UNDERSTANDING POLITICS · CHAPTER 13

Elections, Parties and Party Systems

How votes become power

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OPENING PUZZLE

Same votes, different results

The votes

A 40%, B 30%, C 18%, D 12% in a five-seat district.

The question

Who wins seats depends on the counting rule.

Ask: which result is fairest, and fair by what standard?

DUVERGER’S LAW

> *“The simple-majority single-ballot system favours the two-party system.”*

Duverger (1954), p. 217

Mechanical effect: seats. Psychological effect: voters and elites avoid likely losers.

THE SEAT-ALLOCATION EXERCISE

Five seats, four rules

	D’Hondt	Sainte-Laguë
Party A (40%)	2	2
Party B (30%)	2	1
Party C (18%)	1	1
Party D (12%)	0	1

MEASURING PARTY SYSTEMS

Three standard measures

Effective number

Parties weighted by size (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979).

Disproportionality

The votes–seats gap (Gallagher, 1991).

Volatility

Net change in vote shares (Pedersen, 1979).

ENP by seats here: D’Hondt 2.78; plurality 1.0.

> *“The party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s.”*

Lipset and Rokkan (1967), p. 50

Social divisions become party divisions, then freeze.

Counting parties that matter

Relevance

Count parties that affect government formation or can block it.

Distance

Moderate versus polarised pluralism.

Predominance

One party repeatedly wins majorities in competitive elections.

INSTITUTIONALISATION

Four dimensions

Stable competition

Predictable patterns.

Social roots

Voters identify with parties.

Legitimacy and organisation

Parties accepted and not personal vehicles.

Mainwaring and Scully (1995).

PARTIES IN CHANGE

From mass parties to cartels

Mass party

Members, dues and social organisations.

Cartel party

State funding and collusion among established parties (Katz and Mair, 1995).

Ask: does this explain populist challengers?

WHO CHOOSES THE RULES?

Electoral systems as political outcomes

Boix (1999)

Established parties adopted PR when socialist parties threatened them.

Implication

Rules reflect parties’ fears as well as shaping outcomes.

Rules and party systems shape each other.

REPRESENTATION

Who sits, and what they do

Descriptive

Who representatives are (Pitkin, 1967).

Substantive

What they do for those represented.

Quotas

Reserved seats, party quotas, candidate quotas (Krook, 2009).

Mansbridge (1999): a contingent yes to descriptive representation.

SEMINAR TASK · 25 MINUTES

Which electoral system for the district?

1. Group A defends D’Hondt for governability.
2. Group B defends Sainte-Laguë for proportionality.
3. Group C defends single-member plurality for local accountability.

THIS WEEK'S ESSAY

Do electoral systems shape party systems, or the reverse?

Plan

Duverger and Cox: mechanisms and conditions.

Test

Cleavages and Boix's reverse causation.

Judge

A reciprocal relationship?

1,500 words maximum · Student Pack: essay questions