Electoral Coalitions

Is the New York Case Isolated?

Coordination seemed to fail in New York in 1970. This discussion is at variance with the argument of Chapter 1 that a plurality rule election to select a single winner leads to the dominance of two major parties as electoral coalitions, Duverger’s Law. In New York, there were three major electoral coalitions – G voters, O voters, and B voters – despite the fact that only one candidate was selected and it was a plurality rule election. If Duverger’s Law had held, then only two candidates would have been viable and either Ottinger or Goodell would have won the election. Buckley won because Duverger’s Law did not hold. The outcome in New York is at variance with Duverger’s Law and it is not an isolated example.

How Many Minor Party and Independent Candidates Are There?

In the 1995-96, election year cycle, approximately 26% of the candidates for the U.S. House were independent or third party candidates, and two were elected (Jo Ann Emerson and Bernard Sanders). At the local and state level, candidates from minor parties sometimes receive a plurality of the vote and sometimes win. In the 1930s, Minnesota’s Farmer-Labor Party and Wisconsin’s Progressives won gubernatorial elections and legislative majorities (see Jewell and Olson 1982). In 1990, former Republican Congressman Lowell Weicker formed a third party, A Connecticut Party, and won the governorship with 40% of the vote against Democratic and Republican candidates. Former Republican Governor Walter J. Hickel won his governorship the same year as a member of the Alaska Independence Party with 39% of the vote. In 1994, Angus King won the governorship of Maine as an independent with 35% of the vote. King was reelected in 1998 with 59% of the vote. And in that same year, Jesse “The Body” Ventura, a former pro-wrestler, shocked the major parties in Minnesota by winning the governorship as a minor party candidate with 37% of the vote. Socialists have served as mayors of Burlington, Vermont and Iowa City, Iowa.

Do Voters Vote for Minor Party or Independent Candidates?

As these election results show, voters do not always support the major parties in American elections. Since the Civil War, third party presidential candidates received over 10% of the popular vote in 1912, 1924, 1968, and 1992. Votes for minor party presidential candidates have resulted in 16 out of 40 presidents winning office with less than a majority of the popular vote. In the last 40 years there have been three significant independent or minor party candidates for president in the United States: George Wallace in 1968 with 13.5% of the vote, John Anderson in 1980 with 7.1% of the vote, and Ross Perot in 1992 with 18.9% of the vote and in 1996 with 8.4% of the vote.

For these elections, the National Election Study (NES) surveyed voters asking them how they voted (this survey is conducted obviously after the election). But the survey also asks the voters about their “feelings” about the candidates. Voters are asked to rate the candidates on what has been called a “feeling thermometer” as shown in Figure 2-1. Notice that it measures a voter’s feelings about the candidates much the way we use thermometers to measure temperatures. If a voter rates a candidate at 0 on the thermometer it means the voter has a very cold or unfavorable feeling about the candidate, but if the voter rates the candidate at 100 it means the voter has a very warm or

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21 In 1998, Emerson ran as a Republican.
favorable feeling about the candidate. The dividing line between cold and warm is 50
and represents no feeling at all or indifference.

Figure 2-1 here

By comparing the ratings that these voters make about the candidates, we can get
a measure of their preferences over these candidates. For example, suppose it is the 1996
presidential election. In this election, the three candidates were Republican Bob Dole,
Democrat Bill Clinton, and Reform Party candidate Ross Perot. If a voter rated Dole at
85, Perot at 50 and Clinton at 40, we could say that Dole was his first preference, Perot
his second, and Clinton his third. Sometimes voters rate candidates equally (like the B
voters in our model of the New York 1970 Senate race).22

One way to measure how much voters coordinate is to measure how often voters
who preferred the third party or independent candidate in these presidential elections
voted strategically for their second preferred candidate. Table 2-3 presents this
comparison.

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22 Sometimes voters fail to rate all the candidates, which happens more often with third party or
independent candidates. Also, voters often rate candidates they know little about at the midpoint.
Table 2-3: Voting for First Preference by Voter Preferences, 1968-1996 (voters who tied in their preferences are excluded) from Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode, 1998.\textsuperscript{23}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1\textsuperscript{st} Preference</th>
<th>% Voted for</th>
<th>% Did Not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968: 1\textsuperscript{st} Preference is George Wallace</td>
<td>84% voted for Wallace</td>
<td>16% did not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968: 1\textsuperscript{st} Preference is a Major Party Candidate</td>
<td>96% voted for Major Party Candidate</td>
<td>4% did not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980: 1\textsuperscript{st} Preference is John Anderson</td>
<td>57% voted for Anderson</td>
<td>43% did not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980: 1\textsuperscript{st} Preference is a Major Party Candidate</td>
<td>97% voted for Major Party Candidate</td>
<td>3% did not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992: 1\textsuperscript{st} Preference is Ross Perot</td>
<td>77% voted for Perot</td>
<td>23% did not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992: 1\textsuperscript{st} Preference is a Major Party Candidate</td>
<td>94% voted for Major Party Candidate</td>
<td>6% did not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996: 1\textsuperscript{st} Preference is Ross Perot</td>
<td>61% voted for Perot</td>
<td>39% did not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996: 1\textsuperscript{st} Preference is a Major Party Candidate</td>
<td>97% voted for Major Party Candidate</td>
<td>3% did not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that when a voter’s first preference is a major party candidate, she almost always votes for that candidate. However, voters whose first preference is a minor party or independent candidate are much more often to vote for a candidate who is not their first preference. This tendency has varied over time, was lowest in 1968 and highest in 1980. Interestingly, the two elections where the tendency was highest (1980 and 1996); were cases where the percent of vote the received by the minor party or independent candidate was less than 10%. And the two elections where the tendency was lowest, (1968 and 1992), were cases where the minor party or independent candidate received more than 10% of the vote. This suggests that the voters were more likely to vote for their first preference when that candidate had a greater vote total although this is clearly crude evidence. Even so, voters were much more likely to desert their first preference if their first preference was a minor party or independent candidate, suggesting strategic voting by these voters.

**Not Unique, but Rare . . .**

As thought provoking as the examples of winning minor party and independent candidates are and voter tendencies to vote for them, the two major parties in the United States do dominate substantially electoral competition even when there are minor party or independent candidates. The tendency for voters to vote for major party candidates does dominate. Table 2-4 summaries the distribution of US Senators, Congress members, governors and state legislators by party affiliation after the 1998 federal election. Minor party and independent candidates in 1998 won only 2 state governorships and one Congressional seat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Independents or Minor Party Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senators</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the House of Representatives</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Governors</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Legislators (estimated)</td>
<td>4,003</td>
<td>3,549</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some might say that therefore we don’t need to worry too much about these minor party and independent candidates and situations such as New York’s 1970 Senate race. These can be just relegated as aberrations in the normal course of things. After all, in 1976, when Buckley ran for reelection (running as both the Republican and Conservative candidate), he lost to Daniel Patrick Moynihan (running as both the Democratic and Liberal candidate) 44.9% to 54.2%. Moynihan was to serve in the Senate for over 20 years, so Democrats and Liberals were able to coordinate ultimately.

However, the lesson to be learned from New York’s experience is quite the opposite. The lesson is that if we want to understand why the major parties dominate, we need to understand why it is that they are sometimes not successful in electoral coalition coordination. Plurality rule does not lead to major party dominance alone. When minor party or independent candidates enter races, they can win, if voters choose not to coordinate on the candidates nominated by the major political parties. This is rare, and elections such as New York voters’ selection of Buckley as Senator and Minnesota voters’ selection of a former pro-wrestler instead of the major parties’ nominees are noteworthy because of their rareness. Yet, these exceptions to Duverger’s Law show that understanding coordination in elections is crucial for understanding Americans’ electoral process. The exceptions help us understand the “normal” outcome. If we ignore the
exceptions then we lose the opportunity to understand the true causes of the non-exceptional outcome.

**Institutions and Coordination**

If Duverger’s Law does not always hold and sometimes in plurality rule elections where one candidate is selected voters fail to coordinate into just two electoral coalitions, then are electoral institutions irrelevant? Isn’t that contrary to what Chapter 1 argued? Didn’t we say that in order to understand elections in American politics that we needed to recognize and incorporate the influence of institutions and that examining just the behavior of the actors would not tell us the whole story? How then, do electoral institutions matter?

**The Use of Plurality Rule to Select One Candidate Does Matter**

First, we should not underestimate the influence of plurality rule and the election of single winners. The advantage of coordination for the G and O voters in New York existed because the outcome of the election was to be decided by plurality rule and there could be only one winner. Suppose instead of electing just one candidate the voters were selecting more than one. What if two candidates were to be elected and each voter could cast two votes (one per candidate)? How would B voters vote? Well B voters again would vote for Buckley. Since they are indifferent between G and O, they would cast their second vote for either one or just abstain. How would G voters vote? They would vote for their two top candidates Goodell and Ottinger. How would O voters vote? They would vote for their two top candidates Ottinger and Goodell. Both Ottinger and Goodell would each get at least 60 votes and Buckley would get at most 40 votes. Since two candidates are to be selected, both Ottinger and Goodell would be elected. As a result, the G and O voters would not need to choose between the two candidates and coordinate. The G and O voters do not need to combine into one electoral coalition.24

The point here is that the electoral institution of plurality rule and the restriction to only one winner is the reason why there is an incentive to coordinate into two electoral coalitions. Similarly, if Senate seats were distributed nationally according to the percentage of votes by parties, many argue that the incentive to coordinate into electoral coalitions would be less.25 While coordination doesn’t always work in American elections, the necessity for the coordination comes from the electoral system in American elections. If our election system were different, then the advantage of coordination into just two major political parties might not exist at all.

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24 This is not the only voting equilibrium in this situation, see Gerber, Elisabeth, Rebecca Morton, and Thomas Rietz, Majority Requirements and Minority Representation, working paper, 1998. However, empirical evidence from experiments suggests that this is the most likely equilibrium. At any rate, in all the possible equilibria, all three candidates receive votes unlike the case where only one candidate is elected. So there are always three electoral coalitions while when just one candidate is elected there are equilibria where there are only two electoral coalitions.

Our use of plurality rule to select single winners matters, is the reason for the advantage of coordination into two major political parties. But this is not the only role that our electoral institutions play in the dominance of two major political parties. As noted above, if we want to understand why our two major political parties dominate American elections, we need to understand the factors that affect the ability of voters to form and maintain coordination into electoral coalitions. Other features of our electoral institutions have significant affects on this coordination into two major political parties: ballot access laws, campaign finance regulation, and preferential treatment of the major parties. We will explain how these regulations benefit the two major political parties in later chapters, as we expand our analysis. But first we will discuss the impact of a particular type of electoral rule that is used in some American elections – the requirement that the winner receive at least a certain percentage of the vote to be declared a winner.

**Majority Requirements and Coordination**

**Louisiana’s Spicy Politics**

The election for governor in Louisiana in 1991 attracted national attention. The incumbent governor running for reelection, Republican Buddy Roemer, was unpopular because he had raised taxes after promising not to do so and had tried to institute a teacher certification program that was extremely unpopular with educators. Former governor Democrat Edwin Edwards, who had been tried but acquitted on corruption charges, was his opponent. So both Roemer and Edwards had supporters, but neither were seen as overwhelming desirable by the majority of the voters.

This in itself no doubt would have attracted some attention, but a third candidate had also entered the race, David Duke. Duke was notorious as an active Nazi sympathizer through 1989 and a former leader of the Ku Klux Klan. Like the New York senate race of 1970, all three candidates had vocal supporters – and Duke was perceived to potentially have a plurality of the vote (i.e. more than either Roemer or Edwards). Moreover, many of the supporters of Roemer and Edwards also vehemently opposed Duke. That is, for many Roemer supporters their second preference was Edwards and for many Edwards supporters their second preference was Roemer. Like the G and O voters in New York in 1970, these Roemer and Edwards supporters faced a problem of coordination. The Roemer and Edwards supporters feared that if everyone voted sincerely, Duke would receive the most votes, like Buckley had, and win election.

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26 Actually there were other candidates as well, but they had few supporters and received minimal votes.
What if New York was Like Louisiana?

I do not ask: “What if New Yorkers had Cajun accents?” I am sure some already do. I ask, “What if their electoral systems were more alike?” Louisiana’s electoral system in 1991 had a feature that New York’s electoral system did not. In Louisiana, a candidate must receive at least 50% of the vote to be elected. If no candidate receives 50% of the vote or more, then a “runoff” election is held between the two candidates who have received the most votes. This requirement is called a “majority requirement.” Ten southern states have majority requirements – Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas – as well as many localities such as New York City.27

How do majority requirements matter? Suppose that a majority requirement had existed in our simple model of the 1970 New York Senate race. Would the voters have behaved differently? Consider B voters. B voters still should vote sincerely for Buckley as before; the institution of a majority requirement would not change their choices. But what about G and O voters? What happens if G voters vote sincerely for Goodell and O voters vote sincerely for Ottinger? As before, Buckley would receive 40 votes, Goodell and Ottinger would each receive 30 votes.

But Buckley would not be the winner, since he would only have 40% of the vote, less than the 50% he would require. He would have to be in a runoff election with either Goodell or Ottinger who have tied for second place. Since there can be only two candidates in the runoff, there would be some sort of tie-breaking procedure that would select either Goodell or Ottinger (probably a coin toss) and the candidate selected would face Buckley in a race just between the two. Who would win? If Goodell won the coin toss, he would defeat Buckley in the runoff election (both G and O voters would vote for Goodell in the runoff and B would receive the B voters’ votes). If Ottinger won the coin toss, he would defeat Buckley in the runoff election (both G and O voters would vote for Ottinger in the runoff and B would receive the B voters’ votes). With a majority requirement, Buckley cannot win even if the G and O voters fail to coordinate!

One way to think about this analysis is that the majority requirement, in this case, works as a coordination device for the G and O voters. That is, G and O voters can vote sincerely for their most preferred candidates and “let” the coin toss serve determine which candidate faces Buckley. Then once that candidate is chosen, G and O voters can easily coordinate on the winner of the coin toss. They do not have to coordinate, the electoral system does it for them.

Summary: Majority Requirements can help voters coordinate into just two electoral coalitions. When an electoral system has majority requirements voters may not have to worry about coordination as much as in an electoral system without majority requirements. When majority requirements exist voters may find that it is optimal to vote sincerely while they would want to vote strategically if no majority requirements existed.

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27 In New York City, the winning candidate must receive at least 40% of the vote.
Majority requirements are not a panacea for the coordination problem faced by voters in plurality rule elections, however. Why is that? Our simple examples only have three candidates. As a result, we can be sure that at least one of the candidates in the runoff will be a candidate that a majority of the voters would coordinate on if able to do so. In our model of the New York Senate race, we can be sure that either Goodell or Ottinger will be in the runoff, and that one of these would have been the candidate their supporters would have coordinated on if they were able to. But if there are many more than three candidates, it is quite possible that neither of the two candidates will be one that would be a candidate the voters would have coordinated on if they were able to. When more than three candidates exist, voters may find that they still need to coordinate electorally; they cannot rely on majority requirements to solve their coordination problem.

**No Dukes in Louisiana?**

So, what happened in Louisiana? As expected none of the three candidates received enough votes to win the governorship outright – Edwards received 34% of the vote, Duke 32% and Roemer 27%. Although Duke did not get a plurality of the vote as some feared, he did receive enough to challenge Edwards in the runoff election. However, in the runoff, Roemer supporters turned largely to Edwards despite their dislike of him and Edwards defeated Duke by 61% to 39% of the vote. The “No Dukes” advocates (who used a modification of the liberal call against nuclear power, “No Nukes”) coordinated around Edwards in the runoff election.

**Other Coordination Mechanisms in Elections**

Electoral institutions and rules are not the only factor in American elections that facilitates voter coordination into just two electoral coalitions. There are a number of aspects of the campaign process or candidates that affect coordination. As we will see in later chapters, party endorsements and labels can serve as mechanisms for voters’ to coordinate. Part of the problem in the 1970 New York Senate race was that the “normal” labels of the parties did not send a clear signal to voters. The state Republican Party candidate had been endorsed by the Liberal Party. The national Republican Party leaders rejected the state Republican Party candidate and publicly endorsed a third party candidate. And the Democratic Party chose a different candidate. Before the 1970 election usually the Liberal and Democratic Parties chose as their nominees the same candidate. This made it easy for the voters that used those party labels as a coordination mechanism to coordinate in a common electoral coalition. But because the parties chose different candidates, this mechanism failed. Republican voters also faced problems – which Republican label were they to pay attention?

Party labels are not just the only way voters can coordinate into electoral coalitions. One method of coordination is using the results of “polls.” For example, suppose that a poll is conducted among a random sample of voters prior to the election and that Goodell turns out to get slightly more support than Ottinger. This could serve as a signal for O voters to coordinate on Goodell. In presidential nomination contests, voters in states that hold their primaries at later dates may similarly use the results of early primaries as coordinating signals. Finally, campaign spending and advertising might be a way that voters coordinate. Voters may choose to coordinate on candidates who spend the most, just like they would on candidates who win early polls.

---

28 The vote total is less than 100% because of some votes receive by other candidates.
Notice that voter coordination would suggest that voters are “influenced” by polls, early primary results, or campaign spending. Some might suggest that voters’ preferences over the candidates are changing as a result of the polls, or the early primary results, or the campaign advertising. The important thing to recognize is that voters could be using these things to coordinate into viable electoral coalitions while their preferences are not affected at all. When campaign advertising has an affect on voters’ choices, it does not necessarily mean that voters’ preferences are changing because of the ads. The ads may be playing an entirely different role. We will discuss campaign advertising and how voters are affected in chapter 6.

**French Idealism and American Elections**

Our analysis has focused on the “positive” side of understanding American elections. That is, we have emphasized the answers to “what is” about these elections, who wins, how will voters vote, etc. The Marquis de Condorcet, a French revolutionary, would, we might speculate, have taken a different approach. The Marquis was the first member of the French Legislative Assembly to declare for a republic and drew up the declaration justifying the suspension of the kind and the summoning of the National Convention in 1792. The Marquis’s wife, the former Sophie de Grouchy, was said to be one of the most beautiful women of her time and at her home (salon) often entertained the most brilliant thinkers of the period. She later translated Adam Smith’s famous *Theory of Moral Sentiments* into French.

Condorcet was an idealist. He cared about “normative” questions. He cared about “what ought to be,” who *should* win, how voters *should* vote, etc. How would Condorcet have looked at the 1970 New York Senate race? Who would Condorcet have thought *should* win (or lose)*? Condorcet argued that a candidate was a “good” choice if the candidate would defeat or tie all the other candidates in one-on-one competition and that a candidate was a “bad” choice if he would lose to all the other candidates in one-on-one competition.

**Definition: Positive questions ask what is what was what will be; normative questions ask what ought to be what should have been what should be.**

We can use Condorcet’s concept to determine whether some actual elections select the “right” candidate according to Condorcet, a “Condorcet winner.” For example, consider the three candidate presidential race in 1996. As we discussed above, we can use the voters’ thermometer ratings in the NES surveys to establish voter preferences. Then we can conduct “mock” one-on-one elections between each pair of candidates. It turns out that when we do so, we find that Clinton beats Dole, Clinton beats Perot, and Dole beats Perot. Clinton is a Condorcet winner. Table 2-5 summarizes these results.

**Definition: A Condorcet winner is a candidate who will defeat or tie any other candidate in a one on one election. A Condorcet loser is a candidate who would be defeated by another candidate in a one on one election.**
### Table 2-5: Comparative Thermometer Ratings of the Candidates, 1996 (Head-to-Head Comparisons, in percentages), Source: Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clinton versus Dole</th>
<th>Clinton versus Perot</th>
<th>Dole versus Perot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preelection Survey, Candidate Rated First</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tie</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tie</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dole</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Perot</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(# of Observations)*</td>
<td>(1,680)</td>
<td>(# of Observations)*</td>
<td>(1,659)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postelection Survey, Candidate Rated First</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tie</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Tie</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dole</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Perot</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(# of Observations)*</td>
<td>(1,504)</td>
<td>(# of Observations)*</td>
<td>(1,489)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers are weighted.

While we can argue that the evidence suggests that Clinton did satisfy Condorcet’s criteria in 1996, in our simple model of the New York Senate race, Buckley is a Condorcet loser – in an electoral competition with just Goodell he would lose and in an electoral competition with just Ottinger he would lose. On the other hand, both Goodell and Ottinger are Condorcet winners – both would defeat Buckley in one-on-one competitions and only tie each other.

While Condorcet’s concept helps define one idea of what makes up good and bad choices, it doesn’t solve the coordination problem facing the G and O voters and Condorcet losers can win elections. Nevertheless, it is a useful way to classify candidates normatively, and we will return to this concept later as well as some of Condorcet’s other important ideas. Condorcet, himself, did not fare well during the French Revolution. He was not just an idealist, but an independent thinker and voted against the death penalty.
for Louis XVI, something that angered other revolutionaries. As a result, he was forced into hiding, eventually captured, and died under mysterious circumstances in prison.²⁹

Moving Beyond Voters

In this chapter, we have seen how important coordination is in American elections. We have also seen how our electoral system both makes coordination into electoral coalitions advantageous to voters and how some of the electoral rules, like majority requirements can help voters coordinate. But our analysis is missing something – our analysis has concentrated almost exclusively on how voters choose. But voters aren’t the only ones choosing here – candidates choose, parties choose, interest groups choose. We also have almost completely ignored policy! Do voters have preferences over candidates or what candidates will do?

Many people would say that voters care about how government affects their lives – that voters’ utility is over what candidates do rather than the candidates themselves. For example, Gomillion didn’t have care deeply for Reynolds, the candidate running for tax collector in Macon County, but he cared about the fact that the streets in his neighborhood were unpaved and the schools black children attended were poorly funded. Gingrich didn’t use his personal charm to appeal to voters in 1994, but his policy positions.

We need to move beyond our simple analysis of voter choice and consider policy and how candidates choose policy positions, which we will examine next. We begin our analysis in the next chapter with a story about a candidate name Bush who had to learn how to win.

For Further Reading

{Brief review of relevant literature will be here}

Study Questions and Exercises

Below are some examples of the types of questions and exercises that will be in this chapter and others.

1. Have you ever voted strategically – or considered voting strategically? Why or why not?

2. Suppose that there are three candidates in an election: Bush, Clinton, and Perot. and three types of voters, B, C, and P voters, whose preferences over the candidates are given by the following voter preference table. Is there a Condorcet winner in this example? Is there a Condorcet loser? Do all the voters always vote sincerely in this example? Why or why not? Can Bush win the election? How? Can Clinton win the election? How? Can Perot win the election? How?

²⁹ He was found dead and whether the cause was poison or exhaustion is unknown. Condorcet contributed much more than this simple concept but also significant works on philosophy and sociology and we will see him again in later chapters. His wife (who had divorced him with his permission after he was condemned), also an independent thinker, continued her salon as a meeting place for the opponents of Napoleon and helped edit the Marquis’ complete works.
Voter Utility from the Candidates by Voter Type in Exercise 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voter Type</th>
<th>Utility from the Election of Bush (in units of utility or utils)</th>
<th>Utility from the Election of Clinton (in units of utility of utils)</th>
<th>Utility from the Election of Perot (in units of utility or utils)</th>
<th>Number of Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B voters</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C voters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P voters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Suppose that there are three candidates in an election: Bush, Clinton, and Perot. and four types of voters, B, C, D, and E voters, whose preferences over the candidates are given by the following voter preference table. Is there a Condorcet winner in this example? Is there a Condorcet loser? Do all the voters always vote sincerely in this example? Why or why not? Can Bush win the election? How? Can Clinton win the election? How? Can Perot win the election? How?
Voter Utility from the Candidates by Voter Type in Exercise 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voter Type</th>
<th>Utility from the Election of Bush (in units of utility or utils)</th>
<th>Utility from the Election of Clinton (in units of utility or utils)</th>
<th>Utility from the Election of Perot (in units of utility or utils)</th>
<th>Number of Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B voters</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C voters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D voters</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E voters</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Find an example from a local newspaper or newsmagazine of a three or more candidate election. Do you expect that some of the voters will choose strategically in this election? Why? Are some of the candidates minor party or independent candidates? Do you expect that party labels will play a role in voter choices? Why? Do you expect that coordination will be involved in voter choices? How?

5. Find an example from a local newspaper or newsmagazine of an individual (a researcher, a scientist, a social scientist, or a politician) addressing a “positive” question. Explain how you know the question is positive. Find an example from a local newspaper or newsmagazine of an individual (a researcher, a scientist, or social scientist, or a politician) addressing a “normative” question. Explain how you know the question is normative.
Chapter 3: How Candidates Choose Platforms

Brothers in Office

In Chapter 2 we used as an example the two-candidate race for governor of Florida in 1994 when Lawton Chiles defeated Jeb Bush. But in 1994, Jeb Bush was not the only Republican running for governor of a southern state. Nor was he the only “Bush.” His older brother, George W. Bush, ran for governor in Texas. Unlike Jeb, George W. won, which surprised some. As Lyman and Navarro, 1998, summarize:

“Many close to the family had considered the younger brother the more astute politician, and it surprised some that it was the older brother alone who won in 1994. George W. Bush said that he has a photograph from his inauguration that he finds himself looking at every now and then. In it, he is taking the oath of office while, in the background, his father can be seen wiping away a tear. ‘And there, on the other side, is Jeb,’ he said. ‘He’s looking happy and proud, but also something else, maybe a little sad, too. It’s a tough moment, tough for me to look at. I love my brother, you see.’”

Why didn’t both brothers win? Lyman and Navarro contend:

“The younger Bush alienated many black Florida voters in 1994 and stridently pushed a conservative message that scared off some moderates. His older brother, although just as conservative as Jeb on many issues, ran a more upbeat, unfrontational campaign and has governed in such close partnership with Democratic leaders that Texas’ retiring Democratic lieutenant governor backed Bush for re-election.”

But Jeb apparently paid attention to his brother’s experience – in 1998 he ran for governor of Florida again and defeated the Democratic candidate, Chiles’ Lieutenant Governor, Kenneth H. McKay, Jr. decisively 55% to 45% [Florida law prevented Chiles from running for a third term].

“He [Jeb Bush] aggressively courted liberal Democrats and voter groups usually ignored by Republican candidates in Florida, stressing compassion and inclusiveness as campaign themes. He also reached out to blacks and stressed his own family’s diversity. ‘My children are Hispanic,’ he said of his two sons and daughter during campaign stops in South Florida in fluent, slightly accented Spanish while his Mexican-American wife of 24 years, Columba, appeared on Spanish-language television ads on his behalf. Susan A. MacManus, a political scientist at the University of South Florida in Tampa, said that she believes Jeb Bush has ‘seen that a middle-of-the-road strategy has been extremely effective in Texas.’ Those who know Jeb Bush say that the 1998 campaigner – the one who adopted a style more like his brother’s – was the result of soul-searching and

31 His brother George W. also won reelection in Texas, 69% to 31%.
personal growth over the last four years, and they expect it to continue throughout his administration. ‘There was no epiphany,’ said Jeb Bush. ‘Life is a journey. I hope I never stop learning.’”

Jeb Bush’s experience reflects what many believe are two truisms about American elections – moderation wins and candidates for office are drawn to equivalent and centrist positions on issues in order to win. In this chapter, we will explore this view of American elections (and some of its problems).

Why Moderation Attracts in American Elections

Charlotte’s Preferences over Candidates and Policy

In order to understand why candidates like Jeb Bush are drawn toward moderate positions, we need to expand a little on our view of voters. In Chapter 2, we presented a simple model where voters have preferences over candidates directly and then vote based on these preferences. But in the real world, voters, like Charlotte in Chapter 2, care about what candidates will do once elected. She cares about what she expects Bush will do as governor as compared with either Chiles or later McKay. Like with Gomillion, elections matter to her because they determine the public policies like street maintenance, public schools, police protection, etc. It is not Bush that gives her utility or satisfaction but how Bush’s policies will measure up against what she would like government to do, similarly for Chiles or McKay.

One way to think about Charlotte’s preferences over policy is that it is like the feeling thermometer mentioned in Chapter 2, and that we can represent her preferences along a single line. However, instead of the line measuring the temperature of Charlotte’s feelings about a candidate, the line measures different policy positions on issues, as in Figure 3-1 (and it is horizontal).

The issue of concern for Charlotte may be any policy issue such as gun control or government spending on education. The points on the line represent different positions on this issue. For example, if the issue is gun control and we assume that conservatives want less gun control than liberals, then as we move to the right along the line, gun control decreases.

Notice that Charlotte’s utility or satisfaction from policy is highest at the point we call her ideal point. As policy positions move away from this point, either become more liberal, movements to the left, or more conservative, movements to the right, Charlotte’s utility decreases. We assume that the effects on utility from movements away from Charlotte’s ideal point are symmetric. That is, suppose that 0 represents very liberal policy positions and 100 represents very conservative policy positions. If the issue is gun control, then 0 might represent elimination of all guns and 100 might represent no gun control whatever. We will assume that Charlotte’s most preferred policy position on issues is equal to 45 (which, if the issue is gun control represents some midway degree of gun control) and that her utility or satisfaction from policy is highest at that point. As policy moves away from 45 her utility decreases (for gun control, her utility decreases for levels of gun control either greater or less than that at this midway level). We will assume that Charlotte’s utility is “symmetric.” Symmetry means that her utility from policy at 50 is equal to her utility from policy at 40 (both 5 units away from her ideal point of 45).
Of course there are a number of policy issues in most elections, not just education spending or gun control. For now, let us assume that we can put these issues all along the same line – that there is a single liberal/conservative dimension where points on the left represent liberal positions on all issues and points on the right represent conservative positions on all issues.\footnote{32}

In Chapter 2, we just assumed that Charlotte preferred Chiles to Bush. But now we can expand on this, we can place the candidates on the policy dimension as in Figure 3-2. For example, we can assume that Chiles (and later McKay) had a position on policy issues equal to 30, 15 units away from Charlotte’s most preferred position, her “ideal point.” We can assume that Bush in 1994 had a position on policy issues equal to 70, 25 units away from Charlotte’s most preferred position. Since Chiles is closer to Charlotte in policy, then as before, Charlotte receives higher utility from the election of Chiles and would vote for him. However, in 1998, Bush’s position on issues moderated, and he moved more toward the center, to 57, now only 12 units away from Charlotte’s ideal point. Assuming that McKay is at the same position on the issues as Chiles, Charlotte now prefers Bush and would vote for him.

Of course, our analysis simplifies the complex process of moderation. That is, one way to look at Bush’s change in policy is that he emphasized issues over which he always was more moderate in the second race while in the first race he emphasized positions that were highly conservative – and because of the change in emphasis voters placed him as more moderate in 1998 than in 1994. Bush also had more “personal appeal” than McKay and some argue a more charismatic campaign style, the race was one of “youth and vigor” versus “seniority and experience.”\footnote{33} We will deal with how these factors can effect elections later in this book. Nevertheless, he was perceived to be a more moderate candidate in 1998 than in 1994 (whether due to differences in voter perceptions between he years or an actual change in policy position), and most pundits agree that this moderation was a significant factor in his victory in 1998.

Why Did Bush Move?

In our simple model Bush’s move to a moderate position caused Charlotte to change her preferences over the candidates. But Bush clearly moved not just because he wanted to get Charlotte’s vote but in order to be elected, which surely means more votes than one. Why not move to a more conservative position instead? Or an extremely liberal position? Why towards the middle? In order to understand why Bush moved toward the middle, we have to make some assumptions about the policy preferences of the other voters as well as Charlotte.

We will assume that the other voters are like Charlotte in that they also have preferences over policy with a particular most preferred policy position, or ideal point. And that each voter’s utility from policy is highest when policy equals that point and declines symmetrically as policy moves away from that point. Figure 3-3 presents an example of five such voters, A, B, C, D, and E. The points A, B, C, D, and E represent the voters’ ideal points respectively. These voters’ preferences for candidates, like Charlotte, are determined by how close the candidates’ policy positions are to their respective ideal points. Notice that voter C (Charlotte) is the voter with the “median ideal

\footnote{32}{In later chapters we consider the effects of relaxing this assumption.}
\footnote{33}{New York Times, x.}
point;” that is, half of the other voters’ ideal points are equal to or less than her ideal point and half of the other voters’ ideal points are equal to or greater than her ideal point. Sometimes we call the voter with the median ideal point the “median voter.”

**Definition:** The median voter is the voter whose ideal point over policy is midway between all the voters’ ideal points. That is, her ideal point is greater than or equal to 1/2 of the other ideal points and less than or equal to 1/2 of the other ideal points.

Figure 3-3 here

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Figure 3-4 adds the policy positions of Chiles/McKay and Bush in 1994 and 1998 to the voter ideal points. Consider the election of 1994. In that election, voters A, B, and C prefer Chiles to Bush and voters D and E prefer Bush to Chiles. Since Chiles receives more votes, he wins. Consider the election of 1998. Voters A and B still prefer the Democrat, now McKay, and voters D and E still prefer Bush, but C (Charlotte) now prefers Bush. Changing Charlotte’s vote did change the outcome of the election.

Figure 3-4 here

Of course, in a real election, there are many more voters than just five. But the logic of the simple example holds even as we expand the number of voters. That is, the candidate whose policy position is closest to the median voter’s ideal point, is going to win the election. This brings us to one of the fundamental theorems in political science – the median voter theorem. According to the median voter theorem, if two candidates are competing for an office and they care only about winning, voters have preferences like Charlotte (i.e. they have unique ideal points and their utility declines as policy moves away from their ideal points), then the candidates will choose policy positions equal to the median voter’s ideal point. We can see this theorem in our five-voter example. Suppose that all Chiles/McKay and Bush cared about was winning election. Then clearly the key is to be as close to the median voter’s ideal point as possible, because who ever is closest will win. Obviously, a candidate can get no closer than choosing the median voter’s ideal point as his policy position. Once one candidate has chosen that position, however, the other candidate has no choice but to locate at the very same position. The best the other candidate can do is have an equal chance of winning if we assume that voters who are indifferent between the candidates choose which to vote for randomly. Thus, candidates who care only about winning will converge at the median voter’s ideal point.

**Summary:** Median Voter Theorem states that if two candidates are competing for an office and they care only about winning, policy positions can be aligned along a line, voters’ have unique ideal points over policy and their utility declines as policy moves away from their ideal points, then both candidates will converge in policy at the median voter’s ideal point.

Notice that the candidates converge to the median voter’s ideal point no matter how the other voters’ ideal points are arrayed along the line. Suppose that we have a large number of voters, say 101. Assume that 50 voters have ideal points at 10, 50 voters have ideal points at 80, and one voter has an ideal point like C, at 45. In this case, even
though almost half of the voters have ideal points at 10 and almost half at 80, the candidates will still converge to C’s ideal point. We can move the voters’ ideal points along the policy line, but as long as the median voter’s ideal point does not change, the candidates will still converge at that point. Thus, how the other voter ideal points are distributed does not affect at all where the candidates will locate as long as the median voter’s ideal point stays unchanged. It does not matter whether the other voters are both very extreme in their ideal points or very moderate – it is not the distribution of ideal points in terms of extremism that leads to moderation.

In our example with five voters, there is only one median voter, Charlotte. But if we had an even number of voters, then we could have two median voters. For example, suppose that we add a sixth voter, voter F, with an ideal point equal to 15. Now there are two voters whose ideal points are greater than or equal to 1/2 of the other ideal points and less than or equal to 1/2 of the other ideal points, voters B and C. In this case, it turns out that the candidates will not necessarily converge to the same point, since any point between 40 and 45, inclusive, will get at least half of the votes. Candidates still converge, however, just not necessarily to the same exact point. However, in large elections, the divergence that may be caused by having an even number of voters (and a multiplicity of median points) is unlikely to be much.

**French Idealism Redux**

Recall that in Chapter 2 we discussed how Condorcet argued that a candidate who would either defeat each other candidate or at least tie in pairwise competitions is normatively superior – what we called a Condorcet winner. Interestingly, a candidate who is located at the median voter’s ideal point is also a Condorcet winner. Suppose in our five voter example above each voter was a candidate. Then notice that C (Charlotte) would defeat each of the other voter/candidates (or citizen candidates) in any one-on-one race. Charlotte, or any candidate located at Charlotte’s ideal point is also a Condorcet winner for any set of possible candidates. The median voter theorem not only predicts that the candidates will converge but they will converge at a policy position that Condorcet would have approved of!

**Moderation: Virtue or Vice?**

*Not All Candidates Choose Moderation*

Thirty years before Jeb Bush ran for governor of Florida, Republican Senator Barry Goldwater ran for the presidency. Goldwater was not interested in moderation. In fact, when Goldwater accepted the nomination of his party at the Republican national convention in July of 1964, he declared that: “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. . .moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.” Goldwater’s unwillingness to moderate was spectacular – after his nomination he purged moderate Republicans from his campaign staff and drove a number to support Lyndon Johnson, the Democratic candidate. He also spectacularly lost (winning only 6 out of the 50 states and only 38.4% of the popular vote to Johnson’s 61%). While Goldwater is an extreme example of a candidate who refused to court the median voter, the more key reality of American elections is that candidates in elections are generally different and offer distinct positions. The force of convergence is there, but complete convergence of candidates does not occur.

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Do Candidates Converge?

What do Voters Think?

There are a number of ways to see how candidates diverge in policy positions. One way is to consider voter evaluations of candidates. Do voters perceive that there is a difference between candidates? The National Election Study also asks voters to rate candidates for president (as well as others) on issue scales. These scales are like the feeling thermometers except that the endpoints represent different extreme positions on the issues and the scales only go from 1 to 7. For example, one issue might be how the government should deal with crime. On one extreme (the liberal side), is the option “Reduce crime by addressing social causes of crime” and on the other extreme (the conservative side) is the solution “Reduce crime by catching, convicting, and punishing criminals.” Voters are asked to estimate presidential candidates’ positions on issues like this. So, if a voter thinks that Clinton, for example, strongly believes that we should “Reduce crime by addressing social causes of crime” the voter would rate Clinton at a 1. If the voter thinks Clinton’s position is more moderate and between the two options, the voter would rate his position closer to 7.

How do voters rate the candidates in this way? Do voters perceive a difference? Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 1998 report:

“The public has seen the Democratic candidate as more liberal and the Republican candidate as more conservative than the position of the average member of the public on nearly every issue scale asked since 1972 (the women’s rights scale being the only exception from 1980 on). This was true in 1996 as well. The result, of course, is that the typical citizen sees a great deal of difference between the two candidates’ stances. On average, the candidates are placed 1.7 points apart, which is really quite a substantial spread on 7-point scales. It is, however, very similar to the differences found in preceding election surveys.” (page 128)

What do Candidates Say about their Positions?

Are voters’ perceptions about candidates’ differences supported by the candidates’ positions during campaigns? Project Vote Smart, a public interest group, has surveyed candidates for elected office on their positions on many issues. These surveys show significant differences between Republicans and Democrats. Figure 3-5 presents data on the percentage of Republican and Democrat candidates for Congress in 1996 who agree with the following: legalization of abortion, passage of a Constitutional Amendment requiring a annual balanced budget, and strengthening the Clean Air Act. As the figure shows, there are significant differences between the percentage of Republicans and Democrats who agree with these positions. Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to disapprove of legalizing abortion, favor passing a Constitutional Amendment requiring an annual balanced budget, and disfavor strengthening the Clean Air Act. These answers and the others compiled by Project Vote Smart show both that the difference between presidential candidates by party are also evident when examining the positions of members of Congress by party.

Figure 3-5 here
**How do Candidates choose after Elections?**

However, while candidates may advocate different positions, it may be that once in office they are not as different and moderate more. One way to determine if this is true is to look at the voting behavior of members of the House of Representatives and Senate by their party affiliation. Poole and Rosenthal have conducted such a study. They aggregate the choices that the members of Congress make into positions for each member in a box representing the possible policy choices. These positions for the 105th Congress (1997-1998) are shown in Figure 3-6. In general, the policy positions on the righthandside of the box are conservative positions, those on the lefthandside are liberal positions. The important factor to recognize is that a Representative or Senator’s party affiliation is a strong predictor of her voting behavior. Democrats’ voting positions are almost totally to the left of Republicans’ voting positions.

| Summary: There is a lot of evidence that candidates do not converge in policy positions in American elections, despite the attraction of moderation. Voters perceive the candidates in races as different, candidates espouse different positions, and they make different choices while in office. Moreover, the party of a candidate is a major predictor of the policy position a candidate will espouse and the policies he or she will vote for while in office. |

**Why Does Divergence Occur?**

Many political scientists have puzzled over why, despite the strong attraction of moderation and the pull of the median voter, candidates do not to converge and instead choose distinct positions. As a result, there are a number of explanations for the divergence we see between candidates in American elections. Our simple model of candidate position taking omits a number of important details of the American political process that influence candidate position taking, in particular the role played by political parties. Most candidates first seek out the nomination of one of the political parties before competing for office in a general election. The competition for a party’s nomination means that the candidate must consider the preferences of only a subset of the electorate, the party’s members, not the entire electorate. If party members are more extreme (either liberal or conservative) than the median voter in the general electorate, this may mean that the nominee, in order to get the nomination, chooses positions that are more extreme than the median voter in the general electorate. We saw that empirically,

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37 Note that Poole and Rosenthal measure policy in a two-dimensional space where the horizontal dimension (left/right) captures the positions of members of Congress on a general liberal/conservative dimension that divides the two parties and the vertical dimension (up/down) captures the positions of members of Congress on racial/ethnic issues. We discuss the policy choices of candidates in two dimensions in chapter 5.

party is a strong predictor of policy positions of candidates. Candidates in the same political party choose positions that are similar.

In the next chapter, we see how party members, more extreme than the median voter in the electorate, can attract candidates away from positions of moderation, even when the candidates themselves are primarily concerned about winning election. We begin with a debate from the 2000 presidential primaries.

For Further Reading
{Brief review of relevant literature here.}

Study Questions and Exercises
{See chapters 1 and 2 for examples.}
Chapter 4: Political Parties and Policy Divergence

A Battle for the Left

Bill Bradley appeared infuriated. “That’s not true,” he “shot back” to Al Gore. What irritated Bradley was Gore’s claim that he had always supported abortion rights for women. In 1977, Tennessee Congressman Al Gore “voted for a ban on federal funds for abortions for poor women except when the pregnant woman’s life was in danger. . . . In 1978, he reaffirmed his support for the Medicaid abortion ban and voted for an additional prohibition on the use of Defense Department money for abortions for military personnel and their families, again except when women’s lives were in danger. And in 1980, he voted to prohibit the use of federal money for abortion services under federal employees’ health insurance.”

Gore did cast some votes during this period that activists at the time considered “pro-choice” and was not part of the campaign of the time to pass a constitutional amendment to ban abortion. However, in August 1984 he wrote one constituent that it was his “deep personal conviction that abortion is wrong” and to another “Let me assure you that I share your belief that innocent human life must be protected and I have an open mind on how to further this goal.” (see Toner, 2000) Yet, in the fall of 2000, campaigning for the presidency, Al Gore was a staunch defender of abortion rights, claiming that while he may have been concerned about federal funding of abortion in the past, it didn’t matter, he had always supported abortion rights of women fully, maddening Bradley. Why did Bradley care so much?

Bradley cared because Al Gore was his opponent for the Democratic nomination for president. In order to secure the nomination, Bradley had to face Al Gore in a series of Democratic party primary contests for delegates for the national Democratic convention. An important part of the Democratic party’s coalition are feminist and abortion rights groups and both Bradley and Gore wanted their support. As Dao reported during the campaign, “. . . the two men have been wrestling for the support of just about every left-leaning Democratic group, including labor unions, abortion rights advocates, environmentalists, and African-Americans. Though Mr. Gore has won a few major endorsements, including the A.F.L.-C.I.O.’s, Mr. Bradley has battled him to a draw with most. And their struggle has set off a sort of one-upmanship on progressive issues. When Mr. Bradley was preparing to give a major speech on child poverty last week, Mr. Gore hastily released his own poverty plan the day before. Both have been courting prominent black leaders, including the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who remains uncommitted, and the Rev. Al Sharpton, who is popular in many black neighborhoods but reviled by many mainstream Democrats. In an interview, Mr. Sharpton said he had a call from Mr. Gore’s campaign

manager, Donna Brazile, a few weeks after Mr. Bradley had spoken to Mr. Sharpton’s Harlem organization. She warned him, he said, to think twice about endorsing Mr. Bradley and urged him to meet with the Vice President. He remains uncommitted, but says he likes Mr. Bradley. The two candidates also met last week with the Congressional Progressive Caucus, most of whose 50 members remain uncommitted. The group sharply questioned both about their views, but was wonderfully flattered by the attention. ‘Neither of these guys would be part of the Progressive Caucus if they were still in the Senate,’ said the caucus chairman, Representative Peter A. Defazio, Democrat of Oregon. ‘But what is important is both are talking about issues like health care that matter to progressives.’”

Bradley and Gore’s contest for the Democratic nomination for president in 2000 is just one example of how candidates attempt to appeal to party elites, who are often more ideological than the median voter in the general election. However, we know from chapter 3, that candidates are more likely to win the general election if they choose moderate positions, close to the median voter’s ideal point. So why do candidates care at all about the ideological extremes?

**How Primaries Affect Candidate Positions**

Bradley and Gore both knew that to win the presidential nomination of the Democratic party, they needed to compete in presidential primaries and for the support of the party members that would vote in these primaries. This meant going to all the groups of the Democratic party, many of which are seen as the more “liberal” wing of the party, such as the Progressive caucus, abortion rights groups, and African-American leaders. Similarly, the candidates for the Republican nomination for president also had to compete in primaries and appeal for support from all the groups of that party, many of which are seen as the more “conservative” wing of the party, such as right-to-life groups, the Christian Coalition, and the supporters of Bob Jones University in South Carolina. Does this explain why candidates from our two major parties diverge in policy?

**Appealing to Extremes Does Not Always Work**

In order to answer this question, we consider a simple model of how primary elections work. Suppose that there are seven voters, A, B, C, D, E, F, and G whose ideal points are given as in Figure 4-1 below. Voters A, B, and C are members of the Liberal Party and voters E, F, and G are members of the Conservative Party. Voter D is not a member of either party; is a registered voter as an independent.

We will assume that the primary elections are what we call “pure-closed” primaries, that is, only party members are allowed to vote in the respective party primaries. Not all states use this type of primary system, and in chapter 9, we will consider different types of primary systems and how they affect candidate policy positions. In a pure-closed primary, the Liberal and Conservative parties will first decide which candidates should be their choices for the general election. In the Liberal Party’s primary only voters A, B, and C can vote while in the Conservative Party’s primary only voters E, F, and G can vote. In the general election, all seven voters can vote. Notice

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that in the Liberal Party’s primary, B is the median voter, while in the Conservative Party primary F is the median voter. D is the median voter in the general election.

To make things simple, we will assume that the Liberal Party’s primary is uncontested. That is, assume that the incumbent in the elected office is a Liberal, who we will call I, and her policy position is given at C’s ideal point, 40 and she faces no challengers from her own party. In the Conservative Party, however, there are two candidates for the nomination of that party. We will call them O1 and O2. We will also assume that O1’s policy position is located at E’s ideal point while O2’s policy position is located at G’s ideal point. Figure 4-2 presents this situation.

Figure 4-2 here

Who will win the Conservative Party’s primary? Candidate O2 is closest to the median voter in the Conservative Party primary and would seem the obvious winner. The median voter is F and his ideal point is 85 and 90 (O2’s position) is closest to 85 (O1’s position is at 70). But if the Conservative Party voters selected O2, they clearly would be behaving non-rationally and myopically. That is, in the general election, O2 would face I. I would defeat O2 since I’s policy position of 40 is closer to the median voter in the general election, D (whose ideal point is at 45) than O2’s policy position. Unfortunately, however, O1 would do no better in the general election – I would defeat him as well as O2.

For a candidate from the Conservative Party to defeat I, she or he would have to locate at a policy position closer to D than I. Suppose that O1 recognized this and chose a policy position more moderate than 70, at 49. Would E, F, and G vote for him over O2? Yes. They would vote for O1 at 49 over O2 at 90 even though O2’s policy position is closer to their ideal points because they know that O2 would lose for sure.

What about I then? Would I change her policy position as well? Clearly, she will also find it attractive to choose a position closer to D’s ideal point if O1 has chosen 49. Interestingly, the closed primary system does not prevent the candidates from being attracted to the general election’s median voter’s ideal point. I, O1, and O2, all will be drawn to centrist positions since they recognize that these positions increase the likelihood they will win the general election AND the voters in their respective party primaries also recognize that more moderate candidates are more likely to win the general election. A primary system does not in itself lead to extreme candidates in the general election – moderation still attracts.

Our analysis, then, seems almost a waste of time. Why go through all that if we are going to get the same prediction we got from chapter 3 – that candidates should converge at the median voter. We saw in chapter 3 that that is not true, candidates do diverge. We also know that candidates do seem to try to appeal to the extremists in their parties when they are seeking nominations by the parties for office. What is going on? What is missing?

**Uncertainty and Extremism**

In the primary election discussed above, as in the two-candidate elections we examined in Chapter 3, candidates converged toward the ideal point of the median voter in the electorate because they knew precisely what that point was. But in a real election this is unlikely to be the case. In real elections, unexpected factors may affect who
actually votes on election day and the true median voter in the electorate. For example, a bad snowstorm in the northeast on a presidential election day may affect the distribution of preferences of voters who participate in the election and the location of the median voter’s ideal point. Alternatively, candidates may be unable to precisely measure voter preferences over issues and this may lead them to be uncertain as to the location of the median voter’s ideal point. Uncertainty is out there. If we knew for sure who would win and how voters would vote before an election, we wouldn’t bother to have elections. If there is uncertainty about the median voter ideal point then it is difficult for candidates to converge at a common point – moreover, they may not want to. Can uncertainty lead candidates in pure-closed primaries to choose divergent (more extreme) positions?

Assume that both O1 and O2 care only about winning. But now neither candidate nor the voters are certain where the median voter, D’s ideal point, is in the policy space. Suppose that there is a 50% chance that D’s ideal point is at 40 and a 50% chance that D’s ideal point is at 60 as in Figure 4-3 below. We can think of this as capturing the uncertainty that candidates have about whom the median voter is or who will turnout on election day. Also assume that if D is indifferent between two candidates, when her ideal point is equal to 40 she will vote for the candidate who has the lower policy position and when her ideal point is equal to 60 she will vote for the candidate who has the higher policy position.

Where is the best place to locate to win the Conservative Party primary in this case? The candidates care only about winning. But the voters in the Conservative Party are clearly ideologically different from the voters in the general election and the Liberal Party. In order to understand where is the best place for either O1 or O2 to locate, we can examine how the median voter in the Conservative Party primary, F, will choose. We know that if a candidate can appeal to F, then he or she will win. Candidates O1 and O2 will act “as if” they are trying to achieve F’s most preferred outcome. The candidates, who only care about winning, must adopt the preferences of F in order to win their party’s primary.

**Voter and Candidate Preferences in an Uncertain World**

Candidates O1 and O2 now want to achieve F’s most preferred outcome. However, with uncertainty about the location of D’s ideal point, it is not so clear what the best strategy is for them to achieve their aim. Consider the situation in Figure 4-4 below.

O1 and O2 are located at 40 and 70 respectively. Voter F thinks about what will happen in the general election if O1 faces I. Since they both have policy positions located at 40, then F can be sure that no matter who wins the general, policy will equal 40. But if O2 faces I, then 50% of the time I will win (when the median voter’s ideal point is at D1, 40) and 50% of the time O2 will win (when the median voter’s ideal point is at D2, 60).

Which situation is better for F? For O1 or O2 to face I in the general election? In order to compare these situations, we need to think about F’s expected utility. What do we mean by expected utility? Recall that we have assumed that F receives utility from different policy positions, and that his ideal point is really the policy position that gives him the highest utility. Similar to Charlotte’s preferences in Chapter 3 (Figure 3-1), we can graph F’s utility as a function of policy, see Figure 4-5 below.
At point 85, F’s ideal point, voter F’s utility is equal to 800 utils and declines as policy moves away from 85. For example, at 80 and 90, F receives 795 utils. At 75 and 95, 785 utils, at 70 and 100, 770 utils, etc. Note that the decreases in F’s utility are increasing as we move away from F’s ideal point, 85 – the utility function has a concave shape (from 85 to 80, utility declines by 5 utils, from 80 to 75, it declines by 10 utils, and from 75 to 70, by 15 utils, etc.).

F receives a higher level of Utility from O2 at 70 (he would receive 770 utils) than from O1’s position at 40 (he would receive 575 utils). But, F cannot expect to always receive 770 utils if O2 faces I in the general election, only 50% of the time. F’s expected utility from a general election contest between O2 and I is going to depend on the probabilities that each candidate wins as well as the utility F would receive if the candidate won. Expected utility takes into account the probability that something happens as well as the utility that F gets if that happens. For example, in a two-candidate election say with candidates 1 and 2, for example, where P equals the probability that candidate 1 wins, 1 – P equals the probability that candidate 2 wins, U1 equals the utility that a voter gets from candidate 1, and U2 equals the utility that a voter gets from candidate 2, then the voter’s Expected Utility equals P*U1 + (1 – P)*U2.

We can use this basic formula to figure out F’s expected utility from a contest between O2 and I:

\[
\text{F’s Expected Utility from a Contest Between O2 and I} = (\text{Probability O2 wins})*(\text{Utility F receives if O2 wins}) + (\text{Probability I wins})*(\text{Utility F receives if I wins})
\]

\[
= (0.5)*(770) + (0.5)*(575) = 672.5
\]

What is F’s expected utility from a contest between O1 and I? In this case, his utility from both I and O1 winning is equal, 575. But the expected utility is calculated the same way:

\[
\text{F’s Expected Utility from a Contest Between O1 and I} = (\text{Probability O1 wins})*(\text{Utility F receives if O1 wins}) + (\text{Probability I wins})*(\text{Utility F receives if I wins})
\]

\[
= (0.5)*(575) + (0.5)*(575) = 575
\]

F’s expected utility from a general election contest between O2 and I is greater than his expected utility from a general election contest between O1 and I and F will vote for O2.

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This is different from the utility function we had for Charlotte in Chapter 3 (Figure 3-1), where utility decreased at a constant rate as we moved away from Charlotte’s ideal point – the utility function was a triangle and not concave. We will discuss this difference in more detail later.
Definitions: An individual (voter, politician, etc.)'s Expected Utility is the sum of the probabilities of possible outcomes times the utility the individual would receive from each outcome. For example, if there are two candidates, 1 and 2, and \( P = \) probability candidate 1 wins, \( 1 - P = \) the probability that candidate 2 wins, \( U_1 = \) utility a voter gets when candidate 1 wins, and \( U_2 = \) utility a voter gets when candidate 2 wins, then the voter's Expected Utility = \( P \times U_1 + (1 - P) \times U_2 \). An individual makes an expected utility maximizing choice when he or she chooses the option that will give him or her the highest expected utility.

It is important to note that F does not vote for O2 simply because O2 is closer to his ideal point. Suppose O1 and O2 have positions as in Figure 4-6 below:

In this case, O1 is located at 75 and O2 is located at 82. O2 is closer to F’s ideal point. But in a general election between O2 and I, I would always win regardless of where the general election median voter’s ideal point (D) ends up since I is closer to D1 and D2. F’s expected utility from a contest between O2 and I in this example is equal to:

\[
F's \text{ Expected Utility from a Contest Between O2 and I} = (\text{Probability O2 wins}) \times (\text{Utility F receives if O2 wins}) + (\text{Probability I wins}) \times (\text{Utility F receives if I wins})
\]

\[
= (0) \times (797) + (1) \times (575) = 575
\]

If O1 faces I in the general election, O1 would win 50% of the time. F’s expected utility from a contest between O1 and I in this example is equal to:

\[
F's \text{ Expected Utility from a Contest Between O1 and I} = (\text{Probability O1 wins}) \times (\text{Utility F receives if O1 wins}) + (\text{Probability I wins}) \times (\text{Utility F receives if I wins})
\]

\[
= (0.5) \times (785) + (0.5) \times (575) = 680
\]

So in this case F prefers an electoral contest between O1 and I not O2 and I and F will vote for O1 in the Conservative Party primary. Extremism pays off in the closed primary when there is uncertainty about the ideal point of the general election median voter, but not always.

Given that I is located at 40, what is the optimal policy position for candidates O1 and O2 (assuming that 50% of the time D’s ideal point is at 40 and 50% of the time it is at 60)? O1 and O2 will try to pick a point that maximizes F’s expected utility. They will not choose a point less than 40. Any policy position greater than 40 up to 80 will defeat I in the general election when D’s ideal point is at 60 (winning the general election then 50% of the time). Note that if O1 or O2 locate at 80, and D’s ideal point is at 60, she will be indifferent between O1 or O2 and I, but will vote for O1 or O2 over I (as we assumed earlier). But if O1 or O2 choose a policy position greater than 80, I will always defeat them. F prefers O1 and O2 to choose the policy position that will give him the highest expected utility. This will be at 80. If O1 or O2 locate at 80 and face I in a general election, F’s expected utility equals:
F’s Expected Utility from a Contest Between O1 or O2 at 80 and I = (Probability O1 or O2 wins)*(Utility F receives if O1 or O2 wins) + (Probability I wins)*(Utility F receives if I wins)

= (0.5)*(800) + (0.5)*(575) = 687.5

Hence, O1 and O2 will choose a policy position as close to F’s ideal point as possible while still having a 50% chance of winning the general election.

Our analysis of course, assumes that there is no competition in the Liberal Party and that I does not choose a position closer to 60 in order to always win D’s vote. I will not converge toward 60 because I will similarly try to appeal to the median voter in the Liberal Party, to maximize the expected utility of the Liberal Party’s median voter. Moving closer to 60 may increase I’s probability of winning, but would lower the utility the Liberal Party’s median voter would receive if I moved closer to 60. The Liberal Party’s median voter will prefer a candidate who does not converge completely, just like the Conservative Party’s median voter preferred O2 at 70 to O1 at 40. However, as with the Conservative Party’s median voter, the Liberal Party’s median voter will not prefer extremism for extremism’s sake – the Liberal Party’s median voter will recognize that the ability to win the general election also matters. The competition in the primaries will lead to candidates who will choose positions that maximize the expected utility of the median voters in their parties’ primaries and when there is uncertainty about the location of the general election median voter’s ideal point, the candidates will choose divergent positions.

The combination of uncertainty about the choices of voters on election day coupled with the need to get a major party’s nomination causes the candidates to diverge in policy positions. Bradley and Gore competed for the attention of the liberal wing of the Democratic party because of this combination of factors. This also explains somewhat the inability of John McCain, who was generally seen as more moderate than George W. Bush, to defeat Bush for the nomination of the Republican party in 2000.

### Summary: When candidates must first secure their nomination for office by competing in primary elections where most of the voters are party members who have more extreme preferences, and there is some uncertainty about the preferences of independent voters in the general election, the candidates will choose policy positions that diverge away from the median voter, toward the ideal point of the median voter in their party.

#### Grassley v. Harkin, Clinton v. Gingrich

The National Right to Life Committee (a special interest group that opposes abortion) has a problem with Iowa. Iowa Republican Senator Charles E. “Chuck” Grassley does vote their way on bills they consider important 100 percent of the time, but his vote gets canceled out by Iowa Democratic Senator Thomas “Tom” Harkin, who votes there way 0 percent of the time. Yet, these two senators were elected by the same state, the same group of voters and have both served in the Senate for many years – easily reelected – Grassley was first elected to the Senate in 1980, and recently reelected in 1998, Harkin was first elected in 1984, and recently reelected in 1996. Neither Senator has varied much over these years on their abortion positions. Moreover, abortion is not the only thing they disagree about. According to the National Hispanic Leadership
Agenda, Grassley supports bills they approve of 0 percent of the time and Harkin 100 percent, further canceling each other out. The canceling out is a little less on the environment, the League of Conservation Voters say that Harkin votes their way 89 percent of the time while Grassley does 11 percent. The National Rifle Association says Harkin is a 0, but Grassley is a 100. The list goes on. Why would voters in Iowa want to have their senators cancel each other out like this? Is there some problem with Iowans?

But it isn’t just Iowa. Nationally voters do this as well. Gingrich’s problem, once he secured control of Congress for Republicans in 1994, was that the Democrats still controlled the White House. And in 1996, when you would think these voters would turn everything over to Republicans, who they clearly voted for in 1994, they reelected Clinton! What is the matter with these voters? Why can’t they speak with the same voice? These voters seem to “like” divided government, even “prefer” it. Why?

Our analysis of how the competition for party nominations lead candidates to choose divergent positions also helps us understand why it seems that on occasion voters “like” or prefer divided government and divided Senate delegations like Iowa. Given that the parties choose divergent policy positions and final policy outcomes are a consequence of negotiation between the two parties because of the multiplicity of elected offices and the separation of powers, then a voter in the middle might see it advantageous to have government divided so that the final policy outcome is some compromise that is closer to that voter’s ideal point. The voter “moderates” or “balances” the control of the two major parties. There is evidence that voters choose based on what they think candidates can accomplish, not what they themselves do – that is, that when voters vote for a president for example, they look at what the president can do coupled with who controls Congress, not just what the president by himself would like to do (which he sometimes cannot, like Clinton’s attempt to reform health care shortly after he was first elected in 1992).42

Ambition, Ideology, and Divergence

Our analysis of how primary elections work provides an explanation for the policy divergence we see in American elections – the fact that Democrats and Republicans are different. Since there is always some uncertainty about independent voter preferences and future choices, ambitious candidates who care nothing about policy in itself, but wish to be the nominees of one of the major parties, tend to choose positions that diverge from the median voter toward the ideal points of the party elite.

One thing we have not talked much about and that is the role played by general political ambition. Most of our elected officials don’t just run for one office. City council members run for the state legislature. State legislators run for Congress or Governor or other state offices. Members of the House of Representatives run for the Senate or Governor or other state offices. Governors, House members, and Senators run for President. While occasionally we elect a Dwight Eisenhower, most of our elected officials had previous elected experience, including Jesse Ventura, for example who was a local elected official before becoming governor of Minnesota. We call this “upward political mobility.” It is evident that many of our elected officials see political office as a career where one moves “up the ladder” of the political hierarchy.

The desire for upward mobility reinforces the need for candidates to achieve support from the political elites within their parties. As we will discuss in chapter 6,

political parties distribute campaign resources to their candidates in order to help them achieve election. The payoff from pleasing the elites in one’s political party is more than just what one can achieve in a given election. Francis, Kenny, Morton and Schmidt 1995 find that members of the House of Representatives in a state who have made voting choices in Congress close to those preferred by their political party in their state, are more likely to run for the Senate and to be elected to the Senate, something we will investigate further in chapter 8.\(^{43}\) Ambition of candidates not just for one office, but for many, helps us explain why they diverge in policy positions.

Most elected officials and candidates for office claim that they choose their positions out of strong beliefs in the policies they advocate, and in many cases, this is no doubt true. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for us to truly determine whether a choice a candidate makes is because he or she care deeply about the policies they promote, or merely ambitious for office in itself. However, if a candidate has ideological preferences, these preferences should work to strengthen the tendency to divergence – as ideological candidates will be drawn toward the parties whose elites are closest to them ideologically.

In our analysis in chapters 3 and 4 of candidate policy position choices, we have generally assumed that there is a single liberal/conservative dimension over which the candidates choose positions and we have focused on competition from candidates from two major political parties. But where does this dimension come from?

In the next chapter, we explore what liberal/conservative means in terms of specific policy issues and how the two major political parties tend to shape our views of policy by dominating electoral coalition formation in American elections. This time, we start our exploration with a fable about a planet far, far away

**For Further Reading**

{Brief review of relevant literature here.}

**Study Questions and Exercises**

{See chapters 1 and 2 for examples.}

\(^{43}\) Francis, Kenny, Morton, and Schmidt.
Chapter 5: What Makes a Policy Choice
Liberal or Conservative?

A Fable

The United States has decided to start a colony on a distant planet with three individuals (call them A, B, and C). Each colonist will be given a sector of the planet to manage and run using advanced scientific equipment. The colony will be given $12 million a year for its operating expenses. However, the three colonists must agree on how to distribute the monies across the sectors.

In order to solve the problem of reaching an agreement (and to follow the tradition of American elections), two potential colonial governors (call them G1 and G2) have been designated to propose distributions of the colony’s budget across the three sectors. The three colonists will vote over which potential governor’s distribution they prefer after the potential governors finish making proposals (i.e. submit their final proposal). The potential governor who wins will then become governor and manage the distribution (he or she is constrained to distribute the budget as promised in the election and will receive a $1 million salary). The colonists have no affection for each other (i.e. they are not altruistic) and want to maximize their own personal wealth. They will personally receive a salary equal to 10% of their allocated distribution. For example, if a colonist is allocated $4 million, he or she will receive $400,000 in salary. Finally, no side payments are allowed – that is, once the distribution is promised there can be no re-allocation from the governor’s salary or a colonist’s monies to anyone else. What will the potential governors propose? How will the colonists vote?

In this example, the issues facing the colonists (the voters) are not single-dimensional. It would be impossible to graph all the possible proposals that G1 and G2 can make along a single liberal/conservative line like we have done with policy in our examples so far. You need to have two dimensions to graph the proposals, as in Figure 5-1 below.

Along the horizontal axis, we measure the allocation to A and along the vertical axis we measure the allocation to B. Given that there is a budget constraint of $12 million, the allocation to C is also easy to determine as well. All of the possible budgets that G1 and G2 can propose are within the triangle bounded by the budget constraint. For example, an equal distribution of allocations is represented by the point (4,4), where A, B, and C each receive $4 million. The point (6,6) represents the distribution where A and B each receive $6 million and C receives $0. The three corners of the triangle are the three ideal points of A, B, and C. That is, the point (0,0), where C gets all the budget, is C’s ideal point. The point (12,0), where A gets the entire budget, is A’s ideal point and the point (0,12), where B receives the total amount, is B’s ideal point.

Given this situation, what can our two candidates propose? Well, one solution might be to propose an equal distribution with each colonist receiving $4 million.

44 In chapter 8 we will consider what happens in elections when candidates can back down on promises made during campaigns.
Suppose G1 makes this proposal. But then G2 can propose that A and B each receive $5 million, with C receiving $2 million and defeat G1’s proposal. Can G1 then defeat G2’s proposal? G1 could propose to give A and B each $6 and C $0. Can G2 defeat this latest proposal by G1? G2 could propose to give A $7 and C $5. Unfortunately, there is no winning proposal. For any distribution that one of the potential governors can come up with, the other potential governor can change it a little and defeat it. The proposal making can go on forever and the planet will remain uncolonized.

The Paradox of Voting

The problem facing the potential governors and the colonists in our fable is what is generally called the paradox of voting – the fact that it is easy to construct majority voting situations like the one above where there is no equilibrium. This is a paradox that has been known for many years – for a long time we credited Condorcet, our French revolutionary of Chapter 2, with its discovery, but more recently we have recognized that Condorcet re-discovered what was already known.45

One way to think about Condorcet’s paradox is that majority rule in this case leads to “non-rational” choices for society even though every one in the society is choosing rationally. What do we mean by rational choices for society? In chapter 1 we noted that assuming that individuals choose rationally means that they make choices that maximize goals given constraints that they face. For example, colonist A in our fable above is going to always choose the candidate that offers the highest budget. So for example, suppose there are three candidates, G1, G2, and G3 with the following proposals as given in Table 5-1 below. These allocations are equivalent to points (4,0) for G1, (6,6) for G2, and (0,9) for G3 on Figure 5-1.

Table 5-1: Candidate Proposals in Three-Candidate Colony Fable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allocation to A</th>
<th>G1’s Proposal</th>
<th>G2’s Proposal</th>
<th>G3’s Proposal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allocation to B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocation to C</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A’s first choice is G2, his second is G1 and his third is G3. If there was an election between G2 and G1, he would vote for G2 and if there was an election between G1 and G3, he would vote for G1. Finally, if there was an election between G2 and G3, he would vote for G2. These choices are transitive – recall from Chapter 1 that an individual’s preferences are transitive if when he prefers x to y and y to z, then he also prefers x to z. Similarly, B and C also each have transitive preferences over the three candidates. B’s first preference is G3, second is G2, and third is G1. C’s first preference is G1, second is G3, and third is G2.

While it is straightforward to show that each colonist’s preferences over the three candidates are transitive, what about the choices that society would make if there were a series of two-candidate elections? Consider an election between G1 and G2. A and B

would both vote for G2, while C would vote for G1. Using majority rule as a way to determine how the group decides, G2 would win. Now suppose that G2 faces G3. A votes for G2 but B and C both vote for G3. Using majority rule as a way for determine how the group decides, G3 would win. If majority rule is transitive, then if there is an election between G3 and G1, G3 should defeat G1. Would that happen? B would vote for G3, but A and C would vote for G1. Using majority rule, G1 defeats G3. Majority rule in our example leads to non-transitive “social” preferences – non-transitive choices for society. Condorcet’s paradox is thus that majority rule can lead to these non-transitivities, cycles in social choices.46

### How Relevant is Condorcet’s Paradox for American Elections?

Is this paradox really relevant for our study of American elections? There can be no doubt that a lot of the questions facing voters in elections involve budgetary questions like the ones facing the potential governors and colonists in our fable. In the 2000 presidential election, one of the mostly hotly debated issues between Bush and Gore was how to deal with the (at the time) growing federal budget surplus – should have tax cuts? If so, how big? And for who – across all income groups or targeted for particular individuals – e.g. working families with child care expenses? Should we spend more money on health care plans for the elderly? Or, increase federal spending on education – benefiting primarily the young and middle class? All these questions involve matters of distributing the federal budget across competing interests and are inherently multidimensional because of their distributive nature.

But is the paradox relevant for other issues that do not necessarily involve distributing fixed resources? Consider two issues that are often mentioned in elections campaigns – gun control and paying teachers based on the performance of their students in standardized tests. To think graphically about voter choices in this situation, we need to be able to represent a voter’s utility in a two-dimensional space as in Figure 5-2. There are two issues in the election, 1 and 2 where issue 1 represents different degrees of gun control and issue 2 represents different views of the role of standardized tests in determining teacher pay. Positions on issue 1 are measured along the horizontal axis. At position 0, there is no gun control and as we move along the horizontal axis, the level of gun control increases so that at the furthest right position, there is complete outlawing of all guns. Positions on issue 2 are measured along the vertical axis. At position 0 there is no relationship between teacher pay and student performance on standardized tests and as we move up the vertical axis the percentage of teacher pay determined by standardized tests performance of students increases such that at the highest position, teacher pay is completely determined by the student performance on the tests. We can think of a single voter, say Aaron, whose ideal position on the combination of these issues is point A, which corresponds to position a<sub>1</sub> on issue 1 and a<sub>2</sub> on issue 2.

![Figure 5-2](image.png)

In Chapter 3, we represented a voter’s ideal point in a single-dimension issue space, as in Figure 3-1. As policy moved away from her ideal point, her utility declined. The same thing is true in the two-dimensional space. The way to think about point A is that it is the top of a mountain of utility and as policy moves away from point A, it is like climbing down the mountain and a decrease in utility. The circle labeled I<sub>1</sub> represents a

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46 Note that Condorcet’s Paradox implies that there is no Condorcet winner (see chapter 2) in our three-candidate example.
set of points equal distant from A. They are like a set of points that are all at the same
equal height up the mountain. Since the points all give Aaron the same utility, we call
the curve an indifference curve – that is, Aaron is indifferent between these positions.
There are actually an infinite number of indifference curves, just as there are an infinite
number of heights of a mountain. For every possible combination of positions on issues
1 and 2, there is an indifference curve and a corresponding level of utility for Aaron
associated with that indifference curve, just like every inch of a mountain has a height
associated with it. Notice that Aaron’s preferences over the two issues are transitive.

Now let’s add two other voters to our example, B and C as in Figure 5-3. The
points B and C represent the two voters’ ideal points and, as with Aaron, these points are
like the top of their utility mountains, so that as we move away from these points, their
utility declines. Notice that the preferences of our three voters, A, B, and C, are all
transitive and perfectly reasonable. What happens if we now have our two candidates,
G1 and G2, choosing positions in order to be elected in a plurality rule election? Where
will the candidates locate?

We have drawn example indifference curves around the three voters’ ideal points.
Suppose that G1 chooses a policy position at point G1, which is where the indifference
curves for voters A and C are just touching each other. But G2 can easily defeat this
position by choosing a policy position at point G2, which is closer to A than G1 and
closer to B than G1. So A and B will vote for G1, while C will vote for G2. But G1 can
defeat G2 by choosing a position at G1*, which is closer to B and C, leaving A to vote
alone for G2. However, G2 can defeat this position as well by moving as well and then
G1 will want to move and on and on. It turns out that just as in our colony fable above,
there is no equilibrium set of positions for G1 and G2 to locate. That is, for every
position that G1 might take, G2 can choose a position that will defeat G1. Similarly, for
every position that G2 might take, G1 can choose a position that will defeat G2. We find
that even when issues do not necessarily involve distributing fixed resources, Condorcet’s
Paradox still occurs.

Remember that these three voters all have nice, transitive preferences over these
issues. There preferences on these issues probably mirror different voters in American
elections. Condorcet’s Paradox is without question relevant for our study of American
elections. But we rarely think about it and it is certainly not often discussed in works on
American elections. Why? Principally we often ignore Condorcet’s paradox because the
policy choices in American elections can usually be organized in a single
liberal/conservative dimension that, while it may vary over time, is usually stable for long
periods. Condorcet Paradox raises three fundamental questions – two positive and one
normative:

- The positive questions:
  - We see a lot of stability in American elections – in candidate and party
    positions over the years and in our debates even over budgetary politics.
    Why does this stability exist when Condorcet’s paradox says it should not
    in a plurality rule system?
  - Along with stability in American elections – there is strong evidence that
    our governmental choices can be represented along a single
    liberal/conservative dimension, on a line as we have assumed in our
examples in the previous chapters. For example, Poole and Rosenthal, 1997, have studied the votes of members of Congress for over 200 years and the dimensionality of those votes over time. They find that for almost all of this time the votes of members of Congress can be separated out in terms of two-dimensions – the first is a general liberal/conservative dimension as defined by the political parties and the second differentiates the members of Congress by region within each party. During the civil rights period, the first dimension separated Democrats and Republicans while the second dimension separated northern from southern Democrats. However, they point out “that the separation between northern and southern Democrats has decreased. This process has continued through the 101st Congress, to such an extent that the second dimension has all but disappeared. Indeed the modern Congress is truly unidimensional.” (page 46). Why is this so, when policies that involve the distribution of resources are inherently multidimensional if more than two people are involved?

• The normative question: Can we avoid Condorcet’s paradox by using some other system of voting or aggregating individual preferences – i.e. not plurality rule? For example, maybe we can avoid the problem by using majority requirements like in Louisiana (discussed in chapter 2) or proportional representation (discussed in chapter 1) as in many parliamentary democracies?

We will consider the positive questions first and then the normative one.

Why Do We See So Much Stability and Single Dimensionality?

Given Condorcet’s Paradox in plurality rule elections, why do we not see huge non-transitivities in our government choices? While there are certainly changes over time in government policies, in general there are not the massive cycles and chaotic behavior that non-transitive social choices would reflect. Yet, many of the choices that our government makes do involve distributing resources and there is often serious disagreement over these issues. Why, then, is there not more instability and non-transitivity? Furthermore, how is it that issues that are inherently multidimensional (such as distributing resources as the government does) are usually thought of in a single liberal/conservative dimension, along a single line? It turns out that the answers to these two questions are related – that is, the forces behind our tendency for a single dimensionality in American policy choices are the same forces that give our American political system stability and help us avoid Condorcet’s Paradox.

Becoming a Candidate in a Two-Party World

In Chapter 2, we discussed how in 1970 James Buckley contested the New York Senate race as a Conservative – a minor political party and defeated both major party candidates. We saw how the inability of liberal voters to coordinate allowed Buckley to win with a plurality of the vote but less than a majority. We also noted how different mechanisms can be used by voters to coordinate in elections into coalitions. In particular, we discussed how majority requirements can be used to facilitate voter coordination and how Louisiana’s majority requirement prevented David Duke from winning the Governor’s office in 1991.

Our two major parties “typically” dominate electoral coalitions in American politics – I say typically because, as reviewed in Chapter 2, there are a number of
instances (such as in the case of Jesse Ventura’s selection as governor of Minnesota in 1998) where minor party or independent candidates are elected. We concluded that while plurality rule elections can lead to the dominance of two major electoral coalitions or parties such as ours [Duverger’s Law], plurality rule by itself does not always lead to two-party domination. Institutions like majority requirements can facilitate the domination of two major parties by facilitating voter coordination. Campaign contributions and party labels, we contended in chapter 2, can also play this role.

Many of our electoral rules and institutions advantage two-party domination of electoral coalitions. In the process of electoral coalition formation, there are a number of steps where state electoral laws or institutions affect the ability of a group of voters to form into a coalition and in many cases these facilitate major party domination of coalition formation. Figure 5-4 illustrates how the flows of voters and candidates move through state electoral institutions.

Figure 5-4 here

Voter flows are illustrated on the lefthandside and candidate flows are listed on the righthandside. There are two flows of candidates – candidates who compete for a party’s nomination in the general election and candidates who enter the general election as Independents. For a candidate to appear on a ballot as an Independent, she or he must satisfy state laws governing ballot access. These laws can differ significantly across states. For example, in Tennessee an Independent candidate for Congress need only supply a petition signed by 25 registered voters but in North Carolina an Independent candidate must have the signatures of 5% of the registered voters in the district.

The requirements involved in declaring candidacy for a party’s nomination also varies by state by whether the party is classified by the state as a major or minor party. In New Mexico, for instance, to compete for a major party’s nomination for Congress, a candidate must have a petition signed by at least 3% of the party’s vote for governor within the Congressional district at the last primary and to compete as a minor party candidate submit a petition signed by at least 0.5% of the gubernatorial or presidential vote at the last election within the district. While the percentage of the vote is less for minor party candidates, since it is applied to the general election rather than the primary in effect, the signature requirements facing minor party candidates in New Mexico are greater. In contrast, South Carolina has no petition requirements for candidates for any party’s nomination regardless of party status.

What determines whether a party is major or minor? Typically, major parties have automatic access for their candidates in general elections and minor parties have more restricted access, but this, too, depends on the state. In Alaska, for example there are four different classifications of parties – qualified, limited, new limited, minor/new party. Qualified parties are parties that received at least 3% of the gubernatorial vote in the last election, limited parties are parties that are organized within the state only for Presidential elections and received at least 3% of the Presidential vote in the last election, new limited parties must submit a petition signed by at least 1% of the Presidential vote in the last election, and Minor/new parties must submit a petition signed by at least 1% of the state vote in the last election. Most states, like Alaska make similar distinctions and requirements for a party to have automatic status for its candidates in general elections; only Mississippi places no requirements on political parties.
These ballot access laws make it easier for candidates to choose to run within a major political party than to work outside of it. Since many of them given special status to the existing major parties or are based on past vote totals, they give a huge status quo bias to the existing major party domination of electoral coalitions. Coupled with the advantage of coordination into just two electoral coalitions in a winner-take-all dominated system of elections like ours, most candidates find it optimal to run for major party nominations as their first step in achieving elected office.

Summary:

1. Our electoral system, where almost all contests are decided through winner-take-all, plurality rule elections, advantages a two-major party system, although minor party and independent candidates can win if the two major parties fail to dominate the electoral coalition formation stage.

2. State regulations help facilitate the ability of the two existing major parties (Democrats and Republicans) to dominate the electoral coalition formation stage, by making it costly for candidates to run outside the two major parties.

3. This means that, in general, to be successful most candidates must seek the nomination of one of the major political parties in order to run in a general election.

Two-Party Domination and Voters’ Perceptions

The fact that our institutional system forces us into two-party dominated elections is a major reason why we see our policy debate in terms of a single liberal/conservative dimension. It also provides us with stability in policy choices. How does this work? Imagine that there are set of voters with utility functions like Aaron’s above distributed across a two-dimensional policy space. We also have two political parties, D and R, with policy positions in the same space. Figure 5-5 gives an example.

The two party positions are at D and R respectively. Party D then has a position of \(d_1\) on issue 1 and \(d_2\) on issue 2. Similarly, party R has a position of \(r_1\) on issue 1 and \(r_2\) on issue 2. We can think of these policy positions as being determined by the members of those parties through the candidates they have selected in the past and the positions these candidates have advocated. These parties have major status because in the past they have managed to be the dominant two parties in electoral competition. The electoral institutions across the states give them, with varying degrees, easier access to ballots and they both have managed, in the past, to have a set of existing party members who participate in the process of choosing the party positions.

In chapter 4, we saw that, when working in a single liberal/conservative dimension, if the two major political parties choose their candidates for the general election in some sort of primary process that is principally dominated by party members with more extreme preferences and there is uncertainty about the preferences of voters in
the general election, then the parties will align at different points in the distribution of preferences. This is also true when policy is multidimensional as well. These two points, the party positions, then structure the debate over policy. In general the voters’ ideal points are distributed across the multi-dimensional policy space and they must make a choice whether to vote for a candidate from one of the parties, or not to (by supporting an independent or minor party candidate).

Voters know that the electoral system advantages the two major parties and they expect that all elections are going to be close races between these two parties. They know it is exceedingly difficult for a minor political party or an independent candidate to build a national coalition that can rival the existing major parties. They perceive that minor parties and independent candidates, while they may have an occasional chance to win a lower level office, are unlikely to win the majority of elected offices.

The ballot access laws and state regulations also make it exceedingly difficult for candidates outside the major political parties to build national coalitions. Many independent and minor party candidates for the president, for example have faced huge difficulties just securing a place for their name on the ballot, even when they have huge campaign resources and a large degree of support in the polls as Ross Perot did in 1992.

Our presidential election system makes it further difficult for a minor party or independent candidate to win nationally. That is, we do not vote for the president but for a slate of delegates to the electoral college. In almost all the states, the slates are allocated on a winner-take-all basis, that is, whichever presidential candidate wins the state, wins all the delegates, not just the percent of delegates equal to the percent of his vote. Therefore, a candidate who fails to come in first in a single state, but makes a strong showing across the states, can receive no electoral votes. A winner working outside the major parties needs to build regional as well as national support in order to win nationally.

Finally, we pointed out at the end of chapter 4, that voters don’t just look at what an elected official does himself, but the overall impact of his choices on overall policy. What voters like Gomillion care about ultimately is policy outcomes (as we noted in chapter 3) not the candidates themselves. Because voters know the extreme difficulty of working outside the major political parties, they perceive elections as generally a choice between these two parties. An electoral coalition that can be seen as on a par with the major parties must be able to demonstrate not only the ability to achieve the presidency

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47 Wittman, Donald, 1977, “Candidates with Policy Preferences: A Dynamic Model,” *Journal of Economic Theory*, 14: 180-89; Wittman, Donald 1983, “Candidate Motivation: A Synthesis of Alternative Theories,” *American Political Science Review* 77: 142-157; Wittman, Donald 1990, “Spatial Strategies When Candidates Have Policy Preferences,” in *Advances in the Spatial Theory of Voting*, ed. by James Enelow and Melvin Hinich, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pages 66-98,and Calvert, Randall, 1985, “Robustness of the Multidimensional Voting Model: Candidates’ Motivations, Uncertainty, and Convergence,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 29 (February): 69-95. The mathematics of how this works is a bit complicated and beyond the scope of this text. But intuitively the candidates diverge for the same reasons that they did in chapter 4. Of course, we are assuming that the members of each party have somehow solved the paradox of voting for themselves. Later in the chapter, we discuss how porousness in the parties leads to some instability in these choices over time. We can think of these positions as largely influenced by status quo biases in the way policy is made which allows us to think of them as fixed in the short run.
for also some presence in Congress and some local and state offices. In the 20th century
the Progressives have come the closest to such strength, yet they failed to replace one of
the major political parties and their candidate, Teddy Roosevelt, failed in his attempt to
reach the presidency.

Voters, then, knowing the dominance of the two major parties both regionally and
nationally, the difficulty of candidates who try to work outside these parties to achieve
national presence, then expect that most policy choices are going to be between D and R
and that minor party and independent candidates’ policy positions, which might closer to
them ideologically, are not supported by a large enough electoral coalition to win.

**Summary:** Voters know the electoral system advantages tremendously the
two major political parties. Thus, they expect that most elections are
between the policy positions of the two major parties, and that minor
parties and independent candidates, who may office policy positions closer
to their ideal points, have little chance of affecting national policy.

For example, consider the situation faced by voter A in Figure 5-5. Voter A’s
ideal policy position on issue 1 is the same as the Democratic party while A’s ideal policy
position on issue 2 is the same as the Republican party. However, in terms of distance of
points, A’s ideal point is closer to D than to R. Thus, point D is on an indifference curve
that is closer to A’s ideal point than R is. A sees his policy choices as between D and R,
that a minor party or independent candidate, who may be closer than D or R, has little
chance of winning. A prefers D over R and thus will vote for D, even though R’s
position on issue 2 is at his ideal point.

We can similarly evaluate all the voter’s preferences between D and R in terms of
which party’s position in the two-dimensional issue space is closest to the voter’s ideal
point. A voter whose ideal point is the same distance from both parties’ positions, is
indifferent between the two parties, since the two parties then are on that voter’s same
indifference curve. Notice that this could be a voter in the middle between D and R or a
voter whose preferences are far away from the line connecting D and R, which in the
Figure is the bold line.

**The Meaning of Liberal and Conservative**

We can think of the bold line connecting D and R as the liberal/conservative
alignment of issues in the country as defined by the two parties. Some voters’ ideal
points will be close to that line and thus, their preferences will be easy to describe by the
terms liberal/conservative, as defined by the two major parties. For example, we might
think of issue 1 as abortion policy and issue 2 as economic policy. The 0 point on issue 1
represents full legalization of all types of abortion, while the furthest right position on
issue 1 represents making all types of abortion illegal. The 0 point on issue 2 represents
very little involvement of the government in the economy, while the highest position on
issue 2 represents full government control of the economy. Party D advocates fewer
restrictions on abortions than party R, but more government control of the economy.
Party R advocates restricted abortion rights than party D, but less government control of
the economy. Less restricted abortions and more government control of the economy are
seen as “liberal” positions, where individuals who advocate completely unregulated
abortions and complete government involvement in the economy, are viewed as extreme
liberals. Fewer restricted abortions and less government control of the economy are seen as “conservative” positions, where individuals who advocate making all types of abortion illegal and minimal at best government involvements in the economy are viewed as extreme conservatives.

Individual B, whose ideal point is on the line connecting D and R has preferences that are consistent with the liberal/conservative alignment of the parties. That is, she is a moderate, with an ideal point that represents moderation (in terms of the defining of the words liberal/conservative by the two parties). But what about individual A, who prefers that both abortion and government control of the economy be less restricted? A is not easily characterized in terms of being a liberal, conservative, or moderate. Since A’s ideal point is closest to party D, A prefers party D. But is A a liberal? A conservative? A moderate? We would usually say that A is a liberal on abortion policy, but a conservative on government’s involvement in the economy, using the labels for the parties (D as the liberal party, R as the conservative party) to correspondingly define what it means to be liberal or conservative on these two policy issues.

Interestingly, these definitions are, of course, entirely arbitrary. Party D and Party R could conceivably have positions as in Figure 5-6, where D advocates less restrictive abortion and government control of the economy and R advocates the opposite. We would then say that less government control of the economy is a “liberal” position and that more government control of the economy is the “conservative” position. In Figure 5-6 A’s preferences are consistent with the liberal/conservative dimension established by the party positions and B is the oddball.

Figure 5-6

Summary: Two-Party Domination of American Elections (because of the predominance of plurality rule, winner-take-all elections & explicit barriers to entry for minor party and independent candidates) means that the two existing major parties’ candidates, through choosing policy positions, typically define American politics into a single liberal/conservative dimension. Not all voters, of course, preferences fit consistently into this dimension since policy is inherently multidimensional.

The Left-Out Voter and Potential Instability

In 1998, many political pundits were shocked when Jesse “The Body” Ventura defeated both the Democratic and Republican candidates for governor of Minnesota with a plurality of the vote, much as Buckley defeated both Ottinger and Goodell in the 1970 New York Senate race we discussed in chapter 2. Ventura has made no secret of his contempt for the two major political parties (and some minor party candidates who he views as extremists). On August 20, 2000, Ventura discussed the presidential election contest in 2000 with talk show host Larry King on CNN:

“VENTURA: But I don’t like him [Buchanan, Reform Party Candidate in 2000] politically, because I believe, Larry, for a third party to be successful, you have got to be centrist. You’ve got to be in the middle, not farther right than the Republicans, as the case of Mr. Buchanan, or farther left than the Democrats, which is the case of Mr. Nader. If you’re going to
be successful as a third party, my belief is you have got to be centrist. And what I am...

KING: But isn’t centrist what the Democrats and Republicans, in your opinion, have become?

VENTURA: No, not at all. They try to be. They’re still left and right. What they do is they become centrist for an election, because they know it’s those independents in the middle that determine who wins.

KING: So you’re saying there are no true centrists?

VENTURA: Yes, there are true centrists, but they’re left with no choice. Democrats and Republicans are not centrists, because, Larry, I’m fiscally conservative, but I’m socially liberal.

KING: That means -- who do you endorse this year?

VENTURA: No one.”

Ventura, like voter A in Figure 5-5, does not fit in our current view of the liberal/conservative dimension as defined by the Democrats and Republicans. While he calls himself “centrist” what he seems to mean is better captured by his later statement of being fiscally conservative and socially liberal like voter A above. Ventura sees Buchanan as to the right and down from R and Nader as to the left and up from D.

But despite everything we have said about the way in which our electoral system almost completely stacks the deck against him, Ventura did the unthinkable and won the governorship of Minnesota. The two parties failed to dominate that election. Ventura’s election is an example of how the single-dimensionality we have described above can fail and sometimes does in American elections. Minor party and independent candidates have challenged the major political parties by advocating positions that appeal to voters precisely because they do not fit well within the single liberal/conservative dimension defined by the major political parties’ positions. This could potentially lead to instability in American elections as in our fable at the beginning of the chapter if the size of the group of voters who are disaffected is large enough to build both regional and national coalitions. As we saw in chapter 2, winner-take-all elections sometimes are won by candidates with less than a majority of the vote – and in fact, frequently are. If there is a sizeable group of voters who are distant enough from the liberal/conservative dimension as defined by the two major parties and capable to building an organization, we can see instability.

The Liberal/Conservative Dimension Over Time

How stable has the liberal/conservative dimension been over the course of United States history? In general, the liberal/conservative dimension that divides the political parties has been relatively stable for long periods although it certainly moves about in the policy space. The best analysis of how this dimension moves is the pathbreaking analysis of Congressional voting behavior of Poole and Rosenthal, 1997. They contend that the division between the parties is stable unless a “cross-cutting” issue (an issue that has support and opposition in both parties) becomes “intense.” When this happens they maintain that the “dimensional alignments break down and a reorganization of the party system results.” (page 46). Slavery was such an issue. Yet, typically, we do not see this happen very often and our party system stays relatively stable for extended intervals. In fact, we normally see gradual changes in party positions rather than the dramatic party breakdown during the Civil War when slavery became an “intense” issue. Why?
One reason for the short run stability is the uncertainty about voter preferences that also leads the parties to choosing divergent positions. The uncertainty introduces a degree of randomness in policy choices that is somewhat controlled — that is, the parties have stable positions and there is some chance that either will be chosen, a sort of alternating of party control that means some non-transitivity in policy choices that is relatively stable. It is non-transitive because it means a social choice that for some time will put Democratic “liberal” positions as dominant or our first preference, and other times Republican “conservative” positions as dominant or our first preference. Of course, we have argued in chapter 4 that voters use the multiplicity of elected offices in the country and the different branches of government to balance out or moderate these parties’ differences. But policy does typically swing a bit over time. We see that tax and spending policies vary as Democrats replace Republicans who replace Democrats. Is it a type of “managed” non-transitivity.

The liberal/conservative dimension changes over time gradually partly because of the “porousness” of our political parties, coupled with our strong institutional status quo bias. Voters like A and candidates like Ventura, who find themselves as “oddballs” have two choices — they can try to get one of the major political parties to move closer to their perspective, leading to a redefining of the liberal/conservative dimension or they can work outside the major parties and attempt to form a new party or movement (as Ventura did in Minnesota) that they hope will allow them to eventually replace one of the major political parties. A number of political scientists have reasoned that the direct primary system in American elections facilitates the domination of the two major parties in electoral coalition formation by allowing these dissidents to easily work within the two major political parties. Bibby and Maisel summarize this view (1998, page 58):

“The pervasive use of the direct primary system in all of the states has had the effect of channeling dissent into the two major parties. In the United States, unlike in other nations, dissidents and insurgents do not need to go through the difficult and often frustrating exercise of forming an alternative party. Instead, they can work within the Republican or Democratic parties by seeking to win major party nominations as a route to elective office. This ‘burrowing from within’ strategy is much more likely to yield success than the third-party or independent candidacy method. The direct primary makes American parties particularly porous and susceptible to external influences and in the process reduces the incentives to create additional parties.”

Epstein, 1986, pages 244-245, also encapsulates this perspective of American parties and contends that the use of the direct primary did not create the way in which the two major parties have channeled dissent but is a institutionalization of a party dynamic that existed for many years prior to its creation:

“More important than ballot access, in accounting for the continued electoral dominance of the Republican and Democratic labels, is the manner in which the direct primary institutionalized those labels. States


49 See Bibby and Maisel, 1998.
do much more than merely impose legal burdens on the use of third-party labels by insurgents. . . . the direct-primary laws of the several states provide unusual opportunities for insurgents to win major-party nominations and thereby the valuable state-conferred labels accompanying those nominations. Challengers outside the ranks of an established party leadership and organization are thus encouraged to seek intraparty electoral routes to power, and voters become accustomed to choosing among groups and individuals competing, especially for the party label that probably ensures general-election success in a given constituency. . . . No doubt this use of primaries by voters as well as by aspiring officeholders can be understood as yet another manifestation of the looseness of American party structure and of the tendency of each major party to accommodate considerable diversity. . . . These characteristics antedate the direct primary. Hence the primary may be viewed as the twentieth-century means for confirming the traditional porosity or ready permeability of American parties. I would add, however, that the primary contributes to the porosity as well as confirming it in statutory form. Nothing quite like the American pattern of intraparty electoral competition exists in other nations, and it is not unreasonable to suggest that its absence may help explain why parties in those nations have been less successful than the major American parties in preempting incipient third-party territory."

In general, ballot access laws accentuate the ability of primaries to serve in this fashion. While ballot access laws vary by state, entry into major party competition via primaries is easier than entry into general elections as either a minor party or independent candidate. State regulations make ‘burrowing from within’ smoother for potential candidates. Moreover, it is argued that because ‘burrowing from within’ is better for potential candidates, voters also find it necessary to participate in the primary process if they wish to have their preferences heard. Instead of these potential candidates and their supporters working independently in minor parties or through independent campaigns, dissent is expressed during the primary contests and only two candidates, the major party nominees, receive viable support in the general election.

**Party Labels and Coordination**

When we discussed how it is possible that what we called non-Duvergerian equilibria can exist in chapter 2 – how it is possible that we can have races such as Buckley’s win in 1970 – we emphasized the failure of voters to coordinate as the principal reason. Goodell and Ottinger voters could not coordinate on one of these – if they had then the race would have been only between two candidates rather than a race where all three candidates seemed to have chances to win. How voters coordinate in elections is key. Voter coordination is also part of the argument that the direct primary benefits the dominance of the two major parties. The implicit argument is that in the direct primary system in American elections, voters use party labels as coordination devices in the general election.50

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50 Voters are also assumed to use party labels as information shortcuts. So far, we have ignored the issue of how voters may be less than fully informed in elections and how this may affect electoral outcomes. We will address this in Chapter 7.
Epstein asserts (page 245):
“The preservative element in the legal institutionalization of major-party labels is readily observed in state requirements that voters register or declare their party preference in order to vote in party primaries. However obtained – in written form and in advance or merely by public declaration at the polls – the preference is a forced choice that the state imposes on voters who want to participate in what is often the decisive electoral contest. Even in the minority of states that require no public registration or declaration of party before entering a primary election booth, a voter usually has to decide, though within the privacy of the voting booth, whether to choose a Republican or Democratic party ballot. At least a little temporary party identification is thus at work. The identification that accompanies public registration or declaration is much clearer. Here is a legal inducement to express traditional electoral attachments.”

One way to see how the primary system or public registration or declaration makes voters use the major parties labels as coordinating devices even if they do not personally think of themselves as party members is to compare the party registration percentages with the percentage of voters who, when asked in a survey whether they identify as a party member. Epstein reports (page 246):
“... total Republican and Democratic party registrations, as percentages of all voter registrations, ordinarily run well above percentages of party identifiers counted in sample surveys. In 18 party-registration states for which in 1982 there were also exit-poll data from the midterm congressional elections, the difference was more than 10 points in all but four states. Not untypical were California, where 88 percent of its registrants listed themselves as Republicans or Democrats but only 73 percent of its surveyed voters identified with the major parties, and New York, where the comparable percentages were 80 and 67.”

Summary: The electoral rules that make ballot access easier for candidates who work through the party system and encourages voters to use party labels as part of the process of choosing elected officials makes parties, and in particular the two major parties, dominant in forming electoral coalitions in American politics. This means that the two-major parties can continue to define the liberal/conservative dimension in American politics. This dimension changes over time to reflect the influence of new groups, insurgents, dissidents etc., but in general stays relatively stable helping us avoid the worst implications of Condorcet’s paradox.

Stability Through Other Institutional Features
Part of our governmental system that leads to stability is the fact that many of the policy decisions our government makes are made by super-majorities, not just plurality rule. This happens in two principal ways – 1) presidents have veto power over legislation, and for legislation to pass over a president’s veto it needs a 2/3 majority and 2) super majorities of Congress and the states are required for a constitutional amendment
to pass. This is one thing that helps stability maintain itself even in periods where secondary issues (Poole and Rosenthal’s second dimension) are extremely divisive and we go through party re-alignments in response peacefully. The independent judicial branch also provides stability to our governmental policy positions as Supreme Court judges serve much longer terms than elected officials and it is rare that a particular elected government can make substantial changes in its membership. These institutional features give our policy a status quo bias, which stack the deck against frequent change or instability.

We might also argue that our federalist structure gives us some stability in that it allows for voters who might be “left out” to vary some state policies, where they may be sizeable, from the “national” norm. “Voting with one’s feet” is an option when local and state policy choices are significantly at variance with an individual’s own preferences and there are other localities or states that offer more preferred choices. However, choosing how a degree of federalism (the discretion allowed to states and localities), is one of the policy issues that we are almost continually debating over at a national level.51

Low Dimensionality and Other Party Systems

I have argued above that our election system advantages the two-major party domination of electoral coalition formation and that this gives us the low dimensionality of policy that we observe, and as a consequence, stability in policy choices. It should be stressed that two-party systems such as ours are not required for low dimensionality to occur. In fact, a number of studies, reviewed in Poole and Rosenthal 1999, show that even in countries with multiparty systems the policy space within their parliaments or legislatures has a very low degree of dimensionality.52 This no doubt reflects the features of their governmental systems that reduce the choice space so that there are winning and losing coalitions ultimately. These results suggest that low dimensionality and stability work hand and hand and that in general, successful governmental institutions structure choices so that these things can occur. My argument is that in American politics most of the formation of winning and losing coalitions occurs at the electoral stage and many of the rules that give us stability and low dimensionality are our electoral rules.

The Media is the Messenger

While we’ve highlighted quite a few ways that our electoral institutional system facilitates the domination of the existing major parties over electoral coalitions in American elections – one thing we have left out is the news media. There isn’t a chapter on the media in this book (although we do discuss campaign advertising and voter learning during campaigns). Yet, if you talk to politicians, voters, or interest groups you hear a lot of talk about the role of the media. Often the claim is that the media is biased, or presents a biased view of whatever is being presented. If true, this certainly affects voter information and as a consequence voter choices, as discussed in chapter 8. But one of the big tasks that the media performs is to shape our expectations.

51 Since states and localities find it more difficult to engage in redistribution (voting with one’s feet means wealthy people and business can leave), to some extent this debate is also about the extent of redistribution we engage in nationally.

In chapter 2, we saw that expectations of voters largely determine who wins in the more than two candidate elections. If voters had expected the race to be a close one between Goodell and Buckley and that Ottinger had no chance, Goodell could have won. A lot of news reporting about elections is horse race coverage. Poll results or, during presidential primary season, primary results command election coverage. Voters are interviewed about their preferences, pundits (and a goodly number of political scientists) pontificate on what voters think, what candidates are likely to do, etc. These polls and horse-race results and interviews color voter expectations of the election to come and the choices they make. Predominantly they concentrate on the major parties, although sometimes minor party or independent candidates are more colorful – most governors don’t take Ventura’s career path or have Ross Perot’s charts and graphs – but the air and print attention is mainly, why is she running, rather than on whether she will win.

We should not ignore the force of expectations as facilitated by this type of news media coverage on American elections and the stability of the two-party system. There is no doubt that he role of the media in forming expectations has increased a tremendous amount with the advances in technology of the 20th century. However, it is the one piece that gives us stability that we are least able to control in a democracy, as many politicians have discovered. Under the right circumstances, the news media could reinforce expectations that lead to a demise of our system if such expectations begin to mount enough such that the news media finds it news to report them. In this case our technology could potentially work against the two-party system and lead us quickly to a world where expectations change dramatically. What gives us temporary stability has the potential of great instability.

### The Cost of Stability

While our institutional system does lead to some stability over time, it does mean that there are groups of voters who are left out of the two-party system as Ventura points out. Stability comes at a cost. Although the two parties do accommodate well insurgents, the status quo bias in the system means that this happens only over time, and only at the cost of leaving some other voters “out.” We can see this in the changes that have taken place on the issue of abortion policy in the last 30 years since the Supreme Court decision in 1972, Roe v. Wade, which declared some restrictions on abortion as unconstitutional. During this period of time we see Republican and Democratic elected officials choosing positions on abortion policy that are increasingly divergent, reflecting the influx of anti-abortion, right to life groups, into activism within the Republican party and pro-abortion, feminist groups, into activism within the Democratic party.

The change over time is illustrated in Figure 5-7 from Adams 1997. Adams measures the percentage of pro-abortion votes by members of the House of Representatives from 1973 to 1994. There is an initial increase in pro-choice votes by members from both parties, but Republican percentages then begin to fall slightly, while Democratic percentages continue to increase such that by 1994, Democrats vote pro-abortion 80% of the time to Republicans who vote pro-abortion 20% of the time. To some extent, this change over time also is reflected in Al Gore’s changes in position on abortion through the 70s, 80s, and 90s discussed in chapter 4 (changes that Bradley felt Gore was not being honest about).

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Figure 5-7 here

The effect of this change has meant that voters who previously supported Republican candidates because of their other positions but were abortion rights advocates, faced a dilemma. So did voters who favored other Democratic policies but were abortion foes. Both groups no longer could easily fit on the liberal/conservative dimension as the Republicans and Democrats became more solidly divided on the issue of abortion. The redefining of the parties on the abortion issue did give those that favored abortion and other Democratic policies and those that opposed abortion and other Republican policies a greater voice in the parties as the parties more clearly reflected their preferences. The dimension changed over time, advantaging the ability of some groups to be represented by one of the two major parties, but disadvantaging the ability of other groups of voters.

We began this section of the chapter with two positive questions and one normative one. We have found answers to our positive questions. Plurality rule, ballot access laws, a relatively porous party structure that encourages the participation of dissidents and insurgents, and party label coordination, all advantage a two-major party system that both defines the liberal/conservative policy dimension we typically organize policy choices into and gives those choices some relative stability over time. But this means that there are always groups of voters who do not fit within the liberal/conservative dimension as defined by the major political parties, although these groups vary over time. We generally avoid Condorcet’s paradox in the short run by allowing for gradual changes and organizing our policy choices such that some choices are not represented. Every voter is not represented in our system all the time. Ventura is right, some voters’ preferences are left out.

This leaves us with our normative question – Can we avoid Condorcet’s Paradox in another way that gives all voters full voice to their preferences all the time by using some other electoral system instead of plurality rule? Can we have stability and have all voters’ preferences equally involved in the policy choices all the time? Is there an ideal voting system that we could use instead? Perhaps proportional representation, or policy choices by referenda and initiatives (as occasionally used in some states)?

**Arrow’s Criteria**

Kenneth Arrow addressed the normative question in his Nobel Prize winning work, *Social Choice and Individual Values*. In addressing the issue, Arrow began by listing a set of criteria that he argued any “reasonable” method of making social choices should satisfy. The criteria he set out are the following:

- **Transitivity**: The social choice procedure should be transitive. That is, if the social choice procedure chooses $x$ over $y$, and $y$ over $z$, then it should also choose $x$ over $z$. It should be rational.

- **Unanimity**: If an individual’s preference between $x$ and $y$ for society is unopposed by any other individual – that is, no one prefers $y$ to $x$ (everyone else either also prefers $x$ to $y$ or is indifferent between the two), then $x$ is preferred to $y$ in the social choice procedure.

- **Universal Admissibility**: All rational (transitive) preferences of individuals are possible.
• **Nondictatorship:** No individual’s preferences dominate to such an extent that whenever he or she expresses a preference the social choice procedure always chooses that preference even when everyone else prefers the opposite.

• **Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives:** The social choice between two alternatives must depend only on the preferences of individuals over those two alternatives, and not their preferences over other alternatives.

The *transitivity* criterion is really the criteria that the social choice procedure not lead to Condorcet-like cycles. That as a society we make choices that are consistent and rational. *Unanimity* is a fairly uncontroversial criterion. It is also sometimes called the *Pareto postulate* after the work of the Italian theorist Pareto.

One way to solve the cycling problem for our colonists in the fable that began our chapter as illustrated with the three candidates in Table 5-1 is to say that some preference orderings are not allowed, to violate the criteria of *universal admissability*. For example, we could simply say that C is not allowed to have selfish preferences – that C can only have altruistic preferences where her preferences are the same as A’s. Then we would have a transitive social choice – G2 would defeat both G1 and G3. By restricting the preferences of the individuals who participate – or restricting the individuals who can participate by their preferences, we can get transitivity of social choices easily. Arrow believed that social choice rules that restricted the ability of individuals to participate even when their preferences were rational was unreasonable and that a reasonable social choice rule would have no such restrictions on participation in the social choice.

Another way to solve the problem in our fable above is to allow A’s preferences to dictate when G2 faces G3, to violate the criteria of *non-dictatorship*. Then, G2 would defeat both G1 and G3 and we would have a transitive social ordering. Again, Arrow believed that a social choice rule that allowed for dictatorship of this sort was unreasonable.

The last criterion, which is probably the hardest to understand, *independence of irrelevant alternatives*, rules out certain types of voting systems where voters give information on their entire preference orderings such as the Borda count. The Borda count is a voting system where everyone assigns points to each candidate according to how their preferences over the candidates rank – with the highest number of points going to the first ranked choice, the second highest to the second preferred option, etc.

For example, suppose that there are four candidates, Bush, Gore, Bradley and McCain and three voters as in Table 5-2 below:

**Table 5-2: A Four-Candidate, Four-Voter Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voter 1</th>
<th>Voter 2</th>
<th>Voter 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Preference</strong></td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>McCain</td>
<td>Gore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Preference</strong></td>
<td>McCain</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>Bradley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third Preference</strong></td>
<td>Bradley</td>
<td>Gore</td>
<td>McCain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth Preference</strong></td>
<td>Gore</td>
<td>Bradley</td>
<td>Bush</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Under the Borda count, voter 1 would give Bush 4 points, McCain 3 points, Gore 2 points, and Bradley 1 point. Voter 2 would give McCain 4 points, Bush 3 points, Bradley 2 points, and Gore 1 point. Voter 3 would give Gore 4 points, Bradley 3 points, McCain 2 points, and Bush 1 point. If there was an election between just Bush and Gore, then under the Borda count, Bush would get 8 points and Gore would get 7 points, Bush would win. Under plurality rule, Bush would win as well, getting votes from voters 1 and 2 to Gore getting vote of voter 3.

What happens though if we change voter 1’s preferences to those shown in Table 5-3 below. That is, now Gore is voter 1’s second choice, McCain is his third and Bradley is his fourth. Under plurality rule, Bush still defeats Gore as voter 1 continues to prefer Bush to Gore. But under the Borda count, Gore now defeats Bush, since voter 1 now gives Gore 3 points instead of the previous 1, and Gore now has 9 points to Bush’s 8. The Borda count makes voter 1’s preferences over Bradley and McCain affect the choice between Bush and Gore. Plurality rule does not. The Borda count violates independence of irrelevant alternatives; plurality rule does not.

**Table 5-3: A Different Four-Candidate, Four-Voter Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Preference</th>
<th>Voter 1</th>
<th>Voter 2</th>
<th>Voter 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second Preference</td>
<td>Gore</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>Bradley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Preference</td>
<td>McCain</td>
<td>Gore</td>
<td>McCain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Preference</td>
<td>Bradley</td>
<td>Bradley</td>
<td>Bush</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why would social choice procedures such as the Borda count be unreasonable? At first glance it seems that this type of voting system might be very desirable since it allows for voters to provide greater information about their preferences than in systems like plurality rule. Maybe the fact that Gore moves from voter 1’s last choice to his second should matter?

If the social choice process is one where individuals volunteer their intensities through the voting process as in a Borda count method, there is the potential that individuals will misrepresent their intensities through strategic behavior, manipulating the voting process to their advantage. \(^{54}\) How can the Borda count be used to manipulate

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\(^{54}\) Arrow, Kenneth J., 1951, *Social Choice and Individual Values*, New Haven: Yale University Press. Arrow actually did not justify the criterion of independence of irrelevant alternatives on these grounds, although this is the standard current view of why this criterion is desirable. Arrow justifies this criterion by noting that social choice rules that use preference rankings are then limited by the set of feasible or observable alternatives. See Mueller, Dennis, *Public Choice II: A Revised Edition of Public Choice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 pages 393-395 for a discussion of this criterion and its justification. Mueller points out that Arrow was also concerned that if the social choice process is one where public officials are judging individuals’
outcomes? Consider the preferences of five voters in an situation with Gore, McCain, and Bradley as the candidates presented in Table 5-4 below (based on an example in Mueller, 1989, pages 119-120):

Table 5-4: A Three-Candidate, Five-Voter Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voter Preferences Over Gore, McCain, and Bradley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voter 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Preference</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Preference</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third Preference</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this example, if voters state their preferences sincerely, under the Borda count McCain wins. That is, voters 1, 2, and 3 each give Gore 3 votes, McCain 2 votes and Bradley 1 vote. Voters 4 and 5 each give McCain 3 votes, Bradley 2 votes and Gore 1 vote. So in total Gore receives 11 votes (3*3 + 2*1), McCain receives 12 votes (3*2 + 2*3), and Bradley receives 7 votes (3*1 + 2*2). McCain wins. But what happens if voters 1, 2, and 3 misstate their preferences by giving McCain 1 vote and Bradley 2 votes? Gore will still receive 11 votes but now McCain receives 9 votes and Bradley receives 10 votes and Gore wins. Since Gore is voters 1, 2, and 3’s first preference these voters have an incentive to lie about their second preferences. Strategic misrepresentation of preferences can affect the outcome.

Of course, we already know from chapter 2 that under plurality rule, strategic voting can affect the outcome – in fact in some races strategic voting may be desired as it increases the probability of the Condorcet winner winning as in our Buckley, Ottinger, and Goodell example when O voters vote for Goodell (or G voters vote for Ottinger). A similar thing happens in this example; strategic misrepresentation of voter preference intensities leads to a Condorcet winner winning (Gore is the Condorcet winner – Gore would defeat both McCain and Bradley in separate pair-wise contests).

The difference is that in the plurality rule example, O voters are voting strategically for Goodell because they perceive that there is a close race between Goodell and Buckley and Ottinger has no chance. They are not “lying” about their preferences – in a two-candidate race between Goodell and Buckley, they prefer Goodell. But in our Borda count example above, voters 1, 2, and 3 are “lying” about their second preference in order to manipulate the outcome so that they can get their first preference. Many social choice theorists find this type of strategic misrepresentation of preference orderings an undesirable feature of voting rules like the Borda count and, like Arrow, believe that reasonable voting procedures should not allow for this type of voting.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{55}\) There is a vast literature that looks at the effects of different social choice rules on the probability of a Condorcet winner winning and other normative properties. The interested reader should examine Mueller and other references in the concluding section of this chapter.
How Arrow’s Theorem Works

Arrow takes these criteria and shows that there is no social choice procedure that will satisfy all of them at once. The intuition behind the proof of the theorem is simple. First, because of universal admissibility, we cannot simply assume that there will always be a unanimous choice over a set of alternatives. This means that there is always going to be a set of alternatives over which individuals have differing preferences. The independence criterion restricts our choices over these alternatives to pairwise comparisons – we evaluate alternatives by pairs, not in triples or bigger sets. However, as we saw in our fable about the colonists, universal admissibility of preferences means also that these pairwise comparisons may be non-transitive – we cannot rule out that possibility. The only way to impose transitivity for sure would be to make someone a dictator (since each individual’s preferences are transitive). But this is not allowed either. So there is no procedure that satisfies all of Arrow’s criteria.

While this all seems rather esoteric, the implications for choices that we make in American elections cannot be understated. Arrow’s Theorem means that our electoral system must violate one of these criteria even if we re-designed it. Condorcet’s paradox cannot be ignored by using some other voting procedure unless we violate some of the other criteria of unanimity, universal admissibility, non-dictatorship, or independence of irrelevant alternatives. The answer to our normative question above is a definitive NO.

In Summary: Arrow’s Theorem shows that it is impossible to design an electoral system that satisfies his criteria of transitivity, unanimity, universal admissibility, non-dictatorship, or independence of irrelevant alternatives. If we want to avoid Condorcet’s paradox, we must violate one of Arrow’s other criteria.

Where do we go from here?

In this chapter and the four preceding, we have seen how our electoral system encourages voters and candidates to coordinate into electoral coalitions dominated by our two major parties. We have seen what this means for the policy positions that candidates choose – candidates do not converge at some median voter when there is uncertainty about voter preferences (although moderation does attract), but diverge in policy space reflecting the preferences of those within one of the major party electoral coalitions and define what we think of as liberal/conservative. Because policy is inherently multidimensional, almost always there are voters’ preferences which do not well “fit in” this liberal/conservative dimension. Finally, in the short run these policy positions and the definitions of liberal/conservative are stable because of the status quo bias of the system, but they change over time because of the porousness of the party system which allows for insurgents and dissidents (the left out voters) to change party positions gradually. We have more stability than Condorcet’s Paradox would predict, but we also never have all voters’ preferences fully represented by electoral coalitions.

Our analysis helps us understand a lot about how American elections work. Yet, there is much still to explore. We have not discussed the role played by interest groups and campaign contributions in elections. How do they affect candidate and voter choices? In the next chapter, we find out – and we begin with a desperate president.
For Further Reading
{Brief review of relevant literature.}

Study Questions and Exercises
{See examples in chapters 1 and 2.}
Chapter 6: How Interest Groups Are Involved in Elections

“MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT
FROM: HAROLD ICKES
In order to raise an additional $3,000,000 to permit the Democratic National Committee to produce and air generic tv/radio spots as soon as Congress adjourns . . . I request that you telephone Vernon Jordan, Senator Rockefeller and Bernard Schwartz either today or tomorrow. You should ask them if they will call ten to twelve CEO/business people who are very supportive of the Administration . . . to have breakfast with you, as well as with Messrs. Jordan, Rockefeller and Schwartz, very late this week or very early next week.
The purpose of the breakfast would be for you to express your appreciation for all they have done to support the administration, to impress them with the need to raise $3,000,000 within the next two weeks . . . and to ask them, if they, in turn, would undertake to raise that amount of money.”

The Desperate Man

An Incumbent President is up for re-election. He had won the presidential nomination easily enough at his party’s convention and the campaign had started out well, giving him a good lead over his opposition. But in one of the states that he counted on, and needed, his campaign was in trouble. The party’s state committee told him that they needed funds from the national committee, but the national committee was out of funds. The desperate president “summoned a group of monied men . . . to a hush-hush White House breakfast where he told them that if they gave him the money he needed they’d have nothing to fear from him during his second term.”

This president was not Bill Clinton and the year was not 1996. The president was Theodore Roosevelt, the year was 1904, and the state where his campaign faced trouble was his home state of New York. The monied men were Edward Henry Harriman, Hamilton Mck. Twombly, Henry Clay Frick, and Thomas Lamont. And evidence exists that financiers and railroad magnates such as these did contribute mightily to the campaign – 72% of the contributions were reportedly from corporations. According to Harriman (as quoted by Lukas 1997, page 392), the monies given to Roosevelt in response to his request “enabled the New York State Committee to continue its work, with the result that at least 50,000 votes were turned in the city of New York alone, making a difference of 100,000 votes in the general result.” Moreover, Harriman did not just expect that Roosevelt would turn a blind eye to business dealings that before had faced scrutiny and difficulty from government regulators, but that his friend and ally,

Chauncey M. Depew (about to face defeat in his re-election bid for the Senate) would be appointed Ambassador to Paris after the election.

What about Clinton’s breakfast that Ickes was trying to arrange – referenced in the memorandum quoted above? Clinton was equally as desperate as Roosevelt. As we noted in chapter 1, Gingrich’s success in 1994 meant that the Democrats no longer controlled Congress and many pundits began to pronounce his presidency as a one-term wonder. Did Clinton’s breakfast similarly involve promises of favors? Schwartz, like Harriman, began his career in New York’s financial district. Harriman owned railroads and Schwartz owns Loral Space & Communications. In 1994, Schwartz wrote a check for $100,000 to the Democratic National Committee and two months later he joined Secretary of Commerce Ronald Brown on a trip to China. Schwartz denied there was a relationship between the check and the trip. “On the plane, Schwartz said he asked Brown if he could arrange a private meeting with Zhu Gao Feng, the vice minister of China’s Ministry of Post and Telecommunications. In a meeting with Chinese telecommunications officials, Brown publicly praised Loral’s Globalstar cellular telephone system.” Loral eventually landed an agreement with China resulting in $250 million annually. In 1997, Schwartz was the largest single individual contributor to the Democratic party. Schwartz denied that the contribution and the contract were connected.58

From before Teddy Roosevelt to the present, campaign contributions and monied men (and now women) have played important roles in American elections.59 In this chapter, we examine how contributors and their contributions are involved in elections. In particular, we consider how money influences electoral coalition formation.

Giving to Elect or to Receive?

There are two major questions that any theory of how campaign contributions work in elections must answer:

- What are the motives behind contributors? That is, why are campaign contributions made?
- How does campaign money influence voters’ choices and electoral outcomes?

There are two ways to think about the motivations behind campaign contributions – that they are “policy or electoral-induced” or that they are “service-induced”. Policy-or electoral-induced campaign contributions are given to elect a candidate such that the

58 “Clinton-Loral: Anatomy of a Mutually Rewarding Relationship,” Jill Abramson and Don Van Natta, Jr., New York Times, May 24, 1998. Abramson and Van Natta summarize how Schwartz lobbied the president to approve Loral’s launching a satellite over the objections of other administration officials. They report: “After Clinton was sworn into office in 1993, Schwartz cherished his many invitations to the White House. But he cited one perk that eluded him. ‘I’d give my eye-teeth to stay in the Lincoln Bedroom,’ he said.” At this writing concerns over security leaks through Loral’s dealings have led to a Congressional enquiry. Specifically, the technology used for telecommunications by civilians can also be used by the Chinese military. Republicans have charged that Loral was lax in ensuring that the secrets in technological design that could benefit the military were secure resulting in leaks of technological secrets to the Chinese military.

overall policy outcome will be closer to the contributors’ preferences. Service-induced campaign contributions are given to secure special favors or services for the contributor from officials once elected.

Our examples above present both types of motivations and show that they are intricately related. Clearly, Harriman expected a favor or service if Roosevelt was elected and some suspect that Schwartz contacts with Chinese were set up because he was a big contributor to Clinton. But both Harriman and Schwartz gave to help elect candidates they preferred as well. Harriman, a stalwart Republican, but did face a dilemma in that Roosevelt was more progressive than mainstream Republicans (later breaking away to form the Progressive “Bull Moose Party”) and Roosevelt’s 1904 opponent Alton B. Parker was a conservative Democrat. But even “the spokesmen of high finance supported Roosevelt in the persuasion that ‘the impulsive candidate of the party of conservatism’ was preferable to ‘the conservative candidate of the party which the business interests regard as permanently and dangerously impulsive.’”

Schwartz is a long time Democrat. “His grandfather was a Tammany Hall functionary who died while campaigning for Democrats. Schwartz’s political sensibilities were shaped by the party that sent his family a turkey and two bags of coal every holiday season and the policies of President Roosevelt [FDR, not TR].” Clearly, Schwartz partly supported Clinton for ideological reasons.

There are also multiple answers to the second question about campaign contributions above, how do campaign contributions influence voters and electoral outcomes. In more than two candidate races like the New York senate contest of 1970, we have argued previously that campaign contributions can act as a coordination mechanism for voters, allowing voters to coordinate when they are deciding whether to vote sincerely or strategically. But campaign contributions clearly are used in two-candidate contests and seem to have some effect on voting behavior when coordination is not the issue. Voters may be influenced by campaign spending because it provides them with information. Or the advertising generated by the monies may have an effect on how voters’ preferences over candidates are determined by altering their views of the candidates along some non-policy dimension. Campaign spending may simply be used to increase the ability of voters to vote on election day, leading to an increase in turnout or participation (by providing rides to the polls for voters, etc.).

Interest groups and campaign contributions are complex things – which is one reason why I have waited till chapter 6 to bring them into our analysis. Getting a handle on all the intricacies of how they work is difficult. The easiest way to go about it, is to start small. To think carefully about one piece of how they are involved in elections and gradually add in other pieces. We’ll take that strategy. We are going to leave aside how voters are motivated by campaign contributions and focus on one type of motivation for campaign contributions – policy-induced contributions.

60 Interestingly, Harriman’s son W. Averell Harriman later became the Democratic governor of New York as well as Ambassador to the Soviet Union and England. He and his wife, Pamela Digby Churchill Harriman (also one time Ambassador to France), were credited with re-invigorating the Democratic party during a period of decline.

61 These examples also illustrate the role of political parties in campaign contributions, a subject we will discuss shortly.
We will “black-box” how campaign contributions influence voters by simply assuming that campaign contributions do increase a candidate’s vote totals in elections. Then we will explore the black box of how campaign contributions affect voters adding in both voters and parties. After we finish that analysis, then we will consider the other type of campaign contribution – service-induced contributions.

**Should Contributors Give to More than One Candidate in an Election?**

What are “black-boxed” voters? A simple way to think about the influence of campaign contributions on elections is that the probability that a candidate is elected is just the share of campaign contributions he or she receives. For example, suppose there are two candidates, 1 and 2. Candidate 1 has campaign contributions equal to $X_1$ and candidate 2 has campaign contributions equal to $X_2$. We want to assume that the candidate with the most money is most likely to win. So we want to come up with a way to make the probability of winning depend on who has the most money.

An easy way to this is to just assume that the probability that candidate 1 will win, which we will call $P_1$, is equal to $X_1/(X_1 + X_2)$ and the probability that candidate 2 will win, which we will call $P_2$ as equal to $X_2/(X_1 + X_2)$. We assume that if both $X_1$ and $X_2 = 0$, then $P_1 = P_2 = 0.5$ (or 50%). So if the candidates have equal amounts of money, the election is a toss-up. Notice that using this simple formula, then if 1 has the more money than 2, 1 has a higher probability of winning. If 1 has all the money, 1’s probability of winning is 100% or 1, if 2 has all the money, then 1’s probability of winning is 0% or 0. Notice that $P_1 = 1 - P_2$; for example, if candidate 1 is likely to win with a 75% probability then candidate 2 will win with a 25% probability.

The implicit assumption is that voters respond to campaign contributions and that the larger the share of contributions a candidate has, the greater the probability that that candidate will win. Remember that we are ignoring parties and voters just for a little while and will add them in later.

We will assume that candidates want to maximize their probabilities of winning, which is then the same as maximizing their share of campaign contributions. We will also assume that candidates choose policy positions in a single dimension issue space as in chapter 3. But now the candidates are choosing positions in order to generate campaign contributions which then generate votes (the process through which we have “black-boxed”).

What about the contributors? Policy or electorally motivated contributors care about policy by definition. We can think of the contributors as having utility functions over policy much as we discussed about voters in Chapter 3. They have an ideal point over policy and as policy moves away from that ideal point, their utility or satisfaction from policy declines, just like voters. Contributors, however, do not give their votes to the candidates but money. And they have different amounts of money to give – different budgets. In order to further make things simple, we will also assume that there is just one interest group, which we will label G. G’s utility is given in Table 6-1
Assume that G has $2 million to give to the candidates. In Figure 6-1 candidate 1 is located at 50 and candidate 2 is located at 60.

How will G distribute its monies? G is going to give contributions in order to maximize its expected utility (see the discussion of expected utility in Chapter 4). That is, define $P_1$ as the probability that candidate 1 will win. Then $1 - P_1$ is the probability that candidate 2 will win. Interest group G wants to maximize the following:

$$G's 	ext{ Expected Utility} = P_1 \times 185 + (1 - P_1) \times 170$$

One thing is obvious – G will only give to one candidate. In order to see why this is true, suppose that G gives equally to candidates 1 and 2. That is G gives $1 million dollars to candidate 1 and $1 million dollars to candidate 2. The probability that each candidate will win is equal to 0.5 since $X_1 = X_2$, or the election is a toss-up. Interest group G’s expected utility equals $0.5 \times 185 + 0.5 \times 170 = 177.5$.

Is interest group G behaving rationally? Suppose G gave all its $2 million to candidate 1? Then candidate one has $2 million and candidate 2 has $0 million. The probability that candidate 1 will win is now equal to $2/2 = 100\%$, while the probability
that 2 will win is $0/2 = 0\%$. G’s expected utility will increase to $(1)\times 185 + (0)\times 170 = 185$, which is greater than 177.5.

**Summary:** When interest groups give policy- or electorally-motivated campaign contributions, they only give to the candidate closest to them ideologically. They do not give to more than one candidate in an election.

Is this empirically true? Do interest groups generally give to only one candidate in elections or to more than one? In the 1992 presidential election, only approximately 10.5% of the campaign contributors to Bush and Clinton gave to both candidates, suggesting that it is rare for contributors to give to more than one candidate in an election.⁶²

**The Paradox of Not Contributing**

Given that policy motivated contributors will only give to the candidate that is closest to their ideal points in two candidate elections, then where is the optimal place for candidates to locate? Consider the example above. At the locations of candidate positions in Figure 6-1, candidate 1 will win with 100% probability (since she will receive all of interest group G’s contributions) and candidate 2 will win with 0% probability (since he will receive none of G’s contributions). Candidate 2 can change these probabilities by choosing a policy position closer to interest group G than candidate 1’s. Of course, then candidate 1 would also have the same incentive. So the positions shown cannot be equilibrium positions since candidate 2 is not optimizing given where candidate 1 is located. The equilibrium policy positions for the two candidates is to locate at G’s ideal point.

However, since the candidates have located at the same point and are basically now identical, should either interest group contribute at all? Since the candidates have chosen identical positions, then the contributors do not care which one wins. They are indifferent and, thus, contribute zero monies to both candidates!

**Summary:** When interest groups give policy- or electorally-motivated campaign contributions in a two-candidate elections and candidates maximize their probability of winning, the candidates will be drawn to identical positions and the contributors will give zero monies.

Normatively the equilibrium in this case has both advantages and disadvantages. First, on the “downside,” money matters and the candidates are drawn to positions that

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⁶² See for example the literature reviewed in Morton, Rebecca and Charles Cameron, “Elections and the Theory of Campaign Contributions: A Survey and Critical Analysis,” *Economics and Politics*, 4 (1992): 79-108. While it is true that interest groups sometimes give to Republicans in one race, say for governor, and Democrats in another, say for president, it is extremely rare for contributors to give to two candidates in the same two-candidate race (it may be rational to give to more than two candidate in more than two candidate races).
are preferred by those with more money. However, since voters are black-boxed we do not know if this is good or bad from their perspective since we do not know their preferences. It may be that voter preferences are aligned so that the median voter prefers A’s ideal point. However, there is nothing to ensure that this is the case. Second, on the “upside” campaign contributions may be seen to some extent as a needless expenditure. That is, if campaign spending is low then the election process costs less and so the convergence of the candidates leading to zero contributions might be seen to be a nice outcome.

From an empirical perspective, these predictions also have pluses and minuses – on the plus side the analysis explains why contributors generally give to only one candidate and why money or influence might attract candidates to choose positions close to those preferred by contributors – but on the negative side we know that candidates do not generally converge at identical positions and campaign contributions are not equal to zero so our theory seems at odds with the empirical world. Moreover, since our analysis black-boxes voters and leaves out political parties, we cannot make any empirical predictions about the relationship between candidate policy locations, parties, and voter preferences.

Our analysis, then, is a good first cut at figuring out how policy motivated campaign contributions work. But we need to add more in order to understand their role in elections fully. We will now go inside the voter black box and add in political parties.

**Inside the Black Box**

**Adding in Uninformed, Impressionable Voters**

What happens in our analysis when we add voters and parties? Understanding how campaign contributions affect voters is not easy, as noted above. One way to think about the contributions is that they are used to provide voters with information about the candidate. There are a number of problems with this assumption, however. First, the campaign contributions in themselves send a message – they imply that the contributor is receiving something – in policy or electoral-induced contributions, contributions mean that candidates are choosing positions on policy close to the contributor – in service or favor-induced contributions, contributions mean that candidates are giving away favors to contributors, favors that no doubt mean less favors or services to non-contributors (i.e. most voters). Seeing that a candidate is receiving a great amount of contributions should imply that a voter is less in favor of that candidate not more!

There are several ways to get around this dilemma. One is to assume that the electorate is divided into two groups – informed voters who are aware of the candidate’s choice in policy or the services or favors he or she gives and uninformed voters who do not know these things but are “impressionable” and always vote for the candidate that spends the most. Of course, the impressionable voters are irrational since they should recognize the negative implications of campaign spending but ignore them. One explanation may be that these voters do recognize these factors but receive some positive utility from voting for a candidate who has spent more and the positive utility outweighs the anticipated negative effects for these voters.63

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63 See Morton, Rebecca and Roger Myerson, “The Decisiveness of Campaign Contributions,” working paper, University of Houston.
What happens when we introduce impressionable voters and campaign contributions are policy- or electorally-motivated? Figure 6-2 presents an example where there are both informed and uninformed impressionable voters and our interest group G.

The informed voter utilities are given in Table 6-2 below:

Table 6-2: Voters’ Utility from Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Positions</th>
<th>V1’s Utility</th>
<th>V2’s Utility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>180</td>
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<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

G is the ideal point of the interest group as in the example given in Figure 6-1 above. V1 and V2 are the ideal points of informed voters in the election. These voters are also the median voters in the respective primaries of the Liberal and Conservative parties. There are two candidates, C1 and C2, who will be selected in the primaries, C1 selected in the Liberal primary and C2 selected in the Conservative primary. The candidates will choose policy positions before the primaries. Notice that the candidates, as in chapter 4, will act as if they have the preferences of the median voters in their primaries, V1 and V2, respectively (UV is an Independent voter and since the primary system is closed, he does not vote in the primaries, only in the general election).

After the primaries, then C1 and C2 will face each other in the general election. In the general election, V1, V2, and UV (the uninformed, impressionable voter) will vote between C1 and C2. G will give campaign contributions before the general election. V1
and V2 will each vote for the candidate, C1 or C2, that is closest to them, but UV will vote for the candidate with the most money. If UV is indifferent, both candidates spend the same amount of money, we assume that UV will vote for the candidate closest to his ideal point. Where will the candidates locate?

In order to answer this question, consider some possibilities. Suppose that C1 and C2 locate at the median voter positions in their primaries, V1 and V2, respectively. Who would win? V1 will vote C1 and V2 will vote for C2. G will give campaign contributions to C1. UV votes for the candidate with the most money and C1 will win.

What can C2 do? Can C2 win? C2 can win by locating closer to G than C1 is located. If C2 locates at, say 39, then C2 will win. Notice that this will give V2 higher utility since 39 gives her greater utility than 20. Since C2 wins for sure, then V2’s expected utility is just equal to her utility at 39. What then will C1 do? C1 will try to locate closer to G than C2. But this will cause C2 to move closer as well. The only location in policy space where the two candidates have no incentive to move is for both to locate at G. As above, the candidates should converge to G. Of course at G, everyone (voters and interest groups) are indifferent between C1 and C2, no campaign contributions will be given, and the election will be a tossup.

What would happen if G was located at a point that was more extreme than one of the party’s median voter’s ideal points? Suppose that G was located at 80 as in Figure 6-3 below. Would the candidates similarly converge at G? Again, assume that C1 is at V1 and C2 is at V2. Interestingly, C1 and C2 will not converge to G. That is, since C1 has to be approved in the Liberal primary, C1 must choose a position that V1 prefers and even though by locating closer to G than C2, C1 can increase her probability of winning, V1 would prefer that C2 win in that case.

The best C1 can do to win is to converge to C2, where she will have a 50% chance of winning and again all voters and interest group is indifferent. C2 however, will find it optimal to move closer to V2, which increases V2’s expected utility. C1 will just follow C2 and both will converge at V2. When both C1 and C2 are located at V2, neither can increase his or her probability of winning by moving closer to G. This is because if, say, C2 moved closer to G, then both V1 and V2 will prefer C1 and even though C2 will receive the most campaign money and thus UV’s vote does not make a difference.

It really does not matter in determining where the candidates will locate where UV’s ideal point is since UV will vote for whichever candidate spends the most unless this is the case. Of course, it does make a difference in terms of comparison to what would happen if UV was an informed voter. If UV were informed, and located as shown in the example above, UV would be the median voter and determine the outcome. If on the other hand, UV’s ideal point was either to the left of V1 or right of V2, then UV would not be the median voter, although her location would affect the outcome. For example, if UV were located to the left of V1, then V1 is the median voter or if UV is located to the right of V2, then V2 is the median voter.

This analysis is very complicated and you can see why it is easier to first think about campaign contributions with black-boxed voters and parties. But we did learn some new things. First, candidates are still likely to converge once we put voter and party choices in our model (endogenize voters rather than black box them). But not
necessarily at the policy position most preferred by the interest group with the most money.

Where the candidates locate depends on whether the interest group’s ideal point is between the two ideal points of the median voters in the two parties’ primaries. If the interest group’s ideal point is between these two ideal points, then the candidates will converge at that interest group’s ideal point. But if the interest group’s ideal point is more extreme that one of these party median voters, then the candidates will converge at the ideal point of the party’s median voter that is closest to the interest group. Money attracts the candidates to converge either at the ideal point of the interest group or on the same side of the issue as the group with the most money.

**Summary:** When campaign contributions are electorally-motivated and some general election voters are impressionable and uninformed, then the candidates will converge toward positions close to the policy positions preferred by the interest group. However, since candidates must first seek nomination in parties with informed voters, candidates do not choose positions more extreme than the ideal point of the median voter in the party that is closest to the interest group.

**The Importance of Information Levels**

One key behind these results is that there are no informed voters who are Independents and thus UV, and campaign contributions, are decisive in determining who wins the election. Figure 6-4 presents an example where the impressionable voter is not decisive. There are two Independent informed voters with ideal points at V3. In this example V3 is the median voter’s ideal point in the electorate and both candidates will converge at V3 regardless of campaign contributions.

Notice that in both examples (Figure 6-2 and Figure 6-3), campaign spending is zero in equilibrium, yet in Figure 6-2 the potential of money influences the outcome – the voter who can be influenced by spending is decisive. In contrast, in Figure 6-3 if there were no interest groups offering campaign contributions the outcome would be the same as when there are interest groups. The key is that in Figure 6-2 the impressionable voter is decisive (a significant portion of the electorate), while in Figure 6-3 the impressionable voter is not (not a significant portion of the electorate). Campaign spending effects candidate choices the greater the likelihood that impressionable voters are a decisive portion of the electorate. Having an informed electorate matters.

**Summary:** The more informed the electorate and the less decisive uninformed, impressionable voters are, the less likely that candidates will choose policy positions to please interest groups.

While our analysis provides lots of insight into the effects of electorally-motivated campaign contributions on candidate policy positions, the empirical prediction that candidates converge and that spending is zero in equilibrium makes our results suspect. Campaign spending is positive in elections – and often large – and candidates do not converge in policy positions as we discussed in chapter 3.
Adding in Uncertainty Again

In chapter 4 we showed how uncertainty about the policy preferences or choices of the median voter – the decisive voter in that case – can result in candidates selected in primaries choosing divergent positions. Our model above is very simple and only has one interest group. If we make the model more complicated by adding in some uncertainty about voter preferences as in chapter 4 and other interest groups, we can similarly derive cases where the candidates diverge in policy positions. These divergent positions, though will be affected by campaign spending in the same ways described above. That is, candidates will move toward interest group ideal points, but such movement is constrained by the preferences of voters in their respective political parties and the level of information of voters about candidate positions.

Giving to Receive

In the analysis above, we examine contributors who give campaign monies in order to elect the candidate that is closest to their own preferences. But often the contributors are not interested in overall policy positions of the candidates but in special favors or influence that a contribution might give them in the future as Harriman is reported to have expected and some argue was Schwartz’ expectation as well. How do these motives affect how contributors and politicians behave?

When interest groups give contributions with the expectation that there will be a service rendered in the future, a *quid pro quo*, then the contributor is giving campaign monies in order to receive a private good from the candidate once elected. One way to think of the political service or favor is that it is one of many such “private” goods that the contributor can purchase with his or her campaign contribution. These goods are small enough in magnitude that they do not generate much opposition from other supporters or voters (like a small subsidy for a manufacturer of a new fuel-substitute or a small grant to a university for a research program on student math skills). The contribution is the “price” of the service.

One way to think about services is to turn to an oft used typology of government policies illustrated in Table 6-3 below:

Table 6-3: A Typology of Government Policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution of Costs</th>
<th>Distribution of Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Widely</td>
<td>Widely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: Estate Taxes</td>
<td>General Public Policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like Daylight Savings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Services for Campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Like small contracts, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrowly</td>
<td>Example:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fuel Economy Standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Services then are the type of policy that fits in the top right hand corner, the benefits are narrowly distributed to the contributor and the costs are widely distributed.

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64 We mean “private” in the sense that the goods are divisible and depletable, not that they are produced in the private sector.
across the electorate. Estate taxes are an example of a measure that is the opposite of these services—they benefit are widely distributed, but the costs are narrowly borne. A measure like Daylight Savings Time is a type of policy that has widely spread benefits and costs, and Fuel Economy Standards is a measure that has concentrated costs (the auto industry and auto unions) and concentrated benefits (environmentalists—we say they are concentrated because we are assuming that a minority of individuals are in this group—this, of course, would vary over time with the intensity of preferences on an issue). Both of these types of policies are inherently ideological.

We can think of the service as the return that the contributor receives on his or her “investment” in the candidate. An interest group can make a lot of investments that would yield a return in the private market and presumably could evaluate investments in candidates much the same way. For example, Harriman invested in Roosevelt’s campaign with the expectation that his ally Depew would receive an Ambassadorship and that his business interests would be advantaged by Roosevelt’s administration leading to greater profits for himself. He could have taken the monies he gave to Roosevelt and used them to expand his railroad holdings or to build a new factory. These investments would have yielded a given return and greater profits. When he gave the money to Roosevelt, he expected that the return from the investment in Roosevelt that would at least equal if not exceed the return that he could receive from his other alternatives.

How much would Harriman be willing to give to Roosevelt? We can call the present monetary value of the favors that Harriman expects to receive $s$. Let $P_R$ equal the probability that Roosevelt will be elected. Then the expected monetary value of the favors would be that probability times the monetary value of the favors, $P_R*s$, which is the expected benefit that Harriman would get from contributing. That is, if Harriman knows for sure that Roosevelt will win, then he can be sure of getting $s$. If Harriman knows for sure that Roosevelt will lose, then he can be sure of getting 0. Note that $s$, what Roosevelt is offering is staying the same. But Harriman’s expectation of what he will get depends on the probability that Roosevelt wins.

Harriman will be willing to contribute campaign contributions, which we will call $c$, such that $c \leq P_R*s$. That is, Harriman will contribute as long as the cost of contributing is less than or at least equal to the benefit he expects to receive in the future. Note that if Roosevelt is not elected, Harriman’s contribution to Roosevelt gets him zero favors, so unlike in the analysis above, Harriman receives no utility or satisfaction from the election of Parker, Roosevelt’s opponent (unless he also gave to Parker, but then he would give to Parker based on the services that Parker might give him not what Roosevelt would give him—an issue we will address below).

How much, then, can Roosevelt demand from Harriman for his services? At most Roosevelt can demand $P_R*s$—this is the highest “price” that Harriman is willing to pay, since any price above that would mean that Harriman would be receiving less in the future than he was paying for today.

We can think of each elected official as having a fixed stock or favors that he or she can offer to contributors. For example, there are only so many ambassadorships that Roosevelt could offer to his supporters once elected. Or a fixed amount of tax breaks, etc. We can call the monetary value of the stock of favors that a candidate will have once elected, $S$, where $S = \text{Sum of the } s’s \text{ for each contributor}$. That is, if there are two contributors, then $S = s_1 + s_2$, if there are three contributors, $S = s_1 + s_2 + s_3$, if there are
four contributors, \( S = s_1 + s_2 + s_3 + s_4 \), etc. How much then will the elected official receive in total campaign contributions if all campaign contributions are motivated by the private favors that can be given out once elected? How much should Roosevelt receive? Suppose there are two contributors. Then Roosevelt should receive \( X_R = P_R * (s_1 + s_2) = P_R * S \), in general, for any number of contributors, Roosevelt should receive \( X_R = P_R * S \).

This result suggests an empirical relationship between campaign contributions and the probability of winning – the higher the probability of a candidate winning, the greater the campaign contributions that candidate should receive which has implications about the need for contributors seeking favors to coordinate on winners which we address below.

**Summary:** When campaign contributions are motivated by private favors given out once a candidate is elected, contributors will give campaign contributions equal to the probability that the candidate will be elected times the present monetary value of the services to be provided. This implies that as the probability of winning increases for a candidate, his or her campaign contributions also increase.

Our analysis of service-induced campaign contributions is incomplete, however, since we have ignored not only voters and where the probabilities of winning come from but also policy as well. Moreover, our analysis assumes that a contract can exist between the elected official and the contributor. Actually, such a contract does not generally exist and if it did and was discovered, the elected officials would probably go to prison for bribery! Hence, elected officials are really under no obligation to fulfill their side of the bargain and can easily just take the money and run.

Interestingly, such a violation of the unwritten contract appeared to have occurred between Harriman and Roosevelt. Roosevelt did not give Depew the ambassadorship that he promised. He also did not bestow the favors that the industrialists expected and after his elected continued his battles against the “malefactors of great wealth” causing Henry Clay Frick to state: “We bought the son of a bitch and then he didn’t stay bought” [see Lukas 1997, page 392].

Of course, Roosevelt chose not to run again in 1908 and although he did run in 1912 as a Progressive, he did not seek contributions from the railroad men again (at least not from Harriman). Since many incumbents do plan to run again and are engaged in a repeated game with their contributors, then reneging on promised services is not likely to maximize their probability of winning in the future. Oftentimes elected officials go into debt to finance campaigns that they repay later with post election contributions. These contributions can be more directly closely tied to services since the elected official is then in office. The loser, of course, can have a more difficult time of repaying although this is one way that party connections can help.

Alternatively, incumbents may provide services while in office in return for contributions for campaigns in the future. Nevertheless, the legal limitation on bribery is a real constraint on the ability of contributors to force candidates to provide services as they are a constraint on incumbents from demanding contributions for services already
provided. The legal constraint, interestingly, advantages incumbents in raising campaign contributions since they can more easily tie the contribution to the service provided at the time of the exchange. Challengers must give only contingent contracts.

Note that the fact that elected offices can renege on promised services also implies that they can enforce a requirement that contributors only give to one candidate in a race. Contributors may want to give to both candidates in a race when campaign contributions are service-induced. After all, from the contributors perspective he doesn’t care who is elected when contributions are service-induced – he does want to give to the winner, however. But a candidate certainly does not want to reward a contributor who gives to both candidates in the same race. That is, if the contributions increase the probability of winning then a contributor who gives to two candidates in the same race is not helping either candidate to win since the money balances out. Why would a candidate want to reward contributors who do not help them win and help their opponents as much as they help them? Since empirically giving to two candidates in the same race is rare as we observed above, this suggests that if contributions are service-induced, double-dipping is discouraged.

Summary:

1. When campaign contributions are motivated by private favors given out once a candidate is elected, the greater the probability that a candidate will be elected, the greater his or her campaign contributions.

2. Similarly, the greater the amount of services or favors she or he can provide the greater the service-induced campaign contributions.

3. Because service-induced campaign contributions cannot be legally binding, then it is possible for elected candidates to renege on their promised services or contributors to renege on their promised contributions. This gives incumbents an advantage in raising service-induced campaign contributions since they can more easily tie the service provided to the contribution.

4. Finally, a candidate should reward service-induced contributors who give contributions only to him- or herself and not to the other candidates in the race as well, therefore contributors should only give to one candidate in a race.

Coordination and the Decisiveness of Money

On July 15, 1998, Geraldine Ferraro’s campaign for the Democratic nomination for United States Senator from New York reported that she had raised barely $2 million, much less than the other major candidate in the race, Charles Schumer, who had raised $11 million. Interestingly, Ferraro’s lack of fundraising occurred despite the fact that there were few substantive differences between the candidates in the primary to explain
the imbalance in support. A New York Times editorial the following Saturday suggested that the lack of fund-raising reflected contributors’ perceptions that Ferraro was likely to lose. Ferraro later lost the primary to Schumer, justifying contributor’s expectations.

Ferraro’s failure is an example of the reality of the impact of service- or favor-induced campaign contributions on elections, which we have so far ignored. That is, because contributors are more likely to give to candidates who have a higher probability of winning, the contributors are essentially in a game of coordination much like the voters in three candidate races like the New York senate race of 1970. All contributors would like to give to the candidates who are most likely to win since this increases the expected benefits of the contributions (i.e. the probability of winning is high).

To see why this is a coordination game, consider the following simple example. Suppose that there are two candidates, C1 and C2, both who can offer the same level of service and two contributors, A and B, who would like to receive favors or services from whoever is elected. Assume further that the candidates always fulfill their service commitments (there is no reneging) and candidates only reward service-induced campaign contributions given to them exclusively. The candidates choose policy positions that maximize the expected utility of the median voter in their respective parties as above. There are no electorally-induced campaign contributions, therefore, contributors care nothing about policy, only about the private services they can receive. There is an uninformed, impressionable voter who will vote for the candidate that spends the most unless both spend equal amounts and then she will vote for C2 whose policy position is closer to her ideal point.

Suppose that both groups each have $2 million to spend and that, if elected, the candidate can provide services worth a total of $5 million after the election. Suppose that A gives to C1 and B gives to C2. So C1 promises A all of his services and C2 promises B all of her services. The impressionable voter will vote for C2. C2’s probability of winning is equal to 1, while C1’s is equal to 0. A cannot be rational since because C1 is certain to lose, the expected benefit from the service-induced contributions is equal to 0 (the probability of winning times $5 million). A would prefer to give to C2 and for both A and B to give to C2 is an equilibrium.

Similarly, it is also an equilibrium for both A and B to give to C1. A and B want to coordinate on the same candidate. Note that the service-induced contributors, like the voters in three-candidate races, have two equilibria on which they can coordinate. Which equilibrium is more likely? In the Ferraro and Schumer race commentators argued that contributors believed that Ferraro had less of a connection to voters than Schumer. Contributors formed an expectation that Ferraro was more likely to lose, and given that expectation, they chose to contribute to Schumer, reinforcing the expectation. The contributors had a prior expectation that Ferraro would lose (based on preliminary polls, etc.) and they found it best to focus on Schumer.

Incumbency can work as a focal point for service-induced contributors. If contributors believe that incumbents have an advantage electorally, and are more likely to give to incumbents, their expectation can become a self-fulfilling reality even if an incumbent has no advantage with voters over his or her opposition! Of course, we have already noted that incumbents do have an advantage in tying services to contributions and may be able to generate contributions more easily to begin with. This edge then can attract more contributions, leading to a significant monetary advantage for incumbents.
Our analysis of service-induced campaign contributions suggests that some different implications from electoral induced campaign contributions. That is, when contributions are service-induced, contributors focus on who is likely to win rather than on the policy positions. Contributions are positive regardless of who will win. No doubt campaign contributions in general, like with Harriman and Schwartz above, are mixtures of these two. The more similar candidates are in policy, the more likely contributors are motivated by services or favors. Thus, we would expect that service-induced contributions are more prevalent and decisive in primary elections like Schumer and Ferraro’s. Service-induced campaign contributions also are more likely to be given to incumbents both because they have an advantage in tying service to contributions and because incumbency can serve as a focal point for coordination of contributions across contributors. In general elections, contributors have both motives and may influence the policy choices of the candidates, who may find themselves seeking contributions by choosing positions closer to the interest groups with the most money. However, the more informed the electorate and the more uncertain the impressionability of voters through campaign contributions, the less likely they will influence election outcomes.

**Summary:** Service-induced campaign contributors prefer to coordinate on a common candidate and thus, when money is primarily service-induced, there can be huge imbalances in the monies that candidates have, leading expectations of contributors to become self-fulfilling prophecies. We expect that service-induced campaign contributions are more decisive when candidates are ideologically similar, as in primary elections. Electoral or policy-induced campaign contributions play more of a role in general elections when candidates choose more divergent policy positions and there is uncertainty about how impressionable uninformed voters will choose. The more informed voters are, the less likely money will influence the candidates’ policy positions, however.

**Spending to Inform or to Impress?**

While impressionable voters such as we have considered in our analysis above seem “irrational” it is important to note that in rational-choice modeling, “rationality” is strictly interpreted as meaning that each agent acts consistently so as to maximize the expected value of some utility function. In this strict technical sense, there is nothing irrational about an assumption that some voters are impressionable and receive utility from campaign spending and that utility outweighs the utility that the voter receives from the elected official. An impressionable voter can still have transitive preferences. However, there is something unappealing about such an assumption – it does not explain why these voters are impressionable and why others are not or what determines how many voters are impressionable. Moreover, we saw earlier in this chapter that the more informed voters are, the less likely money will influence candidate policy positions.

Another alternative that may explain how voters are influenced by campaign spending is to assume that contributors have information about candidates that voters are able to deduce this information by observing campaign contributions. One way this may
happen is if voters do not know precisely candidate policy positions and contributions make this information more precise.65

For example, suppose that UV preferences over policy are given by Table 6-3 below:

**Table 6-3: UV’s Utility from Policy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Positions</th>
<th>UV’s Utility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that UV’s utility function, if we were to graph it as we graphed voter F’s utility function in Chapter 4, Figure 4-6, it would have a concave shape. This shows that UV is “risk averse.” That is, as policy moves away from UV’s ideal point, UV’s utility decreases at an increasing rate. Suppose that UV knows that a candidate’s policy position is somewhere between 90 and 70 – there is 1/3 probability the candidate is at 90, 1/3 probability the candidate is at 80, and 1/3 probability the candidate is at 70. The

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expected policy outcome would then be \((1/3)*(90) + (1/3)*(80) + (1/3)*(70) = 80\). UV’s utility from 80 as a sure thing is equal to 185.

But UV does not know for sure that policy will be at 80, so his expected utility he receives from the candidate is the utility he receives from the lottery over the candidate’s possible policy positions \(= (1/3)*195 + (1/3)*185 + (1/3)*170 = 183\). A lottery over policy positions is worth less to UV in utility than the utility he would receive from the certain equivalent policy position. UV prefers the certain equivalent policy position to the lottery – UV is risk averse.

If UV were indifferent between the lottery over policy positions and the certain equivalent policy positions (as in Charlotte’s utility function in Chapter 3, see Figure 3-1), we would call UV risk neutral and if UV preferred the lottery to the certain equivalent, we would call UV risk seeking. In the exercise section of the chapter are some examples of risk neutrality and risk seeking utility functions.

An individual is risk averse when he prefers the certain equivalent outcome to a lottery, which gives the same expected outcome, risk neutral when he is indifferent, and risk seeking when he prefers the lottery.

If UV is risk averse, then more precise information about a candidate’s policy position can increase his expected utility. How does this work? Recall that we have assumed that UV knows that a candidate’s policy position is somewhere between 90 and 70 – such that there is 1/3 probability the candidate is at 90, 1/3 probability the candidate is at 80, and 1/3 probability the candidate is at 70. UV’s expected utility \(= (1/3)*195 + (1/3)*185 + (1/3)*170 = 183\). Now suppose that through campaign advertising financed by campaign contributions he finds out that the candidate is, for certain, at 80. UV’s utility from a sure win by the candidate is equal to 185, which is higher, than when he was uncertain about the candidate’s location.

Interestingly, when the candidate’s position was less certain, it was possible (in UV’s mind) that the candidate would be located closer to UV than he actually is. But because UV is risk averse, UV’s expected utility from a candidate who is less “risky” is higher than the risky one who might be closer but also may be further away. When voters are risk averse, then, if campaign advertising makes the candidates’ positions more precise, the voters may be more willing to vote for them as campaign spending increases. Notice that candidates may differ in how much information voters have about them prior to the campaign and the effect of money on voter preferences may vary. For example, as argued by Jacobson 198x, voters may have more information about incumbents and their advertising may have less of an effect on voters’ likelihood of voting for them while challenger spending may be more effective in this regard (we discuss this in more detail in chapter 8).

If UV is becoming more informed through campaign spending, then are the candidates still drawn to converge to the interest group’s ideal point and away from the median voter as in the example in Figure 6-2 above? It turns out that the answer is yes as long as money implies more precise information as long as voters never become perfectly

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informed. To see why this is true, suppose that both candidates locate at UV. Since the candidates are no different, the interest group does not give to either one and UV does not know that the candidates have actually chosen this position. One of the candidates, say C1, could locate slightly to the left of UV and receive $2 million from interest group G. These monies then could be used to provide UV with more precise information about C1’s position and UV will be more likely to vote for C1 than C2 who is exactly at UV’s ideal point because UV knows more about C1’s location than C2’s! As a consequence, the candidates will be drawn to choose positions where the money is as before, to provide UV with more information and induce UV’s vote. Of course if UV becomes fully informed, then campaign contributions do not matter, and the candidates converge at UV’s ideal point.

There are some problems with this reasoning – for one thing it assumes that all advertising is truthful and that the candidates only communicate about their own policy positions – ignores negative advertising where candidates may make claims about their opponents. It also does not explain why voters know the distribution of possible positions a candidate may have chosen but not the precise position. Finally, if UV is rational, then UV should recognize that more information about a candidate may mean that the candidate is closer to the interest group and money than the candidate UV knows less about and UV should vote for the candidate or “the devil he doesn’t know” instead of the “devil he knows.” Nevertheless, it provides an explanation as to why a voter like UV might be influenced to vote for candidates who spend more.

Another way that campaign spending may be informative to voters is if there is a relationship between service- or favor-induced contributions and information that would influence voters positively about a candidate. For example, suppose that candidates differ in their abilities to provide services or favors – that there are two types of candidates – high ability and low ability ones. Perhaps ability to provide service also means that the candidate is likely to have qualities that voters also find desirable, independent of their policy positions, like an ability to handle a foreign crises, or run government efficiently, for example. Since greater ability to provide service induces more service-induced contributions, then voters can observe contributions and perhaps use these as a signal about whether the candidate is a high or low ability type. The main difficulties with this approach are twofold – it is not always possible that voters will be able to use spending levels as such a signal and it implies that voters value the ability level more than they have a dis taste for the service or favors provided by the candidates once elected. Again, despite these, this signaling story does provide a rationale for campaign spending to have an influence on rational voters. In Chapter 8, we discuss in more detail the role of information in voter choices and how voters may or may not become more informed during election campaigns.

Finally, one way that campaign spending has traditionally influenced voter behavior is its “mobilization” effect – its effect on how many voters participate on election day. One way to think about our impressionable voter is that he or she represents the body of voters who, without prodding of some sort, will stay home on election day. Campaign spending induces the voter to participate. If one candidate spends more than another, then that candidate induces more of his supporters to turnout than the other candidate, resulting in money determining the outcome. So far, we have ignored the participation decision of voters. In the next chapter we address voter
participation decisions more expansively and how campaign spending might be used to mobilize voters.

An Unlikely Coalition

In 1974, Senator James Buckley, the Conservative party candidate elected in 1970, formed a coalition with Eugene McCarthy, a well-known liberal, and others to challenge in the courts the first wide sweeping regulation of elections in the United States. In 1971 and in amendments in 1974 Congress had passed the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA), which required disclosure of contributors and contributions, set limits on the size of the contributions and spending levels, banned contributions by corporations and labor unions, and provided for public financing of elections. In 1976, the Supreme Court heard the coalition’s case in *Buckley v. Valeo*. The Court’s decision in this case is, according to some experts, the longest opinion in the history of the Court and has had a resulting large impact on campaign finance as it exists today.

The main issue before the Court was the extent that campaign finance regulation limits the rights of political actors to free expression of their preferences. The Court ruled that the disclosure aspects of the FECA are constitutional, although in some cases if the disclosure could result in harassment of candidates or contributors, an exemption could be allowed. The court upheld contribution limits but struck down expenditure limits. The court upheld limits on spending in Presidential campaigns if the candidates voluntarily took public funding. Congressional campaigns are not part of the public funding or campaign limits.

Interestingly, the limits do not apply to so-called “soft money” which parties and interest groups have used to fund “issue advertisements” that do not use words like “vote for” or “vote against” but may use pictures of candidates and clearly are aimed at influencing voters in campaigns. In 1996, the use of these advertisements (many of the Democratic ones funded by Schwartz) reached unprecedented levels ($262 million in 1976 as compared to $45 million in 1988). This is how Bernard Schwartz’ contributions to the Democratic party can by far exceed the individual contribution limits of the FECA. Many believe that the use of soft money has made the FECA limits meaningless and advocate legislature to overhaul the campaign finance system and ban soft money. In the spring of 2000, Congress eliminated a loophole in soft money contributions that allowed these to be made anonymously in some cases. In the New York Senate Race in 2000, Hillary Clinton and Rick Lazio agreed to ban soft money in late September.

How do limits on campaign financing (either on individual contributions or overall spending limits) affect our analysis above? Limiting individual contributions and overall spending limits can prevent interest groups with the most money from having more influence. When electorally-motivated contributors have equal amounts of money and indifferent voters vote their preferences, then in our analysis the candidates converged at the median voter. However, if spending does increase voter information, then limits may result in voters choosing candidates based on how much information they have on them rather than whether they are truly closer to them in their policy positions. When contributions are service-induced, limits on contributions and spending, limit the “price” that candidates can “charge” for their services. If services are cheaper relative to other investments options of contributors, this might lead to more service-induced contributions rather than less, assuming that the “price” is not just equal to the cost of
supplying the service before the limits are imposed. The information effects of limits on these types of contributions is also unclear.

What about public financing of campaigns? If campaign contributions are either electorally-motivated or service-induced, candidates are engaging in behavior to attract contributions that they would not have to engage in if all campaigns were publicly financed. To the extent that campaign advertising provides voters with more precise information about the candidates, then this may result in candidates choosing positions that are more preferable by moderate voters and the selection of Condorcet winners. However, if voters are using service-induced contributions as signals of contributor knowledge of candidate ability, then breaking this link could mean that voters have less information about candidates and that candidates with low abilities are more likely to be elected. In this case, public financing could have a perverse effect on electoral outcomes!

**Partying with Money**

If campaign contributions are used by voters to coordinate on common candidacies in electoral coalitions in more than two candidate races, as discussed in chapter 2, limits and public financing hinder the ability of voters to coordinate in this fashion. One important feature of existing campaign finance regulation and some proposals are the benefits to the established parties. Limits on campaign spending control the ability of candidates to build electoral coalitions outside of the major political parties through candidate centered advertising. However, to some extent public financing has led to a decrease in power of the two major parties. For example, Jesse Ventura, in his race for governor of Minnesota in 1998, was able to borrow campaign monies with the anticipation of receiving state public financing, which allowed him to garner greater voter attention for his cause. Public financing can, by providing help to minor party and independent candidates, affect negatively the ability of the major parties to dominate electoral coalition formation.

A significant amount of money, mainly soft money, is given not to particular candidates but to the political parties who then allocate the monies to candidates. When Gingrich built his electoral coalition to take control of the U.S. House he and other Republicans worked to elect more Republicans to Congress. One way they did so was through allocating campaign contributions of the party to candidates in the party on a strategic basis. Sorauf (1998, page 229) discusses how in the 1980s and 1990s political parties used monies to enhance their ability to build electoral coalitions across offices:

“They began to behave more strategically, to channel their money in ways that would more rationally achieve the party’s primary goal: to maximize the number of seats it held in either the House of the Senate. Thus, parties began to funnel more money to challengers and open seta candidates with a chance of winning and to limit contributions to incumbents only to those failing to raise money – the case of center-city Democrats, for example – or to those whose reelection was seriously threatened . . . . The inarticulated major premise behind such strategic behavior, of course, was that most incumbents could secure campaign money and reelection with
little or no party money. Since it was used more efficiently, party money accomplished more per dollar than money from alternative sources.  

Sorauf’s comments fit with the analysis above – that is, incumbents, because they can better connect service with contributions and may also have a high probability of winning (because they are better known), may find it easier to attract service- or influence-induced campaign contributions. Political parties, recognizing this, have used their campaign monies to help candidates who are not as likely to receive these types of contributions. To the extent that these contributions are useful in electing the candidates, suggests that the contributions are not serving so much as a signal but as either to sway impressionable voters or provide voters with information on candidates’ policy positions which increase their likelihood of voting for them.

Sorauf also notes that parties can play a role as an intermediary and information source for contributors. He notes:  

“The mere sum of cash outlays understates the party role in campaigning in another way, for party committees increasingly serve as facilitators and information sources. They introduce needy nonincumbents candidates to PAC representatives in what has come to be called the ‘meat market.’ They also offer like-minded PACs their information about the closeness of races, the general issue positions of candidates, emerging opportunities to back a winner.’”

Sorauf reports on the distribution of campaign spending by parties in the 1996 Congressional races which is summarized in Figure 6-5 below which demonstrates how parties strategically allocate campaign monies given to them.

One should note that distributing campaign monies to elect is not the only option available to political parties. At the national level, once elections have been held, the elected officials form into the winning and losing coalitions that determine government policy. As noted in chapter 1, these coalitions are not always the same as the electoral coalitions that are formed. In the 1960s, for example, southern Democrats did not support the Democratic party in civil rights legislation. To some extent, parties also use campaign contributions to discipline party incumbents who may have chosen positions outside the winning coalition’s position. Certainly, Republican party leaders even actively campaigned against their own nominee and incumbent in the 1970 Senate race in New York to support Buckley. Yet using campaign contributions to discipline or reward what is seen as appropriate policy behavior is generally dominated by party leader use of campaign contributions strategically to elect.

The Basic Framework: A Summary

In chapters 2-6 we explored the major actors in American elections – voters, candidates, parties, and interest groups. But each actors’ behavior is affected strongly by the institutional structure of the American electoral process. American elections are dominated by plurality rule, which means that how voters form into electoral coalitions have big effects on the winning coalitions in choosing governmental policy. Voters in plurality rule elections have incentives to try to coordinate into two major coalitions.

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(generally our two major political parties). Our electoral system’s other institutional features (ballot access laws, relatively porous nominating procedures) help the two major parties maintain their status as the two dominant electoral coalitions.

Because of some uncertainty about voter preferences in general elections, the two parties choose divergent policy positions and given their dominance over electoral coalition formation, these positions define how we think of policy as liberal or conservative. This process leaves out some voters whose policy preferences do not fit nicely in the dimension defined by the parties. Over time, these voters can attempt to influence the parties by “burrowing from within” or sometimes “shouting from without” and over time, the inherent instability of majority rule does lead to some shifting of policy positions.

Interest groups and campaign contributions, that are policy-motivated, can influence the party positions somewhat, although their effects are limited by the degree of information voters have about elected officials positions and how impressionable voters are. The more information voters have and the less impressionable, the less likely the money influences policy positions. However, service-induced campaign contributions can be sizeable and lead to imbalances in elections, amplifying the benefits from coordinating in common electoral coalitions. Service-induced campaign contributions no doubt benefit the status quo bias and strength of the existing two-major parties.

Yet there is still much left out of our basic framework. The next three chapters in some of these important details. For one thing we have only touched on how voters make choices, what determines how informed they are and where their preferences come from. In particular, we have simply assumed that voters always vote. But like the campaign contributors in some of the examples in this chapter who found that it was not rational to give contributions if they believe that these contributions can have little effect, voters may not find it rational to participate in elections where they do not believe that their participation can have much of an effect. Understanding the motivations behind turnout is important for understanding American elections.

We look at turnout in the next chapter. We begin our study of turnout with the puzzle of why people vote above as well as two others – and they all turn out to be related.

For Further Reading

{Brief review of relevant literature here.}

Study Questions and Exercises

{See examples in chapters 1 and 2.}
Part II: The Bigger Picture –
Turnout, Information, and Parties Redux

Chapter 7: Why Voters Vote

Three Things


“It’s turnout, it’s turnout, it’s turnout,” Ron McCloud, Kentucky State Democratic chairman, quoted in R. W. Apple, Jr., “When the Race is Tight, All the Talk Is of Turnout,” New York Times, October 29, 1998. McCloud continued: “I hope we’ve learned from 1994. If a few more Democrats in key places had voted, we might have had Dick Gephardt instead of Newt Gingrich as speaker.”

It should be no surprise that turnout is important in elections in American politics. What does it matter if a party’s candidate has chosen a position that appeals to enough voters to win if those voters stay home on election day? In the 1998 Congressional elections, political analysts recognized the weight of turnout on the outcome of the election. Traditionally, midterm elections like in 1998 (elections without a presidential race) have low turnout and 1998 appeared to be no exception. All the talk among political activists was how to get their supporters to the polls and consequentially their candidates elected.

So far, we have largely ignored the issue of turnout. In chapter 2, we saw how voters choose and form electoral coalitions when all voters vote and in chapters 3-6, we analyzed how candidates choose policy positions to please voters and sometimes contributors who may influence voter choices. Yet, if some voters are more likely to turnout in elections than other voters, then the voter who is decisive in the election may not be the median voter in the population of eligible voters. For example, take the distribution of eligible voters in Figure 7-1 below.

If all five eligible participants turnout, then the median voter in the electorate is C and candidates will be drawn to choose positions close to C (although as we saw in chapters 4-6 the extent that they do so depends on the way in which parties nominate candidates and whether interest groups’ campaign contributions can influence C’s behavior). But what happens if some voters choose not to turnout in the election? Suppose that C and B stay home? Then D becomes the decisive voter and the candidates are drawn to positions more conservative than if B and C had voted. In contrast, if D and
E stayed home, B becomes the decisive voter. Only if A and E are the voters who stay home or B and D are the ones does the decisive voter remain unchanged. For turnout to have no effect on the identity of the decisive voter, abstention needs to be distributed in a symmetric pattern that is “just so.” Since this seems unlikely in any large electorate where abstention is a personal choice, it appears obvious that if some voters do not vote habitually, they are less likely to have their preferences affect candidate behavior.

In this chapter, we consider why voters participate and the role of turnout in American elections. We begin our study of turnout with three puzzles – a strange 45 year lag, a puzzle of declining turnout, and the paradox of not voting.

Three Puzzles

Puzzle I: The Forty-five Year Lag

In 1919 women were finally given the right to vote in American elections with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. The passage of the Amendment was made possible by the concerted efforts of women’s organizations, which had built substantial political clout. Soon after the passage, many believed that women’s new right to participate would result in policy choices reflecting the preferences of women. If a large group of voters begin to now participate it seems obvious that the identity of the decisive voter would change and we would see public policy that is more reflective of the new decisive voter’s preferences. Early on, there were some new measures that suggested this was happening – as Harvey (1998, page 4) reports:

“... women’s organizations led by the National League of Women Voters (NLWV) were the primary lobbyists for several congressional bills immediately after the passage of constitutional female suffrage. ... The first and most visible of these congressional victories occurred in 1921 when a coalition of women’s organizations led by the NLWV successfully lobbied Congress for the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act. ... Sheppard-Towner, which provided matching grants to states for pre- and postnatal care under the administration of the Children’s Bureau in the Department of Labor, had been the legislative priority of the NLWV and was the first federal social policy measure ever enacted. The act’s opposition, led by the influential American Medical Association, called the successful coalition of women’s organizations ‘the most powerful lobby in Washington’; ... In the eyes of many political elites, the passage of Sheppard-Towner signified that the ‘woman movement’ had gained enormous leverage with the passage of female suffrage.”

68 Harvey documents other victories of the early 20s by women’s groups and their successes in achieving roles in party organizations as well. Yet, these accomplishments seemed to quickly dissipate after 1924. Harvey (pages 6-7) recounts:

“In both 1925 and 1926 appropriations for the Women’s and Children’s Bureaus were reduced, and only one substantive bill supported by NLWV passed, providing for compulsory school attendance for the District of Columbia. ... the real blow to the legislative progress of women’s organizations came under the Hoover administration. Leaders of the

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major women’s organizations that had originally supported the Sheppard-Towner Act had hoped that they would be able to renew the act in 1929 as though it were simply being reappropriated. . . . But Hoover’s administration was firmly on the side of the male medical profession and the surgeon general’s predominantly male Public Health Service, which (as it had in 1921) strenuously opposed the administration of a maternal health program by the predominantly female Children’s Bureau. Women’s organizations were unable to counter this opposition, and Sheppard-Towner was not renewed after its expiration in 1929.”

Women organizations’ failures to influence policy continued. As Harvey points out, New Deal programs, although seemingly beneficial to women were designed to please “the concerns of more political powerful groups such as labor unions” rather than women’s organizations. Programs for women and children were largely restricted to “needy” families only, while programs for male “breadwinners” like Social Security and unemployment insurance provided universal coverage. Harvey concludes (page 9): “After 1925, we simply do not see a sustained recognition of women as a significant group in policy making until 1970.” Why the long lag? Why did it take 45 years for women organizations to begin to affect public policy? Why did it take so long for their interests to be reflected in American winning coalitions?69

Summary: Although women received the right to vote in 1919, from 1925 to 1970, women are not a significant group in policy-making.

Puzzle 2: The Puzzle of Participation

In the 1998 midterm elections where activists argued turnout was everything – turnout was low. According to early estimates by the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate turnout was only 36%, which was the lowest in any election since 1942 when the nation was at war. Figures 7-2 and 7-3 present how turnout in presidential elections has changed over time (the data is from Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, 1999).

Notice that the percent of the voting age population eligible to vote is increasing throughout and for most of our history turnout levels have gradually increased (there is a decline after the Civil War when the south restricted black voting and a dip during World War II when many voters were in the services). But things began to change in this overall trend after 1960 and turnout in American elections has been declining steadily since then.70

69 Note that some dispute the implication that women had little influence on policy after getting the right to vote. For example, Kenny, and Lott 199x contend that after women got the right to vote, government spending increased reflecting the fact that women were “poorer” and benefited more from government spending programs. They examine the effects of women suffrage in states that passed these measures before women were given the right to vote nationally. While this may be true, we still have the puzzle as to why women did not turn the right to vote into more equal treatment in general – that is, as Harvey points out government policies continued to be biased in favor of males.

70 McDonald Michael and Samuel Popkin, “The Myth of the Vanishing Voter,” working paper, 2000 contend that while turnout did decline dramatically in the 1960s, the decline since 1972 is
Turnout is positively related to voters’ income and education (which are of course positively related to each other as well). For example, in the 1996 presidential election, self reported turnout rates of white voters with less than $15,000 income is approximately 58%, while for white voters with income of $75,000 or more the rate is 89%. Similarly, white voters who are not high school graduates report a turnout rate of 55%, while white voters with college degrees voted at a rate of 89%. The puzzle is that since 1960 both education and real per capita income have risen which seems to suggest that turnout should be rising. Why? Brody 1978 has labeled this the “puzzle of political participation.”

Summary: Income and education have risen in the post World War II era. We know that voters with higher incomes and more education are more likely to vote, yet turnout of voters has declined.

Puzzle 3: The Paradox of Not Voting

In the previous chapters we used the concept of expected utility maximization to explain how voters might vote, how candidates might choose platforms, how interest groups decide on campaign contributions. Can we use expected utility maximization to understand turnout? Consider the situation faced by a voter in an election, for example, suppose we are talking about Charlotte in Chapter 2, choosing to vote between Chiles and Bush in the Florida governor election. Charlotte prefers Chiles to Bush; she receives a higher level of utility from voting for Chiles. We can call $U_C$, Charlotte’s utility if Chiles is elected and $U_B$, Charlotte’s utility if Bush is elected. We assume that $U_C > U_B$.

But this is just the first part of expected utility – Charlotte also has some idea about the probabilities of the different outcomes. As we discussed in chapter 2, if Charlotte votes, she will vote for Chiles. So her choice is simply whether to vote for Chiles or not to vote at all. We will label $P_C^V$ the probability that Chiles wins if Charlotte votes [$1 - P_C^V$ is the probability Bush wins if Charlotte votes], and $P_C^N$ the probability that Chiles wins if Charlotte does not vote [$1 - P_C^N$ is the probability Bush wins if Charlotte does not vote]. Charlotte’s expected utility, then, depends on whether she votes as follows:

- Charlotte’s expected utility if she votes for Chiles = $P_C^V U_C + (1 - P_C^V) U_B$
- Charlotte’s expected utility if she does not vote = $P_C^N U_C + (1 - P_C^N) U_B$

Charlotte’s benefit from voting, then, is the difference between these two expected utilities, or:

$$\text{Charlotte’s expected benefit from voting} = \text{her expected utility if she votes minus her expected utility if she does not}$$

$$= P_C^V U_C + (1 - P_C^V) U_B - [P_C^N U_C + (1 - P_C^N) U_B]$$

artificial, reflecting an increase in measurement error by the census bureau in calculating the voting age population. That is, the census bureau includes ineligible groups such as non-citizens and felons as part of the voting age population and increases in these groups are responsible for the “turnout” decline since 1972. Turnout, properly measured, they argue, has not declined in the more recent period. This still leaves the puzzle of the decline in participation in the 1960s, despite large increases in education or why with increases in education in the 70s and on, we do not see a turnout increase.
\[
= P_C^V U_C + (1 - P_C^V) U_B - P_C^N U_C - (1 - P_C^N) U_B
\]
\[
= (P_C^V - P_C^N) U_C - (P_C^V - P_C^N) U_B
\]
\[
= (P_C^V - P_C^N)(U_C - U_B)
\]

Label \((P_C^V - P_C^N) = \Delta P\) and \((U_C - U_B) = \Delta U\). Then Charlotte’s expected benefits from voting \(= \Delta P \ast (\Delta U)\).

But the expected benefits from voting are just one side of the decision making for Charlotte. Charlotte also must consider the cost of voting. Voting takes time and effort, and although the cost is not huge, it is not zero. In order to vote in all states but North Dakota a voter must register to vote in order to participate in an election. The weather may be bad on election day, or the voter may have an important deadline on a work project that makes taking the extra time extremely difficult, or the voter may have a sick child at home and no babysitting. Larger elections mean longer lines at the polls and more time away from other activities. All of these factors can make voting costly.

Assume \(c\) is the cost of voting for Charlotte. Then Charlotte will choose to vote if 
\[
\Delta P \ast (\Delta U) > c.
\]

What can we say about the size of \(\Delta P \ast (\Delta U)\)? In particular, what is the effect of Charlotte voting on the probability that Chiles will win? Charlotte’s vote can change the probability that Chiles will win in two cases – when the election is a tie without Charlotte’s vote and her vote decides the outcome for Chiles or when the election is a one vote win by Bush without Charlotte’s vote and her vote makes the election a tie. If Bush is winning by two votes or more without Charlotte’s vote or if Chiles is winning by one vote or more, her vote does not matter and has no affect on the outcome. So unless the election is a tie or Bush is winning by one vote without Charlotte’s vote, \(\Delta P \ast (\Delta U) = 0\), regardless of the size of \(\Delta U\).

Needless to say most American elections come nowhere near being decided on one vote, so clearly in almost all elections \(\Delta P \ast (\Delta U) = 0\) and for any cost of voting, albeit very small a rational voter should not vote. Yet millions of Americans do vote. Why when it is clearly not rational? This “paradox” is generally called the “paradox of not voting.”

**Summary:** The expected benefits of voting depend on the probability that one’s vote is decisive. In a large election, that probability is likely to be very small, or zero. Thus, for any positive cost of voting, a rational voter should not vote.

71 See the literature reviewed in for further reading. Of course, we are ignoring that even at the individual level the act of voting is strategic – that is, if all voters behaved “rationally” then no one would vote and the effect of one vote would be sizeable. Thus, if we assume that voters recognize the endogeneity of the turnout decision, then turnout would not be zero. We address these strategic concerns subsequently. Note that the strategic nature of the choice of not voting is somewhat similar to the strategic nature of the problem confronting a voter in a three-candidate race. However, voting strategically is more likely to be rational when others do as one does whereas the opposite is true in the turnout decision.
Now versus Later

We will begin our attempts to resolve our three puzzles with the last – the paradox of not voting. Much ink has been used to try to explain the paradox of not voting [see Morton 1991 for a review]. One way to think of the paradox is that it emphasizes the “investment” benefits of voting (future benefits after the election) and ignores the “consumption” benefits of voting (present benefits from the act itself) [see Downs 19xx, Riker and Ordeshook 1967]. That is, voters may get some benefits from the act of voting independent of the effect that the vote can possibly have on the outcome of the election. Voters may feel satisfaction or utility from fulfilling their “citizen duty” and their participation in the democratic process. Define D as the consumption benefits that Charlotte receives from the act of voting itself. Then it is possible that:

$$\Delta P^*(\Delta U) + D > c.$$  

This is not a very satisfactory solution to the paradox since it is what researchers call *ad hoc* – it is like saying the sun is in the sky because the sun is in the sky – voters vote because they like to vote. Saying that people vote because they like to do so doesn’t help us much when we want to try to understand the forces that lead to more or less turnout over time (like in the puzzle of participation) or why giving the right to vote to a group of voters who do turnout does not always translate in a change in policy outcomes (like the 45 year lag). It may be a “theory” of why people vote, but it isn’t a very useful theory unless we have some understanding of what gives voters a “taste” for voting.

Furthermore, much evidence exists that voter turnout does vary significantly by factors that affect the investment benefits from voting. Turnout is higher in elections that are expected to be close than those that are not. For example, in the national elections of 1998, the “… biggest increases in turnout occurred in four states with particularly tight contests: Kentucky (an increase of 10.7 percentage points), Minnesota (up 6.8 percentage points), North Carolina (up 5.1 points) and Wisconsin (up 4.2 points).”

Turnout is higher in elections that are open seat races – no incumbent – and thus perceived to be closer races.

In 1983, Harold Washington did the unthinkable – he became the first black mayor of Chicago. He accomplished this feat by first winning the Democratic primary in a three-candidate race – much like the New York senate race of 1970 – against two white Irish candidates (from the machine that had ruled Chicago for over half a century). His success was unthinkable because no one, particularly his supporters, believed a black candidate could win in a majority white city like Chicago and one that had for so long been dominated by a cohesive political machine. As Grimshaw, 1992, page 170 relates:

“The great disadvantage Washington faced was the widely held view, shared by most blacks as well as virtually all whites, that he was unelectable. As long as this perception persisted, two things almost certainly would occur: Turnout among his supporters would be low, and many voters who preferred Washington would not vote for him, for fear they would be ‘wasting’ their votes. Accordingly, Washington faced two

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great hurdles: He first had to convince voters that he was qualified to
govern, and then he had to convince them that he could actually win.”

Notice that there were two things that Washington had to worry about – first just
convincing some voters to participate (turnout) and others who would turnout anyway to
vote for him (that there was a potential that he could win the three candidate race). We
concentrated on how expectations of where the close races are going to be in three
candidate races affects how voters choose in chapter 2. G and O voters had a choice
whether to vote sincerely for their first choices or strategically for their second. Some of
Washington’s voters preferred one of his opponents (Jane Bryne) to the other (Richard
Daley, the former mayor’s son). If they thought that Washington had little chance, then
they would vote strategically for Bryne to avoid Daley.

In chapter 2, we ignored the fact that voters had a third option, choosing to stay
home. In particular, some voters might choose the option of staying home if they
perceived that Washington had little chance and they were indifferent between the two
remaining candidates (like the B voters in chapter 2 who might have not voted in the
election if they thought there was little chance their vote would make a difference as can
happen with majority requirements which Chicago did not have at the time, although
interestingly, Chicago does now). Thus, Washington had to encourage these voters to
participate in the election. In order to win, he had to convince his supporters to
participate and once at the polls vote sincerely for him, not an easy task. He needed to
convince them that he had a chance of winning and their vote could make a difference in
whether he would win.

Despite these obstacles, Washington entered the race anyway and worked hard to
build support. Yet black voters continued to doubt his electability and it looked like he
would lose on election day. Black voters knew that both white candidates had sizeable
support and they did not believe that Washington’s support would be large enough to
make the race close. How could Washington convince these voters that he had a chance
of winning and that their votes could make a difference?

“A sizeable number of black voters remained convinced that Washington
stood no chance of winning. Mayor Bryne retained a firm grip on about
20 percent of the black vote, according to Washington’s own polls as well
as published polls. Thus, a decision was made to hold one final rally at
the University of Illinois’ huge, 12,000 seat pavilion. . . . The bold
decision to hold the rally . . . wildly violated the cardinal rule of the
political advance man. Events must always be held, goes the rule, in small
places; in that way the appearance of a large crowd is created, regardless
of its actual size. . . . By the best estimates of those skilled in organizing
rallies, a crowd of 6,000 would constitute a huge success. Yet at the
colossal pavilion, the huge success would appear to be a dismal failure.
The outrageous plan did not sit well at all with the field organizers. . . . By
the day of the rally, the Washington campaign’s organizers estimated that
they could fill about half of the 12,000 seats. Anybody else who showed
up would be coming on his own. As it turned out, the rally drew a
standing room only crowd of well over 12,000. It was at this point that a

73 See Grimshaw, William J., Bitter Fruit: Black Politics and the Chicago Machine, 1931-1991,
good many individuals, inside and outside the campaign, became convinced that Washington actually had a shot at it.” Grimshaw, page 175.

The make or break rally worked. On election day, Washington turned out black voters in record numbers. Washington turned out black voters in 1983 who had migrated from the south before the Supreme Court’s ruling in 1966 [Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections] which outlawed state poll taxes – individuals who probably had never voted in their lives [“Phone calls came in on election day inquiring about the amount of Chicago’s poll tax.” Grimshaw, page 171]. They voted because they expected that their vote could make a difference and they voted for Washington, not for Bryne.

In 1998, in another three candidate race, Jesse Ventura mobilized Minnesota voters who previously had not voted but, once they began to perceive he had a chance, decided to vote. Turnout does increase with the expected closeness of a race. If turnout was purely consumption only, then closeness and perception of electability should not matter in whether voters vote. Yet it does and with a vengeance.

Turnout also varies with voters’ expected investment benefits, $\Delta U$. Black voters voted for Washington because they perceived clear policy differences between the candidates. When Jane Bryne had been elected as mayor, she had done so with significant black voter and leader support. But in 1983 they perceived that she had turned on them and not followed through with the benefits that they desired. While some still preferred Bryne to Daley, they generally felt left out. Black voters wanted local government to respond to social program cutbacks orchestrated by then President Reagan. Because of what they knew about Washington’s past decisions, they expected that his policies would be closer to their own. If voting were purely based on consumption benefits that have nothing to do with investment benefits, then why is it that these investment benefits have an effect on turnout? The empirical evidence seems to suggest that voting is partly investment motivated even if it is seemingly not rational for voters.

**Summary:** Empirical evidence suggests strongly that turnout increases with the closeness of elections and the differences in policies. This suggests that voting does appear to be investment motivated, even if it should not be according to the paradox of not voting.

**Togetherness**

Empirical evidence that investment benefits for voting matter reflect the fact that turnout choices are influenced by strategic concerns. Consider this – if everyone followed through with the calculation that the cost of voting outweighs the investment benefits, and, as a result, chose not to vote, the investment benefits become huge as one vote can be decisive! Yet at the individual level it is hard to imagine that voters consider the endogenous nature of their investment benefits (that their own choices and the choices of others influence these benefits) in making turnout calculations. But for a group of like-minded voters, the calculation that the group can influence the outcome of the election and that other groups can similarly behave strategically is not very difficult.

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74 See literature reviewed in the For further reading section.
This is what Gomillion realized in Tuskegee in the late 1930s. He understood that while his vote alone might not make a difference, the votes of a group of like-minded citizens, other blacks, could make a difference. In fact, his efforts to get out the vote of other blacks was successful in influencing an election in Tuskegee before he even was able to vote himself (as reviewed in chapter 1).

The possibility that groups of voters who are like-minded can affect electoral outcomes is recognized by most political actors as Washington realized in 1983 as well. In the 1998 election for governor of Georgia, Roy E. Barnes also acknowledged the importance of black turnout and made considerable efforts to mobilize this group of voters as Sack relates:

“The state Democratic Party targeted three telephone calls and two mailings at each of 300,000 black households, many of them in majority black Atlanta, with one flier reminding voters that the Republican candidate for lieutenant governor had threatened, in profane words, to challenge Atlanta’s management. And last Sunday morning Barnes did not simply attend services at one black church. He went to four, escorted by Atlanta’s first black Mayor, Maynard H. Jackson, and a black Cabinet member, Labor Secretary Alexis M. Herman.

Those efforts were rewarded on Tuesday. Black voters went to Georgia’s polls in force, and 9 out of 10 cast ballots for Barnes, according to surveys of voters leaving the polls. He almost certainly would not have won without their extraordinary support. As it was, he cruised to a nine-point victory over his Republican opponent, Guy W. Millner, despite falling short of the 40 percent of the white vote usually considered necessary for a Democrat to win in this increasingly two-party state. . . .

Robert S. Kahn, Barnes’s campaign consultant, said the black vote was ‘essential, indispensable’ to Barnes’s victory. In a state where 27 percent of all registered voters are black and where blacks almost always vote less reliably than whites, 29 percent of Tuesday’s voters were black, according to polls of voters leaving the polling place conducted by Voter News Service. That compared to 16 percent in 1994 and 25 percent in the 1996 Presidential election.”

But blacks in the south or elsewhere were not the only group of voters who were especially targeted with turnout appeals in the 1998 elections. The AFL-CIO and other unions financed advertisements on Hispanic-oriented radio stations in New York and other large cities sending out the message to turn out on election day. The efforts of the union to mobilize its members were partly modeled on efforts they made in the 1997 New Jersey governor’s race. Goodnough reported that in New Jersey in 1997:

The “. . . state’s AFL-CIO, with one million members, is leading the union effort. . . . It has registered more than 10,000 union members to vote this fall, and its members have been operating phone banks and distributing campaign literature since Labor Day. ‘This will be the largest street operation that labor has ever put out in the state of New Jersey,’ said Charles Wowkanech, the president of the state’s AFL-CIO, who has been

visiting union offices around the state and encouraging members to volunteer on Election Day. ‘We’re getting on the phone, we’re getting commitments and we’re holding our members accountable.’76

In the 2000 presidential election, consider the effort of Michigan labor leaders on behalf of Gore:

“LANSING, Mich., Oct. 12 — From a purple trailer emblazoned with the Service Employees International Union name, 18 corrections officers at a computerized telephone bank were calling 1,500 union members an hour this week to tell them that Al Gore is a friend of working families. In Flint, 50 miles east of here, Jessie Cloman, a city housing inspector, was setting up a “mentoring” program in which 190 shop stewards have each been assigned 100 union members who have voted only once in the last six years. The mentors’ responsibility: make sure their 100 people vote this November, preferably for Mr. Gore. And in Detroit today, Don Smith, president of the Teamsters’ local once headed by Jimmy Hoffa, chatted up dozens of dock workers and drivers at a Yellow Freight terminal to tell them Vice President Al Gore, not Gov. George W. Bush of Texas, was good for the working man and woman. In Michigan, long the heart of the nation’s labor movement, unions are making an all-out push to give Mr. Gore the edge in a pivotal state where the presidential race is neck and neck. Dozens of union members have taken leaves from their jobs to do full-time, union-paid campaign work for six weeks. And the state’s unions plan to send more than two million pieces of mail in support of Mr. Gore and other Democratic candidates.”77

Clearly, then at the group level, strategic concerns reflecting the investment benefits of voting matter in determining turnout levels. It is also evident that “getting out the vote” – turnout decisions – are influenced by political elites like party leaders, candidates, union heads, and interest group leaders who recognize these strategic concerns and go to particular groups of voters using group based strategies to convince these voters to go to the polls as a group. The implication is that somehow these group leaders induce their members to vote (and sometimes don’t) in order to influence the outcome strategically as a group. How do group leaders do this?

Consumption and Citizen Duty Redux

One method that group leaders can use to induce their members to vote is to provide their members with enough consumption benefits to offset the cost of voting and thus get them to the polls. In the 19th century and particularly before the advent of the secret ballot, machine politics clearly gave out consumption benefits to individuals in return for their votes (consumption benefits that came close and may have crossed the line into bribes). In 1905, George Washington Plunkitt of Tammany Hall described how machine politics got out the vote by providing individualized benefits to their supporters:

“If there’s a family in my district in want I know it before the charitable societies do, and me and my men are first on the ground. I have a special

corps to look up such cases. The consequence is that the poor look up to George W. Plunkitt as a father, come to him in trouble – and don’t forget him on election day. Another thing, I can always get a job for a deservin’ man. I make it a point to keep on the track of jobs, and it seldom happens that I don’t have a few up my sleeve ready for use. I know every big employer in the district and in the whole city, for that matter, and they ain’t in the habit of sayin’ no to me when I ask them for a job.”

In American elections today the consumption, personal incentives that voters receive from voting are not as tangible as during the era of big political machines. Moreover, secret ballots make it difficult for direct rewards for voting to occur. So what are these incentives?

Primarily the incentives voters receive to turnout today are generally social and related to their membership within groups that are recruiting them. At the individual level, voting is a low cost, low benefit activity. There are many such activities in everyday life and a large number of them are social and depend on a group of people behaving according to some accepted norm as a group. For example, tipping at a restaurant is a similar case – it works as a system where it is expected that most will tip – wait staff are paid less because of the prospect they will receive tips and restaurants charge lower prices for their services as a result. But for each individual customer, clearly “not tipping” can have an immediate financial payoff. Why do individuals follow this norm when there is clearly a benefit from defecting?

The situation facing groups of voters in elections is commonly called a collective action problem. Consider the following simple example with two voters, A and B. Their preferred candidate, C, is expected to lose by one vote. If both voters vote, then their preferred candidate C wins for sure. If only one votes then C is in a tie with D (both have a 50% chance of winning) and if neither votes, D wins for sure. Assume that if C wins, A and B both receive 100 units of utility and if D wins they receive 25 units of utility. If the election is a tie between C and D, each expects to receive \((0.5)*100 + (0.5)*25 = 67.5\) units of utility. But if A or B votes, A or B must each pay 50 units of utility. Table 7-1 presents the utility payoffs received by A and B for each of the four possible choice combinations they could make. The first number in each cell is how much A will receive given A and B’s choices and the second number is how much B will receive given A and B’s choices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A’s Choices</th>
<th>B’s Choices</th>
<th>Utility Payoffs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B votes for C</td>
<td>B votes for C</td>
<td>50, 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B does not vote</td>
<td>12.5, 67.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A votes for C</td>
<td>67.5, 12.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A does not vote</td>
<td>25, 25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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If both A and B vote, both will receive 50 units of utility and if both do not vote, each will receive 25 units of utility. But if only one votes, then only one must pay the cost of voting and they receive different units of utility. For example, if A votes and B does not, A receives 12.5 units of utility and B receives 67.5 and if B votes and A does not B receives 12.5 units of utility and A receives 67.5 units.

What will A and B do? Suppose that A knows for sure that B will vote. Clearly, then, A would prefer not to vote. Or, suppose that B knows for sure that A will vote – then B will prefer to stay at home. The point is that for both to vote is not an equilibrium given what the other is doing. Is it an equilibrium for just one to vote? What if A is voting and B is not – will A be happy? No – again, A would prefer not to vote. The only equilibrium in this example is for both voters to stay home and let D win.

How can the situation be resolved for A and B? Suppose that A and B care about whether they choose the same thing. That is, suppose that if A and B both vote or they both do not vote, they get an additional amount of utility, 25 units of utility from participating in a group activity. If they choose differently, either A votes and B doesn’t or B votes and A doesn’t they get no added utility since they are not participating in a group activity. With this added utility from choosing commonly the new payoff matrix is given by Table 7-2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A’s Choices</th>
<th>B’s Choices</th>
<th>B votes for C</th>
<th>B does not vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A votes for C</td>
<td>75, 75</td>
<td>12.5, 67.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A does not vote</td>
<td>67.5, 12.5</td>
<td>50, 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now there are two possible equilibria in the choice situation facing A and B. Now voting is optimal given that the other is voting. That is, if A votes and B votes, each receives 75 units of utility. Neither has a benefit from not voting given that the other is voting as in Table 7-1. However, not voting is still an equilibrium. That is, suppose both A and B are not voting? Then if B votes, her utility declines given that A is not voting. Similarly, if A votes, his utility declines given that B is not voting. Adding it a utility from coordinating makes voting as a group now a rational decision but does not make that the only possibility. Voting as a group will be the outcome for A and B if they coordinate on voting as a social activity. If they coordinate on not voting as a social activity, then participation for their group will be low.  

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79 Notice that the situation for voters in Table 7-2 is similar to the situation facing diners in restaurants when choosing to tip. In some societies, tipping is not a norm, while in others, like in the United States tipping is expected. In the U.S. we have coordinated on the tipping equilibrium, while in some other countries, individuals have coordinated on a non-tipping equilibrium. Some
The problem confronting group leaders, then, is to coordinate the group of voters on the voting equilibrium instead of the non-voting equilibrium. Consumption benefits for the act of voting can do this — the reason why non-voting is an equilibrium for A and B is because if one of them chooses to vote when the other is known to be not voting, then the voter faces a utility loss of \((50 - 12.5) = 37.5\) utility. If voting, even alone, is rewarded with some consumption benefit that offsets this loss, then the voting equilibrium would be the only equilibrium. These consumption benefits might be from following the group norm, even when others violate that norm or they could be more tangible direct benefits as in the age of political machines.

There is also much empirical evidence that turnout in American elections today is a social activity suggesting that groups of voters who tend to turnout more are groups who have managed to coordinate on the voting equilibrium, perhaps through some consumption incentives used to maintain the group norm of voting. Harvey 1998 reports that in (p. 37) “... a nationwide 1983 ABC-Harvard survey, 37 percent of respondents and 41 percent of regular voters cited as a reason for voting the statement, ‘My friends and relatives almost always vote and I’d feel uncomfortable telling them I hadn’t voted.’” Knack (1992, page 139) reports that 42% of respondents in a 1990 survey answered yes to the question, “Do you have any friends, neighbors, or relatives who would be disappointed or angry with you if they knew you had not voted in this year’s elections?” and those who answered yes were significantly more likely to vote than those who answered no.80

The point is that at the individual level, voters often choose to vote based on individualized, consumption benefits — benefits which are particularistic to the individual and, today, largely social. This does not mean that they are necessarily choosing based on their investment benefits. At the individual level voters are not directly motivated necessarily by the investment benefits of their actions but they may be motivated by satisfaction given to them from participating in a group goal that is indirectly related to the investment benefits. Political leaders of groups of like-minded citizens, like those in a particular ethnic group or in a union or some other interest group, recognize that for the group, the level of turnout can affect the outcome of the election. They recognize that voting can be an equilibrium when voting is a social activity. Group leaders then “mobilize” voters to participate by providing the selective, particularistic incentives to motivate their participation. When the investment benefits are high for the group, group leaders mobilize greater numbers of voters. Turnout, at the group level, is related to the investment benefits of the group — the probability the election will be close and the perceived differences between the candidates.

Summary: At the individual level, the investment benefits from voting are typically too small to outweigh the cost of voting since the probability that one voter's choice influences the outcome is generally negligible in large elections. But at the group level, the investment benefits can be sizeable. Thus, groups have incentives to provide their members with individualized, particularistic consumption benefits to vote. These selective benefits may be social in nature - involving social acceptance by the group and some satisfaction voters receive from participating in meeting a group goal - which can be related to the group's investment benefits.

Voting Rationally and Turning Out Irrationally

Our reasoning so far may seem at variance with the analysis of voting decisions in the previous chapters. That is, we are assuming that voters are willing to vote (turn out) even when it is at variance with their individualistic interests without consumption incentives but once in the voting booth they behave rationally – vote in order to maximize their expected utility [Of course, we have relaxed this before when we introduced impressionable voters in chapter 6]. Are we being inconsistent? Should we not assume that in the voting booth voters also make choices influenced by consumption incentives rather than their own personal preferences? If voters choose to turnout to be socially acceptable, shouldn’t they also make candidate choices for the same reason? For example, if a voter is voting because he wants to be seen as a good party member, then shouldn’t he just always vote the party line regardless of what he personally prefers?

If the group that is providing a voter with the selective incentive to vote is a group of like-minded voters, then by definition once the voter enters the voting booth, his or her preferences are the same as each other member of the group. So, theoretically, selective incentives can actually work positively to help this type of voter achieve his or her preferences. In two candidate races – selective incentives from such a group can only re-enforce the voter’s rational choice. In three or more candidate races – selective incentives may actually help in the coordination problem faced by voters in these cases (discussed in chapter 2) – the selective incentive structure may help voters coordinate on choices and equilibria that particularly benefit the voters as a group.

But what if the group providing a voter with the incentives is not so cohesive – what if the individual’s preferences are distinctive and the individual’s investment motivated choice between candidates is different from that of the group mobilizing him? We can think of two types of groups that can provide voters with selective incentives – office-seeking groups and benefit-seeking groups. Generally, we think of office-seeking groups as political parties or groups of candidates combined together to maximize votes in order to be elected and benefit-seeking groups as interest groups like unions, civil rights groups like Gomillion’s etc., women’s groups like NOW (National Organization for Women) who mobilize voters in order to seek certain policy outcomes.

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81 See references cited in For Further Reading.
Ordinarily, benefit-seeking groups use their ability to provide voters for office-seeking groups so that the elected officials choose policy positions that please (or are perceived to please by the leaders) the benefit-seeking group members. Gomillion’s group of voters were benefit-seekers who used their clout to influence office-seekers. In the 1998 elections in the south, where black votes made such a difference as in the Georgia governor race mentioned above, it is clear that black leaders now expect that their turnout will be rewarded. For example, black South Carolina Representative James E. Clyburn said of his newly elected governor, Jim Hodges: “He’s a smart guy . . . He knows where his margin of victory was, and I don’t think there’s going to be any problem getting our concerns addressed.”

Thus, most benefit-seeking groups work to mobilize voters to supply to office-seeking groups. This is what the AFL-CIO president in New Jersey did in the 1997 election there. Sometimes benefit-seeking groups may choose to directly achieve offices as well, forming minor party or independent candidacies as discussed in chapters 5 and 9.

If we think of the voters in the previous chapters as those that are motivated to participate in benefit-seeking groups, then there is nothing inconsistent with the presumption that the individual voters in our models are making choices in order to receive selective consumption benefits by benefit-seeking groups since their choices would be the same.

If, on the other hand, voters are mobilized to turnout by office-seeking groups who may not share all of the policy preferences of the voters, then they may not be making the same choices in the voting booth as they would if they were mobilized by benefit-seeking groups (although they may be). The reason there may be a disconnect is that the office-seeking groups will respond to voters who are mobilized for policy or benefit purposes. If voters are not mobilized for policy or benefit motivations, then office-seeking groups have less reason to respond to them. That is, if voters are willing to vote because office-seeking groups provide them with private consumption benefits, then it is not necessary for the office-seeking group to provide the same voters with collective benefits that would help them as a group. They will vote based on the consumption benefits since they have no electoral power to induce the office-seekers to provide them with the collective benefits. Figure 7-4 illustrates these differences in mobilization and the mobilization process.

Figure 7-4 here

It is important to remember that the office-seeking groups have chosen policy positions to respond to mobilized benefit-seeking groups and through this process built an existing group of supporters. Changing policy would be costly to the office-seeking group. If the new voters can be mobilized without changing overall policy, through providing purely private consumption benefits to the new voters not related to a collective investment benefit, then the office-seeking group can win new voters without losing the old.

In the 19th century and the era of political machines, some voters were mobilized solely by office-seeking groups which provided them with simple, tangible, private benefits to vote that were often unrelated to a collective benefit for them as a group. In the Chicago machine age experts argued that the machine could control a percentage of black votes in this fashion. Whiteman and Weisman, 1974, page 80, quote Jane Bryne

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campaign manager Don Rose: “The Organization owns a lock on a solid 20 percent of the black vote. This is the vote the machine would deliver for a George Wallace against Martin Luther King.”

The point is that unless a group of voters does have political leaders who perceive the collective benefits of the groups’ voting power and use this to induce office-seekers to also note their voting strength, office-seekers have less incentive to please the group of voters in collective policy decisions. If only the office-seekers are mobilizing a group of voters, then collective benefits for the group are not likely to be supplied.

| Summary: When voters are mobilized by benefit-seeking groups, office-seeking groups must provide these voters with policies preferred by the groups - voters preferences are reflected in their voting behavior. But if voters are mobilized only by those with office-seeking motivations, then it is possible that their preferences are not reflected in their voting behavior since office-seeking groups may have little reason to represent their preferences. |

What determines how voters are mobilized? How likely is that voters are mobilized by benefit-seeking versus office-seeking groups?

**The Forty-Five Year Lag Revisited**

We began this chapter with three puzzles. So far we have addressed one – we have developed an explanation for why voters may vote even when it appears that at the individual level they are making an “irrational” decision. We can also now understand the forty-five year lag in women’s groups receiving policy benefits after such a promising start in the early 1920s. The answer lies in the way that women voters have been mobilized electorally over time. As Harvey 1998 summarizes (pages 48-49): “... women’s benefit-seeking organizations first pursued and then dropped a strategy based on electoral mobilization; women were then mobilized to vote as a group solely by the office-seeking parties until the late 1960s, at which time women’s benefit-seeking organizations once again sought to leverage women’s votes into policy.” Harvey finds that, as a consequence, policy concessions to women and party leadership roles for women also lagged behind.

Figure 7-5 illustrates the situation that some women’s groups faced. W is the policy position of a women’s group that wishes to mobilize voters and D and R are the policy positions of the two major parties. If W mobilizes the new women voters, then this group of voters will choose based on the differences between women and the two major parties. The parties will be forced to move closer to W in order to attract these voters. But if D and R mobilize the new women voters, then this group of voters will divide along the issues that divide the major parties and make choices based on these differences and there will be no pressure on the parties to choose policies favored by the women’s group.

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Notice that in this example women voters are like the left out voters in chapter 5, their preferences are not easily captured by the liberal/conservative dimension of the two major political parties. But because they are mobilized to participate by these parties directly and to both parties, then the parties are not forced to change to reflect their policies to reflect their preferences. Because they are not mobilized as a benefit-seeking group, they do not have influence within the parties.

However, while this answers the puzzle of the lag, it raises the question of why women’s groups did not mobilize voters until so much later. The explanation lies in the difficulties involved in mobilizing voters. While it seems clear that once a large group of voters are mobilized to vote their preferences, the group can then have an impact on policy – initial mobilization of a group of voters is not easy. Getting a large group of people to begin to choose irrationally at an individual level (engaging in a costly activity that has little personal benefit) to meet a group goal is not an easy thing to do. This is the “fixed” cost for a group leader of beginning group-based activity.

For mobilization by a benefit-seeking group of like-minded voters to be worthwhile it must generate a benefit level for the group that is sufficient to sustain the costs of the selective incentives provided to its members. For that to happen, the group has to be sizeable enough, through the votes mobilized, to have an effect on electoral outcomes. That is, unless a group of voters can have an effect electorally, then they cannot deliver any benefits by voting that can make selective social incentives profitable for the group. There is a minimum size of mobilized voters necessary for a group to have an electoral impact. Once a group reaches that size, however, the cost of mobilizing additional voters is small and decreasing with the number of members. The reason why the cost decreases is that the dynamic of mobilization works through the social networks established by the group – the more members the more spread out the cost of the selective incentives in mobilizing those members.

The situation facing a group mobilizing voters is it is like the problem facing a “public utility” – a company offering a service that has high fixed costs such as an electric power plant, a cable television service, etc. Most of the cost of generating electric power is building the plant and providing the lines through a city or neighborhood from which customers can be connected to the plant. After the plant is built and the lines laid, then the cost of adding customers is small in comparison. Similarly, mobilizing a new voter within an existing group of mobilized voters is cheap. Starting a new group of mobilized voters is expensive.

Harvey 1998 argues that the women’s groups did try to mobilize voters after enfranchisement but they were at a serious disadvantage when competing with already organized and developed office-seeking party organizations who also worked at mobilizing women voters. While women’s groups had established strong associations of their own during their drive to achieve suffrage – because of disfranchisement these associations had not developed the procedures through which the group could express its preferences through the voting booth – procedures to select candidates, to establish common agendas, etc. That is, if a benefit-seeking group does not have competition from an office-seeking group in mobilizing voters, its cost of mobilization is lower than if the benefit-seeking group does have competition from an office-seeking group.

Moreover, because of the efforts toward suffrage, the office-seeking party organizations were aware of the benefits of mobilizing the new voters directly. Harvey
notes that often benefit-seeking groups manage to mobilize voters prior to office-seeking groups because they have better information about the likelihood that mobilization can work (that it is possible to build a group large enough such that group benefits exceed the sum of private costs). Women’s groups did not have this advantage since office-seeking groups were aware of the potential benefits from mobilizing women after witnessing the drive toward suffrage.

Once a group of voters are mobilized by one group, a competing group has to be able to provide a higher incentive to get that group of voters to make choices (turnout and voting decisions) for different motives. That is, if a group of voters, such as women, have been mobilized by an office-seeking group, like a party, to choose in order to meet the party’s interests then it is difficult to convince these voters to choose in order to meet a benefit-seeking group’s goals which may be contrary to the wishes of the party. It is difficult to socialize them into thinking of themselves as voting for different motives once they have established a social norm within the office-seeking group. And most importantly, it is more difficult than if the benefit-seeking group had acted before the office-seeking group.

Since mobilization of women was carried out by office-seeking groups, it did not translate into policy benefits for women. Because the parties did not need to get independent women’s groups’ support in order to get the vote of women, the party did not need to provide women with policies in return for their votes. In the 1970s, things began to change. In 1966, the National Organization for Women (NOW) was formed and in 1968 NOW’s President Betty Friedan began to advocate an electoral strategy. In 1970 NOW and other women’s groups began to form electoral coalitions. The consequence of the new mobilization by independent women’s groups meant that the office-seeking groups needed to provide policies that advantaged the benefit-seeking groups. Policies that favored women began to see enactment again. Of course, there were other forces that facilitated the increased mobilization. Notably there has been an increase in the number of single women or women who have been single (divorced) and thus more independent financially from males. This enlarged the group from which leaders like Friedan could recruit members.84

In terms of our analysis in chapter 5, the parties began to re-align themselves on women’s issues from 1970s on. This has led to a oft noticed “gender gap” in voting where women (particularly single women) are more likely to vote Democratic and white males are more likely to vote Republican. Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode, 1999, page 239 report that “the major-party share of the vote was 12 points more Democratic for women in the former case [vote for president] and 7 points more Democratic for the latter [vote for representatives to Congress]. Prior to the 1970s, gender differences in support for the parties were not significant enough to notice. However, as the Democratic party began to support policies favored by women’s groups more than by white males (for example, the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, equal pay, and affirmative action programs), voters responded to the change in the liberal/conservative dimension and a gender gap between the parties developed.

Summary: When women voters first became enfranchised it was cheaper for office-seeking parties to mobilize them since these parties already had established efficient means of mobilizing voters and women's groups had not. However, since the voters were not mobilized by benefit-seeking groups, the office-seeking parties had little incentive to enact policies that women preferred or to incorporate them into leadership positions because women's votes were not tied to benefits. When women's groups began to mobilize voters in the 1970s, partly due to the increase in the number of single women, policies advantaging women received favor from parties seeking votes and women were recruited for leadership positions. The Democratic party in general supported more of these policies than Republicans, resulting in a gender gap between the parties in which single women are more likely to vote Democratic and white males are more likely to vote Republican.

We still have not answered all our questions (if ever) about the mobilization of women in American politics. One important question in particular remains – why did women’s groups begin to mobilize in the 1970s? While the increased number of single women is part of the answer, the increased mobilization by women’s groups was reflective of a general trend of increasing mobilization by interest groups in this period. The answer is related to our third puzzle – the puzzle of declining participation.

The Decline of the Precinct Captain as Mr. Goodbar

In 1955, Richard J. Daley ran in the Democratic primary for mayor of Chicago. At the face of it, it seemed a tough time to try to become mayor of a major American city. After all, his opponent was two term incumbent Martin Kennelly. But Daley had an advantage. The Democratic machine had decided to drop Kennelly and Daley was their man. They would get out the vote to elect him. Chicago Tribune columnist Mike Royko, in his popular book, *Boss*, described the campaign (1971, pages 89-91):

“Kennelly’s campaign strategy . . . was to offset the vote in the strong Machine wards with a huge protest vote in the outlying residential wards, where the precinct captain’s influence was minimal. The only flaw in that plan was that the outlying wards were where the Republicans had their greatest strength, and persuading them to vote in a Democratic primary, requiring public declaration of their party preference, would be a neat trick.

Daley’s campaign wasn’t based on any such ifs. The ward bosses and precinct captains knew their jobs. They would work even harder than usual, because when Kennelly warned that Daley would kill civil service and open up the town, the precinct captains believed him, and the prospect inspired them. . . .

The campaigns began, with Kennelly leaning heavily on radio and television, charging Daley with bossism. Daley leaned heavily on his precinct captains . . . On February 22, Dawson [black Congressman William Dawson from Chicago] and the others cracked the whip and the vote poured out . . . That night, Daley sat . . . [with] . . . the party heavies,
and an hour or two after the polls closed, the figures told him the story. It wasn’t a landslide, but the 100,000-vote spread was decisive. The Machine had delivered as expected . . .”

Daley used party mobilization mechanisms (not much different from Plunkett’s fifty years before) to become mayor and to remain so till his death in 1976. Yet, during his years in office, campaigns changed through most of the country. With the technological advances of the post World War II period, candidates found themselves increasingly able to reach voters outside of the political party and form their own independent organizations. Technological developments also changed the nature in which the selective social benefits of voting are conveyed. The process of mobilizing voters became less the precinct captains cracking their whips or as Royko describes the process of voting in 1955 (page 91): “The Skid Row winos, shaky with the bars being closed for election, came out and got their bottles of muscatel. The elderly were marched wheezing out of their nursing homes, the low-income whites were watched by the precinct captains as the left for work in the morning and reminded that they had to stop at the polling place.”

Today there are two major differences in the way mobilization of voters is conducted:

- First, today much of mobilization is contact by telephone, through targeted television and radio ads, direct mail and most importantly candidate-and, some suggest, issue-centered. While certainly party-managed “get out the vote” campaigns continue, more and more mobilization is concentrated around a candidate or issue and benefit-seeking groups have a larger role than before. Mobilization is more capital- than labor-intensive. Although definitely much door-by-door canvassing continues as it did in the 1998 elections as illustrated above, this is no longer the dominant way in which voters are reached and encouraged to turnout.

- Second, as voters have increased in education levels and become more prosperous the appeal of the older selective incentives are less enticing to voters than before and the appeals of benefit-seeking groups, tied to collective benefits, have become more attractive. More educated voters can recognize the benefit from acting as a collective and are more willing to do so for the social benefit. Benefit-seeking groups can appeal to educated voters by pointing out the benefits of coordination as a group.

Rosenstone and Hansen 1993 estimate that approximately half of the decline in turnout during the period after 1960 can be explained by the decrease in party mobilization and the change to interest group mobilization. They remark (p. 233):

“. . . interest groups have discovered better opportunities for mobilization. Affluence and education have created a citizenry newly attentive to causes such as environmentalism and racial justice. . . . In response, a larger and broader array of interest groups has surfaced to link citizens to city halls,

86 Although perhaps not as much in Chicago as documented in the film *Vote for Me* where precinct workers are seen in acts not that much different from the senior Daley’s days.
statehouses, and Capitol Hill. More interests and more groups have the motivation and capacity to mobilize public involvement.87

Benefit-seeking groups have had larger roles in mobilization because they have been advantaged by the rise of candidate- and issue-centered campaigns and the technology that made them feasible as well as the existence of a more educated and less needy set of potential voters. These groups speak to voters on the issues that motivate them — they tie the selective benefits to the collective goal, which these voters appreciate. Mobilization simply to please an office-centered party precinct captain for some current or future simple private favor has less import in a more technologically advanced, educated population. The social and selective incentives that motivate political participation that interest groups such as women’s groups can offer to voters are more appealing in a more prosperous and informed electorate.

However, this change has meant in general a decline in turnout. Rosenstone and Hansen note that generally interest group mobilization has been focused toward other types of political participation (letter writing to members of Congress, for example) which they suggest has led to a decline in turnout. But there may be other reasons as well. As Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 1998 discuss, there are many factors that have influenced the downward trend in turnout — the electorate has become younger (with the reduction in the voting age from 21 to 18) and younger voters participate at lower numbers, for example. McDonald and Popkin 2000 contend that part of the alleged turnout decline is due to errors in the measurement of the voting age population. Nevertheless, even when you account for these errors, turnout did decline in the post WWII era, mainly in the 1960s and has held relatively steady recently.

One of the answers may also be that when voters switch from turning out for the motivations provided by office-seeking groups which are less obviously tied to the individual’s investment benefit from voting to turning out for the motivations provided by benefit-seeking groups which generally have explicit ties to the individual’s investment benefit from voting, the cost of mobilization is higher. We have argued that voters are mobilized to participate in elections through private, selective, and social incentives. Parties for many years worked very well to provide this type of mobilization through private consumption benefits and social incentives as well.

But as these consumption benefits have become replaced with benefits that are more directly tied to the collective benefits for voters by interest/benefit-seeking groups, the paradox of not voting can be more difficult to overcome. If a voter is not particularly interested in the collective benefit or believes that the group will act without him or her and she or he can “free ride” on the votes of others, then the associated social incentive provided by a benefit-seeking group can be less valuable. Educated voters can figure out when they are being manipulated. In some cases, the advances in education and technology have advantaged groups with policies favorable to them that were not previously mobilized by benefit-seeking groups, like women, but in general, less voters are participating. Oddly enough, the paradox of not voting to some extent explains the puzzle of participation!

Summary: Mobilization of voters to turnout in elections has changed as campaigns use more capital- than labor-intensive methods in response to increases in technology, affluence and education. The role played by parties and the selective incentives they provide has declined as the one played by interest groups and their associated benefit-related incentives has increased. This has led to more influence for the benefit-seeking groups that had been previously less than successful in mobilizing voters (like women) when competing with office-seeking groups, but also has resulted in a lower level of turnout and participation in elections as social incentives of voting are more closely tied to the collective benefits which have less value at an individual level.

One remaining paradox that is often tied to the puzzle of declining participation is that in American elections turnout is much lower than in many other democracies. Rosenstone and Hansen 1993 report that turnout in national elections in Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Portugal averages between 80 and 90 percent and between 70 and 80 percent in Ireland, France, the United Kingdom, and Japan. In contrast, in the 1996 U.S. presidential election only 49% of the voting age population participated.

If we look at the investment benefits from voting, it should be no surprise that voters are less likely to vote in American elections where outcomes are determined by plurality rule than in countries with proportional representation. The probability that one vote can affect the ability of a party or candidate to achieve office is much lower in winner-take-all elections. Plurality rule, which forces more of American coalition formation to take place during the election process rather than post election, also implies that individual voters, by the time the election takes place, have less of an impact on the outcome. This also limits the ability of small benefit-seeking groups to mobilize and effect the electoral outcome since it raises the size of the coalition needed to have an effect. Other institutional differences have led to lower American turnout – Americans have a large number of elections and officials elected, much larger than other countries which makes the cost of voting higher and the benefits from each contest lower.

Summary: Plurality rule reduces the expected investment benefits from turnout - by reducing the ability that a group can influence the election outcome and increasing the number of motivated members necessary to generate influence.

The Good, the Bad, and the Institutions

In one sense the analysis in the preceding section is good news – when mobilization is mainly by benefit-seeking groups, choices in the voting booth are more likely to reflect preferences. So if mobilization is more likely to be as a result of benefit-seeking group activity, that may be good for policy. What can be good about black voters who turnout but whose mobilizers brag about getting them to vote for George Wallace over Martin Luther King when the mobilizers clearly imply that this would not happen if the voters chose according to their own preferences?
However, the decline in participation suggests that a significant subset of voters do not participate who once did. And their preferences may be ignored. Are they disregarded? The amount that these voters’ preferences will be overlooked will depend on their abilities to form into mobilized benefit-seeking groups if they so desire. If that is easily achievable, then ignoring these voters can have consequences for the parties and other office-seekers and we expect that they are not being disregarded. Hence, it could be that these voters are not mobilized because they are generally happy or indifferent with the policy outcomes that are occurring. Alternatively, it could be that the cost of these voters mobilizing as a benefit-seeking group is prohibitive and thus their preferences can be safely overlooked by office-seekers.

To the extent that there are class inequalities, many researchers contend that when mobilization of the population is low, class inequalities are multiplied since voters with less total income are less likely to be able to mobilize enough to overcome the fixed costs they face. Office-seeking parties and candidates continue to allocate resources making the class inequalities greater and increasing the cost of mobilizing. Rosenstone and Hansen 1993 remark (page 245) that American history of disfranchisement of blacks in the south makes it clear how differences in voting power can affect class inequalities: “Inequalities in participation led to inequalities in influence, which led to inequalities in policy outputs, which led to inequalities in resources, which led once more to inequalities in participation and the beginning of another vicious circle. Jim Crow [laws in the south during this period limiting black civil and voting rights] was self-perpetuating because the disadvantaged did not – indeed, could not – participate.” The logic is that if low income and less educated voters are not mobilized to the degree that high income and more educated ones are, then, it is probable that inequality will increase through public policies that disadvantage these voters further making it even more difficult for them to mobilize to change policy.

Ideally, some benefit-seeking group entrepreneur will recognize the potential benefits and mobilize the group. But such mobilization can take a long time and even bloodshed as the Civil Rights movement demonstrates, in the meantime resulting in permanent effects on disadvantaged groups. How can this type of outcome be prevented? One way is to use governmental policy, electoral institutions, to facilitate the efforts of benefit-seeking groups in mobilizing voters. One of the themes of this book is the importance of institutions in constraining and influencing political behavior. Institutions that increase the ability of benefit-seeking voters to mobilize as groups, decrease the likelihood that they will be ignored.

Recall that some of the stability of our system, as we saw in chapter 5, comes from the fact that we have left out voters. One way left out voters can be safely ignored is if they are not mobilized. The cost of mobilization and the difficulty of organizing is one source of our stability in policy choices. So we face a trade-off – full involvement in policy choices, complete mobilization versus stability in those choices.

We haven’t talked much about the cost of voting which is one important barrier to benefit-seeking groups mobilization efforts yet. We turn to how our electoral institutions affect the cost of voting next.

**Making Voting Cheap and Easy**

Regardless of whether voters are motivated for investment or consumption benefits, when the cost is high, they are less likely to vote. A major hurdle for voting in
American elections is the requirement that voters register in advance. Only North Dakota has no registration requirements for voters. Harold Washington’s campaign in 1983 was partly successful because in the fall of 1982 a voter registration drive “added about 125,000 black voters to the rolls, expanding the size of the black electorate by nearly 30 percent.” [Grimshaw, 1993, page 168].

**The Motor Voter Bill**

Recently, there have been a number of measures to decrease the cost of voting by decreasing the barriers to registration and other factors that inhibit the act of voting. Most notably, in 1993 Congress enacted the National Voter Registration Act (“motor voter” law), which took effect January 1, 1995. The Act required that states establish three types of registration procedures:

- States must enable individuals to register to vote simultaneously with their application for drivers’ licenses.
- States must provide for mail-in voter registration and the forms must be made readily available for groups to conduct registration drives.
- States must provide in-person registration at various agencies, including all public assistance agencies and agencies that serve primarily the disable; and were encouraged to provide such assistance at other agencies, such as schools, libraries, and licensing bureaus.

There have been court challenges to the law, it has survived intact. Has it been successful? Certainly, many voters have made use of its provisions. During the Act’s first year, 8 million citizens were enrolled or updated their voter registrations at motor vehicle agencies, 1.3 million registered in public assistance agencies, and 4.2 million registered by mail. Over 1.2 million were registered in both Florida and Texas.\(^88\)

Nevertheless, it is not clear whether the law has significantly increased turnout. The first elections since its passage are not promising. Turnout in the 1996 presidential election, 49%, was the lowest since the 1920s and turnout in 1998 was also low (although as noted above, McDonald and Popkin contend that these numbers understate turnout rates). However, there is some evidence that the influence of black voters in the 1998 elections, as discussed above, is a consequence of the motor voter law. Sack (1998), for instance, reports that “An analysis of selected precincts in the Atlanta area suggests that this year’s higher black turnout may have been a windfall from increased voter registration under the motor voter law . . .” It remains to be seen if the motor voter act will have a consequential effect on voter turnout.

One important caveat to easier voter registration is that the motor voter act only applies to general elections, not to primaries (see chapter 5). Many states have much more restrictive registration requirements on voters in closed primaries. For example, in New York a voter must register a year in advance to vote in a particular party’s primary. In general, primaries do have much lower levels of turnout than general elections. The average turnout rate in presidential primaries in 1996 was 11.01%. However, this is not a good measure of participation since the turnout rate in presidential primaries varies significantly across states depending on when the primary is scheduled – from 34.4 in New Hampshire (the first primary in the sequence and widely regarded as more important

than many of the others) to 3.17% in Rhode Island. In contrast, turnout in the presidential election in New Hampshire was 58% to Rhode Island’s 52%.

**Voting by Mail, by Shopping, on the Net . . .**

Accompanying measures to make registration easier, there has also been a movement to extend the period over which an election takes place as well as expand the number of polling locations a voter can choose from in order to make voting convenient (satellite polling stations at malls, for example). In the 1970s, states began to liberalize their absentee ballot laws. The enlargement of absentee balloting privileges is part of the general expansion of the voting franchise that took place after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But liberalized absentee balloting has evolved, in a number of states, to an extended voting period. It began with a few local elections where officials despaired of declining turnout and interest in special ballot measures. According to Magleby 1987 the first such completely mail-in balloting took place in Monterey County, California for a small special district election in April 1977.\(^89\) Subsequently other localities experimented with mail-in balloting elections – as maintained by Hamilton (1988) thousands of sub-state, often nonpartisan, vote-by-mail elections had been held by 1988.\(^90\) Liberalization of early and mail-in balloting to voters at large at the state level has occurred in the 1990s. At least 21 states had adopted these procedures by the end of 1998, although they are generally not mandated for counties but options available to local election officials.

The advantage of early voting is that it lowers the cost of participation and thus is supposed to increase turnout. Like with the motor voter law, the hope of advocates is that mail-in and early balloting will, in particular, increase turnout of voters who normally are less likely to participate – voters with low income and less education. Unfortunately, the early evidence does not support the hope. Oliver 1996 compared 1992 turnout levels across states as a function of absentee voting eligibility, mobilization efforts and types of voters. He concludes (page 510):

“Liberalizing absentee eligibility has produced its intended effect on increasing turnout, but not by encouraging turnout among those groups less likely to vote like the young or uneducated. Higher turnout is the consequence of political parties targeting and reaching those individuals more likely to vote anyway, i.e., registered voters.”\(^91\)

He also reports that the voters most likely to be so mobilized are elderly and Republican.

Stein 1998 compares election day with early voters in Texas’ 1994 gubernatorial election and finds that (pages 67-68):

“ . . . the sharpest distinctions between election-day and early voters were observed for attitudinal (i.e. interest in politics, paranship, and ideology) rather than for demographic traits. . . . these findings underscore the view that early voting is largely a function of convenience and partisan interest (i.e., those who arrive at a vote choice early in the political campaign). . . . Candidates and their parties might prefer to turn out their core supporters

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\(^89\) Magleby, David B. “Participation in Mail Ballot Elections,” *Western Political Quarterly* 40(1):79-91.

\(^90\) Hamilton 1988.

early in order to concentrate late campaign efforts on voters with weak partisan ties who require stronger issue and candidate appeals in order to win their votes. . . . If candidates use this strategy, I would not expect early voting to mobilize a significant number of new voters, nor would I expect to observe any net partisan bias to early voting. The effect of this strategy would be to allow parties and their candidates to more effectively compete for the swing and nonpartisan voter.”

Expanding the voting period so far has not resulted in an increase in turnout of voters who are generally less likely to vote but made the turnout decisions of voters who are generally likely to vote more predictable.

A number of advocates have proposed allowing voting over the internet (Florida and California are studying these systems). It seems naturally obvious that voters who benefit from the ease of the internet are not typically resource poor or less educated, so this type of voting does not seem a measure that would on the face of it increase turnout among those who do not generally participate.

But there is also a subtle change in the nature of voting when it is conducted via mail-in ballots or other mechanisms where voters make their choices outside of a government office. As Romano 1998 observes:

“The polling booth also guarantees privacy for voters. But when a person is filling out a ballot at home, they could be subject to intimidation, mail balloting critics say. ‘It could become difficult or uncomfortable for a person to cast a different vote than her family. And how do we protect the elderly from pressure?’ asked an adviser to a campaign that relied heavily on mail balloting.”

If the act of voting is a function of social incentives, then when the act of voting is less private, mobilization of voters may increase. But when does a social, selective incentive become a “bribe”? Moving voting into private spaces makes the distinction between fraud and honest expression of preferences more difficult to determine.

Summary: The motor voter bill has reduced the cost of registration and increased the number of available voters for election day. Early and mail-in balloting makes voting more convenient but early evidence suggest that this makes the votes of “regular” voters more certain rather than increasing turnout of those who typically do not vote. Potentially these new measures can be used by groups trying to mobilize voters because they lower the cost of mobilization. However, they also increase the possibility of fraud as the distinction between bribes and social selective incentives becomes blurred.

Financing Turnout

As mentioned in chapter 6, one of the roles that campaign contributions can play in elections is to increase the probability that voters turn out. How do campaign contributions enter in our explanation of why people vote? Campaign contributions

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clearly finance the expenditures of candidates and parties in mobilizing voters – the television and radio ads, the targeted mailings. One explanation for the impressionable voters of chapter 6 is that they are voters who have been mobilized by office-seeking groups and that the selective or consumption benefit they receive is satisfaction from voting for the candidate that has advertised more on television (or has better ads).

Interest groups have a choice whether to provide campaign contributions or to mobilize voters directly. Interest groups who maximize expected utility will compare the expected benefits from giving to a campaign with mobilizing its own members. Both campaign spending and mobilization are investments a group makes in achieving policy outcomes. Groups vary in their capacities. Some interest groups with large numbers of members who can be easily reached and contacted (like unions) may find it cheaper to mobilize members directly than to give monies for campaign ads. Mobilizing voters themselves is more likely to mean that they get their benefits as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Other interest groups may not have as many members and/or mobilization of their members may be difficult logistically (like some business interests). These groups may find it easier to give money to campaigns which are used to sway impressionable voters. Finally, we would expect that interest groups, like any other investor, will choose a diversity of methods given that the effect of each is uncertain and a diverse portfolio is less risky than for the group to invest completely in one type of strategy. So we would expect the AFL-CIO in New Jersey in 1997 to both mobilize voters and give campaign contributions to candidates or parties (which it did).

Uncovering Voters

We began our study of American elections by considering voter choices – first voter choices in two candidate elections, then voter choices in three candidate elections. We built on our understanding of voter choices to model the behavior of candidates, political parties, and interest groups. But our analysis ignored the decision at the base of voter choices once in the electoral booth – the decision to enter the booth at all. In this chapter, we have examined that choice. Voters are not always motivated to turnout and their motivations can also affect the choices they make if they choose to vote. Because candidates, parties, and interest groups recognize this reality, their behavior is also affected. If voters are mobilized by benefit-seeking groups then candidates and parties will find it in their interest to respond to the policy concerns of these voters. If voters are mobilized only by office-seeking groups or are not mobilized at all, then candidates and parties are not as likely to find it in their interest to respond to these concerns.

Changes in technology, education levels, and income have changed the effectiveness of different types of mobilization strategies. Office-seeking groups have found that the traditional consumption-only based mobilization strategy is less useful. Benefit-seeking groups have found that social selective benefits tied to collective investment benefits are more attractive to voters than previously. However, these changes may have contributed to a decline in turnout over time as it is more difficult to motivate voters to turnout for investment benefits.

Our electoral institutions affect the ability of groups to mobilize voters. Plurality rule makes it harder for a new group of voters to mobilize and actually affect electoral outcomes. While the motor voter bill and the lengthening of the voting period coupled
with ease in reaching polling places have the potential of resulting in greater turnout as they reduce the cost of participation, the evidence of an increase is minimal at present.

In the next chapter, we continue to uncover more of the basis behind our simple model of voter choices. We have slightly touched on the way in which voters form perceptions of candidates — how impressionable voters may simply be responding to information they receive in campaign messages for example. The paradox of voting suggests that voters have little motivation for investment purposes to pay the cost of participation on election day. If voters are not very motivated to turnout, how motivated can they be to acquire information about candidates? How informed are voters? How much information do voters need?

These are questions addressed in the next chapter. We begin with the story of a confused Congressman.

For Further Reading
{Brief review of relevant Literature.}

Study Questions and Exercises
{See chapters 1 and 2 for examples.}
Chapter 8: What Voters Know About Elected Officials – Retrospective Voting, Incumbency, and Term Limits

Goodling’s Unusual Election

“Rep. William F. Goodling (R-Pa.) looked uncomfortable. Surrounded by Christian and ideological conservatives supporting his besieged bid for a 13th term, Goodling, a moderate of the old school, plaintively told the gathering in the second-floor meeting room of the York Christian School: “This has been the most unusual election I’ve ever been through in my life. I don’t understand. I’m still trying to figure out what is really going on.”

What was unusual about Goodling’s election? For the one of the few times since he was elected in 1974, replacing his father who had retired, Goodling was facing a serious fight. It is no surprise that Goodling was perplexed. After all, in 1992 he had managed to get reelected despite having 430 overdrafts at the Bank of the House of Representatives, totaling $188,000, a sum that would have led to the defeat of some of his colleagues in Congress. Since then, the voters and his party had seemed quite happy with his record in Congress. Moreover, with Republicans in the majority after Gingrich’s success in 1994, Goodling had become Chairman of the Education and Workforce Committee and was thus in a position of power within the House, which should appeal to his voters. But in May 1998, Goodling looked in danger of not even winning renomination much less reelection. Why?

The voters deciding Goodling’s fate were considering a question that has faced voters in American elections repeatedly. Should they reelect an incumbent with clout, power, and prestige who can ably deliver the policies they wanted? “You don’t bench champions . . . Just let him do his job and continue,” argued one of his supporters. Or should they throw him out and try someone new and less powerful because Goodling was “as removed from the people as was the royalty of Europe. . . . he’s accepted special interest paid junkets to the four corners of the world”? (according to his opponents’ advertisements)

A Return to Citizen Legislators

In 1997, the Maine legislature had 40% new members. In 1998, 2/3 of the Michigan House, 1/2 of the Arkansas House and 1/3 of the Oregon House were replaced. This is surprising since in general incumbents in state legislative elections win over 90%

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of their races. The reason is not that voters were suddenly voting less for incumbents but that incumbents were no longer allowed to run because of the imposition of new term limits on legislators.

The change was attracting new people to politics. For example, in Arkansas, term limits induced Jack Norton, a 64 year old chicken farmer and Mary Beth Green a 41 year old speech pathologist and mother of five to run for the state legislature. Voters in Arkansas and other states with new legislative term limits had decided that they didn’t want incumbents in state legislatures like Goodling in Congress to have a chance at reelection. Norton and Green were vying to replace a state representative who was chairman of the Joint Budget Committee and had served for 24 years. “[P]opular Rep. Edward S. Thicksten delivered to his rural district countless paved roads, nutrition programs for the elderly funding for a local community college and an adult education center.”

Arkansas voters are avoiding the decision that faces Goodling’s constituents by preventing incumbents from running again by term limits. Thicksten was forced to retire because of the new term limits law. Why have Arkansas voters chosen to institute a new system that prevented incumbents from running again?

The Secret World of Candidates

The dilemma facing Goodling’s voters and the voters in any race with an incumbent arises partly because of uncertainties they face about Goodling and his opponent. In most of our analysis, so far (except for the impressionable voters of chapter 6), we have assumed that voters know the policy positions that candidates will enact when elected. But voters have little incentive to gather information about candidates if it means expending time and effort. Why? Because it isn’t rational for a voter to be informed. The desire that voters may have for information about candidates in an election is derived from their expected benefits from participating in the election. Since the expected benefits are low, if not negligible (paradox of not voting in chapter 7), then whether a voter is informed or not is not likely to matter much either. Does this mean that elected officials then can get away with “murder” and that voters simply choose based on non-policy characteristics like good looks or interesting accents? Not necessarily, as we will see.

The Uselessness of Knowledge

When voters are only mobilized by office-seeking groups, as noted in chapter 7, the voters may be induced to vote contrary to their own preferences. One reason why these voters can be so manipulated is because they have little incentive to become informed enough to recognize that their choices are in variance to their own preferences.

While it is true that voters mobilized to turnout by benefit-seeking groups are likely to vote as a group based on the investment benefits of the group, individual voters still do not have much incentive to become informed on their own. The presumption is that group leaders, because the size of the investment benefits are large, do have an incentive to be informed and will then, using their information induce individual voters to choose according to group investment benefits. For example, union leaders might convey

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to voters that they should choose candidate A instead of B, because A is better for labor and will choose policies better for labor without being very specific about A’s or B’s particular policy positions. Voters will receive simple cues or endorsements by these leaders and, using these, choose accordingly. Voters mobilized by benefit-seeking groups, then, may be no more informed than voters only mobilized by office-seeking groups, but are more likely to choose as if they are informed since they have been induced by their group to vote according to the group’s preferences. Finally, voters who are not mobilized to vote have very little incentive to become informed.

Notice that there is a difference between how informed a voter is and how informed a voter acts. In general, voters have little incentive to actually be informed. But some voters may have incentives to act informed when they are mobilized by benefit-seeking groups.

**Summary:** Voters, in general, have little incentive to actually be informed about candidates. But voters may act as if they are informed. How informed voter choices appear depends on how a voter is mobilized:

1. **Voters who are only mobilized by office-seeking groups or non-voters** have little incentive to be informed about candidates and thus may not act as if they are informed.

2. **Voters mobilized by benefit-seeking groups who also have little incentive to be informed, however, may act as if they are informed.**

**Do Campaigns Matter?**

The focus above is whether a voter has an incentive to become informed – to acquire information. But voters receive a lot of messages about candidates (or seem to) without much trouble. Some of these messages are the cues given by interest group leaders discussed above. Others are messages a candidate provides herself in campaign advertising. We noted in chapter 6 that campaign spending may be seen by voters as a measure of a candidate’s abilities along a dimension that all voters care about – like honesty, for example – and that voters then become more informed about the candidate through that spending. We also discussed how one way to view impressionable voters is that they are risk averse voters who, as they receive more precise information about a candidate’s position in campaign advertising are more likely to vote for that candidate. Because the voters are risk averse, they receive higher utility when they know a candidate’s position with greater certainty (less risk) even if that candidate is further away ideologically than a more uncertain candidate might be (see pages x in chapter 6 for a review).

Campaign advertising, then, can convey three types of information to voters:

- Cues from Group Leaders (Benefit-seeking and office-seeking) to voters mobilized by them on how to choose in the election (and to encourage them to vote)
- Information that contributors may have on a candidate’s overall quality
- Direct information on a candidate’s policy positions
There is much debate about how much campaign advertising is used for the first and second purposes instead of the third. Nevertheless, all three types of messages can increase the amount of information a voter has about candidates. During campaigns, voters also receive other information – news reports about candidate activities, interviews by the news media, and poll results by the news media and other independent bodies. How is this information going to be used by voters?

This question relates to the fundamental issue of what goes on during election campaigns. Voters receive lots of messages during the campaign. How does this affect their choices and preferences? Consider a voter, M, who is trying to decide whether to vote for candidate A. At the beginning of the election campaign, M, has some prior information about A. Perhaps M simply thinks A is just like the average candidate. This is what we call M’s prior on A – M’s judgment on A without any additional information. We will call M’s prior on A, PRIOR, and A’s actual position ACTUAL. M must make a prediction about A’s real position, ACTUAL. We will call M’s prediction, PREDICT.

At the start of the campaign, M’s prediction is the same as her prior, i.e. PREDICT = PRIOR. During the campaign, M receives information about A. The more information M receives, the closer PREDICT comes to ACTUAL. At any point during the campaign, we can think of M’s prediction as an average between ACTUAL and PRIOR. But it is not just a simple average, but what is called a weighted average. That is:

\[ \text{PREDICT} = W \times (\text{ACTUAL}) + (1 - W) \times \text{PRIOR} \]

The weight is W. W depends on the number of messages that M has received. The more messages M has received about A’s actual position, ACTUAL, the higher is W. A fully informed voter has a weight of W = 1, while a completely uninformed voter has a weight of W = 0.

Suppose that M is also receiving information on A’s opponent, B. As M receives information about B, M similarly updates that information. Formally, M is using what is called a Bayesian learning procedure – where she begins with priors about A and B and updates these priors during the campaign as she receives more information.

Suppose that M is asked in a survey (a poll) during the campaign which candidate she prefers. Assuming that she answers sincerely, M will respond with the candidate whose position she predicts is closest to her ideal point. This may not be the candidate that she ends up voting for, however. That is, during the remaining campaign, she may acquire new information that causes her to revise her predictions and her preferences. At the end of the campaign, M makes a decision about whether to vote for A or B based on the predictions she has about their positions at that time. For example, consider the situation in Figure 8-1.

Figure 8-1

There are two candidates, A and B, with policy positions at 60 and 10 respectively. B is well-known. But voters have little information on A besides the fact that he is conservative. There are two voters, M1 and M2, with ideal points at 20 and 40, respectively. At the beginning of the campaign, both M1 and M2 predict that A is at a conservative position that normally conservatives have, P1. Thus both prefer B. But during the campaign, they receive campaign messages, which cause them to revise their predictions (update) to P2. Now M1 prefers A to B, while M2’s preferences remain unchanged. Note that we have assumed that both voters have the same prior. This may
not be the case. Since voters have typically different information about politics in general before a campaign begins, they may have different priors.

There are a number of important implications from the Bayesian learning procedure about how campaign advertising will affect M’s preferences during the campaign. In particular, more informed voters are unlikely to have their preferences changed during campaigns, while voters who before the campaign begins are uninformed may have their preferences changed during the campaign. Moreover, if a candidate is better known to begin with across all voters, then there is less for voters to learn and it is less likely that voters will learn about the candidate during the campaign. Voters are more likely to learn during campaigns about candidates who are less well-known.

Summary:

1. Voters who are well-informed before a campaign begins are unlikely to have their preferences changed by campaign messages or events.

2. Voters who are largely ignorant before a campaign begins may change their preferences during a campaign as they are influenced by campaign messages and events.

3. Voters are more likely to be influenced by the campaign messages and events about candidates who are less well-known before a campaign begins than the messages and events about candidates who are already well-known.

Of course, in some campaigns even fully informed voters may be influenced by campaign spending if that spending is used as a coordination mechanism in more than two candidate races as discussed earlier. Here the point is that in most two-candidate races, the extent of the influence of campaign spending on voters depends on how much information different voters have before the campaign begins and how well-known a candidate is before a campaign begins. Generally, incumbents are better known than challengers before campaigns begins. This suggests that incumbent campaign spending will have less of an effect on the information that voters have about the incumbent.

In a simple test of the prediction that incumbent spending has less effect on voter information levels, Gary Jacobson 1987 estimated the effect of campaign spending by incumbents and challengers in the 1982 House Elections on the probability that voters can recall their names or recognize them from a list. These probabilities are presented in Figure 8-2.

In general, voters are much more likely to both recall and recognize incumbents’ names than they are challengers’. Importantly, as campaign spending increases, voter knowledge of both incumbents’ and challengers’ names increases, reflecting evidence that campaign spending does provide voters with information and suggesting that voters can learn during campaigns.
Money, Information, and Incumbents

Our analysis of how voters use and gain information during campaigns can explain why incumbents have advantages in elections. For example, incumbents like Goodling rarely lose House elections. Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 1999 report that for House races from 1954 to 1998, on average over 90% of incumbents were reelected. In 1998, 394 of the 401 House incumbents who ran for reelection won, and 26 of the 29 Senate incumbents were reelected.

Because voters know more about incumbents, this can give incumbents an advantage in elections particularly when voters are risk averse. Recall that in chapter 6 we saw that if voters are risk averse, more certainty about a candidate’s policy position increases the expected utility that the voter receives from that candidate’s election. Thus, incumbents can have an advantage in elections simply because they are better known. For challengers to be as well known as incumbents, voters must receive more messages about challengers during the campaign. For example, if an incumbent spent $175,000 in 1982, on average 50% of the voters could recall her name. For a challenger to have the same recall percentage the challenger, must have spent $400,000 in his campaign, over twice as much.

Yet, it is more difficult for challengers to raise campaign contributions. It is well known that incumbents have access to a number of privileges that make campaign expenses cheaper. Members of Congress have what is called The Franking Privilege which allows incumbents to send mail to their constituents at taxpayer expense and they have on average 22 staff members and typically more than one office per district which allows them extensive contact with voters. With the advent of the internet, incumbents access to government computer equipment and space gives them a further potential advantage, although it is not clear whether this advantage will be significant.

But more importantly, if campaign contributions are service- or favor-induced, as discussed in chapter 6, incumbents have an advantage in providing services to contributors during the campaign and acquiring campaign contributions. As we found in chapter 6, contributors would like to coordinate on a common candidate and if one candidate has a known advantage, contributors are much more likely to contribute to that candidate leading to an imbalance in campaign contributions. Thus, before campaigns begin, incumbents are better known among voters, giving them an advantage electorally that is evident to voters and contributors. They can provide services and receive service- or favor-induced campaign contributions and these contributors will choose the incumbent over her challenger. Challengers, then have more difficulty raising monies that are necessary in order to have a chance of defeating incumbents. Gary Moncrief 1998 reports that in the 1992 Senate races the median challenger campaign expenditure was 43% of the median incumbent campaign expenditure. Given all these advantages it is a wonder that incumbents ever lose!

Summary: Voters are more likely to have information about incumbents and this means that voters may receive greater expected utility from incumbents simply because they are better known. Incumbents also are more likely to receive service- or favor-induced campaign contributions, which further increases their electoral advantage with voters.

The analysis of how voters use information also has implications for early and mail-in balloting elections (discussed in chapter 7) and the timing of voter decisions. If voters are well informed before a campaign begins, they are more likely to make up their mind early about which candidate they prefer and to vote early if it is more convenient to do so. Also, our study implies that for some voters the value of waiting (because of new information that may be revealed) is significantly less than for others. In the example above, M1 is highly unlikely to change her preferences between A and B, whereas for M2 this is more possible. Thus, M1 is more likely to be willing to vote early than M2, because the value of waiting for more information is less. The implication is that in early and mail-in balloting, early voters are more likely to be have extreme preferences and/or to be well informed about candidate positions which is supported by the empirical studies cited in chapter 7.

Two Secrets

The fact that voters know more about incumbents and incumbents generally spend more in elections, thus, explains partly why incumbents have an advantage in contests for reelection. But the analysis up till now examines voter and candidate choices assuming that what candidates say they will do will be what they will do. This isn’t always the case. Sometimes candidates make promises that they do not keep once elected, like former President George Bush’s famous “Read my lips, no new taxes,” pledge during the 1988 election, which he was forced to ignore when budget shortfalls required additional federal revenues. Finally, incumbents do not have complete control over policy once in office – random factors like sudden upturns or downturns in the economy, bombing of embassies and taking of hostages abroad, can influence the political outcomes that occur. How much credit should an incumbent receive for policy outcomes (good or bad)? How honest are her statements about the credit she deserves?

Although we have considered to some extent how information provided by campaign advertising and interest group campaign spending may influence voter choices, we have ignored the dynamic nature of the uncertainty facing voters in an election. We have assumed that it is possible for a candidate to choose a policy position during a campaign and then enact that policy once elected. But this is not the real world of politics. Voters must choose in elections with part of the information they need about the world to come “hidden.” The information that is hidden from voters has to do with the choices that incumbents make once elected. There are two types of information about elected officials that even voters who are informed or act as if they are informed are unlikely to have when voting:

- Information about how much effort a candidate expends once in office
- Information about a candidate’s true policy choices once in office
When voters do not have the first type of information, they face a problem of moral hazard. Moral hazard exists in many relationships. A classic example of moral hazard is when an insurance company offers fire insurance to a smoker. If the smoker does not smoke in bed, the chance of fire is much lower than if the smoker smokes in bed. The insurance company cannot monitor the smoker to determine if he or she smokes in bed – thus the insurer faces a moral hazard problem in determining which rate to charge the smoker since the insurer does not have complete information on the smoker’s behavior. Should the insurance company charge the smoker a higher rate assuming that she will smoke in bed even though the smoker does not? Should the insurance company assume that the smoker does not smoke in bed and charge a lower rate?

How would a moral hazard problem appear in elections? As insurance companies cannot monitor smokers’ habits, voters cannot monitor the day-to-day activities of their elected officials, their incumbents. A voter does not know how much time a representative is spending on running the government versus vacations at the beach or a junket abroad as the opponents of Goodling claimed. A voter does not know when representatives are setting up their own bank and allowing costless “overdrafts” – effectively interest free loans off the federal treasury.

When voters do not have the second type of information, they face a problem of adverse selection. Like moral hazard, adverse selection also exists in many relationships. An example of adverse selection occurs when consumers buy products without knowing the quality of the product. For example, a car maker may produce two types of cars – low and high quality. On the outside and for simple inspections it is difficult for the consumer to determine if he or she has a low quality car (a “lemon”). What should the consumer do?

An adverse selection problem can be manifested in elections when candidates have their own policy preferences or when they have incentives to choose policies that are different from that they promised during their campaign (to please special interests, for example). The adverse selection problem occurs because voters do not know what type of elected official they have chosen just like consumers may not know the type of cars they buy. Unfortunately there is no way to make politicians tell the truth about their policies. In 1998, for example, the Washington State Supreme Court struck down a law that banned false political advertising because it infringed on free speech.\(^{98}\)

Adverse selection was also an issue in Goodling’s unusual election. His opponent in the Republican primary, Charles Gerow, also criticized Goodling as not choosing conservative policies – “for failing to support full implementation of the anti-missile defense system, for opposing the death penalty and for supporting the 1997 budget agreement” [see Edsall, 1998].

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**Definitions:**

Moral hazard problems in elections exist when voters do not know the actions that incumbents choose once in office - how much effort they expend at policy making. Adverse selection problems in elections exist when voters do not know the type of incumbent they have chosen - what policies incumbents will choose once in office.

Can the Moral Hazard Problem in Elections be Solved?

A Simple Example

First, we will consider whether voters can “solve” the moral hazard problem in elections. In order to answer that question, consider a simple example of how the moral hazard problem works. Suppose there is an existing status quo level of policy equal to SQ. For some reason voters in the electorate prefer a different policy level, M, which is greater than SQ. Figure 8-3 illustrates an example SQ and M.

Figure 8-3

In the figure, SQ equals 50 and M equals 75. Why might M not equal SQ? One reason might be new information about how policy translates into the real world. For example, suppose that SQ is a law against using a particular drug because of side effects. But scientists discover that the drug works very well in curing a disease that was previously incurable and now the median voter in the electorate would prefer legislation that allows the drug to be used for patients with this disease. Another example might be a SQ that outlaws gambling in a particular jurisdiction and now the median voter decides that gambling is OK if the government can tax gambling, leading to more revenue.

Suppose that the voters then elect a candidate, say A, who promises to try to implement policy equal to M – to move policy from SQ to M. The candidate does not care about policy – all she cares about is being elected. She receives 100 units of utility if she is elected and 0 units of utility if she is not.

But moving policy from SQ to M depends on two things – the effort (E) that A puts forth in policy making (holding hearings, writing legislation, discovering facts) and factors that she has no control over (for example, unexpected changes in the economy with respect to the tax benefits of legalized gambling, unexpected changes in disease and health factors with respect to legalizing use of the drug). We will call these random factors, R. R could have a positive effect on policy, making it easier for policy to approach M or R could have a negative effect. The problem is that R is unpredictable and unobservable by voters and incumbents cannot predict R when they choose their effort levels. So ultimate policy that would be implemented once A is elected is equal to P, which is the sum of SQ, E, and R:

\[ P = SQ + E + R \]

Notice that if R is high, then A does not need to put much effort into changing policy. But if R is negative, then A needs to put forth more effort. Figure 8-3 illustrates some example values of R given E and how P is determined. In the figure, A puts forth an effort equal to 20. When R = -10, the resulting new policy is P = 50 + 20 -10 = 60. But when R equals +10, the resulting new policy is P = 50 + 20 + 10 = 80.

A does not know what R will be when she chooses E. Furthermore, E is costly to A. Why might this be? This may be because A would prefer to spend her time on other issues or perhaps prefer taking beach vacations or foreign junkets to policy making on this issue. Assume that for every unit of E that A puts forth, she must pay a loss of 2 units of utility. So in our example, A loses 40 units of utility by expending effort equal to 20. A’s utility then from serving in office is 100 - 40 = 60. Finally, voters are unable to measure E or R. All voters ever observe is P.

Given the situation facing A, what value of E should she choose? Suppose that A is only going to serve one term. Clearly, then her utility maximizing choice is to choose
an $E$ equal to 0. Since voters never observe $R$, she can always claim that it is because of the value of $R$ that policy did not reach close to $M$, not her lack of effort or take credit if $R$ does benefit A. However, voters know that A will choose an $E = 0$ since they realize that A has no incentive to put forth effort. So they expect that $E$ will equal 0. This is the essence of the moral hazard problem – A has no incentive to put forth effort once elected and voters have zero expectations about A’s effort as well.

But this is not the typical situation in electoral politics. Most incumbents do not put forth zero effort once elected. Why when there seems to be little incentive to do so? One explanation may be that most elected officials do not find effort costly but enjoy it – policy making is why they chose politics as a career. I suspect that many incumbents would find the suggestion that they prefer foreign junkets to policy making offensive. But just assuming that politicians like policy making is like just saying people vote because they like voting – it does not help us understand politics and elections very much. If incumbents tend to have lower costs of policy making than those not in elected office, then this means that elected officials who have lower costs of effort are more likely to get elected. How if voters cannot observe effort or induce it?

**Voters’ Choice**

Now consider a slightly more complicated example. Assume that there are two candidates, A and B. A and B are exactly alike – there is no difference – they receive the same utility from getting elected and the same disutility from expending effort. Therefore, we assume that they always make the same choices when elected and when they make campaign promises.

We assume there are two periods as shown in Figure 8-4.

In period 1, A and B make promises about the effort they are going to expend in office. Then voters choose one who becomes the incumbent. The incumbent chooses $E$ and nature chooses $R$. $P = SQ + E + R$. Voters observe only $P$, not $E$ or $R$.

In period 2, the incumbent goes up for reelection and faces a challenger (the defeated candidate in the first election). Now voters care about a different issue (which we will call Issue 2) – that is they would like to see the status quo changed on a different issue. Both the incumbent and her challenger make promises about the effort they will expend to change policy and again since these two candidates are exactly alike, they make exactly the same promises. The same sequence of events occur, one candidate is elected, the incumbent then chooses an effort level, nature chooses a random factor value, voters observe the policy position. This continues indefinitely.

Consider the situation facing voters at the election at the beginning of period 2. Since the candidates are exactly alike, voters are indifferent between them. Voters have no reason to expect that A is any different from B and vice-versa. Voters in each election could just toss a coin and vote randomly. But if voters voted randomly, then what effort levels would A and B choose if elected? A and B would both choose effort levels equal to 0 if elected – there is no payoff to A or B from choosing anything else.

Suppose instead that voters choose retrospectively based on the policy they observe from the previous period. For example, suppose that in period 1 A is elected. A is now the incumbent. A would like to be reelected in the second period. Suppose she knows that voters will be more willing to vote for her if they observe policy on issue 1 closer to their preferences? That voters are no longer voting prospectively based on what
they expect A to do in the future, but retrospectively based on the outcome of policy in the past. In this case, A now has an incentive to choose a positive effort level.

Of course, because of R, the random factor that nature determines, voters never know exactly how much effort an incumbent has expended. So tying the probability that voters will choose an incumbent for another term to observed policy may reward some incumbents who expended little effort and punish others who expended much. However, on average, because voters vote retrospectively, incumbents want to be reelected, incumbents will have more of an incentive to expend effort than when voters ignore their past choices.

It is important to note that although voters are choosing retrospectively, voters are using this decision rule because they want to have an effect on future effort levels. If candidates anticipate that voters use retrospective voting strategies, then candidates are more likely to fulfill effort level promises that they make about the future.

\[E_M\]

**Definitions:** Retrospective voting is when voters choose in an election with an incumbent purely on the basis of the policies of the incumbent's administration - the policies of the past. The election is a referendum on the incumbent's performance in the past. Prospective voting is when voters choose in an election based on their expectations of what the candidates will do once in office - in the future.

Voters can help alleviate moral hazard problems in elections by voting retrospectively and if candidates anticipate that voters will vote retrospectively in the future, they will be more likely to fulfill campaign promises made about prospective policies.

**Can the Adverse Selection Problem in Elections be Solved?**

So, retrospective voting can help voters solve the problem of moral hazard. But what about adverse selection? Moral hazard is certainly an important issue in politics – but in moral hazard situations it is clear where policy should move – which direction – all voters in our example above agree that SQ should move to M. Suppose that the candidates not only care about being elected but also care about actual policy choices, either because they have their own preferences over policy or they would like to please interest groups. What can voters do in this case?

Suppose in the example above, where all voters prefer policy move to M, some candidates do not. Some candidates prefer that policy stay at SQ. Perhaps they prefer that policy stay at SQ because they personally like SQ more than M. Or perhaps they would like to please some special interest group which prefers SQ to M (we will assume that voters do not know about the interest group and that the benefit to the candidate from pleasing the interest group is independent of what voters do – for example, perhaps the special interest group is offering the candidate some private benefit just for her).

We can call the candidates that have a private preference for SQ over M, SQ types and those that have no private preference for SQ over M, M types. Furthermore, we can assume that M types have a lower effort cost than SQ types. That is, let $E_M$ be the effort
level of M type candidates and $E_{SQ}$ be the effort level of the SQ type candidates. We are assuming that $E_{SQ} > E_M$.

The problem for voters is they do not know which candidates are SQ types and which are M types when they vote. What should voters do? Again, retrospective voting by voters will help induce the candidates to expend higher levels of effort than they would if voters ignore their past behavior. Even though SQ type candidates have a higher cost of effort, they will still be induced to expend some effort if they want to be reelected. They may also be less likely to run for election since their expected utilities from running will be lower than for M type candidates – leading to some selection of candidates who like to make the policy voters want. Retrospective voting can help alleviate the adverse selection problem faced by voters.

Notice that when voters choose retrospectively and incumbents recognize this, incumbents are more likely to be reelected than otherwise. Retrospective voting is an additional reason why we observe high rates of reelection for incumbents.

**Summary:** Retrospective voting can help voters alleviate the adverse selection problem in elections by inducing even candidates who have private preferences over policy to choose policies that please voters in subsequent elections. Retrospective voting can also be one of the explanations of why incumbents have high reelection rates.

**Parties Redux and Evidence**

Do voters choose retrospectively? Are incumbents held accountable? We can answer this question by comparing the difference between incumbents’ past positions and voters’ preferences with the probability incumbents win reelection. If incumbents have a higher probability of winning reelection, when their positions are closer to those preferred by voters, then this suggests that voters are choosing retrospectively. But some incumbents, who anticipate that voters will choose retrospectively, may choose not to run at all. So we should also compare incumbents decisions whether to run for reelection with how closely they have chosen policies that please voters as well.

Yet, in the discussion above we have assumed that the voters incumbents must please to secure reelection are the voters in the general election. But Goodling’s difficulties were in the Republican party primary. In Pennsylvania, Goodling’s state, primaries are closed. The voters that Gerow was trying to convince to throw out Goodling based on Goodling’s past behavior were Republican voters, not all of the electorate. We saw in chapter 3 that the two major political parties are different in policy – that voters perceive they are different, that candidates for office choose different policy positions, and that once elected, they make different policy choices. Hence, we need to recognize that the relevant voters for understanding retrospective voting may be the voters in their parties, not the median voter in the electorate.
Figures 8-5 and 8-6 present the frequency that Senators run for reelection and win reelection by the distance of their positions from those preferred by their party’s voters from 1960 to 1990 as estimated by Schmidt, Kenny, and Morton 1996.99

The policy positions are measured on a 100-point scale and are based on the scores of these Senators by the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). They pick a set of votes on bills as proxies for the liberalness/conservativeness of members of Congress. If a member votes the way the ADA prefers on all these bills, the member receives a score of 100 and if a member votes against the way the ADA prefers on all these bills, the member receives a 0. As we noted in chapter 3, these scores show a significant difference between the ADA scores of Democrats and Republicans. For example, the average ADA score for Republican members of Congress from 1982 to 1990 was 17.17, while the average ADA score for Democratic members of Congress during the same period was 74.09.100

In Figures 8-5 and 8-6 Schmidt et. al. measure how close the incumbent Senator’s ADA score is to that Schmidt et. al. estimate is the Senator’s party position in his state on the ADA scale. If an incumbent is 0 to 5 from her party’s voters, then this means that her adjusted ADA score is 5 or less points away from that preferred by the voters in her party as estimated by Schmidt, Kenny, and Morton. If an incumbent is 25 and over from her party’s voters, this means that her adjusted ADA score is 25 or more points away from that preferred by the voters in her party.

As the two figures demonstrate, both incumbents who are more extreme than their party’s voters and those that are more moderate are less likely to run for reelection or to win reelection. The relationship is particularly sharp for the likelihood that an incumbent can win. Incumbents are much more likely to win if their voting positions in the past are close to that preferred by the voters in her party. This suggests strongly that voters do choose retrospectively.

Moreover, the relationship reported here also further demonstrates how parties influence candidate positions. In chapter 4, we saw how when candidates must first secure nomination in a primary before becoming a candidate in the general election and there is uncertainty about the location of the median voter in the electorate, the successful candidates will choose divergent positions. Our analysis shows that when voters choose retrospectively, they evaluate incumbents based on their closeness to their party’s voters. Interestingly, moderation does not necessarily secure reelection and becoming more moderate can lessen an incumbent’s chance for reelection rather than enhance it.

**Retrospective Voting and Political Mobility**

Our analysis so far has assumed that the candidates for a particular office, like the Senate, are either incumbents with a past history in the office competed for or challengers with no record in politics. But generally, new candidates for an office like the Senate, are seeking this office after having served in a lower level elected office. For example,

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100 Sometimes members of Congress miss votes due to absences. The ADA counts an absence as a vote for conservatism. We correct for this in our analysis of the data.
Schansberg 1994 finds that between 1960 and 1990 nearly 40% of the voluntary retirees from the House of Representatives left to seek higher office.

Voters can use a retrospective voting strategy to enforce behavior of incumbents to conform to their preferences when they seek higher office just as when they run for reelection. Francis, Kenny, Morton, and Schmidt 1994 compare the difference between House members voting records and those preferred by their party’s voters and the decision of these members to enter their party’s primary as a candidate for the Senate for primaries where no incumbent was running in that party’s primary from 1960 to 1988. The frequency by which a member of the House enters by the members’ distance from her party is presented in Figure 8-7.101

House members are more likely to enter a Senate primary when their past voting decisions are closer to the party’s voters just as Senators are more likely to seek reelection and win reelection when their past positions are similarly close. These decisions by House members suggest that they expect their party voters to evaluate them retrospectively based on their policy decisions in the House and that political mobility of elected officials is affected by voters using a retrospective evaluation strategy.

Summary: Senators are less likely to seek reelection and to win if sought, when their past voting decisions are far from those preferred by the voters in their parties. House members are similarly less likely to compete for Senate seats when their voting records are also far from those preferred by the voters in their parties. This evidence suggests that voters use retrospective voting strategies to monitor both Senators and House members and that both are rewarded for choosing policy positions closer to those preferred by the voters in their parties.

Should Incumbency be Limited?

As we noted above, Rep. Goodling considered the contest he faced in 1998 highly unusual. It wasn’t just that his opponent in the primary was strong and articulate but that his opponent had support from a unique interest group, U.S. Term Limits and its sister organization, Americans for Limited Terms. Term limits for elected offices in the United States have been debated since the American Revolution and are not unusual. Presidents are prevented from serving more than two terms since 1951 with the passage of the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution. In fact, Goodling had pledged to support a constitutional amendment limiting House members to three terms – 6 years in office. But he later voted against this measure and voted in favor of one allowing six terms – 12 years in office. One reason that U.S. Term Limits decided to oppose Goodling was because of his change of stance on the constitutional amendment.

Most states have had term limits on executive offices like governor, some have had these for many years – since the American revolution. Figure 8-8 shows states with term limits on governors and the year that the term limits were enacted.

Figure 8-8

It is noteworthy that 16 of the 39 states with limits on gubernatorial terms, passed these measures in the 1990s. At the same time, many of these states also passed term limits for legislative offices as illustrated in Figure 8-9.

As the figure illustrates, legislative term limits are completely a 1990s phenomenon. Often these laws were designed to apply to members of Congress, however, in U.S. Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton 514 U.S. 779 (1995) the Supreme Court declared the application of these laws to Congress unconstitutional since the Constitution sets forth the requirements for membership in Congress and to change these requirements (i.e. to prevent some from running for office since they had already served a number of terms) would require a constitutional amendment.

Why would voters want to enact term limits? After all, the analysis above suggests that voters can and do use a retrospective voting strategy to encourage incumbents to choose policy positions that they prefer. Retrospective voting can help alleviate the twin voter information problems of moral hazard and adverse selection when incumbents run for reelection. But if incumbents are prevented from running for reelection because of term limitations then voters cannot use a retrospective strategy to solve moral hazard and adverse selection problems. Why would voters take away a good way of controlling incumbents? *Voters may impose term limits if it is difficult for them to use a retrospective voting strategy and if they believe that the moral hazard and adverse selection problems increase with the time that an incumbent serves in office.*

Why might the moral hazard and adverse selection problems become worse as an incumbent serves a longer term? Just as voters can “learn” during a campaign about candidates, incumbents also learn while in office. We have assumed that the reason that voters cannot observe an incumbent’s effort level is due to the random factor that affects the ultimate policy outcomes. But incumbents who serve longer terms may be able to learn more about the random factor than voters. If an incumbent can anticipate the true size and direction of the factor, then they can use this information to put forth less effort or make choices closer to those of her own preferences or the preferences of contributors. Incumbent knowledge of the governmental process can allow them to make legislation that benefits them in ways that voters have less ability to monitor. For example, the creation and expansion of the House bank as a no interest loan source for Representatives was for a long time unrecognized by voters. A term-limited legislature may not have found creation and maintenance of such an entity as easy. It may also be that the time cost of effort declines with time in office, allowing incumbents to use less time for policy-making and perhaps more time for activities that voters see as wasteful. In summary, it is possible that as incumbents serve longer periods of time in office, the problems of adverse selection and moral hazard increase.

Even so, why can’t voters just adjust their retrospective voting strategies to account for this? But that may not be so easy. Why would it be difficult for voters to use a retrospective voting strategy? First, because incumbents are at an advantage over challengers independent of the advantage from retrospective voting, retrospective voting may not be as effective a method of solving moral hazard and adverse selection problems. Recall that incumbents are better known and better able to raise campaign contributions. These factors give them an electoral advantage regardless of retrospective voting to control for moral hazard and adverse selection problems. The longer an
incumbent has served in office the greater the informational advantage the incumbent can have with voters and the easier she can raise service- or favor-induced campaign contributions. These advantages, independent of retrospective voting, lessen the ability of voters to use retrospective voting as an evaluative mechanism and can increase with length of term.

Second, not all voters may have the same skills at processing information that may be necessary for retrospective voting to be effective. Husted, Kenny, and Morton 1995 find that more educated voters are less likely to make errors in estimating their Senators’ voting records. So if most voters are less educated, it may make more sense to use term limits as a control over incumbents in place of retrospective voting.

Third, even if voters do have the skills to process the information or can use cues provided by benefit-seeking group leaders as mentioned above, the ability to communicate information to voters varies across jurisdictions. More rural jurisdictions have fewer newspapers and television stations, making communication to these voters more difficult.

**Summary:** If voters are limited in their ability to monitor incumbent choices and the problems of moral hazard and adverse selection increase with tenure in office, then voters may find it preferable to limit the terms of their elected officials rather than rely on retrospective voting strategies alone.

Adams and Kenny 1986 find support for this explanation of the use of term limits when examining the states that used gubernatorial term limits as of the mid 1980s. In general, term limits at this time were more likely in rural states and where educational levels are lower. Gubernatorial term limits were also more likely in states that have four-year terms for governor than those with only two-year terms.

**The Puzzle of the Rise in Term Limits**

Yet, there is a problem with this explanation – it does not seem to explain why there has been a new movement of instituting legislative term limits and an increase in states using gubernatorial term limits in the 1990s. As Francis and Kenny (forthcoming) remark concerning the advent of legislative term limits:

“The answer cannot lie in legislative term length or in voter education. There have been very few changes in the last 40 years in the length of terms for the state house or senate. And educational attainment has risen, which should actually reduce the need for term limits.”

As noted above, however, one reason why voters may turn to term limits is if an incumbent has an electoral advantage independent of retrospective voter evaluations. If incumbents have greater campaign contributions and can use them to sway impressionable voters, then even if other voters attempt to use retrospective voting strategies, the mechanism may not be as successful in weeding out bad incumbents. There has been a growth in campaign expenditures in all election races – which may

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reflect increasing use of service-induced campaign contributions, which voters may see as detrimental. Although we argued that these services’ costs are widely dispersed and thus difficult to organize against, voters may use a term limit measure to control for their use. Hence, the increased demand for term limits for legislatures and governors not previously covered may simply be a reflection of this increase.

Daniel and Lott 1997 found that in California legislative term limits substantially reduced campaign expenditures and increased the competitiveness of legislative races even before the limits became effective. This suggests that since incumbents were less able to promise favors and services, that campaign contributions fell and contributors did not have the same advantage from coordinating their contributions on an incumbent who would soon be term limited out of office.

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Summary: One reason for the increased use of legislative and executive term limits may be a rise in influence in elections of service- or favor-induced campaign contributions which advantage incumbents. When campaign contributions are service-induced, incumbents have an advantage in attracting them since they can tie services to contributions more effectively. Moreover, contributors' desire to coordinate on one candidate, and even a slight perception that an incumbent has an advantage electorally, can lead to a large imbalance between incumbent and challenger spending. That imbalance may sway impressionable voters. This advantage for incumbents may also increase with tenure. Hence, even if most voters attempt to use a retrospective voting strategy, they may prefer to use term limits to restrict incumbents if they perceive that their ability to control incumbents through retrospective voting decreases with tenure and that adverse selection and moral hazard problems increase with tenure.

There are other explanations for the rise in term limits – some have argued that the movement reflects simply attempts by Republicans and conservatives (the main proponents) to change the partisan control of legislatures.

Advocates argue that the new legislators will be more like citizen representatives rather than the career politicians they replaced – like Jack Norton in Arkansas. Have term limits had this effect? Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998 surveyed state legislators in 1995. They found that there were no systematic differences in the professional backgrounds, education levels, income levels or ideologies between the legislators elected in states with term limits and those without. The electoral success of blacks and religious fundamentalist candidates were not significantly different, however, term limits states did demonstrate greater success for women candidates. Carey, et. al. did find that legislators in states with term limits spent less time “securing pork” – benefits specific for their districts than legislators in states without term limits which may reflect a decline in service or favor-induced campaign contributions.

We have repeatedly observed in our study of American elections the importance of electoral rules or institutions. Our analysis of voter information illustrates the significance of rules once again. In fact, they show how voters might use changes in the rules (institution of term limits) to control for inabilities they may face in using retrospective voting to control for moral hazard and adverse selection problems in elections.

In the next chapter, we also consider how groups of voters have attempted to change the electoral rules in order to change election outcomes. In this case, an unsuccessful Senate candidate campaigned successfully to change the way his party’s primaries worked. However, the change was only temporary as the supporters of his change discovered when the U.S. Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional, illustrating the limits to our abilities to change electoral rules to suit ourselves.

For Further Reading

{Brief review of relevant literature.]

Study Questions and Exercises

{See chapters 1 and 2 for examples.]
Chapter 9: Political Parties, Policy Divergence, and Stability, Once Again

If You Can’t Win, Change the Rules

The 1992 California Senate race between Democrat Barbara Boxer and Republican Bruce Herschensohn was argued by some to be a case where the ideological differences between the two candidates were stark. Herschensohn, a Los Angeles TV and radio commentator, had written speeches for Nixon, supported Reagan, opposed abortion, argued for a flat rate income tax, and favored offshore oil drilling in California. Boxer, a member of the House of Representatives, led women to oppose the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court because of charges of sexual harassment, denounced the Persian Gulf war, and had the record for voting for the most spending of any member of the House of Representatives. Boxer ended up winning the race by 48% to Herschensohn’s 43% (other candidates received 9% of the vote) after news leaked that Herschensohn attended night clubs with nude dancing.  

Republican moderate Tom Campbell found the race frustrating. He had competed for the nomination against Herschensohn and lost – Herschensohn had defeated him 38% to 36% in the Republican primary (Sonny Bono received 17% of the vote). The Republican primary that Campbell lost in was a “pure-closed” primary in that only previously registered Republican party members were allowed to vote. Campbell believed that he could have defeated Boxer in the general elections – that his positions were closer to the general election median voter and that Herschensohn had lost when Republicans could have won. Campbell decided to take action – he decided to change the rules governing how the Republican party nominated candidates. He believed that the system that the party used to select candidates disadvantaged moderates like him, and hurt the party electorally since only party members could vote, not independents or Democrats. He felt that if the Republican primary had been an “open” primary – allowing not only Republicans but all California voters to participate – then he could have defeated Herschensohn in the primary and gone on to win the general election. A change in the rules, he believed, would advantage moderates.

Campbell took his campaign to the public at large and succeeded in getting California to pass in March 1996 a referendum changing the primary rules to allow for nonparty members to vote in a party’s primary – making California’s primaries open. However, Campbell success was short lived. The political parties successfully challenged the change in primary system and in California Democratic Party et al. v. Jones, Secretary of State of California, et al., the United States Supreme Court ruled on June 26, 2000 that the California primary system change to open was unconstitutional for violating the associational rights of the political parties (note that the Supreme Court did not rule that open primaries are unconstitutional per se’, simply that the state cannot force a political party to hold an open primary if the party prefers a closed one). Do rules on who participates in party primaries matter so significantly in determining who wins

106 See Barone and Ujifusa, page 138. These opening paragraphs paraphrase the opening of Kanthak and Morton, forthcoming.
general elections as Campbell believed? In order to answer this question, we need to first explore more fully the roles played by political parties in American elections.

**Do Parties Rule American Politics?**

Political parties are not constitutional institutions. In fact, it is well known that many of the writers of the American constitution wanted to avoid a democracy driven by political parties. Yet political parties did develop, and despite claims of decline in recent years, are important actors in the electoral system. We saw in Chapter 2 that almost all elected officials in the United States are members of one of the two major political parties. All but one member of Congress in 1998 is either a Democrat or Republican as are the vast majority of state legislators. In Chapter 3, we found that there is a significant difference in policy positions of candidates that can be explained by party affiliation. Candidates for Congress from different parties are viewed as different by voters, advocate different positions in elections, and once elected they vote differently. In chapter 4, we saw that a reason for this is the fact that these candidates must first compete for a party’s nomination and to do so, they have to please party members, who are often more extreme than the general electorate. Finally, in chapter 5 we discussed how the two major parties, in picking their divergent policy positions, shape policy choices into a single liberal/conservative dimension, which while relatively stable in the short run, does change over time in response to insurgents and dissidents. Political parties are an important part of the American electoral system.

Yet there are significant historical and regional differences in the role played by the major political parties, with implications for the ability of the major national parties to dominate electorally and the policy positions that our elected officials take. These differences often reflect differences in the rules or institutions that govern the electoral process, differences again historically and regionally. Like Campbell in California, in this chapter we will argue that the rules do matter – the rules determine how much parties matter in elections. *The issue is not whether parties matter or not in elections – but under what rules and institutions parties matter more.*

Before we begin our study, however, we need to understand how these rules have evolved over time leading to modern American political parties.

**A Story of How Rule Changes Dethroned a King**

In the 1820s, one of the foremost American political leaders of the day was William H. Crawford. “He was of imposing presence and had great conversational powers” according to the Encyclopedia Britannica. He served as Senator from Georgia, Minister to the Court of France, Secretary of War, and Secretary of the Treasury. He ran for president in 1824, the nominee of the same political party that had previously supported James Monroe to overwhelming victory in 1820. Yet, he lost the election and few Americans today have heard of Crawford (although we know well his opponents John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, and Henry Clay). Why? To answer this question, we need to explore how the first American political parties developed, the rules that shaped them, and the rule changes that altered them.

**Parties: Where Necessary Evils Happen**

Originally American political parties were ignored in the Constitution.\(^{107}\) To the extent that parties were considered by the nation’s founding fathers, they were viewed as

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\(^{107}\) There are a number of excellent reviews of the history of American political parties, see for example Burns 1963 and Epstein 1986.
“factions” of interests to be mitigated and one of the reasons for setting up a governmental structure that was divided into multiple branches. George Washington, in his farewell address, warned of the dangers of political parties stating: “Let me . . . warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party, generally.”\textsuperscript{108} James Madison, in Federalist 10 wrote:

“Complaints are everywhere heard from our most considerate and virtuous citizens, equally the friends of public and private faith and of public and personal liberty, that our governments are too unstable, that the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of rival parties, and that measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority.”\textsuperscript{109}

Yet, these men were also involved in the start of the first American political parties. Why? Our founding fathers, like most citizens in democracies, disagreed about the policies that the government should enact. First, they battled over the design of the constitution and how to distribute the number of representatives across the states. In the First Congress, they fought over Alexander Hamilton’s proposed financial program to fund the federal debt and assume state debts. They disagreed over the charter of the Bank of the United States and whether to impose an excise tax. And, they argued over whether they should sign John Jay’s Treaty with Great Britain. The policy decisions led to some as winners in winning coalitions and others as losers in losing coalitions. Hamilton, allied with Washington, was the primary winner in the policy decisions in the First Congress as his proposals were enacted. These winners became known as the “Federalists.” One of the big losers in the earliest decisions was Thomas Jefferson.\textsuperscript{110}

At first, Jefferson attempted to persuade members within the winning coalition to change their minds, but was unsuccessful. What, then was his alternative? He knew that if he could not change the minds of those who were in the winning coalition now, he could change the balance of power that gave the winners enough support in Congress and the control of the presidency, he could turn them into losers. Jefferson recognized that through electing others who agreed with his point of view, he could build a large enough coalition create a new winning coalition. Like Gingrich, approximately 200 years later, he recognized the importance of elections in American politics. He turned to forming a political party not because of a fondness for parties but because he perceived parties as necessary evils, necessary in order to change the nature of public policy by changing the post-election winning coalition. He worked to form an electoral coalition so that he could change public policy once elected.

\textbf{Jefferson’s Caucus Dominated Electoral Coalition}

Jefferson’s electoral coalition [called the Republicans, although they are the antecedents of today’s Democrats] was, however, much different from the type of electoral coalition that Gingrich formed in 1994. The rules of elections in American politics in the first years of the Republic were significantly different than they are today.

\textsuperscript{109} See The Federalist, page x.
\textsuperscript{110} Aldrich 1995 argues that one of the reasons for the formation of the first political parties was the difficulty of forming winning coalitions within Congress.
The United States Constitution specified that senators were to be selected by state legislatures (this was not changed till the ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1913). Presidents were to be selected via the indirect vote of the electoral college whose selection was left to the states, where direct voter participation for these elections were limited. So many of the elected offices were chosen by the political elites within the states, with little direct involvement by voters concerned with issues.

It is true that voters did directly elect the members of the House of Representatives. But the determination of who could vote in these elections was left to the states. Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution stated that “. . . the Electors [voters] in each State shall have the Qualifications requisite for Electors [voters] of the most numerous Branch of the State Legislature.” Most states had inherited property qualifications for voting and other restrictions [exclusions of women, Catholics, Jews, aliens, and servants] from the British. However, in the colonies these restrictions were less severe because of the availability of cheap land and indifferent administration by elected officials. By the time the Constitution was written, many of the other restrictions had been eliminated (except for the exclusion of women and slaves). Nevertheless, restrictions on the franchise were still significant enough that from Jefferson’s perspective the way to elect a winning coalition was through appealing more to political elites and working through members of Congress rather than directly to voters.

There is also evidence that voters during this period were likely to follow the lead of political elites in Congress. Many voters still viewed elections as ratifying social and political hierarchies (as they were then viewed in England and during the Colonial period) rather than a choice between competing candidates with positions on issues as they were evolving to become. For example, in Virginia voters would often elect their two leading men even when they held opposite positions on issues. The first political parties, then, were dominated by those already elected (social and political elites) and by Congress. They worked through “caucuses” of members of Congress to nominate candidates for office, particularly the presidency.

Thus, because of the need to form into winning and losing coalitions in choosing public policies, the first political parties were formed, the Federalists and the Republicans. Jefferson’s first attempt, though, to become the winning coalition [the election of 1796] was unsuccessful and he was defeated by John Adams. In the election of 1800, however, Jefferson, was more successful than the Federalists. While both parties were dominated by political elites and their respective Congressional

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111 See Lowenstein 1995 and Bott 1991 for discussions of the history of suffrage in the United States.
113 Under the electoral college system at the time, Jefferson was elected vice-president and served under Adams with the understanding that he was part of the “opposition.” In 1804 the Twelfth Amendment changed the electoral college system and provided that separate votes be cast for president and vice-president. It also added a requirement that the winner must also receive a majority of the votes cast (a majority requirement). Unlike majority requirements discussed in chapter 2, a run-off election is not held between the two vote receivers if one does not receive a majority; instead the selection of the president is then decided by the House of Representatives.
caucuses, the Republicans employed state-by-state organizing efforts to appeal to voters – grass-roots organizing – and influence the selection of the Electoral College. Despite Federalists efforts to use elite power to change the outcome, Jefferson was selected which peacefully changed the winning coalition within the new government, an important step for the new country.\footnote{114}

**Voters Overthrow the King**

Jefferson’s new party was so successful that for the next two decades, the country was essentially dominated by its choices and in 1820 the Federalists did not even nominate a candidate to oppose the Republican choice of James Monroe. The dominance of his party led Monroe to contend that the era of party politics was ending and that the divisions between the country into winning and losing coalitions no longer were relevant.

This claim was far wide of the truth – actually party politics was really just beginning! Shortly after Monroe’s election the economy took a downturn and differences over governmental policies became evident once again, as well as the need to work through political parties to secure control over the government.

In 1824, these divisions led to weak support of the Congressional caucuses’ nominee William Crawford (who, as we noted above, is rarely remembered by Americans today) and the nomination of John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, and Henry Clay from state legislatures. To many voters, now more likely to see elected officials as their representatives, not as their “lords” saw Crawford’s selection as an attempt by party leaders to dictate to them. Crawford suffered a stroke during the campaign (he later recovered and served as a circuit judge in Georgia, passing away in 1834). Jackson won the popular vote [41 percent] but not an electoral vote majority and through bargaining, the House of Representatives selected Adams as president and Clay as Secretary of State with the understanding that Clay would be next in line for President. Jackson supporters saw this as a “corrupt bargain.”

Why had “King Caucus,” which had been so successful prior to 1824 failed in getting Crawford elected? While Crawford’s stroke certainly hurt his candidacy, the demise of the caucus was evident when only 66 out of 216 Republican members of Congress attended the meeting that chose Crawford as the nominee and instead supported the other candidates proposed by state legislatures.

The key to the demise of King Caucus are the rule changes that had taken place during its period of domination. For the period of Jeffersonian Republican mastery, rule changes had occurred that ultimately affected how the political parties operated. During this time, property qualifications for voting had begun to disappear.\footnote{115} Even more importantly, voters were given increasing roles in the presidential election process. At first, presidential electors were typically chosen by state legislatures, but by 1824 eighteen states out of twenty-four states (75%) selected presidential electors by popular vote. Moreover, prospective electors had been making commitments to particular presidential candidates for two decades. Candidates began to compete for voters’ preferences using issues and elections ceased to be mere ratifications of the existing power structure.\footnote{116}

\footnote{114} For a discussion of the events of this period, see Chambers 1963.  
\footnote{115} See McCormick 1960 and Aldrich 1995 for a review of this history.  
The old Caucus dominated political party discovered in 1824 that because of the evolution of changes in the way electors were selected and the increased role of voters, their nominees could no longer build a large enough electoral coalition to win. While there had been some grass-roots organizing and appealing to voters to support the Caucus chosen nominees, the balance of power had shifted because of the expansion in the franchise and the more direct selection of electors. It is ironic to note that some of the rule changes were in response to the grass-roots organizing to try to build support for Congressional candidates and that this organizing led to the demise of Caucus control.

Among the losers in the bargain in 1824 was Martin Van Buren of New York. As Jefferson before him and Gingrich after, Van Buren recognized that he needed to build an electoral coalition large enough to become one of the winners in the government policy game. He also recognized that because of the expansion of the franchise and the changes in the way electors were selected, the coalition needed to be built as a confederation of the states, bottom up, rather than top down as the old Congressional Caucus had been built. Van Buren built what was to become the Democratic party and successfully saw the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828. By then 90% of presidential electors were directly chosen by voters. Other political leaders followed Van Buren, forming confederations of affiliated state parties meeting in conventions [Whigs and Anti-Masonic parties in 1831]. The first national nominating convention of a major political party was held in 1832 when the Democrats met to re-nominate Jackson for president. A party system dominated by two major parties emerged in 1832 when the Whigs united with Henry Clay’s group of former Republicans. The modern American political party was formed.

Summary: The first American political parties were dominated by Congressional caucuses comprising the winners or losers in the government policy game. These Congressional caucuses nominated candidates for president. As the right to vote expanded and voters’ role in selecting presidential electors increased (the rules changed), the ability of the Congressional caucus to control the selection of presidents decreased leading to the development of the modern American political party, a confederation of state-level grass-roots parties, to select presidential nominees.

Changes in the way in which presidents were selected coupled with the expansion of the franchise, changes in the rules, changed the role that political parties played and the way they were organized. Because the determination of whom would be winners or losers ultimately depended on who dominated in forming electoral coalitions, the major parties changed their structure to better form electoral coalitions.

117 Much of Van Buren’s success was in increasing turnout and mobilizing voters, as discussed by McCormick 1960 and Aldrich 1995. Van Buren’s success was also facilitated significantly by the expansion in the nation’s transportation and communication systems, which make possible organization on a scale not previously possible.
Although the first modern American political parties began to emerge during this period, the period was a time in with the multidimensionality of political issues was such that the parties found it impossible to stabilize choices on a single liberal/conservative dimension. As a result, we fought the Civil War and not until the issue of slavery was settled by the outcome of that war, did a period of long-run stability ensue.

**Unruly Bosses and the Creation of New Rules**

**Crawford’s Legacy**

While William Crawford was unsuccessful in his quest for the presidency, he did author a bill that changed the rules of American government having a long-term effect on the American political parties of the late 19th century. The four-years-terms law, enacted in 1820, limited the term of service of thousands of public officials to four years, and did much to develop what we have called the “spoils system.” That is, the concept that “to the victor goes the spoils” and that the party that won presidential elections – every four years – would distribute federal jobs to its members. The spoils system increased the value to state-level parties from joining national electoral coalitions that could win and dominate as winning coalitions, particularly the value of winning the presidency. The spoils system was also translated to local and state government jobs and helped the development of political machines at the state and local level and the alliance of these machines into the national party. Recall that it was the “spoils system” of patronage jobs in Chicago that helped Daley senior first win the mayorship in the 1950s.

The first mass political party formed by Van Buren was a confederation of state parties. Aldrich 1995 reviews how Van Buren strategically chose states where existing organizations were most developed and most likely to efficiently build a national alliance. Many American public policy decisions are made by state governments. In the early 19th century, it might even be argued that state rather than national legislation dominated domestic policy. As with national government policies, at the state level there are winners and losers. It should be no surprise that in the competition over choosing state policies state level factions or political parties formed. It is these factions or parties that Van Buren and later the Whigs used to organize into major national political parties. Federal patronage was one of the advantages to these state level organizations to join in a national alliance. As Epstein 1986 notes about the post civil war period (page 134):

“Despite their primarily state and local concerns, the old party organizations [machines] not only derived electoral advantage from the Republican and Democratic labels of the national alignment, as state and local parties still do, but they could also benefit from the addition of national patronage to state and local sources. To seek such patronage from Washington, the old organizations were indeed willing to join forces to choose their party’s presidential nominees and then help to elect them.”

**The Spoilers**

Of course, not everyone was a “winner” in the patronage dominated machine politics of the 19th century. Evidence mounted that winners were not only securing public policies that were closer to their preferences, they were also receiving personal and private returns from government coffers (graft). Political machines became notorious for vote fraud and inflated government contracts, which seemed to only line the pockets of party and government officials. One loser in the machine politics age, Charles J. Guiteau, a disgruntled office-seeker, took out his rage by assassinating newly elected President
Garfield in 1881. Others took more conventional, and somewhat more successful ways of changing the balance of power – they changed the rules. Populists, and later progressives, advocated changes in the institutional structure to restrict the ability of machines to control elections and build their electoral coalitions through the spoils system. Their efforts coupled with Guiteau’s act, led to passage of the Pendleton Act of 1883, which provided for a federal Civil Service Commission and the beginning of the demise of the spoils system, at least at the federal level.

The reformers also engineered the passage of a number of different electoral changes at the state level (these laws were enacted at the state and local levels because the constitution largely left the regulation of elections to the states).

The electoral reforms were multiple and consisted of the following:

- Direct primaries to select party nominees for offices
- The Australian (secret) ballot
- Requirements that voters register in advance of voting, sometimes as much as a year in advance
- Literacy tests for voters
- Non-partisan elections for some state and local offices
- State and local elections held on “off” years – non-presidential election years

The reforms of the progressive spoilers changed fundamentally the relationship between the government and political parties by introducing new regulations that placed restrictions on the right to vote, how parties chose their nominees, how candidates could secure access to the ballot, etc.

The Secret Ballot

The effects of the adoption of the secret ballot cannot be overstated. Before the use of the secret ballot, the state did not provide voters with ballots, voters brought their own, either pre-printed by parties or candidates or hand-written by voters themselves. Reformers argued that party printed ballots facilitated election fraud and vote buying. That is, a vote-buyer could place a pre-printed ballot in the hands of a voter and then watch the voter place it in the ballot box. Furthermore, the public nature of voting made it possible for retaliation against voters who did not use the pre-printed ballots of the candidates preferred by their employers or others who may have economic power over them.118

Pre-printed ballots had other effects – they made it more difficult to engage in split-ticket voting (for example, voting for a Democratic candidate for governor and a Republican candidate for Congress), made it costly for independent and minor party candidates to get votes (printing and distributing ballots was costly), and, importantly, made it easier for illiterate voters to participate. Moving to secret ballots was seen as both a way to decrease the influence of political party machines and as a de facto literacy test for voters.119 And significantly, the advent of the secret ballot brought the state in as an actor in determining who can run as a candidate and control over ballot access.

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119 See J. Morgan Kousser, The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restrictions and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910. Secret ballots no longer serve as literacy tests as non-literate voters are guaranteed the right of assistance at the polls if needed.
Secret ballots are also argued as a source of change in Congressional elections. Since the secret ballot allowed voters to split their tickets and candidates could not rely as much on party line voting, it became more important for candidates to have be able to be seen to voters as distinctive independent of their parties. Constituency services and direct relationships with voters became more significant. Katz and Sala show that after the secret ballot law was passed members of Congress became more concerned with “ownership” of committees and other aspects of their office, which could then be translated into votes for the individual candidate independent of the party. Interestingly, Katz and Sala find that members of Congress changed the structure of committee assignments as a result – an important implication of how changes in our electoral system affects much of American politics.

Variations Across the States

Because in general, the Constitution leaves much of the regulation of the electoral process to states, and the influence of the reformers varied across states, the regulations passed over elections varied significantly across states. As a result, the process of American electoral coalition formation within states varies with these institutional differences, as we will see.

The South and Black Disfranchisement

One important regional variation was the use by southern states of many of these reforms to disfranchise black voters who had been given the right to vote with passage of the 15th Amendment after the Civil War. Many people do not realize that shortly after the Civil War, black voting was significant and quite a large number of blacks were elected to local, state, and federal offices. However, southern states were able to subvert the constitutional amendment through a variety of mechanisms. Kousser provides an excellent review of how this happened. Southern states used control over ballots, voting requirements, and notably a Democratic primary system restricted to white voters as means to disfranchise blacks.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s and the resulting passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its renewal over the years has eliminated most of these deviations although some of the effects of these institutions still linger. For example, the use of majority requirements at the state level, discussed in Chapter 2, is confined to southern states. Majority requirements, as we saw in Chapter 2, help voters coordinate on candidates that are Condorcet winners, i.e. would defeat or at least tie all other candidates in two-way competitions. During the first half of the 20th century, southern states were virtually dominated by one party (Democratic rule) through the use of Democratic whites-only primaries. Majority requirements allowed the factions within the state Democratic parties to coordinate on a single candidate when voting was restricted to whites. Although the era of disfranchisement is over, many southern states still use majority requirements as shown in Figure 9-1 below:

Primary Differences

Figure 5-4 illustrated how voters and candidates flow through the modern electoral process. We focused in chapter 5 on candidates – how candidates had choices whether to compete for major party nominations or minor party nominations or as independents and the implications of those choices. As there are two flows of candidates, there are also two flows of voters – voters who participate in party nomination processes
(principally primary elections, sometimes conventions) and voters who do not. During King Caucus, political elites, primarily members of Congress in a political party determined that party’s nominees. During the heydey of the spoils system and machine politics, again political elites dominated the nomination process. Political parties would have conventions – either national or state – where the elites would choose. It is of course an oversimplification to suggest that voter preferences were ignored during this process and evidence certainly exists that anticipation of voter preferences affected the choices of political elites then as they do today. Epstein 1986, as we noted in chapter 5, contends that the party system has always been porous to insurgents and disidents. But with the advent of the direct primaries, average party members, voters, were brought explicitly into the nomination process. Today, many party nominees for national, state, and local offices are selected in primary elections.

However, the way in which voters are involved in parties’ primaries varies significantly by states. There are six different types of primary election systems: pure-closed, semi-closed, semi-open, pure-open, blanket, and non-partisan. The title of each system gives some clues as to how the systems vary in voter participation. In general, in pure-closed primary systems voters register a party affiliation in advance. Voters who affiliate as Democrats can only vote in the Democratic primary, etc. Voters who do not choose a party affiliation in advance are not allowed to vote in the primary election at all. States vary in how early voters must declare their party affiliation. In New Hampshire, for example, voters only need to declare affiliation 10 days in advance while in New York state voters must declare their affiliation one year in advance. Semi-closed primary systems are closed primary systems, which allow new or unaffiliated voters to vote in a party’s primary without declaring affiliation in advance. Open primary systems allow voters to decide on election day in which party’s primary to participate. However, open primaries differ in the extent that voters must declare a party affiliation in order to vote in a party’s primary on election day (semi-open primaries) or can choose which party’s primary to vote in secretly (pure-open primaries). In pure-open primaries the secrecy is maintained by giving voters the ballots for all the parties’ primaries at once, but allowing voters to choose only one party’s primary in which to vote secretly. Typically, however, there is more than one nomination contest on a ballot. For example, voters may be deciding who a party’s nominee will be for governor as well as lieutenant governor, for senator as well as representative. In standard semi-open or pure-open primaries, a voter’s choice of party primary will apply to all the nomination contests on the ballot. But in blanket (or sometimes called juggle) systems, voters can choose contest by contest which party’s primary to choose in – perhaps voting in the Democratic primary for governor and the Republican primary for lieutenant governor.

As we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, California’s attempt to change to blanket primaries in 1996 was recently ruled unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in California Democratic Party et al. v. Jones, Secretary of State of California, et al. The Supreme Court ruled that a state cannot force a political party to

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120 Note that these are the primary systems as used in non-presidential elections. In some cases, states with open primary systems used a closed primary structure for the selection of delegates in presidential primaries (as in California in 2000 where the presidential primary was “open” to all voters, but only party members’ votes counted in the selection of presidential candidates).
allow non-party members to vote in their primaries unless the party chooses to do so – forcing the political party to allow non-members to vote when the party rules do not permit this is a violation of the political party’s constitutional right of freedom of association. Thus, a state cannot require a political party to have an open primary unless the party wishes to do so. The same is true for closed primaries. Connecticut’s election law required pure-closed primaries and in 1984 the Republican Party wished to allow independents to vote in their primary, holding a semi-closed primary. This was challenged by the state and the Supreme Court ruled in Tashjian v. Republican Party of Connecticut, 479 U.S. 208 (1986) that the party’s associational rights were violated by Connecticut’s pure-closed primary law. Thus, although the Connecticut Republican Party has never actually held a semi-closed primary, a state cannot restrict a political party from allowing non-party members to participate.  

In some states, then, different political parties hold different types of primaries. Moreover, the California ruling has led to some discussion of challenges to open primaries in other states and plans for changes. Democratic Governor Gray Davis has said he will push for a semi-closed primary in California and lawmakers in Washington state have stated publicly that they plan to abandon their blanket primary in 2001. Nevertheless, a significant number of states (like for example Iowa and Minnesota) still use semi-open and open primaries and these states are unlikely to change their systems in the near future. As of Fall 2000, seventeen states currently use pure-closed primaries: [Arizona, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Oregon (Democrats), Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and West Virginia (Democrats)]. Eight states have semi-closed primary systems: Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon (Republicans), Rhode Island, and West Virginia (Republicans). Semi-open primaries are used in 14 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wyoming. Pure-open primaries are used by nine states: Hawaii, Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin and two states have blanket primary systems: Alaska and Washington.

However, if you are counting above, you will realize that we are leaving one state out. In Louisiana, parties do not have primary elections at all and we call the general elections “non-partisan.” In Chapter 2, we discussed the 1991 governor’s race in Louisiana where Edwin Edwards, Buddy Roemer, and David Duke faced each other in a three-way contest. In that race, all three candidates had strong supporters but either Edwards or Roemer would have defeated Duke in a pair-wise contest since Duke was a Condorcet loser. Because Louisiana has a majority requirement and none of the three candidates received more than 50% of the vote, Duke and Edwards faced each other in a runoff election where Edwards defeated Duke. One aspect of the race we did not consider in chapter 2 is that both Duke and Roemer claimed the Republican party’s

121 Note that while these two Supreme Court rulings appear to give parties complete power to determine who participates in their primaries, there are limits. White primaries were declared unconstitutional in Smith v. Allwright, 321 U. S. 649, 1944, because “when a State prescribes an election process that gives a special role to political parties, the parties’ discriminatory action becomes state action under the Fifteenth Amendment” – which guaranteed the right to vote to racial minorities.
mantle. If the runoff election had been between Duke and Roemer, then the contest would have only been between Republicans. Louisiana is the only state to hold completely non-partisan state-wide elections, however non-partisan elections are used for many local contests and for some state-wide special elections.

Table 9-1 below summarizes these differences in primary election systems.

**Table 9-1: Primary Systems and Participation Rules**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Type</th>
<th>Participation Rules</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pure-Closed</td>
<td>Voters must declare party affiliation in advance of the primary election and can only vote in that party’s primary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Closed</td>
<td>Voting is restricted to voters who have already declared their affiliation to the party in advance and new and/or independent (non-affiliated voters).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Open</td>
<td>Voters can choose which party’s primary to vote in on election day, regardless of their party affiliation, but must do so publicly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure-Open</td>
<td>Voters can choose privately which party’s primary to vote in on election day, regardless of their party affiliation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanket</td>
<td>Voters can choose which party’s primary to vote in by office on election day, regardless of their party affiliation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Partisan</td>
<td>Voters choose between all the candidates for an office regardless of party affiliation of candidates or voters and if no candidate received more than 50% of the vote, the two top vote receivers face each other in a runoff election.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Primary Effect of Closedness**

Tom Campbell believed that California’s pure-closed primary system was the reason that he lost the nomination for the senate in 1992 and the Republicans lost the senate race. He believed that pure-closed primaries resulted in extreme candidates as Barbara Boxer and Bruce Herschensohn were perceived to be and that if the primary process was opened to non-party members, moderate candidates would be advantaged. Is he right?

**Letting in Independents**

In chapter 4, we considered how candidates choose positions in pure-closed primaries, we discovered that yes, when there is uncertainty about the preferences of the median voter in the general election, candidates in closed primaries will diverge in policy positions. Our analysis so far suggests that Campbell might be right – pure-closed primaries can lead to extreme candidates. But will changing the rules of who participates – moving to a more open primary system lead to less extreme candidates? What happens if the primary system is semi-closed? That is, the primary is closed to members of other parties, but independent voters are allowed to vote in the primary. Figure 9-2 below gives an example of a semi-closed primary.

Figure 9-2 here
As in the examples in chapter 4 (see pages xxx), we assume that the Incumbent is a member of the Liberal Party and faces no opposition. His position is at 40. There are three voters in the Conservative Party, E, F, and G, with ideal points at 70, 85, and 90, respectively. There are two candidates in the Conservative Party’s primary, O1 at 70 and O2 at 75. One change is that we assume that there are two independent voters. With 50% probability both have ideal points equal to 40 and with 50% probability they both have ideal points at 60. We assume two independent voters to make our calculation of the median voter in the Conservative party primary easier – our results would be qualitatively the same even if we only had one independent voter (or three or more).

If the primary is closed, which candidate will win? Both O1 and O2 have a 50% chance of winning against I (either would defeat I if the independent voters’ ideal points equal 60). The median voter in the Conservative Party’s primary is F and O2 is closer to F’s ideal point than O1. So F will prefer O2 and O2 will win the Conservative Party primary if the primary is closed.

What if the primary is semi-closed and the two independent voters can vote in the Conservative Party’s primary? Is F still the median voter in the Conservative Party primary? No. Now, E is the median voter in the Conservative Party’s primary. Now, what matters in the primary is which candidate gives E a higher expected utility not which candidate gives F a higher expected utility. Allowing the independents to vote in the Conservative Party’s primary makes the median voter in the Conservative Party’s primary more moderate. Does it affect which candidate wins the Conservative Party’s primary? Yes. O1 is closer to E’s ideal point than O2 (O1 is at E’s ideal point!). So E clearly prefers O1 to O2 and O1 wins the Conservative Party’s primary when the primary is semi-closed. Opening up the primary to independents does advantage moderate candidates.

What happens if there is competition in the Liberal Party’s primary? Now one or both of the Independents may choose to vote in the Liberal Party’s primary. Suppose that 50% of the time the Independents both vote in the Liberal Party’s primary and 50% of the time they vote in the Conservative Party’s primary. Then there is in the Conservative Party primary a 50% chance that the median voter there will be E and a 50% chance it will be F. Similarly, there is a 50% chance that the median voter in the Liberal Party’s primary will be more moderate if the Independents vote there. The effect of allowing the Independents to vote in the closed primaries advantages moderates in both parties!

**Summary:** When primaries are semi-closed, allowing independents to vote, moderate candidates can be advantaged. Semi-closed primaries can result in more moderate candidates winning than in pure-closed primaries.

There is one important caveat to our analysis above, however. We have been assuming that the independent voter is a moderate and that our policy space is unidimensional. But what happens in a multidimensional policy space? Clearly, semi-closed primaries will result in the candidates moving in policy space closer to where the ideal points of the independents in a multidimensional policy space are perceived by the candidates to be as well. This may mean a shifting of the liberal/conservative dimension, and perhaps less polarization but also perhaps more instability.
Letting the Opponents Choose

Nevertheless, Campbell did not work to change California from a pure-closed primary system to a semi-closed one. Campbell went further – he advocated a blanket primary (a version of an open primary as discussed above), where any voter can vote in a party’s primary regardless of party membership. Does this openness lead to moderate candidates winning as does allowing independents to vote in semi-closed primaries? It turns out that the answer is a lot more complicated than the semi-closed primary case.

**Campbell’s Hope – Sincerity**

In order to investigate the effects of openness, let us return to the example above from the semi-closed primary as shown in Figure 9-3 below:

![Figure 9-3](image)

In this example, open primaries are much the same as semi-closed primaries. That is, in the general election what matters is which candidate is closest to the Independent voters who are both the median voters in that election. If their ideal points are equal to D1 at 40, I will defeat either O1 or O2. If their ideal points are equal to D2 at 60, either O1 or O2 would defeat I. So in the choice between O1 and O2 in the Conservative Party primary, allowing Liberal Party members to vote (making the primary open) will advantage O1 since they realize that this will lead to a better outcome in the long run for the general election for them. We call the voters in the Liberal Party who vote in the Conservative Party’s primary *crossover voters* and in this case they are *sincerely crossing over* or engaging in what we call *sincere crossover voting*. We call this sincere crossover voting because the Liberal Party voters are choosing sincerely the candidate in the Conservative Party primary that has a position closest to their own ideal points. They sincerely prefer O1 to O2. Note that O1 is not their first preference and in the general election they will vote for I. But in the primary they are sincerely crossover to vote for O1 because they prefer O1 to O2. In this case, the open primary does advantage O1, the moderate candidate. In a pure-closed primary O2 would win. Campbell does seem right that open primaries can advantage moderate candidates more than closed primaries.

**Definitions:** When voters who are party members vote in the primary of a different party from the one they belong to we call them crossover voters. If they vote in the primary to advantage or help nominate a candidate that they sincerely prefer in the primary, they are engaging in sincere crossover voting.

**Wisconsin’s Customs**

Does sincere crossover voting actually take place? Consider the situation in Wisconsin, with pure-open primaries, in the first half of the 20th Century. For nearly thirty years the LaFollette family dominated the state government. They were Republicans, but a large portion of their support came from Democrats and even Socialists because of their liberal policies. The state was virtually a one-party state at the time and Democrats had little chance of winning. As Berdahl 1942 reports (page 39): “...
. . the LaFollette group always had to battle the conservative Republicans for control of that party, but usually won because Democrats, having no fight in their own party and little chance of success in the election, participated in considerable numbers in the Republican primary on the side of the LaFollettes.”

The lesson is that sincere crossover voting of Democrats did advantage candidates in the Republican party who were more moderate. It also allowed the Republican party to continue to dominate Wisconsin politics. But national politics began to intervene as the candidacy of Franklin D. Roosevelt revived the Democratic party nationally and Wisconsin Democrats began to feel hopeful. In the fall of 1932 the LaFollette faction ran incumbent Senator John J. Blaine and Governor Philip LaFollette ran for re-nomination in the Republican primary against the conservative faction’s candidates of John B. Chapple and former Governor Kohler. Berdahl relates (pages 40-41):

“. . . most Democratic leaders ‘shouted adjurations to Democrats to vote in the Democratic primaries instead of following their usual Wisconsin custom of voting in the Republican primary,’ while other Democrats such as Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana toured the state ‘crooning to Democrats that they ought to flop into the Republican primaries and vote for Senator John J. Blaine and Governor Philip F. LaFollette.’ All observers agreed that the result in the Republican primary would depend upon the extent to which Democrats stayed in their own primary, that ‘a light Democratic vote would help FaFollette, a heavy Democratic vote would aid Kohler,’ it being estimated that ‘eighty per cent of the Democrats who vote in their own party instead of voting a Republican [primary] ballot will be a loss to LaFolette.’

“As a matter of fact, 131,930 Democrats of Wisconsin did stay in their own primary on that occasion, nearly eight times as many as two years before, with the result that the conservatives carried the Republican primary, but were defeated in the November election. . . . The conclusion is clear, that in Wisconsin the party tie rests very lightly on the voter; that a considerable number of voters who consider themselves normally Democrats do not hesitate to participate in Republican primaries, not, however, to take advantage of that party, but in order to participate more effectively in advancing the principles in which they believe.”

**Campbell’s Enemy – Insincerity**

Not all crossover voting is like the story of Wisconsin in the 1920s. Nor has it been restricted to open primaries. In New Jersey in the 1930s (which used closed primaries), for example, Berdahl states that (pages 42-43): “. . . the participation of Democrats in Republican primaries became so traditional that these ‘one-day Republicans,’ as they were called, were openly bid for by the managers of the respective Republican candidates, and this in turn encouraged deals of various kinds between the respective party leaders or bosses. . . . In 1937, with the Democratic nomination for governor uncontested for Senator A. Harry Moore, but a sharp fight for the Republican nomination between two state senators, the Rev. Lester H. Clee and Clifford Powell, the Clee managers charged openly that the Democratic ‘one-day Republicans’ were being lent to the Powell faction ‘in the belief that Senator Powell would be a less difficult candidate for Senator Moore to defeat in the election,’ and predicted a large majority for
Clee ‘if the vote of ‘one-day Republicans’ was held to a minimum by the watchfulness of Clee workers at the polls.’ Clee was nominated but defeated in the election, although it was estimated that 25,000 ‘one-day Republicans’ had voted for Powell in Hudson county, the home and political stronghold of Mayor Hague [the Democratic boss of Jersey City].’

According to the observers and Clee, the New Jersey “one-day Republicans” were not crossing over sincerely to vote for a candidate they preferred but one they thought their own nominate was more likely to defeat. Why would voters engage in this behavior? Can this be a problem? Let’s return to our example above but with a different position for O2 as in Figure 9-4 below:

Figure 9-4 here

In this example, O2 would lose to I in the general regardless of whether the Independent voters’ ideal points are at 40 or 60. All three Conservative Party voters should vote for O1 since they know there is a chance for O2 to defeat I than O1 (if the independent voters’ ideal points equal 60). But the members of the Liberal Party prefer O2. They recognize that if O2 does win the Conservative Party primary I will win for sure and they prefer that to the probabilistic choice between I and O1. They will crossover and vote “insincerely” in the Conservative Party primary or “strategically” for their least preferred candidate because they believe that candidate is an easier opponent for their most preferred candidate I, like the “one-day Republicans” in Jersey City. We call this type of crossover voting strategic crossover voting.

Definitions: When voters who are party members vote in a different party’s primary for a candidate they expect will be an easier opponent to their own nominee in the general, they are engaging in strategic crossover voting.

Will O2 win the Conservative Party primary because of the strategic crossover voting? It depends on the Independent voters. If the Independent voters’ ideal points are 60, clearly they prefer O1 to I as well as to O2 and they will vote sincerely in the open primary for O1 and then again for O1 in the general election. If the Independent voters’ ideal points are at 40, however, they prefer I. They are like the Liberal Voters and may vote strategically for O2, leading to a win by O2 only to lose in the general election. Of course, since the Independent voters’ ideal points are at 40, it really doesn’t matter whether O1 or O2 wins the Conservative Party’s primary as I will defeat either in the general election. Thus, the strategic crossover voting does not really affect the outcome of the general election.

Is it possible for strategic crossover voting to have an effect on the outcome of the general election? Consider the situation illustrated in Figure 9-5 below:

Figure 9-5

Suppose that there are three Independent voters. One Independent voter votes in the primary and has an ideal point equal to D1. The other two Independent voters are “new” voters and did not register in time to vote in the primary so will only vote in the
general election. Moreover, there is uncertainty about their ideal points. That is, with 50% probability both have ideal points equal to D1 and with 50% probability they both have ideal points equal to D2. In the Conservative Party’s primary A, B, C, and the Independent voter will vote strategically for O2 and O2 will win, thus ensuring a victory by I in the general election. In this example, strategic crossover voting does lead to a change in the electoral outcome if both of the new voters have ideal points equal to 60. If the strategic crossover voting had not occurred, O1 would have defeated O2 in the Conservative Party’s primary and won the general election. Note that in this example the strategic crossover voting changes the outcome because some voters do not vote in the primary. If all the Independent voters voted in the primary then the strategic crossover voting would not have been consequential.

One important issue with crossover voting is that we have assumed that there is not a contest in the Liberal Party’s primary. What would happen if both parties were having contests in their primaries? As we discussed about Wisconsin, Wisconsin Democrats were torn between crossover sincerely and voting for the LaFollette candidates and voting within their party for their own party’s candidates. It is conceivable that Conservative Party members would strategically crossover to vote for an extreme candidate in the Liberal Party while the Liberal Party voters are strategically crossover to vote for an extreme candidate in the Conservative Party, leading to two very extreme candidates in the general election instead of moderates! Such an outcome is possible, but highly unlikely. Typically for strategic crossover voting to be successful a large number of party members must be prepared to engage in this type of behavior, to coordinate and be a group of “one-day” Republicans or Democrats. It should be no surprise that the examples of concerted and organized strategic crossover voting mentioned above come from the era when many state and local political parties were still controlled by machines or bosses as in Jersey City and such coordination was easier to manage.

What does this mean for Campbell’s idea that open primaries will help California elect more moderates? Do open primaries lead to more moderate candidates than closed primaries? Campbell believed that if the Republican primary had been open in 1992, Democratic and Independent voters would have sincerely crossover and voted for him, he would have won the nomination and defeated Boxer in the general election. Clearly, sincere crossover voting does advantage moderate candidates and opening up closed primaries to independents as in semi-closed voters can help nominate moderate candidates. But when primaries become open the other party members can crossover either sincerely or strategically. Crossover sincerely advantages moderates in open primaries like it does in closed primaries. But crossover strategically can advantage extremist candidates. Thus, open primaries may not necessarily lead to more moderate candidates if strategic crossover is likely.

We have not mentioned much the difference between semi-open and pure-open and crossover voting. Since semi-open requires a voter to publicly announce in some fashion which party’s primary he or she is voting in, some voters may be reluctant to do so. Recall in chapter 6 when Royko told how Daley won the mayorship of Chicago partly because his opponent was unable to convince Republican voters to publicly crossover and vote in the Democratic primary. Royko wrote (1971, pages 89-91):
“Kennelly’s campaign strategy . . . was to offset the vote in the strong Machine wards with a huge protest vote in the outlying residential wards, where the precinct captain’s influence was minimal. The only flaw in that plan was that the outlying wards were where the Republicans had their greatest strength, and persuading them to vote in a Democratic primary, requiring public declaration of their party preference, would be a neat trick.”

Hence, we might expect that both sincere and strategic crossover are more likely in pure-open primaries, like Wisconsin, than in semi-open primaries, like Illinois.

| Summary: When primaries are open, sincere crossover voting by members of another party can advantage moderate candidates. But strategic crossover voting is possible and it can advantage extreme candidates at the expense of moderates. |
| Summary: Pure-open primaries potentially lessen the stability in policy choices that our two-party system gives us and may lead to a greater degree of non-transitivity in policy choices. |

Does the Theory Fit the Data?

So far, we have seen that Campbell is partly right – opening up pure-closed primaries to independents as in semi-closed primaries should result in more moderates elected, or at least a decrease in polarization of the political parties if independents and new voters are moderates. When primaries are open and crossover voting is “primarily” sincere, then open primaries should also result in more moderates elected than in closed primaries and less polarization. However, the potential of strategic voting and a greater degree of non-transitivity in policy choices in open primaries, may mean that we cannot predict what types of candidates will be selected in such systems. But theory is one thing, the real world is another. Is the theory supported by the data?

In Chapter 3, we saw that in general Republicans and Democrats choose different positions. But how much does the type of primary system account for these differences?
Are Republicans and Democrats from closed primaries more extreme than their counterparts from semi-closed or open primaries? Of course, voter preferences also vary across Congressional districts. The median voter ideal point in some southern Congressional districts is likely to be more conservative than the median voter ideal point in a district in the northeast.

In order to test whether the type of primary system affects whether moderate candidates are elected, we need is a measure of extremism— a measure of how different a member of Congress’ ADA score is from the median voter ideal point in his or her district. Gerber and Morton 1998 provide a measure of the median voter ideal points across Congressional Districts for 1982-1990 on a 100 point scale like the ADA scores. We can look to see how far members of Congress’ ADA scores are from their respective median voters. We can call the difference between a member’s ADA score and his or her district’s median voter’s ideal point, Extreme. Of course, the sign of Extreme should vary by party membership of the Congress person. That is, extreme Republicans will have lower ADA scores than the median voter ideal points in their districts and extreme Democrats will have higher ADA scores than the median voter ideal points in their districts, Extreme will be generally negative for Republicans and positive for Democrats. So that we can look in general at extremism, we transform the Republican extreme scores to be positive so that higher numbers means a member of Congress has taken more extreme positions than his or her median voter’s ideal point.

Figure 9-6 presents the mean values of our measure of Extremism for members of Congress from 1982-1990 by primary system. The last bar shows the average degree of Extremism across all members of Congress. On average, members of Congress choose policy positions 23.28 points (on a 100 point scale) more extreme than their median voters’ ideal points. For example, if the ideal point of the median voter is 50, then the average member of Congress (if a Democrat) has an ADA score of 73.28 and (if a Republican) of 26.72.

The data show that the empirical relationship between openness and extremism is complicated. The first bar on the graph shows the mean measure of Extremism for members from Closed Primaries, which is 25.16. This means that on average, Members of Congress elected in closed primaries are 25 points (on a 100 point scale) more extreme than our estimate of their median voter ideal points. Opening up primaries to Independents and/or new voters in Semi-closed primaries does lead to more moderate candidates, on average members of Congress elected from semi-closed primaries are 21.34 points more extreme. Opening up primaries further to all non-members (crossover voters) but requiring the participants to publicly choose to vote in the party’s primary also leads to more moderate members of Congress, 20.15 points more extreme. However, opening up primaries to “private” crossover voting in pure-open primaries leads to members of Congress who choose positions on average 29.35 points more extreme, choosing positions more extreme than candidates chosen from pure-closed primaries! And blanket primaries lead to members of Congress choosing positions about as extreme as those selected from pure-closed primaries.

What does this data then tell us? It shows that when primaries are opened to Independents and/or new voters or to people who publicly cross party lines to vote (as in semi-closed and semi-open primaries) candidates may choose more moderate positions
than in pure-closed primaries to appeal to these voters. But when primaries are open to “private” crossover voting and to crossover voting by race as in pure-open and blanket primaries, candidates are not necessarily drawn to moderate positions and may choose positions more extreme than those selected in pure-closed primaries. Our results suggest that Campbell is right about opening up primaries to independents, but that pure-open primaries may lead to less predictable types of candidates.122

Not surprisingly, members of Congress selected from non-partisan elections are closest to the median voter ideal points in their districts, choosing positions on average 10.11 more extreme. This is largely the effect of the combination of non-partisan elections with majority requirements. Notice that members of Congress from states with runoff requirements are on average only 15.23 points from their respective median voter ideal points, significantly less extreme than those selected from states without runoff requirements who are on average 25.77 points from their respective median voter ideal points.

Summary: The empirical evidence on whether opening up primaries leads to more moderate candidates is mixed. Opening up primaries to Independents, new voters, and/or non-party members who publicly cross party lines can lead to more moderate candidates, but opening up primaries to “private” crossover voting and crossover voting by race, may lead to more extreme candidates. Non-partisan elections with runoff requirements lead to the most moderate candidates and runoff requirements in general lead to more moderate candidates.

The empirical analysis above suggests that opening up primaries broadly does not lead to moderation and may even lead to more extremism. We argued above that this may be due to strategic voting and greater instability in party positions. Different primary systems may also reduce the ability of the status quo major parties to dominate electoral competition if they affect the decisions candidates make about how to enter (i.e. whether to enter as a major party, minor party, or independent) which can also increase instability. We consider the effects of primary systems on the choices of how candidates enter next.

Major versus Minor Leagues

An Unlikely Route to Deanhood

In 1998, the “Dean of Massachusetts House Delegation” (i.e. the senior member of the House of Representatives from the state) was Joe Moakley, Representative of the 9th District. Moakley is a prominent Democrat, serving on the House Rules Committee and, during the years that the Democrats controlled the House (before Newt Gingrich’s

122 Of course many factors may affect a Member of Congress’ extremism, see Kanthak and Morton, forthcoming, for a multivariate analysis of the data. They demonstrate that the patterns shown in the figure are statistically significant.
success in 1994), Moakley used the Rules to restrict the influence of the minority party and to secure the ability of Democrats to be winners in the government process. Yet Moakley was not first elected to the House as a Democrat but an Independent just as Bernie Sanders now serves in Congress as an Independent. Once elected, Moakley, unlike Sanders, ran for re-election as a Democrat, so his use of Independent Status when he first won was a temporary expedient. Why did he choose to run as an Independent and what does Moakley’s story tell us about the role of parties in elections?

**Primary Status of the Majors**

In order to answer these questions we need to assess more broadly how potential candidates choose whether to enter as major party, minor party, or independent candidates. Our analysis so far has exclusively examined the effects of different primary election systems when potential candidates can only be elected if they are first nominated by one of the major parties – and that there are only two major parties. But as Figure 5-4 shows, there are two flows through which candidates can move through the electoral process – they can compete for a party nomination or they can run as an independent in the general election. They may also choose to compete as a nominee of a minor and/or new party. As we saw in Chapter 2, it is possible that an Independent or Minor Party candidate can win in American Elections. James Buckley in 1970 was elected to the Senate as a candidate from the Conservative Party as Jesse Ventura was elected Governor of Minnesota in 1998 as a Reform Party candidate.

In chapter 5 we argued that the parties use primaries as a way to channel dissent and that the porousness of primaries allows for insurgents and dissidents to influence party positions, maintaining the status quo two-party domination of policy. We also contended that electoral rules that make ballot access easier for candidates who work through the party system and encourages voters to use party labels as part of the process of choosing elected officials makes parties, and in particular the two major parties, matter in forming electoral coalitions in American politics.

When Joe Moakley first ran for Congress he chose the route of expressing dissent through the major party primary recognizing the role that the party system played. He ran for the Democratic nomination in 1970 but he faced a highly visible anti-busing mayor of Boston, Louise Day Hicks and lost the nomination.

**Does Openness Matter?**

If direct primaries are a means by which the major parties allow dissent to be expressed through them and not through minor parties or independent candidacies and voters are encouraged to see the major parties as funnels through which electoral coordination occurs – then perhaps the more open the parties’ primaries are to participation, then the more likely the major parties might dominate electoral coalition formation? One way to think about Tom Campbell’s campaign to open the primary process in California is that, as a dissident from the dominant Republican conservatives in the state, Campbell believed that the Republican party was not sufficiently listening to the moderate dissenters such as himself. Republicans lost the Senate race as a result, he believed. A more open primary process might help dissents and allow for larger support for the Republican party in the general election as voters coordinated more on the Republican label. Cox 1997 expresses this view (page 172):

“The more valuable is running with a major-party label rather than without, and the more permeable is the major party’s nomination process,
the more likely are new groups or would-be candidates to ‘infiltrate’ the major party, rather than start a new party, in accord with the old adage: If you can’t beat them, join them.”

Is Cox right? Does increasing permeability help two-party domination? In order to answer this question, consider a simple situation where there is a group of voters who are “dissidents” – unhappy with either major party’s policy positions. One way to think about dissidents is that they represent voters who are not a majority of the electorate nor are they a majority within either party. For example, they may be moderate voters who find both major parties’ positions too extreme (Tom Campbell’s idea) or they may be voters who want a more conservative or liberal position than either party has adopted on a single issue like abortion policy (our left out voters in chapter 5, like Jesse Ventura). Some of the dissidents are already members of the major parties and some are Independents. As explained above, as the primary system becomes more open, candidates find it more optimal to appeal to the dissidents since openness allows Independents and members of the other party to vote in the party’s primary who may also be dissidents. Furthermore, potential candidates who have preferences like those of dissident voters may find it more optimal to enter and compete for major party nominations when primary systems are open. But when primary systems are closed, they are more likely to run outside major party competition. Thus, we might expect that party’s primaries in open primary states should exhibit greater competition (more candidates) than in closed primary states. If the group is a moderate group which finds both parties too extreme, open primary states may facilitate the selection of moderate candidates by the major parties. But if the group wants a more conservative or more liberal position on an issue and finds both parties more moderate, open primary states may facilitate the selection of less moderate candidates by the major parties.

However, openness may also effect the ability of party labels to work as coordination devices and can also effect how dissidents choose where to compete and their type of competition. In closed primary states, voters are asked whether they wish to declare a party affiliation. If they do not so declare, they cannot participate in the nomination process. In these states, voters are encouraged to use party labels as coordinating devices in general elections. They are encouraged to use the party process as a method of coordination by the institutionalization of parties as the method through which the candidates in the general election are selected. A dissident candidate who does not have the support she needs within a major party and chooses to enter in the general election may find it preferable to choose to run under a minor party label than as an independent. Since party labels have meaning in closed primary states – the minor party label is more meaningful than running as an Independent as voters are encouraged to use party labels to coordinate.

In contrast, open primary states vary in the extent that voters are asked their party affiliation – in some they are asked their party preferences but in others the question is never posed (such as Iowa currently). Moreover, in open primary states voters are actively encouraged to cross party lines in primary elections – they are purposefully discouraged from using party labels as Daley’s opponent tried in Chicago.

As a result, voters are more likely to use “candidate-centered” coordination devices such as polls and campaign contributions. But these can be perhaps even used more easily by an Independent candidate than a party nominee. A dissident who chooses
to enter general election competition may find it optimal to enter as an Independent rather than a minor or even major party candidate. Thus, we should see more minor party competition in closed primary states than in open primary states and we should see more independent candidates in open primary states than in closed primary states.

The discouragement of using party labels also can make major party labels less useful for potential candidates even though under open primaries the nomination process may be more permeable. A consequence of this and the potential of strategic crossover in open primaries may mean that major party competition is less in open primaries than in semi-closed ones as some potential candidates simply choose to run as Independents.

Summary:

• There should be greater competition within primaries (more major party candidates in primaries) in semi-closed and open primary states than in closed primary states since dissident voters are more likely to participate and this will attract candidates. However, semi-closed primary states are likely to have greater competition than open primary ones as the decreased use of party labels and the potential of strategic crossover makes entry as an Independent in a general election more advantageous in comparison to entry as a major party candidate in a primary.

• There should be more minor party competition in general elections in closed primary states rather than open ones as dissident candidates enter general elections rather than primaries and as minor party candidates because party labels are meaningful.

• There should be more independent candidates in general elections in open primary states than closed ones as voters in these states use party labels less as coordination devices and independent candidates can attract these voters through other coordination mechanisms.

• Finally, opening up primary systems, by loosening the control of the major party mainstream party members over the nomination of candidates and the election of candidates allows dissident groups better ability to elect candidates of their choice who may be more or less “moderate” than the choice of mainstream party members.

Theory Meets the Data Again . . .

Are the conclusions that we reach above true? When we examine electoral competition, does major party domination vary as predicted across primary systems? First, we examine evidence on the contention that voters use party labels less in more open primary systems. One way to measure this is to consider how many voters are “self-declared” independents when interviewed in surveys. Erikson, Wright, and McIver 199x present data by state on voter declaration of independence. Note that this data is not how many voters are party members but rather their personal view of their party identification – regardless of how they may be registered in their state, do they think of themselves as Republicans, Democrats, or as Independents. The figures for this are shown in Figure 9-7.

Figure 9-7 here
Voters in pure-closed primary states are least likely to think of themselves as independents. Interestingly, voters in semi-closed primaries are most likely to think of themselves as independents. Therefore, evidence does exist that voters in more open primary states are less likely to think of themselves as party members. Does this lower use of party labels have the predicted effect on competition?

Figure 9-8 presents the percentage of Congressional races that were contested by one or more independent candidates by primary type. Notably, more Congressional races are contested by Independents when primaries are less closed. The aggregate data supports the argument that openness attracts dissidents to compete for party nominations but that openness also has a negative effect on the ability of parties in general to control electoral coalition formation.

Figure 9-8

We began our discussion of candidate entry by the puzzle of Joe Moakley, mainstream and dominant Democrat today, entry into the House of Representatives as an Independent. Our analysis helps us understand why Moakley was first elected in this fashion. Moakley first tried to win nomination to the House in competition with Louise Day Hicks in the Massachusetts Democratic primary in 1970 but lost. In 1972, Joe Moakley chose to challenge Hicks as an Independent rather than in the Democratic primary and defeated her by 5,000 votes. Massachusetts is a semi-closed primary state, and Moakley gambled that he could build an electoral coalition of voters using a candidate-centered approach and won the gamble. Once elected, however, he chose to work as a Democrat as one of the winners in the policy making process and ran as a Democrat in elections thereafter – using both the party and candidate-centered coordination mechanisms to keep his coalition of supporters dominant.

Policy Divergence Over Time and Electoral Institutions

So far we have focused on the determinants of party policy positions and policy stability as a function of different states’ candidate nomination procedures. Our analysis has concentrated on the way in which these different state systems work currently. But, we began our discussion with the history of political parties in American elections. We made the assertion that American electoral laws and institutions determine how parties are involved in American elections and the extent that parties matter. American political parties evolved as the founding fathers and early leaders (Jefferson, Madison) realized that they needed to elect officials that agreed within them on policy in order to form winning coalitions at the policy making stage. The expansion of the franchise to a large portion of the population (albeit still only white males) coupled with the institutionalization of direct voter involvement in the selection of the electoral college led later leaders to build electoral coalitions from the state level up – working with existing state parties and forming new state parties out of factions. The spoils system provided

123 In Gerber and Morton 1999, a more comprehensive empirical analysis of candidate types by primary systems is presented controlling for differences in ballot access laws and other factors such as incumbent quality which affects these levels. The pattern of the raw data is supported by the more sophisticated empirical analysis.

124 It is interesting to contrast Sanders, Independent from Vermont, with Moakley. Sanders has also been accepted by the Democratic coalition within the House even though he maintains his Independent electoral status whereas Moakley quickly abandoned Independentness once elected.
rewards that the national coalition could distribute to state and local party machines (who
distributed their own spoils as well).

Losers in the electoral game under the machine/spoils system instituted reforms of
the electoral process – direct primaries, ballot access laws, etc. These reforms affected
the way in which parties mattered in the process of electoral coalition formation. The
direct primary and restriction of ballot access outside of the major parties allowed the two
major parties to control the process by which electoral coalitions are formed as we have
discussed above. We have seen how differences in primary systems affect both the
divergence in party positions across the states and the ability of the existing major parties
to control electoral coalitions across the states.

We also expect that these changes in the rules over time affect the divergence in
party positions and their ability of the existing parties to control electoral coalitions over
time. As we noted in chapter 5, Poole and Rosenthal, 1997, have extensively analyzed
the dimensionality of Congressional voting and find that in general, Congressional voting
over time can be captured by two dimensions – the main liberal/conservative dimension
that separates the parties that we have highlighted and varying second dimensions that
cross-cut the parties. When the second dimension becomes “intense” as with slavery
prior to the Civil War, the party structure breaks down, i.e. we have instability. The
second dimension has varied in its intensity – and currently Congress is almost
completely unidimensional (all voting by members of Congress appear to be along the
single liberal/conservative dimension created by the party positions).

Interestingly, there have been periods where the second dimension is important
without significant instability. For example, from the New Deal period until fairly
recently – Poole and Rosenthal contend that there was essentially a relatively stable
three-party alignment within Congress, Northern Democrats, Southern Democrats, and
Republicans for this period. The stability of three political parties choosing distinct
positions shaped the meaning of liberal/conservative into two-dimensions.

During this time, southern Democrats were allowed to engage in serious
disfranchisement of voters as we saw in the beginning of this book with our story of
Gomillion. Southern Democrats aligned with northern Democrats for control over
Congress and the presidency as long as the federal government did not engage in civil
rights legislation and southern Democrats could maintain their control over their state
policies. When the civil rights movement began to force northern party members to
confront the disconnection between some of the more populist policies Democrats
advocated during the New Deal and subsequently with their support of the suppression of
blacks in the south, the two regions of the party began to break apart and southern
Democrats began to vote increasingly more with Republicans. Interestingly, the parties
realigned on the issue of civil rights, as carefully documented by Carmines and Stimson.

Before the early 1960s, Republicans were consistently slightly more liberal on civil and
voting rights issues than Democrats. But after 1964, and the election of Lyndon Johnson,
the Democratic party became more liberal on civil and voting rights issues than the
Republican party. With the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1964, the increase in
black voting in the south (and north, as black voting strength was increased in general,
see Filer, Kenny, and Morton) led to more two-party politics in the south and less of a
disconnection between northern and southern Democrats and the demise of our
temporary three party system. Currently, as noted above, Poole and Rosenthal find that the Congress is basically entirely unidimensional.

Poole and Rosenthal also find significant variation in the polarization of the political parties along the liberal/conservative dimension over time. Most noteworthy is that there is a lot of evidence that polarization is increasing – that the positions of the political parties are more divergent in our liberal/conservative dimension than in previous recent decades. The increasing divergence is a puzzle for many political scientists and many different explanations have been proposed (see the review by Fiorina 1999 for example). These two things, the increased unidimensionality of Congressional voting – the transforming from a three-party to a two-party domination of federal elections and the apparent increasing divergence within that dimension – the increasing polarization of the two parties seem related and probably reflect changing control over the electoral coalitions that determine these party positions. In fact, I wonder if the concern over polarization is misplaced since it essentially assumes that the liberal/conservative dimension is fixed and that the parties are moving along it over time, rather than that the whole line may be shifting and increasing/decreasing polarization may just reflect our abilities to measure accurately the dimension as it changes. That we see these two things together, increasing unidimensionality and polarization suggests that we should not separate them from each other.

Do changes in electoral rules during this period explain the increasing unidimensionality and polarization? There have been a number of changes in our electoral institutions since World War II. Principally, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its subsequent amendments and expansions has, as noted above, vastly changed the ability of minority groups to vote and participate in the electoral process. A related important change for American elections took place with the Supreme Court ruling in the early 1960s that legislative districts be re-apportioned after each national census such that there was a relatively equal apportionment of voters per elected legislator in a state.

Another large change in our electoral system was the expansion in the use of primaries to select presidential nominees. While parties have used primaries to select nominees for many lower level offices since the turn of the century, not until the reforms of the Democratic party nomination procedure which took place in 1972 did presidential primaries predominate our presidential candidate selection process.

One aspect of these reforms and the reforming that continues – for example, Campbell’s movement which changed California from a closed primary state to one with blanket primaries (albeit only temporarily) – is the role played by those affected by the rules in changing the rules. In attempting to build an electoral coalition, early leaders expanded the franchise, which led to the demise of King Caucus. The Progressives wanted to change the nature of the way party politics worked in American elections and through their reforms did so. The Voting Rights Act was passed in response to the courageous efforts of civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King. Presidential nomination procedures changed in response to the divisive 1968 Democratic convention which many felt showed a party elite out of town with local party members. The changes changed the balance of winners and losers in each case – the electoral coalitions. The inherent instability in multidimensional issue space probably means that these changes are inevitable, however, our system has stayed amazingly stable throughout these changes.
For Further Reading
See Gerber and Morton, Morton and Kanthak, Carmines and Stimson, Cox, Epstein, Jewell, etc.

Study Questions and Exercises
1. Some simple problems of candidate positioning
2. Some research into candidate nomination procedures.
Chapter 10: A Final Note on the Importance of Institutions for the Study of American Elections

Unanticipated Effects

One Change Begets Another

The national Democratic nominating convention in Chicago, Illinois of 1968 was a disaster. Protestors of the Vietnam war outside the convention were constantly in the news media as well as the too enthusiastic response of Mayor Daley’s police. Many believed that the convention and the entire process that gave Hubert Humphrey the nomination was at fault, caused the party to lose the election, and that massive changes were necessary in national party organization. The party undertook reforms that fundamentally changed these processes, not just for Democrats but also for Republicans (since many of the reforms involved changing state electoral systems, Republicans were affected).

The big change was an opening up of the nominating process. Democratic leaders wanted to encourage the use of caucuses (as currently used in Iowa), but the mechanics of those are difficult (finding locations, school libraries, auditoriums, individual homes, etc. where precinct voters can meet physically at one time to discuss candidates and engage in grass-roots politiking) and there is probably a good reason they are primarily used in small states. Most states chose the easier alternative of a statewide primary. The result was that by the end of the 1970s, primaries and their outcomes dominated the selection of presidential candidates whereas previously they had only been part of that process.

But the change led to a new problem, timing. For years New Hampshire was the first state to have its presidential primary, and for years this seemed not much of a problem or important. Campaigning in New Hampshire was one way to signal to party leaders grass-roots support, but leaders still controlled the outcome. New Hampshire was advisory. But in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, New Hampshire’s first in the nation’s status was suddenly quite scary to other states as it began to count. Running, and success in New Hampshire, became important in achieving the nomination. Other states, like California, whose traditional June primary was fast becoming meaningless in determining the nomination, felt that they should be important as well. These views are captured by the comments of the Secretary of State of California in the May 6, 1996 Los Angeles Times:

“Earlier this year residents of a small New England state with a population roughly equivalent to that of California’s Alameda County were able to eat breakfast, share war stories and then intimately discuss the future of America one-on-one with a number of prominent presidential candidates. On Feb. 20, the nation watched as New Hampshire voters played a major role in determining who would be the nominees for president. Why New Hampshire? Why not Alameda County? Each has about 1.5 million residents and 700,000 registered voters. It can be argued that Alameda County, with its three professional sports franchises, world class...
university and major international port adds more to America’s gross national product than several entire states.”

California was not to be held back. In 2000, they held their presidential primary in early March, as they and other states increased a trend toward “front-loading” of presidential primaries and early decisions on presidential nominations, decisions that leave states without early primaries out of the entire nominating process. There are a number of proposals to reform the system again, by either having one national primary, or a series of regional primaries where regions “rotate” in scheduling. Morton and Williams, forthcoming, discusses the process of front-loading and the effects that timing can have on the types of presidential candidates nominated by the two major parties. The point is that the initial change of opening up the primary process led to unexpected questions about the timing of the process, questions that few, if any, anticipated in 1968.

**An Earlier Struggle over Being Early**

Yet, there is a historical precedent to our current dilemma. In chapter 9, we discussed how American elections changed in the early 19th century as increased suffrage and direct voting for the electoral college dethroned King Caucus. These changes also made timing an issue as well. State legislatures typically differed in when they met and rather than require them to choose electors on a single date, the decision was made in the Second Congress to allow for states to take a period of time to choose and required that the delegates be chosen within thirty-four days of the first Wednesday in December. The length of the time worried some in Congress who felt it might be used for intrigue while others envisioned a time of debate and consensus building, much as the reformers of the Democratic nomination process saw caucuses as the solution for rebuilding the Democratic party.

But the result of having a period of time for states to decide led to “interesting consequences.” McCormick reports (page 45): “By the time the last states voted, for example, either the results of the presidential election might already have been determined or – as in 1800 – the whole election might hinge on the vote of the final slate.” The lopsided influence of early states’ voters was noteworthy; McCormick (page 208) comments: “It was notorious that in 1840 hordes of voters, having cast ballots in their home states, crossed into neighboring states with later election days and voted a second time.” Consequently, in 1845 Congress legislated a uniform federal election day for the selection of the electors. The regular election day was extended to Congressional elections in 1872.

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125 McCormick 1982.
126 In 1845 Congress enacted 3 U.S.C. Section 1: “The electors of President and Vice President shall be appointed, in each State, on the Tuesday next after the first Monday in November, in every fourth year succeeding every election of a President and Vice President.”
127 In 1872 Congress enacted 2 U.S.C. Section 7: “The Tuesday after the first Monday in November, in every even numbered year, is established as the day for the election, in each of the States and Territories of the United States of Representatives and Delegates to the Congress commencing on the 3rd day of January next hereafter.”
The United States Supreme Court re-affirmed the right of Congress to legislate a uniform election day in *Foster v. Love*, 1997. Justice David Souter wrote in the majority opinion:

“... our judgment is buttressed by an appreciation of Congress’s object ‘to remedy more than one evil arising from the election of members of Congress occurring at different times in the different States.’ *Ex parte Yarbrough*, 110 U. S. 651, 661 (1884). As the sponsor of the original bill put it, Congress was concerned both with the distortion of the voting process threatened when the results of an early federal election in one State can influence later voting in other States, and with the burden on citizens forced to turn out on two different election days to make final selections of federal officers in presidential election years: ‘Unless we do fix some time at which, as a rule, Representatives shall be elected, it will be in the power of each State to fix upon a different day, and we may have a canvass going on all over the Union at different times. It gives some States undue advantage. . . . I can remember, in 1840, when the news from Pennsylvania and other States that held their elections prior to the presidential election settled the presidential election as effectually as it was afterward done . . . . I agree . . . that Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, by voting in October, have an influence. But what I contend is that that it is an undue advantage, that it is a wrong, and that it is a wrong also to the people of those States, that once in four years they shall be put to the trouble of having a double election.’ Cong. Globe, 42nd Cong., 2d Sess., 141 (1871) (remarks of Rep. Butler).”

A Changing System

These two stories illustrate the ever-changing nature of our electoral system. In general, the constitution is quite vague about the operation of elections, which allows for significant variation both historically and regionally. At any given point in time, we are considering new changes in our system ranging from implementing internet voting in some states to a series of regional primaries. The federalist nature of the electoral system gives states a large degree of discretion in the way in which elections are organized, resulting in innovations in different states at different times. For example, direct primaries began in Wisconsin, which quickly evolved into a pure-open type. Primaries came to other states much later and remain pure-closed. Oregon is the first state to allow for entire elections by mail and Texas was an early innovator in “early” voting.

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128 *Foster v. Love* is an interesting case in itself. As we noted in chapter 9, Louisiana is the only state with statewide nonpartisan elections for members of Congress, governor, etc. But Louisiana also, as we have discussed, uses majority requirements. When Louisiana switched from previously having closed primaries to nonpartisan elections, they scheduled the general nonpartisan election on the day they used to have primaries and then scheduled run-off elections, when held, on the traditional Congressional legislated election day. But run-off elections are rarely held, over 80% of Congressional incumbents secured victory in the first stage, making the second stage unnecessary. *Foster v. Love* while it ruled that the current dates were unconstitutional, however, did not rule that nonpartisan elections themselves are unconstitutional, and Louisiana quickly changed the dates in order to adjust to the ruling.
Over the years the discretion allowed to states to control their electoral systems has decreased with federal legislation (such as setting a single federal election day, passage of the Voting Rights Act, requiring members of Congress to be selected in single-member districts, the motor voter bill, etc.), nevertheless states still have discretion. Moreover, these measures are federal level changes that similarly reflect an electoral system in flux.

The constitution does limit to some degree our abilities to change our electoral system. For example, Tom Campbell and California voters’ desire for more open primaries was defeated by the Supreme Court ruling that this violated the rights of the political parties to free association. In Buckley v. Valeo the court ruled that involuntary federal limits on campaign spending violated the right of free speech. But within these constraints much change is still possible and changes do occur.

**Is Political Science Useful?**

Both the members of the Second Congress and the Democratic national party leaders did not fully anticipate the effects of the rule changes they made. They failed to predict that electoral rule changes that increased voter participation in decision processes (both for electors to the electoral college and presidential candidates) would upset systems of timing that worked well before the change in voter participation. Given that our electoral system is changing and that changes are proposed on a regular basis, we need to be able to engage in some prediction of the effects of these changes. Scholars of American elections should be able to help with these kinds of predictions.

Prediction is a difficult thing for a social scientist. Supposedly, it is our goal. That is, the scientific enterprise is to build a theoretical framework or understanding of how society works – for political scientists, how some aspect of politics in society works. Ideally, we can then use this framework to make predictions of how it will work in the future if we change various aspects of that framework. There are two types of possible predictions by political scientists studying American elections. There are the limited predictions that look at current elections, candidates, current electoral rules, and predict who will win, vote totals, who will run, how voters will respond, etc. etc. We do a lot of this. Then there are the broader predictions that try to draw out implications for how that our electoral system might change over time, what could happen if we make some proposed changes (or don’t), etc. We do only a little of this.

In this book, I have attempted to establish a framework from which we can view the American electoral process and how it works. But such an enterprise isn’t much use, if it doesn’t help us understand not only how things work today, but how things might work in the future as the rules change. These predictions are risky. The main reason is that we know that the framework, the theory, presented here is just a model of the American electoral process. It simplifies, it ignores, because, as we discussed in chapter 1, we cannot model without doing so.

Limited predictions are less risky and easier to make because we can try to make them as close as possible on the basis of pure description – i.e. we can take a lot of facts about voters, interest groups, candidates, parties, and use statistical analysis to tease out inferences without much theory about how these things are put together (to speak in political science methods jargon, we can maximize our “goodness of fit” of our statistical models). The shorter the time period, the more stable the election system, and the more
data we have and the more variables we can measure, the better we probably are at predicting things like election outcomes, voter behavior, etc.

Yet, even these limited predictions can fail because we only measure those things that we think are important based on past behaviors, not theory. So if something changes that never changed before, and we didn’t realize it was important, we would fail to measure it and account for it. We miss turning points. Moreover, we cannot make predictions about what will happen if we institute national presidential primaries, or Louisiana dropped its majority requirements, or we limit campaign contributions, or Congress switched from single-member districts to multi-member districts, or we adopt voting over the internet, or we allow for national referenda, or we make other proposed changes in our election system. For that we need to turn to our theory and model.

The dilemma for political scientists is that we need theory to make meaningful predictions, predictions that society needs for us to make, but that theory means that our predictions are fundamentally flawed because of what our theory does not cover (and we don’t know what the flaws are or we would fix them).

Using Theory to Make Predictions

Changing One Thing at a Time . . .

Some things fall effortlessly out of the analysis in this book. For example, our theory tells us that political parties are more likely to be responsive to voters who are mobilized by benefit-seeking groups. Our theory tells us that increasing the information levels of voters can reduce the influence of campaign contributions on elections. Our theory tells us that changing primary election rules on participation can affect candidate policy positions and the stability of the two-party domination of elections. Our theory tells us that if we control the reporting in the media about elections, reporting of polls for example, this may make it more difficult for voters to coordinate through common expectations about election outcomes.

The framework we have built in this book can provide a very useful way of looking at some of the changes that have been proposed. For example, how would internet voting affect our electoral system? Some of the possible effects of internet balloting are already discussed in chapter 7. In general, internet voting clearly lowers the cost of voting for some voters, much as mail-in and early balloting does. The capability to engage in internet voting varies by income and education, of course, so internet balloting may change the distribution of voters who participate and the policy positions of the candidates as a consequence. Internet balloting also can potentially lead to an increase in vote buying – as it is possible for the vote buyer to observe the voter’s choice as they choose if the voting takes place in a private setting, something that the secret ballot currently prevents. Moreover, internet balloting done in a family or social situation blurs the distinction between the social selective-incentives involved in mobilization by a group (perhaps benefit-seeking) and bribery. This is just one illustration of how the analysis established in this book can be used to consider proposed changes in our electoral system.

Looking Beyond Individual Changes

Yet, looking at these individualistic changes can make us miss the overall effect of a group of changes. Condorcet’s paradox (and the implications of Arrow’s Theorem) tells us that our system has an inherent instability, which, we have argued, is “managed” such that we avoid chronic instability. In the short run, this happens through the fixed
political positions of the two major parties, an electoral system that advantages coordination into these parties, and the uncertainty of voter choices. In the long run, this happens through a system that both gives tremendous advantages to the status quo and the existing major political parties which, through their own “managed” porousness, adapt over time to insurgents and dissidents, and “manage” to control electoral coalition formation.

The individualistic changes can affect this larger picture and do. And often in unexpected ways. When Minnesota enacted public financing of elections, I doubt if many anticipated that this would help Jesse Ventura defeat both major party candidates for the governor. But it happened because anticipating public financing allowed Ventura to borrow money in anticipation of monies to come, and coupled with voters who are used to thinking beyond party labels in Minnesota pure-open primary system, Ventura could use these expenditures to build a candidate-centered campaign, to create the expectation that he could be one of the “contenders” and to induce supporters to vote by mobilizing new voters (and post election contributors). All of these factors, public financing, pure-open primaries, the importance of voter expectations and mobilization, gave him his surprise victory. It is all perfectly predictable yet it turned out to be perfectly unpredictable.

Can this happen nationwide? Is it possible for an independent or minor party candidate to surprise the nation in the same way? It seems highly unlikely. Only a few states use pure-open primaries. Mobilizing voters nationally is extremely difficult. Ballot access laws that advantage the major parties, a news media that is dominated by reports on major party candidates is much more difficult to crack. Yet, public financing of elections has led to what appears to be an increased effort by some minor party candidates. Ralph Nader made it quite plain in his campaign for the presidency in 2000 that his goal was to achieve at least 5% of the vote and qualify for public financing for the Green party in the future. Nader argues that he is building a coalition for the future, to replace one of the major parties. It may be that the edge given to minor parties by public financing can have long standing effects on the dominance of our two major parties.

Whether Nader is successful or not, his efforts illustrate an important point – that if we ignore individuals like him and Ventura we fail to really understand how our electoral system operates and how it may change over time. I believe that political scientists failed to anticipate fully the success of Ventura because of the heavy reliance on empirical data – facts – as the main way we understand the electoral process. The facts are against Ventura. The limited prediction says, no way can he win – independent and minor party candidates rarely win, they usually are flukes, and we can just safely ignore them since they don’t amount to much in our numbers from the past. But with theory, we can see that the combination of various factors – public financing, a pure-open primary system, increased mobilization of new voters, the role of expectations in determining election outcomes, that can lead to an outcome outside the range of prediction allowed by using facts alone.

The Ventura case shows that when we study American elections, we should not ignore the consequence of our electoral institutions on the choices of voters, candidates, parties, and interest groups. Our electoral institutions fundamentally shape these choices and unless we understand how this happens, we will fail to truly understand voters,
candidates, parties or interest groups. My goal in this book is to convey some of the current work on these processes to a broader audience. But that research is, as is our electoral system, in the process of change as well. Furthermore, I have only presented a part of that research as it is not only expanding but it is quite vast. My hope is that this work will lead readers to further study in these processes – to the literature cited in this book as well as other related works. There are many remaining interesting questions about the complicated process that I have tried to simplify here and I encourage the reader to explore.