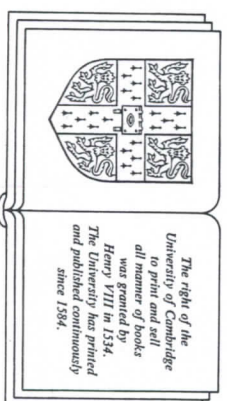


Parties and party systems

A framework for analysis

Volume I

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Spatial competition

10.1 *The Downsian theory revisited*

Anthony Downs' landmark *Economic Theory of Democracy*, published in 1957 but circulated earlier, deals exactly with what the title says. Not only does Downs draw from an "economic" theoretical perspective, but his style – and one might also say his method – is deductive, though not in the rigorous and formalized fashion of current deductive theorizing. Since Downs assumes that citizens in a democracy primarily act to maximize their self-interest and their utility income, that "parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policies," and that the primary objective of politicians "is to be elected,"¹ it is consequential to these premises that a theory of elections is very central to his theory of democracy. Thus Downs can be read and developed along three perspectives: (i) within the general context of theories of democracy, (ii) in terms of a better formal and deductive fit between economic premises and the theory of elections, and/or (iii) by isolating his spatial model of party competition and testing it against empirical findings.

As a theorist of democracy it suffices to note that Downs does not even begin to explain how a democracy comes into being, but that his interpretation appears more convincing the more we read it as an explanation of how democracies inevitably deteriorate and end up performing as meanly as they do. This is, however, the least pursued way of developing Downs.² The second reading focuses on his spatial theory of elections, but in the light of more rigorous and mathematically formalized premises. Much of this development hinges, in fact, on rational choice theory of the game-theoretic variety. As has been concisely stated: "Spatial theory is but a particular formulation of elections as a game in the Von Neumann-Morgenstern sense. . . ."³ The third reading of Downs neglects the premises (the rational-action assumption), does not seek a more formalized model, and tests the spatial model of party competition against the evidence on voting behavior. Donald Stokes was the first to take issue with the Downsian model with reference to its empirical applicability, while Philip Con-

10.1 *The Downsian theory revisited*

verse has been especially sensitive to its bearing on the interpretation of the data.⁴

My own interest in Downs is very close to the one of Stokes and Converse, except that I shall gradually move away from the U.S. evidence in an attempt to develop the model of inter-party competition where it works least, that is, in multiparty settings. Also for this reason I shall equally leave aside the mathematical approach, since the theories of the formalized spatial theory are "virtually irrelevant to the analysis of multiparty proportional representation systems."⁵

The first thing to note is that the theme that appears central to most interpreters was not exploited as such by Downs himself, for it is wrapped and somewhat hidden in a chapter whose title is, "The Statics and Dynamics of Party Ideologies." One immediately senses, here, the difficulties that Downs creates for himself in order to be consistent with his premises. Ideologies are difficult to enter, and especially to rationalize, on grounds of economic rationality. Downs contends that "three factors . . . explain how wide ideological variance can develop out of our vote-maximizing hypothesis. They are the heterogeneity of society, the inevitability of social conflict, and uncertainty."⁶ Fine for the variance – but how does this explain ideology? Downs actually lays the emphasis on "uncertainty," which is his major intervening variable; and the general thrust of his argument is that with regard to parties ideologies accrue to their distinctiveness, whereas with regard to voters ideologies are "shortcuts" that save them the cost of being informed. This is convincing enough – except that the economic premises lead Downs to conceptualize ideology very narrowly, that is, only from the vantage point of how ideologies are "rationally" put to use and exploited. Nor is a deductive apparatus needed for making the point that ideology is an economizing device for the voters and a "means for getting votes" for the parties.⁷

The backing of an economic theory helps even less the development of Downs' spatial model of party competition as such. It is true that the suggestion comes from two economists, Hotelling and Smithies; but it does not follow that his borrowing of the "spatial analogy"⁸ is amenable to an analogical treatment. In 1929 Hotelling sought to explain why two competing stores end up by placing themselves, along Main Street, right next door. In 1941 Smithies improved the argument by pointing out that the demands of the consumers are "elastic" (they may not buy if both stores are too distant, that is, if transportation costs are too high). The implication is that while the two stores will still tend to converge, nevertheless their optimal location (equilibrium) is reached when their closeness does not discourage the hinterland consumers placed at the extreme ends.

Now the crucial issue with respect to the Downsian spatial model is

whether a voting space is unidimensional, or whether this assumption is far too restrictive. Therefore, Downs can well proceed by analogy in replacing consumers with voters and firms with parties, but *not* with respect to how a physical space (Main Street or a railroad) relates to a symbolic space. The fact that Main Street is linear cannot testify in the least to the fact that the space of politics (of competitive politics) equally is linear, i.e., unidimensional. We are thus faced with the conclusion that at the most important juncture of his theory of elections Downs fails us precisely because of a misleading economic analogy.

Presumably, Downs realizes that his unidimensionality rests on shaky credentials. The most interesting property of his theory of competition is that leapfrogging is difficult and generally impeded. Adjacent parties can converge or move apart but cannot leap past each other. Downs well understands the centrality of this point but dares not deduce it from, or impute it to, the assumed unidimensionality of his space. What "prevents a party from making ideological leaps over the heads of its neighbours" is explained with the concepts of "integrity and responsibility."¹⁰ So, after having introduced a unidimensional space of competition Downs defends its most important property on entirely different grounds that are, in turn, entirely extraneous to an economic perspective.

For the completeness of the argument it is fair to recall that when Downs assumes that "each stand [of each party] can be assigned a position on our left-right scale," he is actually pursuing another cue, namely, that "the party's net position on this scale is a weighted average of the positions of all the particular policies it upholds."¹¹ This in effect the cue picked up by the interpreters interested in the mathematical formalization. However, along this latter route we quickly encounter difficulties that should not block the empirical line of development. Recasting Downs more rigorously, his basic suggestion is that the voter's position over an Euclidean space represents his "utility function." And we know how thorny this concept turns out to be. Along this route we equally and quickly stumble into Arrow's intransitivity of preferences and, moreover, into "equilibria problems" that become very nasty as soon as we move from a two-person zero-sum conceptualization (the case of twopartism) to an n -person (multi-person and multiparty) conceptualization of competition that cannot be adequately dealt with in a pairwise fashion.¹²

The superfluity of an economic approach to a spatial theory of inter-party competition, and indeed the advantage of separating the two things, can also be highlighted with respect to the very definition of party.

If parties are defined as "vote maximizers," the objection immediately is that this conceptualization is largely untrue to the facts. Like-

wise, Downs is often criticized because he assumes parties to be "teams," and indeed coherent and unified teams, rather than largely disconnected and multifaceted "coalitions." But let us recall our initial, minimal definition: Party is any political group capable of placing through elections candidates for public office.¹³ Now, surely, this definition embraces all the following kinds of parties: (i) witness parties, uninterested in maximizing votes; (ii) ideological parties, interested in votes primarily via indoctrination; (iii) responsible parties, which do not submit policies to maximizing votes; (iv) responsive parties, for which winning elections or maximizing votes take priority; and, finally, (v) purely demagogic, irresponsible parties, which are only vote maximizers. Our minimal definition does not suffer, then, from any "economic" restriction or assumption. Yet if the question, "What do parties compete for?" is raised, it seems quite natural to me to reply: As a rule, for votes – for my definition does imply that parties cease to be such (even though they may survive qua movements, political associations, or pressure groups) when they do not muster votes. This does not mean that parties compete *only* for votes, nor that votes are an end in themselves. Votes are a *means* for staying in the market and a means for enacting policy. Therefore, parties do not necessarily formulate policies in order to win elections; nonetheless, it can well be maintained that *at elections* parties are vote maximizers. Likewise, it is contrary to fact to assume that parties are unified teams; and yet it makes perfect sense to assert that *at elections* even multi-appeal and faction-riddled parties tend to perform as teams.

To sum up, the theory of Downs has actually been furthered in either one of two directions – mathematical and empirical. Along the first route his premises are made stringent and formalized. Along the second route, by giving up the deductive apparatus and relaxing the economic premises his model of party competition overcomes unnecessary objections without suffering – I would add – any loss. This is so because whenever the economic analogies hold, we can still put them to insightful use. Thus the analogue of the witness-type party can well be the firm that does not compete via prices but via high quality, prestige products. At the other end, the analogue of the purely demagogic party is provided by a set of perfectly competitive sales-maximizing firms; while the in-between cases can be assimilated to profit-seeking (though not necessarily maximizing) oligopolies. These analogies help us, in turn, to assess the thresholds at which we either have too much or too little competition – thereby underpinning, among other things, the warning that ever more "competitiveness" is not an unmixing blessing.¹⁴

10.2 Issues, identification, images, and positions

Voting behavior studies provide most of the empirical evidence that substantiates or disconfirms a spatial interpretation of party competition. A disproportionate amount of this evidence is drawn, however, from the U.S. scene or is influenced – when drawn from other countries – by the survey designs originally devised for the American voter. On both counts, for comparative purposes the findings of American scholars are less interesting than their concepts. And three concepts – unknown to Downs and largely articulated after the time of his writing – stand out as being crucial to our understanding of voting: (i) issue, (ii) identification, and (iii) image.

With respect to “issue” the central questions are: To what extent do voters have an issue awareness and an *issue perception*? To what extent do an issue orientation and an issue preference affect their party choice, thereby leading to *issue voting* (or policy voting)? And, in any case, how do voters relate issues to parties and party policies? Moreover, if issues are found to be relevant for a spatial model, then we have a third major connotation of the concept: not only (i) issue perceptions and (ii) issue voting, but also (iii) *issue positions*. What is an issue? Issues are not such unless they are visible and controversial. I equally take issue to mean a bounded set of problems that can be isolated and is indeed perceived in isolation – not only in its distinctiveness but because of its distinctiveness. Brian Barry wonders whether issue should include “group-interest” responses such as “good for the working class.”¹⁵ I would definitely reply in the negative. If “good for the working class” is understood as a permissible formulation of an issue, then almost anything can be declared such, and the concept is of no analytical avail.

Issue voters having issue perceptions and issue preferences are often contrasted with “identified voters,” i.e., with the voters who identify themselves with a given candidate or party symbol. However, an identified voter can be highly informed on the issues. Conversely, the issue-insensitive voter need not be “identified.”¹⁶ Clearly, there are voters who are neither aware of issues nor identified whose motivation for voting may simply be social pressure, or “negative voting” – voting against some feared enemy or outcome.

The foregoing introduces the second concept: identification, or, in full, *partisan identification*. Identified voters are supposed to be standard patterns: They always vote for the same candidate or party regardless of what it says or does. This assumes, however, “strong identifiers.” Surveys generally distinguish between strong and weak identifiers and assume that the latter are likely to be unstable or defecting voters. But this assumption may well be entirely incorrect. If one accounts, e.g.,

for negative voting, feeble identifiers may well turn out to be very stable voters. In any event, while we may say that the identified voters are standpaters, the obverse is not true: We cannot really say that all stable voters are “loyalists” identified with “their” party.

Both with respect to issue voting and partisan identification the note of caution is that we often confuse two different things: (i) the actual *variance-invariance* of the voting choice and (ii) the *motivation* for being a switcher or a standpatter. The caution is, then, that from the voting *behavior* we cannot infer the *personality type* of the voter, that is, his motivations. A standpatter need not be “identified” and can indeed be a highly informed, articulate and issue-alerted citizen. Conversely, a switcher may be highly uninformed and issue-insensitive and simply drift randomly or according to some kind of Markovian process.¹⁷ It should be clear, therefore, that issue voting and partisan identification refer to different types of voting motivations, *not* to how many voters do in fact change or split their vote.

Issue voting and partisan identification are best conceived as the opposite ends of a continuum. If so, it is useful to have an in-between concept in which issues and identifications can blend, albeit in very different ways and proportions. Moreover, under the assumption that voters are identified, their way of linking to a given party is obvious; but how do the issue voters link to parties and select among the parties? On both counts we need at least another concept: party image. The third concept has been utilized and developed far less than the other two. Yet I take it that parties communicate to mass electorates via party images and that much of their electoral strategy is concerned with building up the appropriate image for the public from which they expect votes.

Party image is not the same thing as *party identification*. Although the two concepts obviously are related to one another, it is quite possible . . . to identify with the same party but to have very different mental pictures of it. . . . Although party image is not as deeply rooted or as stable as party identification, it is likely to be less ephemeral than voter attitudes toward the issues and candidates.¹⁸

Yes – but there is more to it. An image is – in my understanding – a vague *policy package* condensed in, and rendered by, one word or slogan. “Good for the workers” or, even better, “workers’ party” is an image (not an issue). The labels liberal and conservative, progressive and reactionary, left and right, typically exemplify the images for which parties maneuver and outmaneuver one another.

How does one select, then, a given party? If the answer is – as I suggest – via a party image, then the question turns on how the image (not the identification) interplays with the issues. Therefore, from the

issue end of the process the question is: How do issue preferences enter the image and eventually alter the identification? Needless to say, our findings do not adequately address these questions. On the other hand, questions necessarily precede the findings.

Issue, identification, and image are thus the major concepts employed for understanding why voters vote as they do. How do these concepts relate to the Downsian model of spatial competition?

In his influential criticism Stokes puts forward three major objections. First, political conflict cannot be reduced to a single dimension, for the findings point to several "dimensions of attitude" toward issues that are independent (inconsistent) from one another. Second, on many issues — such as fighting corruption, promoting prosperity, etc. — parties have exactly the same "position" (they do not offer alternatives: they all oppose corruption); and this entails that "valence issues", as Stokes calls them, cannot be given a spatial ordering even though they play a major role, for one party rather than all takes the blame for past corruption, and only one party is believed, or credible, in promising to fight corruption. Third, it is a fact that "only about one tenth of the electorate [in the 1952, 1956, and 1960 presidential elections] by the loosest definition is found to be using the liberal-conservative distinction or any other ideological concept. By a more reasonable count, the proportion is something like three percent."¹⁹

The first criticism is somewhat puzzling. Stokes assumes an "issue public" at a time when the findings of his Michigan colleagues were that issue orientations and issue perceptions were weakly related to electoral choices, and that party identifications were the single most powerful motivation of voting behavior in the United States.²⁰ As Angus Campbell and Converse succinctly put it, "nearly everyone in our samples could be placed in a unitary dimension of party identification"²¹ and, "for the public, in sharp contrast to the elite, party preference seems . . . relatively unconnected to issue positions."²² So why make "issues" the issue? While Stokes seemingly builds up a case that the evidence of the fifties does not warrant, theoretically his point is impeccable, namely, that the Downsian model navigates poorly with respect to, and in terms of, issues.

The second criticism of Stokes brings out the interesting distinction between position issues and valence issues. In essence, a valence issue is a nonpartisan issue, an issue on which there is no disagreement, and yet is an issue in that one party accuses another of being untrue to its verbal strands. Pressing the point further we arrive at the question: Why is one party "believed" while another is not? A first reply is that electors are not fooled by what the parties say. But there is more to it. So-called valence issues point, it seems to me, to the juncture at which issue perceptions become largely monitored by party images and iden-

tifications. Ultimately, the question hinges on whether identifying with a party establishes — first and above all — "the authorities," indeed the cognitive authorities, on whom mass publics rely for believing, or not believing, in what they are told.²³

The third criticism of Stokes is that the American voter virtually ignores the left-right spatial imagery, and that even the liberal-conservative mapping is seldom utilized and even more rarely understood. Here Stokes is in keeping with the findings of the Michigan Survey Research Center. So here the blow to the Downsian model appears to be a deadly one. However, at the end of his article Stokes points out that "political conflict can be focused on a single, stable issue domain which presents an ordered-dimension. . . . Let us call this the case of *strong ideological focus*. On the other hand, political controversy can be diffused over a number of changing issue concerns . . . the case of *weak ideological focus*."²⁴ Since this surely is a central point, I propose to take it up in due course. At the moment let us pursue our sweeping review of the American findings.

It was especially Key's *The Responsible Electorate* that attempted to reestablish the cogent connection between voting preference and issues that had been found lacking by the Michigan surveys. Key was motivated by an ethical or at least a practical concern: If politicians "see voters as most certainly responsive to nonsense, they will give them nonsense. If they see voters susceptible to delusion, they will delude them."²⁵ While I do share Key's concern, let us also bear in mind that democratic controls do not rest only on the *demos* — so that the fairest deal is, perhaps, to ask of an electorate what it can give, and no more. In any event, in the late sixties the fact finders began to search for what Key asked, and the facts themselves underwent a change.²⁶ The 1964 election revealed a greater ideological awareness and a better perception of party differences. Goldwater did succeed, though not to his own benefit, in moving the Republican party image rightward — just as McGovern succeeded, in 1972, in moving the Democratic image leftward. Concurrently, the 1968 election — with Vietnam, campus, and racial unrest at their heights — did bring these issues to the fore and did increase the amount of "policy voting." In the latest accounts, then, the American voters are found to be more ideologically conscious or at least more motivated by the liberal-conservative image of parties.

To be sure, the recent literature finds more issue voting than before also because it has been searching — with the aid of issue-sensitive measures — for what it has found. Nonetheless, the figures unquestionably speak to a changing pattern. While almost no net change occurred from 1952 to 1964, by 1972 more than one-third of the American electorate turned out to be "independent," that is, non-identified, and

only about one-half appeared strongly identified with one of the two major parties. More precisely the independents were about 23 percent from 1952 to 1964, and rose to 29.5 and 35.1 percent respectively in 1968 and 1972. The Democratic identifiers reached a peak of 52.2 in 1964, but were at 41 percent in 1972. The Republican identifiers were about 30 percent in 1956 and 1960, and down to 24 percent in 1972.²⁷ On the other hand, these changes are hardly surprising if one considers that the 1964, 1968, and 1972 presidential elections were held under a greening America deeply wounded by Vietnam and heated by racial issues. Nor does it appear that any of these elections taken singly was really "critical," i.e., reflected a deep, durable, and fundamental realignment.²⁸ All variations considered, the central conclusion of the Michigan surveys of the fifties still stands: Partisan identifications remain, despite everything, the single major determinant of American voting behavior. This conclusion holds not so much because the percentages still remain on its side, but especially because it cannot be disproved by the finding that more people perceive more issues. What matters is the *direction of causality*. Is it the issue orientation that actually determines the voting choice? Or is it the party identification and image that shape the issue perceptions and preferences? One can reply neither or reply both. Yet the problem of which is the independent variable – to what extent, with respect to what proportion of the electorate – remains. No doubt, partisan identifications may well derive from issue attitudes – but from remote ones, going all the way back to the age and processes of socialization. And, presumably, partisan identifications include policy preferences. However, these conditions will obtain a high consistency between issue preference and party choice that still does not speak to the direction of causation, to the question whether the votes are actually cast *because*, and on the basis of, issues.

The irony of the situation is, then, that when Stokes was – in his first criticism – untrue to his evidence and somewhat unfair to Downs, he was vindicated by the subsequent evidence; and that when he did rest on the findings of the fifties (that the American voter was not located in an ideological space), the findings of the sixties and seventies undermined his criticism and vindicated the applicability of the Downsian model. As noted earlier, a spatial model of party competition navigates poorly with issue voters. Conversely, the model applies best under the assumption that voters are ideologically conscious and sensitive to the left-right imagery. The intuitive reason for this is that issues can hardly be reduced to a single dimension, whereas the most attractive property of the Downsian model is precisely its unidimensionality. Upon further reflection, however, it appears that the voting findings do not easily fit the Downsian model unless an additional (fourth) concept is entered – *positioning* – under two formulations,

namely, *position-perception* and *position-image*. The notion of position-perception implies that the voter places himself and the parties in some kind of *spatial ordering*, in a row; and the notion of position-image implies that parties maneuver precisely for conveying to the electorate a *spatial location* of themselves. Given position-perceptions and position-images, then – but only then – can we fruitfully employ the notion of "issue position" in an "issue space."

Having laid out the conceptual framework for organizing the findings, let us outline the full set of conditions under which we should, or should not, expect a spatial model of competition to be serviceable.

1. Where no structured party system exists, the prevalent determinant of voting behavior is some kind of attachment to a notable – and we may thus speak, in short, of *personality voting*. This entails, in substance, that the Downsian model has no bearing on the Third World and until the scene is entered by mass parties.

2. *Policy voting*, that is, a voting choice determined by issues and reacting to the policy stands of parties, is relatively rare; it neither occurs all the time nor can it be easily demonstrated that issue perceptions and orientations are the independent variable. However, when issue or policy voting does occur, it is hardly amenable to a spatial representation, and even less to a single spatial dimension.²⁹

3. Whenever politics develops, whenever electorates have a capacity for abstraction, and whenever the party system is structured by mass parties, the strong presumption is that *position-voting related to party images* represents the single, prevalent determinant of the voting choice. And to the extent that voters are *position-oriented*, to the same extent the spatial understanding of party competition is worth pursuing.

4. While voters surely have issue preferences – for otherwise realigning elections would never occur and deviating elections would be difficult to explain – the question hinges on the *defection point*, or the breaking point, that is, the point at which a nondesired issue-policy of the preferred party is perceived and breaks the preexisting image, loyalty, or affiliation of the voter to a given party.

5. Issue voting is easier and therefore more likely within the simpler systems – twopartism – and becomes more unmanageable the more the party system is complicated by an increasing number of parties and especially by coalition governments.

6. Concurrently, issue voting gives way to position-voting as we pass from a feeble to a strong ideological focus, that is, from pragmatic to ideological politics.³⁰

The first three points, or generalizations, simply delineate the area of applicability of the Downsian model. The fourth attempts to meet Key's apprehensions by pointing out that neither identifications nor position-voting implies that voters can be fooled to no end, for parties

do worry about the defection point. After all, the mechanism through which a voter becomes identified is the party image – and the image is related, in turn, to basic, if vague and elastic, issue orientations. As for the last two generalizations, they simply point to the broad hypotheses to which we shall now turn for closer inspection.

10.3 *Multidimensional, unidimensional, and ideological space*

The question with which we have yet to come to grips is: What is a “political space”? More precisely: In what kind of space do parties compete? Surely they do not compete in the geographic or physical space of Hotelling and Smithies. Nor is it sufficient to reply that parties compete in a symbolic or figurative space. Furthermore, the transition from a spatial configuration of politics to an ideological type of space is, far more often than not, too easily assumed.

Let us call a left-right arrangement a spatial imagery. Its only property is, as such, to *order* objects side by side (horizontally) in a flat (unidimensional) space. And this is nothing more, in itself, than a *spatial archetype*. How does it enter politics? A spatial translation of political perceptions in terms of left and right was first used during the course of the French Revolution, in perfect keeping with an ideological “development of politics,” but with specific reference to the seating arrangements – left side, right side – in parliament. And while value connotations have always been intended, throughout the nineteenth century and well into our century these connotations of praise and blame underwent considerable shifts and, in the aggregate, counterbalanced each other. In an 1848 French dictionary of politics the left-seated members were spoken of as “defenders of the principle of liberty, while the right-seated members were declared “defenders of the principle of power.” However, according to the 1848 writer these were “old distinctions” that had lost much of their value, for also within the left many members had become “more concerned with raising themselves to power than with preserving public liberties.”³¹ With respect to the value connotation, “right” capitalized on the positive association with the legal meaning of the word (the abstract French *droit* and Germany *Recht*, and the concrete English “having a right,” let alone “being right”) but suffered from the initial association with the king’s side and the subsequent one with the Restoration. Conversely, “left” capitalized on the left placement of the heart and on the early association of the word with the constitutional, “republican” politicians, but remained handicapped by the inferiority of left-handedness over right-handedness.

Without pursuing the fascinating developments of, and additions to,

these initial associations, it is fair to say that the current victory of “left” – its ever-growing evaluative positiveness – follows from the defeat of the Fascist “rightist” regimes, coincides with the decline of religion (Christ was always painted at the right of God), and currently results in “democracy,” “future,” and “young” becoming increasingly associated with “left.”³² This victory is of no small consequence, for it renders left the most courted and crucial word in the *war of words* with which political battles are fought. Still more important, as the evaluative imbalance between left and right grows, the emotional element of these labels overcomes their cognitive function. Therefore, this victory brings about what may be called the purely ideological use of left and right. In the Downsian analysis ideologies are devices for “cutting” information costs.³³ There is a point, however, at which this “cutting” is so drastic that the “information” element disappears altogether. It is along this shift, then, that a spatial imagery is fittingly spoken of as an *ideological space*, which is all the more ideological the more left and right become sheer laudatory or derogatory epithets. True enough, some associations to some policies remain – but the nicety of spatial images is that they lack any semantic anchorage, that is, any semantic constraint governing their use and abuse. The labels liberal-conservative are often assimilated, at least on comparative grounds, to left-right. Yet the two sets of labels fundamentally differ in that the first cannot be entirely stripped of cognitive-informative content whereas the latter set consists of empty boxes that can be filled and refilled, in principle, at whim. While there is a semantic impediment against associating “liberal” with Stalinist policies, no such impediment exists for “left.” Historically, left-right did enter politics heavily loaded with cultural and religious meaning. But these labels are easily “unloaded” and “reloaded” – for they lack any semantic substratum.

We are now ready to confront the grand debate, namely, whether the space of party competition can be reduced to a single dimension or whether it is inescapably multidimensional. When the Downsian model is utilized for interpreting the data, we are left – across nations – with mixed findings and some results are both puzzling and contradictory. What is pretty certain, by now, is that European (including England) mass publics are able to place themselves, when interviewed, on a left-right scale.³⁴ But this evidence does not demonstrate, to be sure, that left-right explains, or suffices to explain, the actual voting behavior. A one-dimensional left-right explanation has been found sufficient for Italy,³⁵ and, somewhat more roughly, for Germany³⁶ and Sweden.³⁷ England could also be appended to this group.³⁸ But France is found to be different, in this respect, from Italy.³⁹ Less surprisingly, the Netherlands and Israel seemingly require two dimensions.⁴⁰ And we

are now told that Switzerland requires three.⁴¹ As Giacomo Sani rightly emphasizes, much of the controversy on the applicability of the left-right continuum may well hinge on

the different techniques of data-gathering. . . . Thus the conclusions for the American electorate are based on the analysis of open-ended material; in the British case a "screen" question was asked in a preliminary way. . . . In the three continental nations [France, Germany, Italy] the respondents were simply asked to locate parties on a left-right spectrum that was presented to them.

To be sure, it is highly plausible for mass electorates to display - from country to country - "different rates of internalization of different cognitive devices, or labels . . . that assist the average voter in 'making sense' of the party system."⁴² But these differences cannot be properly assessed unless we equalize first the data-gathering techniques.

Awaiting more equalized findings, the theoretical argument is that party positioning is a point of intersection that requires, for its determination, not only an abscissa representing the left-right continuum but at least another intervening ordinate: the authoritarian-democratic continuum emphasized by Eysenck⁴³ and/or the secular-denominational continuum. We may also find ethnic or racial parties that definitely belong to a distinct dimension. Additional dimensions may be construed on the basis of the urban-rural cleavage, and even on the basis of the modernity-tradition cleavage. We quickly end up, then, with some four basic cleavage dimensions, which can be represented as in Figure 44.

Nobody denies that these dimensions of cleavage do exist - in some country or other - that they help organize the issues, and that they

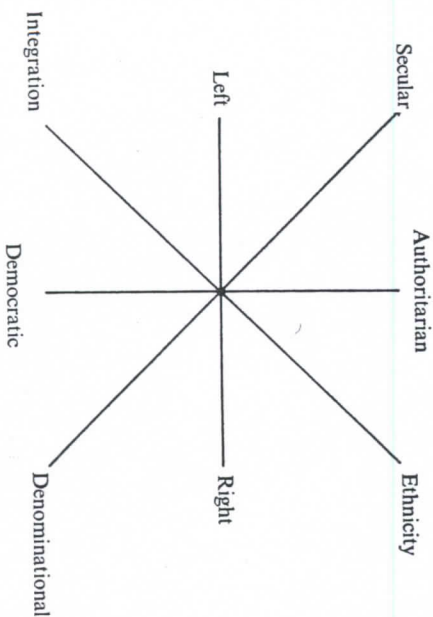


Figure 44. A multidimensional space

10.3 Multi-undimensional and ideological space

enter the party images and identifications. The fact remains that there is nothing much we can do with this multidimensionality - at least in the sense that there is little point in conceiving it as a "space." As Barry observes: "Extending the Downsian one-dimensional analysis to more dimensions does not in itself give reasons for expecting a number of parties nor for the parties to be anywhere except in the middle of the voters as they are distributed over the n -dimensional space."⁴⁴ And while more than one dimension generally allows a better fit of the data, nonetheless "evidence that dimensions x , y and z are needed to account for a particular batch of preference orders does not assure that any of the actors are seeing the space in more than one dimension."⁴⁵

We are thus prompted to seek ways of working our way back toward a unidimensional simplification. The first thing to note is that we seemingly find no contradiction in assuming one left-right dimension while acknowledging that it actually consists of multiple orderings - depending on whether the criterion is economic, socioeconomic, constitutional, populist, or, in the end, no criterion at all.⁴⁶ Under the economic criterion left points to state control (ending with a collectivized economy) and right to a market system based on private property. Under the socioeconomic criterion left favors, and right disfavors, welfare policies and leveling. But there are hosts of noneconomic issues that are equally accommodated under our labels: civil rights, civil liberties, *habeas corpus*, due process, privacy, and so forth - in short, law, safety, and order issues. Here enters, then, what I call (with reference to the constitutional democracies) the constitutional criterion, according to which extreme left and extreme right are used as pointers of an anti-system opposition, and the constitutional left-right differ with respect to how equal laws relate to societal inequalities. However, we also abide by looser criteria. In the fifties left was often equated with "change" and "movement," while right indicated a status quo orientation. But this criterion loses its discriminating power, *inter alia*, in the face of the protective and immobilizing practices of trade unionism. Therefore, on these loose grounds I prefer to speak of a populist criterion, that is, the pure and simple placing of appeals downward (to the masses, the workers, the deprived) along the dimension of socioeconomic stratification, as against upward or, preferably, at some null point. On similar grounds another criterion is, perhaps, "dissatisfaction." Finally, we end up with no criterion at all, that is, with mere scare and cuss words whose only sense is the one established, following the contingencies, by some Big Brother.⁴⁷

Most of these criteria are, to be sure, strictly Western bound. Indeed, only the economic criterion is able to travel from the democratic to the nondemocratic world. The Soviet Union remains at the

left only on account of its state-owned economy – hardly on any other of the aforementioned grounds. Within the Western world, however, the constitutional standard of judgment is no less central than the economic or socioeconomic one, and actually appears to be the crucial criterion at the level of political elite and intra-elite perceptions.⁴⁸ Indeed, why should constitutional democracies be such unless they remain a matter of major concern? This is also the reason that upholds my presenting the parties – throughout the volume – in a left-to-right constitutional-political sequence. Had I followed a socioeconomic criterion of ordering, the positioning puzzles would have been far greater and a number of parties would have been placed at very different points of the spectrum. No doubt, even under the constitutional-political criterion the positioning of two adjacent parties may well result in being interchangeable, both because the impressionistic nature of spatial assignments is intrinsic to their nature and because two adjacent parties may indeed overlap and compete for the same positioning. But no harm follows by allowing for inverted, contiguous positionings. The case is very different, instead, when the constitutional criterion is replaced by the economic criterion. For instance, under the latter the Gaullists could well be moved, in the fifties, from the far right to a center-left positioning. Likewise, the Italian neo-Fascist party (MSI) represents the extreme right on constitutional grounds but could be placed at very different points of the spectrum under socioeconomic criteria. And similar instances are afforded by a number of multiparty countries.

At first sight multiple orderings complicate rather than simplify our problem. Upon second thought, however, we discover that the “emptiness” of our left-right boxes facilitates, and indeed prompts, the squeezing of a multiplicity of orderings (equivalent to a variety of issue spaces) into one and the same spatial dimension. For instance, the authoritarian-democratic dimension of Eysenk is absorbed by extending the overall left-right space and allowing for different distances between the parties. The foregoing adds up to saying, then, that while people locate themselves and the parties at different points of the left-right spectrum for multiple and often confused reasons, yet they do assign – whenever the options or the ideological heating grows – spatial positions.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the squeezing process entails that a broad gulf is bound to separate (i) the opinions and overall perception of politics tapped by interviews and (ii) the actual voting choice. Indeed, the greater the squeeze, the broader the gulf. When the citizen speaks, he may have many things to say. But when he is coerced into casting a yes-no vote, he may well have to settle for the “least-distance” solution, that is, to vote for the party (candidate) perceived as closest, on the left-right spectrum, to his self-assigned

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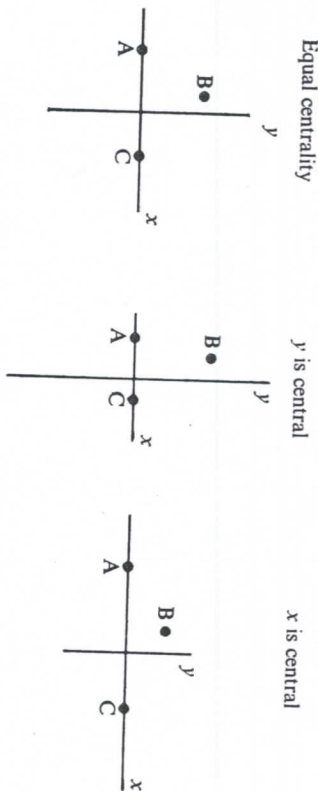


Figure 45. Variations of a two-dimensional party space according to centrality

location on the same spectrum. The difficulties confronting the observer when he attempts to gauge the interview responses to the voting act are the very same difficulties that the voter beholds as he actually votes. Therefore, the observer creates for himself more problems than he can solve unless he accounts for the squeeze and is alerted to the fact that the overall perception of politics of the citizen cannot be automatically transferred to the actual ballot of the voter.

In spite of the foregoing considerations at least one dimension – the religious one – seems irreducible and encroached upon the actual voting choice. The laical-denominational dimension cannot be absorbed; yet it can be somewhat compressed. As Converse ingeniously points out, two dimensions represented in a Cartesian space can be perceived in three very different shapes, according to whether the x and y axes are equal, to whether the x dimension, being more important, is extended and the y dimension shortened, or to whether it is the y dimension that becomes central and extends while the x dimension shrinks – as shown in Figure 45.⁵⁰

Assuming the x axis represents the left-right dimension, and the y axis represents the clerical-anticlerical dimension, if both dimensions are of equal centrality to the voters – as in the first example – the case for unidimensionality is seemingly lost (though not, we shall see, as it stands in the first figure). If, however, the y dimension is dominant, parties A and C become compressed (very close) and we may well argue that this is a case of unidimensional clerical-anticlerical competition between B and A-C in which the left-right dimension plays no other role aside from impeding the coinciding of A and C. In the third case, instead, it is B that is compressed along (in proximity to) the x axis, and the argument becomes that we have here a left-right single dimension of competition in which party B enters the competitive arena only when perceived as an in-between party.

Needless to say, this is the case that fits my argument and can be

redesigned so as to represent the competitive status of the Christian Democratic parties of Germany, Italy, France, and Chile. The German CDU does not seek Catholic identifiers (except in Bavaria) nor desires to be perceived as a religious party, and it is almost entirely flattened along the *x* axis in the pursuit of an absolute majority. The Italian DC capitalizes on Catholic identifiers, but its center (or center-moving-leftward) placement attracts non-Catholic voters as well. The French MRP lost its potential Catholic identifiers by starting, in 1946, too much on the left, and thus failed in terms of both religious appeal and positioning. The Chilean PDC equally failed in stabilizing its support because of its overly fickle swings along the left-right dimension.

The case for unidimensionality can be pressed still further if we are reminded that we are investigating vote hunting, that is, if *competition* is taken seriously. Competition presupposes a common ground on which *two* parties (at least) speak to the same voters. Therefore, just *one* single-claim party – whether religious, ethnic, or linguistic – supported by identified voters does not add another dimension of competition: Actually, such a party is not subject to, or out of, competition. In the first case of Figure 45 (equal centrality of both axes) party B does not testify to a two-dimensional space of competition; it testifies, instead, to an *out-of-running* position. If B is satisfied with its voting pool, it will remain safe – aside from demographic and generational changes.⁵¹ If it seeks, instead, a greater share, then it will have to approach the *x* axis and attempt to compete, for better or for worse, along the left-right dimension, as indicated in the third case of Figure 45. To be sure, a religious ordinate (the *y* axis) helps explain, say, why a left-oriented Catholic is not a Marxist Socialist; but this element is discounted, or taken for granted, in the bidding arena. That is to say, in general, that the reasons for the fragmentation of the party system do not translate themselves *eo ipso* into a multidimensional space of competition.

Thus a two-dimensional competition remains plausible especially with respect to Israel, for here we do have two to three denominational parties that compete among themselves on religious grounds.⁵² It does not appear warranted, on the other hand, for Italy, Germany, France, or Chile.⁵³ In particular, the Israeli *Misrachi* (National Religious party) can freely float along the left-right dimension precisely because its identifiers are interested only in the religious payoffs of whatever alliance pays. Contrariwise, the Italian DC has been maneuvering not in another space, but in the same space as all the other parties.⁵⁴ Had the DC believed it could gain votes in terms of religious proselytism, it would not have sought, over the past 20 years, a center-left image. The same considerations apply to the ethnic parties. The Swedish People's party in Finland can be located, spatially, anywhere or, better,

nowhere: It represents an ethnic out-group that neither loses nor gains votes in a competitive space. On the other hand, the current predicament of Belgium can well be interpreted as a two-dimensional splitting of a formerly simpler space.

Overall, it seems to me that the feeble case might well be the case of multidimensionality. While a unidimensional simplification may oversimplify the elementary case (twopartism), yet it becomes a more realistic representation the more we proceed toward the muddled cases. This is so under two assumptions: first, that position-perceptions become more useful and, at the limit, unavoidable the more the number of parties increases; second, that a left-right space is all the more likely the more we pass from pragmatic to ideological politics.

The argument hinges, then, on *how many* are the parties of a given system. With two parties only, the elector can orient himself without a spatial perception of the left-right type, and there is no compelling reason for a space of competition to be an "ideological space" – as has been the case in the United States.⁵⁵ Yet the British pattern is already a different one. For one thing, labels make a difference, and the dichotomy Democratic-Republican is far more anodyne and easily conducive to overlapping than the Labor-Conservative dichotomy. Furthermore, class politics does enter the British-inspired twopartism. On both counts the English-speaking voter is more sensitive than the American-speaking one to a left-right perception of politics.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, electorates that are amenable, albeit to a different extent, either to the liberal-conservative or to the labor-conservative squaring of politics, markedly differ from the electorates that plainly abide by the left-right squaring. As already noted, the labor-liberal-conservative distinctions are anchored, semantically, to a cognitive substratum – even if mass publics are unable to articulate it – while the left-right distinction can stand and float as a purely emotional symbolism. And this difference forcibly comes out when we compare – glossing, for the moment, over the three-to-four party systems – twopartism with extreme multipartism. When the voter is confronted with five or more parties, the information costs and the indeterminacies multiply exponentially, and some drastic simplification becomes a sheer necessity. In this context the average voter should be a kind of computer if we expect him to relate – following Stokes – several dimensions of cleavage to several issue performances, and these performances to the issue platforms of several parties.⁵⁷

Around the five-party turning point we are confronted, however, with the bifurcation between segmented and polarized politics.⁵⁸ Here we can think of two interpretations. We may argue that the more numerous the parties, the more we either have a multidimensional space (the segmented societies) or an ideological space (the polarized

societies) of competition. Alternatively, we may argue – this being my option – that while the segmented politics surely require a multidimensional explanation for the party *identifications*, it does not automatically follow that their *competition* is multidimensional also.

The broad hypothesis is, then, that the more the parties, the more their competition tends to spread along a linear, left-right type of space; that this is more surely the case the more a party system displays an ideological patterning; but that the space of competition may well be unidimensional also in the segmented politics with low ideological focus, for a party stepping out of line into another dimension runs the risk of being left to play a solitary and, over time, losing game. Hence the presumption of multidimensionality is strong only for the countries in which another “unsqueezeable” dimension calls for two parties (at least) to compete among themselves in such a way as to operate a distinct subsystem. The question could be why the left-right dimension is assumed to prevail over the other dimensions. I would answer that in a mass communicating world characterized by mass politics a maximum of visual simplicity coupled with a maximum of manipulability represent an almost unbeatable combination.⁵⁹

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In attempting to show that the Downs' model has been too readily dismissed on overly perfectionistic grounds or on the assumption that issue voting is more decisive than it actually is, I may have gone to the other extreme. In principle, however, models *are* drastic simplifications whose purpose is not to represent reality. A model (in the Downsian sense) purports to bring into prominence some basic feature that otherwise gets lost in the complexity of descriptive accounts.

Not only models are, in themselves, drastic simplifications, but the preceding discussion brings out that it is not on the Downsian premises that we can explain why voters distribute and align themselves as they do. It follows that the Downsian model is best defended and furthered by narrowing the issue, that is, by interpreting it as a theory of the impact of party positioning upon voting behavior. Still more narrowly, my interest will be focused on the *rewarding tactics of inter-party competition by the party leaders*. In this perspective, policies and issues are formulated in such a way as to convey to the electorate at large *position-images*, and the competitive preoccupation of party leaders bears precisely on the *position maneuverings* that are believed not to disturb the party's identifiers and, at the same time, to attract new voters (or to retain potential defectors).

The issue having been narrowed, let it be immediately stressed that its elements are more complex than the ones envisaged by Downs. In

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and by itself, left-right amounts only to an *ordinal space* whose only property is a unidimensional sequencing. If so, it is very tempting to assume that its objects stand at equal intervals. However, as left-right is transformed into an *ideological space*, new properties are added. Parties not only stand side by side but must also be assumed to be placed at *unequal intervals*; and a third property, *space elasticity* – how far and how much the space extends – becomes, I shall argue, even more crucial.

Parties are neither perceived by the public nor by the politicians as simply placed – with respect to the positioning of each actor – rightward or leftward. They are also perceived as being more or less “alien,” more or less “extraneous.” For the voter this means that some parties are acceptable as second and/or third choices, whereas other parties are simply non acceptable. Thus only a segment of the spectrum allows for *vote transferability*: Each voter moves, or is willing to move, along the spectrum, only up to a point of no-transfer.⁶⁰ Likewise, legislators and politicians do not simply abide, in their coalitional maneuverings, by a contiguity principle: They too encounter, or may encounter, a no-coalition point. If these perceptions are recast in spatial language, they point to different *spacings* between the parties – if not to a *disjointed* space. Unequal intervals mean, then, that in an ideological space parties are separated by different distances – distances that can in fact be highly distant.⁶¹

Space elasticity is best conceived as a third property – rather than as an implication of different in-between spacings – in that it addresses the question: How does the number of parties relate to a space of competition? Most authors seemingly assume the overall space of competition to be fixed, or inelastic. In this perspective, two parties slice among themselves the same “linear size” of competitive space than, say, six parties. But this is a highly implausible assumption. Whatever the reasons for the proliferation of parties – and there are many – once several relevant parties exist, the assumption supported by the evidence is that their existence is correlated with a more extended space of competition. I am not arguing, then, that several parties exist *because* the space is more extended – for it can be equally held that the space is extended by the parties. I am only pointing out that we have yet failed to translate in spatial terms the otherwise acknowledged differences between homogeneous and heterogeneous (or fragmented) political cultures, or between consensual and conflictual societies. If we speak, as we do speak, of an “integrated” versus and “unintegrated” party system⁶² and if – as I have contended all along – party systems differ in being bipolar and multipolar, non-polarized and polarized, the unidimensional spatial representation of all of this is that the various systems display different overall linear distances.

In any event, the pure and simple existence of unequal intervals between the parties brings forcefully to the fore that competition cannot be assumed to have only one, natural tendency – convergence. In other words, an ideological space squarely raises the problem of the *directions* of competition. In the Downsian model parties basically compete centripetally, and the problem is the extent to which their converging is counteracted. Downs indicates two major counterpulls that impede an excessive overlapping or even coinciding of the parties: the abstention of the voters (either of the extreme voters or of the ones who do not care to choose among parties without “differential”), and/or the rise, at the extremes, of blackmail parties.⁶³ On these premises, Downs suggests that parties find an “equilibrium” among themselves, that is, an optimal position along the spectrum at which they tend to remain or to revert, for, by moving away, they would lose votes. Nonetheless, the thrust of his argument definitely is that competition occurs – within the aforesaid restraints – in one direction only.⁶⁴ However, if some parties are perceived – and perceive themselves – as being alien and extraneous, why should they compete centripetally? Moreover, and in general, there is no point in hunting for the non-transferable votes; and the transferable ones may well be located at the outer ends, not in the middle area, of the spectrum.

An ideological space gives equal weight, then, to *two* possible directions of competition, either centripetal or centrifugal. In this perspective a center-fleeing trend is not simply a *pro tempore* reversal of a basic centripetal drive, but an alternative, independent competitive strategy. And if this is so, we have here an entirely new problem with which neither Downs nor his interpreters have yet come to grips. Let us attempt to pursue it.

As is prudent on highly tentative grounds, the cue will be simplified to the utmost – as will be seen by glancing at Figure 46, which is merely intended as a crude visual aid for making one point only: why it is that two-, three-, and four party systems happen – as the empirical evidence abundantly confirms – to be characterized by centrality, by a centripetal drive. The point may appear, in itself, obvious; but it is less obvious when the alternative possibility – center-fleeing competition – is borne in mind. Moreover, and in particular, I shall attempt to explain this centripetal drive in *purely mechanical terms*, that is, simply on the basis of the interactions between the number of parties, on the one hand, and the extension of the space of competition, on the other hand. I am not trying to explain, that is, how and why a given system comes into being, but only how it operates once that it is given. Whatever the reasons why parties are two, three, four (or more), I am simply saying: If they are two, *then*; if they are three, *then* – and so forth. Therefore, it is precisely because each pattern “works” as sug-

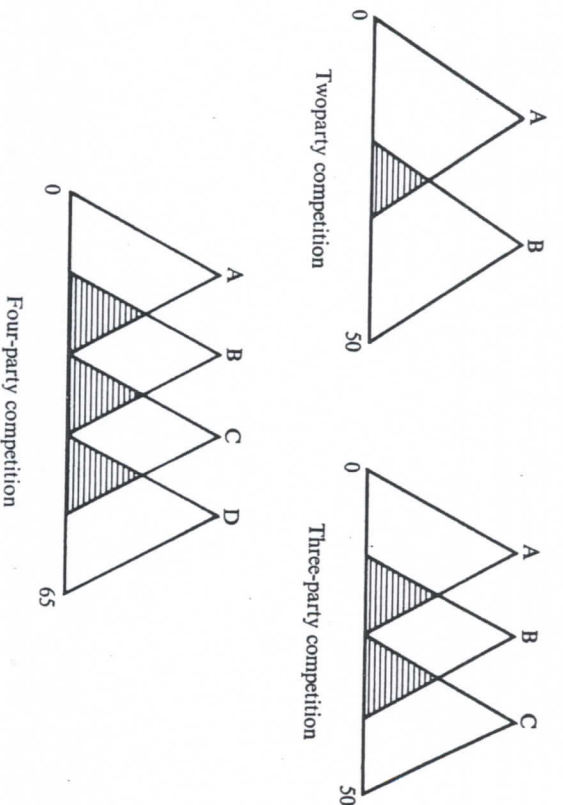


Figure 46. Schemes of centripetal competition

gested, that it remains as it is. In particular, if in a two-, three-, or four party system the prevailing pull is not centripetal, this means that the pattern in question is in transition either to the one that follows or ultimately to the centrifugal pattern. As for Figure 46, the shaded overlaps indicate the voters for whom the parties compete among themselves; and I use triangles instead of curves because my argument does not presuppose any particular curve of the voters' distribution of preferences.

Two-party systems have been examined in detail,⁶⁵ and here Downs is at his best. Therefore, the first design in Figure 46 hardly needs comment. In twopartism either the contestants converge – for the area of rewarding competition is between A and B – or the system becomes dysfunctional and eventually falls apart. Hence “centrality” is the very essence of the system – *unless* one of the two major parties begins to fear that it has no chance of winning in the foreseeable future. This condition – which is seldom made explicit – calls our attention to two points, namely, how the parties of twopartism should be counted and, second, how the notion of winning should be defined.

I need not dwell on the first point. Let me simply recall that two parties are not the same as a two-party system. A first possibility is that one of the two parties appears confined – either in fact or in fear – to a somewhat permanent minority status. In this case – predominance⁶⁶ – there is no compelling reason for the minority party to compete centripetally – it may well try the opposite strategy. A second possibility,

albeit an extreme one, is for two parties to belong to entirely different dimensions (e.g., one black and one white, with strong sanctions against trespassing). In this case, however, we simply have a stalemate, not a state of competition – and that is that. Finally, and this we well know, a two-party *system* may well contain *third* parties. In this case two-partism differs from three-partism as, or as much as, single-party government differs from coalition government. Pulling these threads together, the Downsian model of two-party competition may be said to apply under the four following conditions: (i) that the undecided or floating voters are center located, that is, moderates; (ii) that the classification is correct, i.e., that the party system is not a predominant system; (iii) that the two parties compete in the same space; and (iv) that at least one party is able to win a plurality.

Turning to the second point, attention should be called to the fact that the vote-maximizing assumption takes on, in two-partism, an entirely different meaning than in multipartism. In the two-party context “winning” means a plurality, and whoever does not win a plurality simply loses. In the more-than-two party systems, instead, “winning” means gaining votes or seats – and, furthermore, a party may be more interested in winning in terms of positioning than in terms of returns. And there is a world of difference between the winner-takes-all and the greater-share notions of winning.

These considerations redress the harsh criticism, among others, of Hirschman: “. . . hardly ever was a hypothesis [vote maximizing] so cruelly contradicted by the facts as were the predictions of the Hotelling-Downs theory by the Goldwater nomination.”⁶⁷ Since the Republicans had reason to fear, at the time, a permanent minority status, from this angle it was perfectly “rational” to attempt a somewhat desperate sortie in search for a realignment. Losing for losing – why not lose with Goldwater?⁶⁸ The calculated risk of 1964 – which turned out, to be sure, to be a miscalculation – was to appeal to the pool of the nonvoters.⁶⁹ If anything, the “irrational” nomination was the one of McGovern in 1972 (the long-run fears of the Republicans are the long-run hopes of the Democrats), even though it still applies that – failing a plurality – it is rational to lose with the “right” candidate. However, in both instances the *electoral* prediction of the Downs model was entirely correct, for both candidates were in fact severely defeated. Therefore, the Goldwater and McGovern cases deserve scrutiny not because they disconfirm the model, but for the better reason that they prompt us to look at the intra-party processes. Our rationalizations notwithstanding, presidential nominations result, in no small part, from bitter fights among rival groups seeking, to begin with, a victory for themselves. Let us keep well in mind, therefore, that the *outer* moves of a party – the inter-party competition – are also a func-

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tion of its *inner* moves, that is, of intra-party competition. The question turns, then, on whether also the intra-party processes can be interpreted in Downsian terms.⁷⁰ My conjecture is that this is very much the case.⁷¹ But this opens up a path of inquiry that cannot be pursued here.

Moving on to the case of three-partism, the banality of the design in Figure 46 has the merit of vividly confronting us with the question: Why should the rewarding tactics of party competition remain *centripetal*? After all, with three parties we can already have a left, a right, and a *center*. So we can no longer shun the thorny issue of what is meant by *center*. The distinction between a *center placement* – resulting from a spatial configuration of politics – and so-called *center opinions* (doctrines, ideologies, and the like) should be, by now, well established. Yet it is well to know *whose* placement. And the ultimate question remains: How is a *center placement perceived as such*?

As regards the first question, the actor, or the subject, can either be a party – the so-called *center party* – or a portion of the electorate. And I have maintained that while any polity contains a center-placed electorate, only some polities display center-placed parties, i.e., parties that can be meaningfully said to occupy the middle area of a competitive space.⁷² No doubt, along this route we may be confronted again with the problem of what *center* means “mentally” (ideologically or otherwise). But this is not a crucial matter for our purposes. We may leave it at saying that *center* is, in itself, a broad spectrum containing reasonableness, balancing of pros and cons, moderation, but also pure and simple mental abstention, a know-nothing or a do-nothing (undecided) attitude.

Thus the crucial question is: How and when does the perception of “center” arise with respect to a party that is perceived as “occupying” the center? Here enters the notion of space elasticity, for the perception of a center is a function of the length of the space. A short space does not allow, or does not facilitate, the perception of a center: It has, so to speak, no room for it. A short space is defined simply by its ends – left and right. A third point of reference – the *central point* – becomes meaningful and perceivable only as the space extends, and particularly when the ends of the space are perceived as being two poles apart.

The secret of the centripetal convergence of three parties resides, then, in the linear distance of the abscissa, which remains – in the figure – as it was in the two-party case. There is no reason to assume, in fact, that three-partism calls for a larger competitive distance than two-partism. If England adopted proportional representation, it would immediately become a three-party system (at least), whereas if the German Federal Republic adopted the single-member district system,

its Liberal party would disappear – with the distribution of political preferences remaining unchanged. Assuming, then, that the space of competition does not include – being short – sizable extremized sectors of opinion, parties A and C do not run the risk of being outflanked. Moreover, the fewer the parties, the more each party has a chance of having access to power and is, therefore, governing oriented.⁷³ On both counts A and C will both try to gain votes by converging toward the central area, for by departing they would leave a vacant space for the expansion of party B. As for party B, it can either attempt to resist the expansion of party B. As for party B, it can either attempt to resist on both sides or to attack on one side. What it cannot do – since it is not perceived as a center party and cannot capitalize on the fear of extremism – is push apart its neighbors via a double-front, centrifugal expansion. If anything, the in-between party of a three-party system tends to be squeezed into being the smaller party. Note, also, that with three parties the near evenness of twopartism tends to wither away. Therefore, the competitive interplays may actually take three configurations: not only A and C converging upon B, but also A and B both moving toward C or, conversely, C and B both going in the direction of A. All of this adds up to saying – in my previous terminology – that three parties do not make for a tripolar system: The competitive configuration of three-partism remains *bipolar*.

A four-party system as designed in the figure does not raise any problem. It is merely a subdivided, or doubled, representation of the twoparty scheme. The only difference is that I now assume the space of party competition to be larger – as indicated by the abscissa running, conventionally, from 0 to 65. There is no necessary reason for this extension. Two parties may slice themselves into four parties simply because a single-member system is replaced by proportional representation. Even so, as the restraints of the single-member system are removed, two things change: The hitherto blackmail parties can well materialize as additional parties, and, in any event, the extreme (not extremized) opinions acquire a leverage. So the odds are that a four party system will either reflect, or help produce, a wider linear space than the one allowed by twopartism. However, the fact that the count-erpulls acquire greater force does not detract from the fact that no four-party polity actually displays an extremized or polarized pattern. This confirms, then, that four parties can still interact centrifugally either with three parties converging against one (as in Sweden), or in a two-against-two contest for the in-between floating voters.⁷⁴

The step that follows – five parties or more – appears to be the critical step. Here it is imperative to recall that “five” is defined by my multidimensionality, thereby discarding the parties that have been declared, in the previous section, out of competition. That is, the five or

more parties that enter a unidimensional model of competition must all compete along one and the same line.⁷⁶ With these provisos, we may turn to Figure 47, which comes closer to portraying a “model” than the mere visual aids of Figure 46. It should also be noted that we are now representing five specific parties and/or more-than-five parties clustered into five groups. The argument now is that when the critical threshold is bypassed, it makes little difference whether the parties competing along the left-right line are six, eight, or even ten – provided that they are “real parties,” that is, that we are not misled by a situation of party atomization.

Downs may be right when asserting that any given distribution of voters in a given electoral structure allows for a certain number of parties and no more.⁷⁷ The trouble is that this argument verges on circularity, for the actual distribution results, in no small part, from how many are the parties and is, therefore, shaped by the parties themselves. It is safer, therefore, to pursue the argument only in terms of space elasticity. To be sure, the extended space represented – in Figure 47 – by an abscissa running from 0 to 100, implies that we are envisaging politics that display a strong ideological focus, low consensus, and high polarization. But this leaves the actual distributions to be investigated empirically.

The arrows in the figure indicate that we now have a competitive pattern that is no longer centripetal but centrifugal. How is this reversal to be explained? The crucial element is – according to my earlier suggestion – that when the extreme ends of the spectrum are so far removed as to be two poles apart, then the center becomes not only a highly visible point but also a pole endowed with strong leverage. Now a center positioning is perceived by the non-extremized electorate as the *safe position*, the position that best secures the survival of the existing democracy. We may equally say that the center position now incarnates a “center logic” of defense against the extremes. Hence the system is now tripolar or, eventually, multipolar. This entails that a

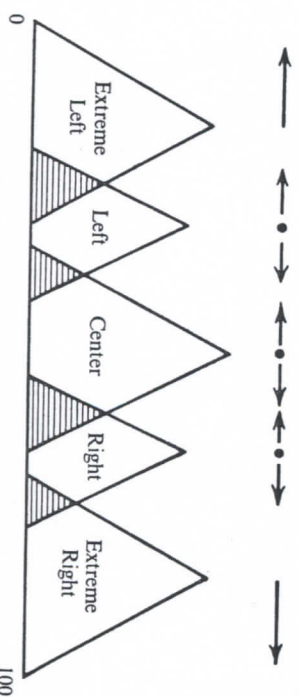


Figure 47. Centrifugal competition

centrifugal push is started at the very metrical center of the spectrum, for the center party (Italy) or parties (Weimar, Chile) acquire a hitherto unprecedented appeal – so much so that they attempt to expand with the “oil stain” technique, that is, on both sides. And while a simultaneous war on two fronts may not succeed, this logic of expansion is reflected in, and revealed by, the inner, centrifugal tensions of the center party itself. In any event, the central area is now physically occupied in a very real sense, namely, that the moderate electorate no longer is the floating electorate *par excellence*: Indeed, it turns out to be, under the circumstances, a highly stable electorate. To be sure, the “eccentric” push of the center party (or parties) is somehow counteracted by a centripetal competition of the moderate left and the moderate right. But the (pro-system) left is outflanked on its left side, and the (pro-system) right is equally outflanked on its right side. That is, the wings that are loyal to the system have also a problem of competing centrifugally vis-à-vis the unloyal (anti-system) oppositions. This means that their positioning does not allow them to exert any decisive influence on the ultimate trends of the polity.

The final say is left, therefore, to the extremized parties. Since the “extreme extremes” are not exposed to outflanking, one may well wonder why they should not converge. But let us recall the second property of an ideological space – unequal distances. In the case in point we are confronted with very “distant” parties that are perceived, and perceive themselves, as alien, if not as foes. Hence the extreme left and the extreme right neither desire nor have much to gain, in competing centripetally. Their goals are best furthered by tearing the system apart. To be sure, successful anti-system parties are office-holding parties, especially at the local and regional levels. But their holding office does not mean that they are “integrated” into the system; it may equally testify to the system’s “disintegration.” Even when anti-system parties soft-pedal their anti-ideology, their primary strategy is to make the system collapse by emptying it, that is, by means of a draining leading to a bimodal distribution or to a unimodal one peaked in the proximity of one of the ends of the spectrum.

In sum, the basic idea conveyed by the model that applies to the systems that I call of extreme and polarized pluralisms, first, that the leverage acquired by a center *pole* discourages, and actually impedes, centrality; and, second, that the extreme parties of such systems prosper on more, not on less, polarization. No doubt, this pattern is so precarious, and so un felicitous, that the iron arm can hardly last indefinitely. Over time, counter-trends may well begin to prevail. This means, or implies, that the space of competition cannot be extended indefinitely: Either a polity squarely collapses or its competitive space will, at some points in time, begin to shrink. The point remains that we

do need a model which accounts for the competitive trends of the “unstable,” non-working democracies. The fact that most of them have died out is not a reason for forgetting them. It is precisely because they are dead that it becomes crucial to understand why.

Two concluding remarks are in order. The first is that models – as here understood – are supposed to predict *trends*, not single elections. The second one is that the best defense of the approach pursued here is in the point made by Downs himself (in spite of his deductive theorizing), namely, that models “should be tested primarily by the accuracy of their predictions rather than by the reality of their assumptions.”⁷⁸

NOTES TO CHAPTER 10

- 1 *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, cit., pp. 28, 30.
- 2 This is so also because, after Downs, more insightful approaches to the theory of democracy have been provided by Dahl (*A Preface to Democratic Theory*, cit.), James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock (*The Calculus of Consent*, University of Michigan Press, 1965), and Olson (*The Theory of Collective Action*, cit.).
- 3 Peter C. Ordeshook, *The Spatial Theory of Elections: A Review and Critique*, ECPR paper, Strasbourg, 1974, p. 3.
- 4 D. Stokes, “Spatial Models of Party Competition,” *APSR*, June 1963 (also reprinted in *Elections and Political Order*, below, n. 16). With reference to Converse see esp. “The Problem of Party Distances in Models of Voting Change,” in M. Kent Jennings and I. Harmon Zeigler, eds., *The Electoral Process*, Prentice-Hall, 1966.
- 5 Ordeshook, cit., p. 21. Within the boundaries of two-candidate contests a recent example of mathematical treatment is R. W. Hoyer, Lawrence S. Mayer, “Comparing Strategies in a Spatial Model of Electoral Competition,” *AJPS*, August 1974.
- 6 Downs, op. cit., p. 100.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 96.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 103–113.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 12 These difficulties are pointed out by Barry, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy*, cit., ch. 5, *passim*; and they are acknowledged on more technical grounds, among others, by Ordeshook, loc. cit.
- 13 *Supra*, 3-2.
- 14 *Supra*, 7-1.
- 15 *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy*, cit., p. 143.
- 16 Also on account of these conceptual ambiguities, issue voting can hardly be assessed with respect to how many voters are identified, and it has in fact been assessed on the basis of the “normal vote.” See P. E. Converse, “The Concept of a Normal Vote,” in Angus Campbell, Converse, and Warren E. Miller, eds., *Elections and the Political Order*, Wiley, 1966.
- 17 For a development see Douglas Dobson, Duane A. Meeter, “Alter-

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- native Markov Models for Describing Change in Party Identification," *AJPS*, August 1974.
- 18 Donald R. Matthews, James W. Prothro, in Jennings and Zeigler, *The Electoral Process*, cit., pp. 149-150.
- 19 Stokes, "Spatial Models of Party Competition," cit., p. 370 and *passim*.
- 20 See A. Campbell, P. E. Converse, W. E. Miller, D. Stokes, *The American Voter*, Wiley, 1960, esp. chs. 6, 8.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- 22 P. E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in D. E. Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent*, Free Press, 1964, p. 229.
- 23 Reference is made to the "authority beliefs" of Milton Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind*, Basic Books, 1960, esp. p. 44 and *passim*.
- 24 "Spatial Models of Party Competition," cit., p. 376. I gloss over the specifically methodological criticisms of Stokes, for they appear immaterial - it will be seen - to my subsequent argument.
- 25 V. O. Key, *The Responsible Electorate, Rationality in Presidential Voting 1936-1960*, Harvard University Press, 1966 (a posthumous publication edited by Milton C. Cummings), p. 6.
- 26 The findings of the sixties are well recapitulated and discussed in the articles of Gerald M. Pomper, Richard W. Boyd, Richard A. Brody, Benjamin I. Page, John H. Kessel, in *APSR*, June 1972, pp. 415-470. See also N. H. Nie (with K. Andersen), "Mass Belief Systems Revisited: Political Change and Attitude Structure," *JP*, August 1974.
- 27 These figures are summarized by Peter Nissen, *Party Identification, Issues and Images as Components of Electoral Decision: An Analytic Model*, ECPR 1975 London paper, mimeo, Table 1.
- 28 The notion of "critical election" - first developed by Key - is probed by W. D. Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics*, Norton, 1970. Its baseline, or "normal vote" (above, n. 16), which equally provides the parameter for "deviating" and "reinstating" elections. On the basis of the 1952 to 1960 elections Converse estimates the American normal vote to be 54 percent Democratic. Elections are classified as maintaining, deviating, and realigning, in *Elections and Political Order*, cit., by Campbell.
- 29 To be sure, some issues, such as birth control, are nicely related to the left-right dimension. But when all issues are taken together, or when issues are constantly changing, the overall structure of voting is unlikely to fit a single dimension.
- 30 This hypothesis may also be stated as follows: That a strong ideological focus is likely to produce congruence between issues and the left-right dimension. This reformulation actually reinforces the case for unidimensionality.
- 31 *Dictionnaire Politique*, 3rd ed., prefaced by Garnier-Pagès, Page-nerre Editeur, 1848, the entry *Gauche*, p. 425.
- 32 For additional considerations see Jean A. Laponce, "The Use of Visual Space to Measure Ideology," in Laponce and P. Smoker, eds., *Experimentation and Simulation in Political Science*, Toronto University Press, 1972, pp. 52-53; and Rokkan, *Citizens, Elections*,

Notes to Chapter 10

- Parties*, op. cit., pp. 334-335. I am indebted to Laponce for many penetrating comments on the ms. of this chapter.
- 33 Downs, op. cit., p. 113.
- 34 A 1973 survey in nine European countries found the following percentages of left-right self-locations: Germany, 93; Netherlands, 93; Denmark, 91; Italy, 83; Great Britain, 82; Ireland, 80; France, 78; Luxembourg, 78; Belgium, 73. See R. Inglehart, H. D. Klingemann, *Party Identification, Ideological Preference and the Left-Right Dimension Among Western Publics*, mimeo, Table 1. The paper will appear in Ian Budge and Ivor Crewe, eds., *Party Identifications and Beyond*, Wiley, forthcoming.
- 35 S. H. Barnes, "Left-Right and the Italian Voter," *CPS*, July 1971; Giacomo Sani, "Fattori Determinanti delle Preferenze Partitiche in Italia," *RISP*, I, 1973, and "A Test of the Least-Distance Model of Voting Choice: Italy 1972," *CPS*, July 1974.
- 36 H. D. Klingemann, "Testing the Left-Right Continuum on a Sample of German Voters," *CPS*, April 1972.
- 37 Bo Särilvik, "Sweden," in Rose, *Electoral Behavior*, cit., esp. pp. 424-426.
- 38 According to Rokkan, his sample indicates that the countries that "come nearest" to an arrangement along the left-right dimension are England and Sweden (*Citizens, Elections, Parties*, cit., p. 300). Converse definitely finds, in France, a left-right plus a clerical-antidemocratic dimension (see Converse and Georges Dupeux, "Polarization of the Electorate in France and the United States," now in Campbell et al., *Elections and Political Order*, cit., ch. 14; and Converse, "Some Mass-Elite Contrasts in the Perception of Political Space," mimeo, IPSA Paris meeting, January 1975). But see Emeric Deutsch, D. Lindon, P. Well, *Les Familles Politiques*, Minuit, 1966; and Roy Pierce, S. Barnes, "Public Opinion and Political Preferences in France and Italy," *MIPS*, November 1970, whose conclusion is that "public opinion in the two countries is most closely related to left-right ordered party identification for religious and religious related issues" (p. 658).
- 40 The reason will be explained shortly. However, while Israel surely is two-dimensional, this is less the case with the Netherlands.
- 41 R. Inglehart and Dusan Sidjanski, "Dimension Gauche-Droite chez les Dirigeants et Electeurs Suisses," *RFSP*, octobre 1974.
- 42 Sani, "A Test of the Least-Distance Model," loc. cit., p. 194. The U.K. study referred to in the quotation is David Butler, D. E. Stokes, *Political Change in Britain*, St. Martin's Press, 1969.
- 43 H. J. Eysenk, *The Psychology of Politics*, Praeger, 1955, ch. 4.
- 44 *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy*, cit., p. 139.
- 45 Converse, "The Problem of Party Distances," loc. cit., p. 196. Converse goes on to suggest that "it may be surmised that such perceptions instead of being interpreted as a function of a complex space which all voters perceive in the same way, may be interpreted as a function of simpler perceptions within spaces which differ from voter to voter" (p. 197). I understand this observation to run counter to the "fixed structure" assumption of Stokes (loc. cit., pp. 371-372).
- 46 It should be well understood that these criteria are articulated at the elite level, not at the level of mass electorates.

- 47 For instance, I am unable to find any criterion under which a Western leftist should be pro-Arab and, in particular, under which truly feudal sovereigns who should be denounced—in the left optics—as supercapitalistic parasites become untouchable.
- 48 This is well confirmed by our evidence on coalition governments, which shows that the adjacency principle holds far better in terms of the constitutional than the socioeconomic ordering. De Swaan, *Coalition Theories and Cabinet Formations*, op. cit., creates unjustified difficulties for his best explanation (“closed,” i.e., adjacent coalitions) by assuming a priori a socioeconomic ordering. Also the studies on the left-right positionings assigned to the parties by legislators reveal an overriding prevalence of the constitutional criterion.
- 49 As will be specified shortly, this generalization applies to the more-than-two party systems but can be extended to twopartism with reference to elite groups (below, n. 55).
- 50 “The Problem of Party Distances,” cit., pp. 198–199. My figure simplifies the one of Converse, which is referred to the French party system and carries six parties.
- 51 Over time party B will have the problem of keeping its followers removed from the dimension in which competition does occur and is likely to lose to it. This is, e.g., the current predicament of the Dutch Catholic party.
- 52 On Israel see *supra*, 6.2. The Netherlands is a less convincing case, for its Catholic and Calvinist major parties do not really compete against each other: Their respective voters are identified.
- 53 The well-established fact—at least in the case of France—that the position of the voter on the clerical-anticlerical dimension is the best single predictor of his voting choice is not a counter-evidence, for there are many reasons (largely inextricable ones) that make for a good predictor.
- 54 This is confirmed by the intra-party factional strife (*supra*, 4.4), which occurs exclusively in terms of left-right outflankings.
- 55 This applies to normal voters, not to elite populations. Thus American and Canadian university students are perfectly able, like all other Western students, to locate themselves on a left-right continuum. See Jean A. Laponce “Note on the Use of the Left-Right Dimension,” *CPS*, January 1970; and David Finlay et al., “The Concept of Left and Right in Cross National Research,” *CPS*, July 1974.
- 56 Austria (*supra*, 6.4) is the extreme case, i.e., the more definitely ideological one, of the twoparty category.
- 57 It is especially at this end that the methodological critiques and assumptions of Stokes appear vitiated by what I call the “microscope fallacy”—a variant of the fallacy of misplaced precision.
- 58 *Supra*, 6.3.
- 59 Let it be added that the decline of religion brings about a “religious left,” which produces, in turn, a congruent ordering of the religious and economic dimensions, thereby reinforcing the left-right perception of politics.
- 60 This is well confirmed by Michael Laver, “Strategic Campaign Behavior for Electors and Parties: The Northern Ireland Assembly

- Election of 1973,” *EJPR*, March 1975, with reference to the introduction, in Ulster, of the single transferable vote. Laver makes his research a test of the Downsian model.
- 61 Converse (“The Problem of Party Distances,” loc. cit., pp. 184–193 and esp. Figure 2) analyzes the French and Finnish evidence finding, with reference to the “perceived distances” between the parties, that “in both cases the gulf between the two main parties of the left (Communists and Socialists) is very nearly as large as the length of the segment occupied by all the non-Communist parties together” (p. 191). With respect to the Netherlands a sophisticated research of H. Daalder, Jeroold G. Rusk, “Perceptions of Party in the Dutch Parliament” (in Patterson and Walke, *Comparative Legislative Behavior*, cit., esp. pp. 169 ff.) reports “a clear differentiation between parties regarded as potentially in the system . . . and parties outside the system” (p. 180), indeed a significant finding for a system with comparatively low polarization (*supra*, 6.2). Denmark is covered on similar grounds by Mogens N. Pedersen, E. Damgaard, P. Nannestad Olsen, “Party Distances in the Danish Folketing,” *SPS*, vol. 6, 1971. On Norway, see Converse and Henry Valen, “Dimensions of Cleavage and Perceived Party Distances in Norwegian Voting,” *SPS*, vol. 6, 1971.
- 62 See, among others, Helmut Unkelbach, *Grundlagen der Wahl-systematik*, Vanderhoeck, 1956, pp. 36–41.
- 63 Downs, op. cit., pp. 127–132. Enthrambishment may well be a third “tearing apart” factor (exemplified by Downs, with reference to England, p. 129, Figure 6), but it is an exogenous factor whose influence disappears as all the parties readjust to the new distribution.
- 64 With reference to multiparty systems Downs simply allows that they provide “no incentive for parties to move toward each other ideologically” (*ibid.*, p. 126), with the sole consequence that the party “differentials” will remain neat.
- 65 *Supra*, 6.4.
- 66 *Supra*, 6.5.
- 67 *Exit Voice and Loyalty*, op. cit., p. 71.
- 68 This is, in part, the argument of William C. Baum, *APSR*, September 1965, p. 693, in response to the one of Converse, below.
- 69 Converse et al., “Electoral Myth and Reality: The 1964 Election,” *APSR*, June 1965.
- 70 Sjöblom, *Party Strategies in a Multiparty System*, op. cit., pp. 163–164, briefly goes into this problem from the angle of party cohesion and shows well how the Downsian model can be redesigned so as to account for the intra-party distribution of preferences.
- 71 Remember, in this connection, that party members are far less multidimensional, in their reciprocal outmaneuverings, than electorates at large, and that they make a much greater use of left-right epithets. Other supportive considerations can be drawn from ch. 4, *supra*, on party fractions. For instance, “Factions of interest” are, for themselves, pure vote maximizers.
- 72 *Supra*, 6.1.
- 73 Even the smaller party must have a governmental role to play, for otherwise we have, by definition, a twoparty system.

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- 74 For the details and the evidence supporting the three cases over-
viewed in the text, reference must be made to ch. 6, *supra*.
75 *Supra*, 5-2.
76 This remark helps settle the dubious cases that have been long dis-
cussed in ch. 6, *supra*, namely Switzerland, the Netherlands, and
Israel.
77 Downs, op. cit., p. 126.
78 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

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