

Section 3 Lesson Plan

Logistical Things

- Need to fill out “chart your course in gov” form – on the course website, it’s a requirement for Gov 97.
- Paper 1: due Friday at 5pm
 - o Each day late will deduct 1/3 of a grade (i.e. A to A-)
 - o Writing resource: Amanda just sent out an email, so sign up for that. Harvard Writing center is also a good resource.
 - o I will hold office hours next Monday (even though it’s a holiday) so you can come talk to me about your papers if you want
 - o Do not write more than 8 pages – follow the instructions of the assignment

Agenda

- Enki’s article presentation
- Short introduction
- Discussion
- 10 min break
- Activity/discussion

Enki’s presentation

- Brings up issues of exclusion in political parties and the question that we discussed in class – are political parties public entities or private clubs?
- Also brings up issues of accountability, as Enki refers to. Keep this in mind as we’ll be discussing parties later in the class

Introduction

- There are three main actors in this week’s readings: voters, electoral systems, and parties
- There are tensions and tradeoffs among the outcomes we would like to achieve in an ideal democracy, from each of these three components.
 - o **Voters:** free of living their lives without worrying about politics/individual liberties (Constant) v. paying attention to politics; rationally deciding how to vote, v. being irrational in going to cast a ballot
 - o **Electoral systems:** representation v. governability; stability v. minority voice
 - o **Parties:** responsible and accountable v. transparent and inclusive
- Will table the discussion of voters until the end of class; let’s talk about electoral systems and parties.

➔ Electoral Systems

- [Duverger] What are some different types of electoral systems? How do they work? What is “Duverger’s Law”?
- [Duverger/Downs] How would US politics look different if we had a PR system? Politics in other countries you know about? [p 377] How would such a change in the system change the costs/benefits of voting brought up by Downs?
- [Duverger] Should we be worried about the distortion of public opinion that inevitably comes up with parties and representation? Duverger points out two versions of such a distortion – which one is more worrisome? (p 373) Where do such distortions come from?
 - o Disparity between the distribution of votes and true nature of opinion
 - o Disparity between the percentage of votes and the percentage of seats
- Which electoral system – PR or majoritarian – gives us a better expression of public opinion? What are the arguments for either side? Which is more stable? Why? [Dahl]

PR: better for representation, less distortion, minority representation

Majoritarian: better for accountability and governability

→ Parties

- Rosenstone – parties play a mobilizing role
 - Duverger – parties help crystalize opinion
 - Fiorina – need of parties for accountability
 - Schumpeter – without parties, ideas are vague
- You all said last week that you were in favor of parties when you designed your own democracy. What are some arguments in the opposite direction? What are some arguments that bolster your view? Did anyone change their mind?
 - How do parties interact with the median voter theorem? Does this idea have room for parties? How would introducing parties to the MVT change it?
 - Should we be able to ban parties? Under what condition should we be able to ban parties?
 - White supremacist parties?
 - Fiorina argues in favor of parties because parties ensure greater collective responsibility for what is happening. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

Part 2: Compulsory Voting Debate

- Is voting rational? What does Downs think? Why do people vote? Why do people abstain? What are the limitations of Downs' theory?
- Median voter \neq median citizen – what does that imply for democracy? (Rosenstone, costs and benefits of voting) Who is left out?
- [Shelby's Compulsory voting exercise]
 - Students summarize their articles
 - What readings or concepts from the readings does your article relate to?
 - Should we have compulsory voting?

Bringing it together:

- How could we include parties in Downs' theory of voting? What part of his theory would parties change? [cost of voting? Cost of information acquisition? Benefits from voting?] Would this change depending on what electoral system we were in?

Discussion Questions:

- Why don't the poor just take over? Why can't they just vote for their self-interest?
- Is voting all about a straightforward cost/benefit calculation?
- What is the nature of indifference in Downs' model? What is the nature of political indifference in real society?
- What are some of the costs of voting that Downs talks about? Why are these costs regressive, i.e. why do they affect poor people more? Do we see these costs for poorer people in real life? (standing in lines, opportunity cost, transportation costs). What could/should we do to ensure that the costs are more equitable or progressive?
- What does Downs mean by the "per se" value of voting? Can you think of examples from real life?
- Where do parties come from according to Duverger? What role do they play in democracies?
- What are Duverger's views about representation? [Deputies represent their electors not as a madatory represents his mandatory, but as a photographs represents a landscape – p372] Do you agree?
- Should we be worried about the distortion of public opinion that inevitably comes up with parties and representation?
- How does the electoral system affect the latter type of distortion? Consider PR v. majoritarian systems? How do party lists affect the representativeness of PR? Second ballots?
- Does the "nationalization" of opinion or "localization" of opinion brought about by PR and simple majority single ballot (respectively) better reflect public opinion?
- Fiorina argues in favor of parties because parties ensure greater collective responsibility for what is happening. Do you think this is true? Why or why not? What about machine politics?
- Would moving the US towards a list voting system be better for accountability?
- Do you agree with Dahl's conception of what makes a stable democratic system? By his definition, do we live in a stable democratic system?