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## Gov 97 Week 3: Elections

### Overview

- Look at the relationship between voters, parties and electoral systems, and tensions and tradeoffs therein.
- Duverger's "distortions": how are individual opinions translated into votes? And how are votes translated into seats?

### (1) Voters

- Why do people vote?
  - Paradox of voting/political participation
  - Economic model: costs and benefits of voting (cf. Downs, Rosenstone and Hansen)
  - Income/class bias of voting: wealthier and more educated people tend to have higher rates of voting/political participation (Downs, Rosenstone and Hansen)
  - Social networks in creating/reinforcing norms of political participation (Rosenstone and Hansen, Downs (the benefit of voting *per se*), Dahl (democratic creed))

### (2) Parties

- Role of parties (Schumpeter, Duverger, Rosenstone and Hansen, Fiorina)
  - For voters: provide information, enables voters to hold parties accountable for performance (cf. Fiorina and collective responsibility)
  - For politicians: mobilize voters, provide resources, help candidates win office
  - For legislators: facilitate creation of stable majorities in parliament, makes possible party leadership/discipline
- Q: Are parties necessary in/important to democracies? (Cf. Madison on faction.)

### (3) Electoral systems

- Compare single-member districts/winner-take-all systems with PR (Duverger)
  - Accountability vs representation
  - Examples of PR systems:
    - Germany: voters have two votes: one for a particular candidate, one for a party list. About half the seats in the Bundestag are distributed by direct mandate, and half according to the party list votes (adjusted to get PR). 5% threshold.
    - Denmark: voters can vote for individual candidates or party lists. 135 votes distributed according to PR results within electoral districts plus 40 compensatory votes. 2% threshold.
    - Israel: a single nation-wide constituency for the Knesset. 2% threshold.
- Exercise: divide into two groups and read different [op-eds](#) from the NYT debate on PR for Egypt. What would you have recommended for Egypt and why?

Discussion questions (sent ahead of time)
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I'd like to look at the relationship between voters, electoral system and parties, and the tensions and trade-offs therein.

1. Voters:

- Why do people vote? Is it rational to vote? We could connect this to Shklar and Dworkin in the first week's readings – the impact of any one vote is almost nil. What is the paradox of political participation more generally? Look in particular at Downs's economic model of voting, at Dahl on the democratic creed, at Rosenstone and Hansen.

2. Parties:

- What is the role of parties in a political system? One way to approach this is to consider the benefits parties provide to politicians seeking office, to voters and to legislators? Look at Rosenstone and Hansen, and Fiorina, in particular.

- What is role of parties in a representative democracy? How has the American party system changed (see Schattschneider on the nationalization of politics, for e.g.) and do you think this has been better or worse for democracy in the US?

- How is individual opinion translated into votes? Look at Schumpeter, at Duverger, at Rosenstone and Hansen on strategic mobilization.

3. Electoral systems:

- And how are votes translated into seats? (cf. Duverger on these questions). Consider the relationship between the electoral system and the party system. On the electoral system: what are the advantages and disadvantages of single member districts (SMD) v. proportional representation (PR)? How do the electoral systems map onto two-party and multi-party systems? Think of some examples of other kinds of electoral and party systems.