POLITICAL PARTIES AND COORDINATION PROBLEMS

2013
Hans Noel
Georgetown University
bit.ly/hansnoel
I. What is a Political Party?
II. Parties solve coordination problems
   - In Legislatures
   - In Elections
A coalition of people who form a united front to win control of government and implement policy.
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A DEFINITION

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Many actors, possibly with disagreements, set aside disagreements in it to win it, not just have a voice. Want something, have goals.
UNITED FRONT

A bundle is stronger than an individual stick.
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A bundle is stronger than individual sticks.
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How big of a bundle?
UNITED FRONT

A bundle is stronger than an individual stick

How big of a bundle?
Minimal Winning Coalition
UNITED FRONT

A bundle is stronger than an individual stick

How big of a bundle?
Minimal Winning Coalition
Large enough to win
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Large enough to win
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Can choose who your Coalition is:
UNITED FRONT

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Can choose who your Coalition is:
Interaction between Coalition of People and United Front
# LONG COALITIONS

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The outcome of a collective action depends on your action, and on the actions of your allies.

By enforcing collective decisions, parties help solve that.
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“The job of the speaker is not to expedite legislation that runs counter to the wishes of a majority of the majority. ... On each piece of legislation, I actively seek to bring our party together.”

— Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), Speaker of the House 2003
The case of the Powell Amendment (1956)
Bill for federal school funding.
Each major group in Congress has these preferences:

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The case of the Powell Amendment (1956)
Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-N.Y.) proposes amendment to deny federal funds to states that do not comply with Supreme Court (*Brown v. Board of Education*)
Now preferences look like this:

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Nothing (Status Quo)

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SINCERE VOTING

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A KILLER AMENDMENT

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SINCERE VOTING

STRATEGIC VOTING

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AGENDA CONTROL

Hard to enforce strategic voting. Parties help solve the problem.

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PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
**THE PROBLEM:**  
**COORDINATING VOTERS**

**Election of 1824:**

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Election of 1912

- Republican Party fights over nomination. Chooses incumbent William Howard Taft over Theodore Roosevelt (president 1901-1909)
- Roosevelt supporters, “Progressives” balk. Nominate Roosevelt on the “Bull Moose” ticket
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Democratic Party nominates Woodrow Wilson.

- Taft (R) 23.2%
- Roosevelt (P) 27.4%
- Wilson (D) 41.8%
- Debs (S) 6.0%
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\[50.6\%\]
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\[ \text{Total} = 50.6\% \]

N.B.: Things would have played out differently under different scenarios. If Roosevelt had not run, Progressives might have voted for Wilson. If Roosevelt had the GOP nomination, though...
CONDORCET CYCLES

1st Choice
- Wilson (30%)
- Taft (30%)
- Roosevelt (40%)

2nd Choice
- Taft (Wilson)
- Roosevelt (Taft)
- Wilson (Roosevelt)

3rd Choice
- Roosevelt (Taft)
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1968-1972

MCGOVERN-FRASER COMMISSION

1968: Democrats Hubert H. Humphrey

Supporters of McCarthy (and RFK) unhappy with 1968 outcome. Commission to evaluate delegate selection

Delegates must be chosen in a manner open to rank-and-file party members.

Not primaries, necessarily. Expected more caucuses.

Democratic state legislatures impose on both parties.
FIGURE 6-1: Distribution of Endorsements by Contest

Distribution of politically weighted endorsements before the Iowa caucus for presidential nominations, 1972 to 2004. Eventually nominee in black.

1972 DEMOCRATS: 20.0% of governors endorsing
1972 REPUBLICANS

1976 DEMOCRATS: 11.4% of governors endorsing
1976 REPUBLICANS: 100.0% of governors endorsing

1980 DEMOCRATS: 68.6% of governors endorsing
1980 REPUBLICANS: 27.8% of governors endorsing

1984 DEMOCRATS: 47.1% of governors endorsing

1988 DEMOCRATS: 19.2% of governors endorsing
1988 REPUBLICANS: 58.3% of governors endorsing

1992 DEMOCRATS
1996 REPUBLICANS: 90.0% of governors endorsing

2000 DEMOCRATS: 64.7% of governors endorsing
2000 REPUBLICANS: 87.5% of governors endorsing

2004 DEMOCRATS: 4.8% of governors endorsing
PARTY VOTERS ARE LOYAL

- Voters who self-identify as partisan vote much the same way as political endorsers.
- Independent voters are less persuaded.

Endorsements is the percent of all politically weighted endorsements for each candidate in the year prior to the primaries, up to the day before the Iowa caucuses. Primary election vote shares are from Mayer 2007.

Solid circles are Democrats. Open circles are Republicans.
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