

Section Plan 3 - Are Elections Undemocratic or the *Sine Qua Non* of Democracy?

Gov 97

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Introduction:

- We're moving into the modern empirical context but will keep the theoretical discussion going
- It's worth systematizing our concept of modern democracy. For today:
 - Modern democracy as a noun (procedural): Representative system of government [in which people select their reps through free and fair elections?]
 - Empirically, that means elections, and it means free and fair to distinguish from authoritarian regimes, most of which hold elections at this point
 - *Note, as Manin does, that representatives need not be chosen via election--lot, heredity, and examination are other options. Modern empirical reality is that this first arrow election, and this is what we are going to discuss, but keep in mind that theoretically this need not be.*
 - "Democratic" as an adjective (normative)
 - What might "democratic" denote?
 - egalitarianism?
 - representativeness
 - inclusiveness?
 - competitiveness?
 - accountability?
 - Separating into the 2 allows us to do 2 things:
 - Ask, why is this procedure considered democratic?
 - Make comparisons between similar institutional structures w/ different outcomes in terms of "normative" aspects of democracy

Big Q's

- How democratic is modern democracy?
- What kind of representatives do elections produce?
- What kind of policies do elected representatives make?
- Are these outcomes "democratic"?
- Where do parties and interest groups fit into this process?
- What is public opinion, where does it come from, and how does it get formed into policy?

Diagram:

Idealized vs. "real-life" democratic process. Put simpler versions of system on board: direct democracy, then republican model

- **THE PEOPLE** (includes voters, public opinion, interest groups, media, PIE, institutions)
- **ELECTED REPS** (esp. role of parties):
- **POLICY OUTPUT**

Today we'll ask, under what conditions does this modern schema produce a representative

system?

I. THE PEOPLE

Ideally, what characteristics do we want a voter to have?

- rational
- clear on their policy preferences
- clear on their facts (educated)
- responsive to new circumstances and information (able to learn)

Let's see where this week's authors weigh in. (*Put chart on board; fill in as you go*)

Voters are...	Downs	Schumpeter	Bartels
Rational?	Yes	No	No
Clear policy pref.s?	Yes	No	No
Educated? (facts)	Only when not costly	No	No
Responsive to info?	Yes	Will comes from interest groups and parties	Barely

Q: Just a note on this criterion, "rational." What is the "rationality" in rational choice theory? What do we mean when we say a voter is rational (or not)?

Rationality: people weigh costs and benefits to maximize their own utility

- Critique 1: takes preferences as given and exogenous (this is changing, but still super hard)
- Critique 2: does not allow for ethical considerations (i.e. it is an ends-driven theory, doesn't allow for means-based decisions irrespective of ends)
 - Critique 2a: if you expanded the definition of utility (or ends) to include ethical/ means-based logics then the theory becomes non-falsifiable
 - You either need to define people's preferences *ex ante* (which opens it up to criticism; sometimes the assumption is defensible, sometimes not); or, you say *ex post*, the person acted in this way, therefore it was rational
 - In the second instance, it is descriptive analysis--not a testable (falsifiable) theory

Downs: (1957)

Transition: Downs is a political theorist who gives a famous rationalist view on the individual voter.

Q: Why doesn't everyone vote, according to Downs' theory?

- Voting is costly
- Some ppl are indifferent
- They know others will vote so democ will be preserved

Q: Why does anyone vote at all?

- Some ppl's preferences are so strong they outweigh the costs of voting
- The rewards are different for different people
 - Rewards:
 - benefits gained from democracy
 - how much you want a party to win (some people are indifferent)
 - how close you think the election will be (how much you expect your vote to matter)
 - how many other citizens will vote (this affects how likely it is your vote will be decisive/matter *and* how likely it is that democracy will continue)
 - They know others will vote so democ will be preserved
 - But then you're trying to figure out what other people think the voter turn out will be -- "a maze of conjectural variation" (267)
 - But under this formulation, democracy is rationally unsustainable
 - "sense of social responsibility independent of their own short-run gains or losses" (267)
- Some people will vote because of a sense of social responsibility, especially if they gain a lot from democracy and can afford to vote
- Q: Okay, so some people will vote; others won't. But how are these voting types distributed in society? Why might low-income voters have disproportionately less political power than high-income voters, according to Downs' model?
 - Cost of voting and cost of information more likely to outweigh benefits

Q: What about the concept of political culture--that we might participate not because of rational calculation about our own payoffs but because our culture tells us we should do so? Does this idea show up anywhere in Downs?

- He adds an aspect of social responsibility, or the value from voting per se, to the model which says that some will vote, others won't. But in Downs, it's not because of social pressure--it's because of the huge cost/tiny probability that democracy will collapse. It depends on my gains from democracy and my guess about how many others will vote.

Later rational theorists try to amend the model to account for this (Downs' original model actually *underpredicts* voter turnout): William Riker and Peter Ordeshook, in "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting" (1968)

$$R = pB - C + D$$

where

R = the reward gained from voting in a given election (R , then, is a proxy for the probability that the voter will turn out)

p = probability of vote "mattering"

B = "utility" benefit of voting--differential benefit of one candidate winning over the other

C = costs of voting (time/effort spent)

D = citizen duty, goodwill feeling, psychological and civic benefit of voting (this term is not included in Downs's original model)

Schumpeter: (1987)

Transition: Schumpeter has a very different view of the voter. It begins with his critique of the concept of the individual will and the common will.

Q: Schumpeter begins his theory of the individual voter by problematizing a classic, idealistic definition of democracy. *Read classic definition:*

- “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will.” p.206
- Q: What does he think is wrong with it?
 - Assumptions about people.
 - Common good isn't unique or obvious. You just have a bunch of individual wills. Even if there's such a thing as “the will of the people,” it's not the same as the will of the majority.
 - What doubts does Schumpeter raise about the quality of individual wills? Individual wills are not well-formed. People are not capable of processing information well or resisting the pressure of interest groups and propaganda. He calls the individual will “an indeterminate bundle of vague impulses loosely playing about given slogans and mistaken impressions.” CPP 207
 - Worth noting the historical context of this; he is writing against socialism
- Q: What is his second model/definition of democracy?
 - “the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.” p. 214
 - Take the idea of self-rule out of it
- Link this new definition to the discussion we had about a procedural definition of democracy

Q: In Schumpeter's view, where does the common will come from?

- Quote from CPP 212 (“...Human Nature in Politics being what it is, they are able to fashion and, within very wide limits, even create the will of the people. What we are confronted with in the analysis of political processes is largely not a genuine but a manufactured will...”)
- People can't really think well in the arena of politics
- “Manufactured will” - people get manipulated by interest groups and propaganda, can't easily see that their opinion is bad

Q: What is Schumpeter's vision of a political party? (located on CPP 218, bottom of end of chapter)

- its' a pretty cynical view: “Yet this happens as everyone knows. Party and machine politicians are simply the response to the fact that the electoral mass is incapable of action other than a stampede...the psycho-technics of party management and party advertising, slogans, and marching tunes are not accessories. They are of the essence of politics.”

Q: So how does Schumpeter weigh in on our view of the ideal-type democratic voter?

Bartels (contemporary - 2008)

Transition: Bartels shares a pessimistic view of voters, but he corroborates Schumpeter's theorizing with some empirical evidence.

- Problematizes our ideas about voters rationality
- Clear on policy preferences?
 - No - pick issue positions on candidate they already prefer
- Clear on facts?
 - No - not about "how things are going," not even for informed voter
 - ex. biased beliefs about recession and deficit in favor of their own party
- Responsive to new circumstances or information?
 - They are responsive to political ads, but only in the short-term
 - Long-term influence on informed voters
 - But is this a good source of information anyway?
- Rational?
 - No: prefer candidates to "look competent" in photos
 - No: punish representatives for shark attacks (stuff they don't control)
 - No: short-sighted (recency effects)
 - the economy the year before the election matters the most

- DISCUSSION QUESTION: Which view of the voter do you find most convincing?
Anyone want to defend Downs against his critics?

II. ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES AND POLICY OUTPUT

Transition: So now we have a picture of the voter in modern democracy - we've complicated the first part of our ideal-type diagram. Let's pivot to the next part of our modern democratic process - the selection of representatives and the making of policy.

What do we think our ideal representative and policy should be?

- *Representative of the people*
 - *How? Descriptive? Interest-based? Single-issue? Bundle of issues?*
- *Accountable*
 - *Answerable to the people in policy decisions?*
- *Should policy look like what people say they want? What "should" be their interests? According to some understanding of national interest or common good?*

Manin

Manin helps us think in broad terms about how these things actually work. How do voters choose representatives - this is the first arrow on our diagram.

Q: How representative are representatives?

- Voting is an aristocratic process
 - It is not meritocratic--i.e. we are not required to use impartial standards defined *ex ante*
 - The system does not guarantee equality of opportunity (CPP 191)
- We select people that we view as superior to us
 - This is a function of choice; we must distinguish between candidates in some way
- Because of this salient candidates are advantaged: how visible are you (are you already easily distinguishable as a candidate)?
 - This allows for information shortcuts to be taken by voters
 - "operating on the basis of overall perception" (CPP 195)
- Candidates need to make themselves known
 - This costs money: campaigns (a process of distinguishing yourself) aren't cheap

In sum: "election selects perceived superiorities and actual differences" (CPP 197)

Q: Once we have these representatives, can voters hold them accountable for their decisions (or are we just selecting leaders from a number of competitors who will then make policy, a la Schumpeter)?

- Kind of, only by retrospective voting
- Representatives have huge latitude in *initiating* policy
 - because they have to anticipate how voter will react (retrospectively) in the future
 - but they have longer time-horizons to do this, depending on how frequently elections are held
- "negation is more powerful than affirmation" (201)

Duverger

Transition: So there is some slippage between our ideals and reality. Are there choices or institutions that can make this better or worse? According to Duverger there is.

Duverger helps us think about the way in which the people's preferences (i.e. public opinion) get translated into policy via representatives and the electoral process. Even if we rule out selection of representatives by examination, lot, there are still decisions to be made about the details of electoral institutions, and Duverger's point is that those details can have important consequences. He is thinking about how different institutions and party systems affect the quality of democracy, mostly by distorting representation of public opinion.

Q: So starting with the will of the voters: Where does public opinion come from, according to Duverger?

- It's shaped by parties.
- Q: Does he think that is a bad thing? What picture does this paint of the people?
 - No, it's ok. Not nefarious. Quotes CPP. 269 Moves opinion from raw opinion to public opinion.
- Q: How does this compare with Schumpeter? (schumpeter thinks it's bad.)
 - This doesn't have to be a bad thing
 - In our ideal type world why is it necessary that we already have formed

preferences; is it necessarily a bad thing that outside interests and parties influence us?

Q: Duverger problematizes the translation of the voters' will into policy. What are Duverger's 2 distortions: (name them, then take them one at a time)

- 1) Disparity between the distribution of votes and true public opinion - this comes from abstention.
 - Abstention comes partly from the party system.
 - In 2-party systems with an imbalance, you have high abstention. In 2-party systems with balance, you have high participation, and this distortion is minimized. (quote CPP 273)
- 2) Disparity between votes and seats - this largely comes down to institutional design
 - PR there's less of this distortion - Why? **I'll send the John Cleese video**

Q: Why does Duverger claim that you get 2 parties in a plurality/FPTP system like the US?

- Distortion of seats to votes is worse in multi-party situation, so in that institutional framework, you tend to get two parties. Wasted vote logic.

Q: What difference does the party system/institutional structure make to the formation of opinion?

- It gets localized by single member district systems and nationalized by PR
- It is aggregated into 2 simplified camps in a 2-party system, whereas in a multi-party system its shades can be represented by different parties. He doesn't necessarily think that's better--he thinks 1 big cleavage is really there on most issues.
- DISCUSSION QUESTION: What do you think? are 2 parties enough to represent our views?

(Q if time; skip if not): In Duverger's view, what is the advantage/disadvantage of PR?

- Advantage: represents shades of opinion, less distortion between
- Disadvantage: divisive, intensification of differences, tends toward the extreme

Fiorina

Fiorina focuses our attention on how political parties affect the relationship between voter preferences and representatives' choice of policy. Let's think about whether political parties can help address the slippage that we identified between our ideal process of representation and policy making, the issues identified by Manin.

Q: First, what's the difference between Party in the Electorate, Party in Government, and Party Organization?

- Party in Electorate: party ID, psychological attachment (declined b/c of organizational decline, plus younger voters and media revolution)
 - Empirically not true (say Independent because it's entered our political lexicon, but when pushed party ID is just as strong)
- Party in Government: who gets seats. It's increasingly split. Decline in electoral interdependence of party in government. It's partly because congressmen focus on

delivering non-partisan local constituency goods, so party is less important.

- Empirically not true: presidential coattails and midterm referenda on presidential performance are still alive and well
- Party Organization: how well can parties select competent people and discipline their members
 - This one is less empirically clear; we were never Britain... but maybe, a little?
 - There has certainly been a decline since machine politics, but has it stabilized?

Q: What is responsibility, according to Fiorina?

- Responsibility - we know who to blame
- *Individual responsibility* is decreasing, so we don't know who to blame anymore - therefore our ability to get the govt to work for us is diminished

Q: Why might responsibility be important for democracy?

- Ppl elected to office will only act in our interests if they'll be held accountable for their decisions
- Mansbridge: Anticipatory representation (and Manin's retrospective voting) only works if we can locate responsibility

Q: If individual responsibility is lacking, what's available to us?

- Collective responsibility

Q: In an ideal world, how would parties help us achieve collective responsibility?

- They create an incentive to produce good outcomes, not just good campaigns.
- They don't pit congressmen and presidents against each other in the blame game.

Q: Fiorina is pessimistic about contemporary American parties' ability to create collective responsibility. Why?

- Party reforms (direct primaries, decrease in patronage and power of party bosses, opening up of presidential nominations, funding reforms that said presidential candidates had to have their own funding, not party funding)
- People used to vote for parties; now they vote for candidates (candidate-centered elections)
- Parties are good at articulating interests but not aggregating them
- Candidates are held responsible for articulations of proposals, but not very much for adoption of proposals and not at all for consequences of proposals.
- Media makes it possible for candidates to run without much party support
- Party-in-government is split and incoherent, turned against each other

Q: Given the empirical problems with his argument outlined above, do we still buy this?

Q: So the consequence is immobilism, this situation where:

- Less incentive to stick your neck out and solve problems if you can offload the blame onto others. Collective action problem.
- (Quote CPP 235 if you need it, first paragraph of Immobilism: "As the electoral interdependence of the party in government declines, its ability to act also declines...lessens.")

- Problem in future, costs in present. Congress faces nearer election. They rebel against President's attempt to solve problem. They eventually adopt weak and ineffective policy for symbolic purposes. Then blame president for weak leadership.
- Q: On the one hand, you have a more open party system where candidates can run even without strong party backing, less control. On the other, there are all these negative consequences. Worth it? Or would we rather go back to stronger party control?

[Schattschneider]

Transition: So parties might matter for increasing the accountability/collective responsibility of representatives. But Schattschneider also thinks they matter - for balancing out the power of interest groups.

Q: What is Schattschneider's critique of an interest-group approach to politics?

- It assumes that you just translate society's power composition into groups. In reality, groups are not representative at all.
- It ignores the role of parties

Q: What's the danger of a polity made up of special interest groups?

- "the flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the chorus sings with a strong upper class accent"
- Can't assume that "the interested" get most represented in pressure groups
- Special interest groups are narrow and biased.
- Pressure groups only represent some people - those that want to change the status quo, those that have resources. The set of them that are available is relatively small, centered on business, mostly upper-class people are members, even if not businesspl

Q: How does Schattschneider think parties transform special interests?

- Parties are large-scope organizations. Forces special interests to come to some kind of negotiated pact or compromise. Implication is that it moves us closer to the common interest.

Q: **Wrap-Up Discussion Question:** How democratic is modern representative democracy? Refer to chart on the board, which should be very messy by now.

[Median voter theory if extra time]

- Single member district with first-past-the-post system, get 2 parties
- Explains why they end up looking a lot like each other
- Draw the picture