Parties as Organizations: Implications of the American Party System

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All-is-Forgiven Policy

- For students who improve their performance consistently, especially on the final compared with the midterm, the midterm grade will be discounted or completely ignored. It is possible to fail the midterm and earn an A in the class!
- While there is a strong (but not perfect) correlation between performance on the midterm and the final, every year there are students who benefit (sometimes spectacularly) from the all-is-forgiven policy.
- If you need get it now.
- Policy works under assumption that there is close to perfect participation in the course and steady improvement on the remaining essay assignment (i.e. the essay must show evidence of significant improvement from midterm performance).
What is a Political Party? Overcoming Collective Action Procedural Cartel (Partisan) Model

Senate GOP Efforts to Repeal & Replace the ACA

New Defections Signal End for Health Bill

Trump Calls On Congress to Pass Repeal-Only Plan

By THOMAS KAPLAN

- Senators Jerry Moran of Kansas and Mike Lee of Utah said they would oppose the bill to replace the Affordable Care Act, leaving it short.
- President Trump said Congress should “start from a clean slate.” Senator Mitch McConnell said he would push a measure to repeal the law now and replace it later.

A Battle Begins as Republicans Look to Pass a Budget

By ALAN RAPPEPORT

Having failed so far to agree on a health care overhaul, a fractured Republican Party must now tackle a spending plan.

2097 Comments

- ‘We Will Return,’ Trump Tweets About Health Care

Using the course concepts, what explains Senate Republican’s failure to follow the House GOP Majority and repeal the ACA?

Does their failure surprise you? What does this say to party strength in the U.S. Congress?
Agenda

1. What is a Political Party?
2. Overcoming Collective Action
3. Procedural Cartel (Partisan) Model
Opening Question: What do you think this quote by E.E. Schattschneider means with regards to the American party system: “Modern democracy is **unthinkable** save in terms of political parties?”
What is a Political Party?

Overcoming Collective Action

Procedural Cartel (Partisan) Model

Recap: Parties Solving Collective Action Problems

### Political Parties and Problems of Collective Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arena</th>
<th>Collective Action Problems</th>
<th>Parties Help Solve by:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electorate</td>
<td>Free riding</td>
<td>Branding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rational abstention</td>
<td>• Focus of collective responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rational ignorance</td>
<td>• Heuristic; party id.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Mobilization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>• Coordination of politicians’ ambition</td>
<td>• Nomination (agenda setting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Getting elected to office</td>
<td>• Mobilization</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Fundraising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>• Transaction costs for making policy.</td>
<td>“Long” coalition; ready-made support for party policy.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Coalition maintenance</td>
<td>• Agenda control and the problem of cycling.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Imagine a President Perot or Blumberg…or Trump?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What is a Responsible Political Party?

- What is Fiorina’s argument about the party behavior in Congress during the 1970’s?
- **DOCR Thesis:** Decline of Collective Responsibility & inability of parties to secure cohesion to tackle “big problems”
- What does this mean?
- Voters unable to tease out various party policy positions or even agree on who to blame & who to reward (collective accountability)
- Gives rise to electoral “blind spot” creating incentive for *individual accountability*...implications for party cohesion?
- Parties mainly collection of group interests that agree on set of agenda items & that work to give nominations (with resources) to candidates with a *credible agreement* towards that agenda
What is a Political Party? Overcoming Collective Action Procedural Cartel (Partisan) Model

Voter assessments of the Collective Congress

N = 1,395 national polls & shaded areas indicate divided control of Congress. Quarterly estimates derived from dyad ratios model (Stimson 1998).
Voter assessments of the Congressional Parties

What is a Political Party? Overcoming Collective Action Procedural Cartel (Partisan) Model

Parties as a Function of *Group Interests*

- What in the Madisonian framework & electoral system undermines collective accountability?
- Fiorina asserts that parties are merely collection of organized interests, what does this mean?
- How do these interests use nominations? Is this a principal-agent relationship?
- Group Interests (teachers, lawyers, interest groups, etc.) are *main* unit of interest
- What are the incentives of office holders in this theory?
- Parties are collection of fragile “long” coalitions... parallels with *Federalist 10*?
Parties as *Long Coalitions*

**Parties and Coalition Maintenance**

Parties form a “long” coalition:

- **Democratic Coalition:** Environmental Groups + Labor + Minorities
- **Republican Coalition:** Business + Christian Right + Defense Est.

What kinds of issues might divide each party’s coalition?
- Are there issues that might tempt groups to defect from one coalition to another?
- What are the advantages of remaining in the coalition by smoothing over differences?

Source: Stone (2016) UC Davis Pol 1 Seminar
What’s the fundamental problem of collective action in the legislature?

Parties in-government consist of office-holders who have preferences

Remember, collective action fundamentally about securing public goods

What does this mean?

Parties in government are plagued by competing incentives among their members

Consider the following simple Prisoner’s Dilemma
Game Theory: The Prisoner’s Dilemma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player 1 Choice</th>
<th>Cooperation</th>
<th>Defection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>(2,2)</td>
<td>(1,4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defection</td>
<td>(4,1)</td>
<td>(0,0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Payouts in parenthesis. Assume one-shot game.
Collective Action in Government

- How does this game parallel to the struggle parties have in delivering public goods?
- Parties can either form long or narrow coalitions, longest coalitions could be a coalition of all legislators.
- This is the norm of universalism, each legislator receives something as member of a “long coalition”, what’s the downside to this?
- The fear here is that this can lead to legislative cycling, where no single faction constitutes a majority and thus infinite bargaining can occur between members.
- Consider if players (legislators) are worse off under cycling.
The problem of cycling in legislatures

Imagine there are three factions or voting blocks: A, B, and C. No single faction constitutes a majority; any two factions can form a majority:

- **A+B**
  - A and B form a majority by proposing a bill that:
    - Taxes C more heavily
    - Divides benefits equally between A and B

- **A+C**
  - A amends by offering C:
    - 50% of benefits

- **B+C**
  - B amends by offering C:
    - 60% of benefits

- **C+B**
  - C amends by offering B:
    - 60% of benefits
    - Taxing A

Parties solve this problem by controlling the agenda. If A and B are in the same party, the party prevents amendments offered by C that would split the coalition.

Source: Stone (2016) UC Davis Pol 1 Seminar
Parties Solving Collective Action in Government

- Premium on *setting the agenda* for House & Senate party leaders
- What do party members get out of delegation of agenda setting powers to party leaders?
- **Stable coalitions** & distinct public goods that *distinguish* party brands
- What happens “in-government” contributes to how parties solve collective action problems in electoral arena, how?
- Heuristic & raw mobilization efforts by parties benefit all candidates running under the party brand (ex: coattail effect in presidential years)
- Politicians are *office-seeking* and what parties do in government reduces cost of election (*key: distinct public goods/policy wins*)
The *Partisan* Model in Congress

Critical Elements of the Theory:

1. Members seek re-election, policy, & majority status
2. Party brand/reputation important for re-election & winning majority (explicitly collective accountable model)
3. Party brand/reputation depends on legislative record
4. Building a legislative record involves overcoming collective action problems:
   - All would like more for their own districts
   - Party label is a public good, free-riding incentive
5. Primary way of solving collective action problems is delegation to central authority: party leaders, including committee chairs.
6. Key resource that is delegated is agenda control:
   - Party leaders, rules committee & substantive committees
   - Cartel assures that all positions are in hands of senior party leaders.
   - Negative agenda control: prevent majority party from being *rolled*
What is a Majority-Party *Roll*?

Majority-party roll occurs when the majority-party median voter opposes legislation & passes. Ultimately, responsibility of the Speaker to keep majority rolls off the agenda. Consider $P$, a Trump infrastructure bill & $Q$, the status quo. Will it require a majority-party *roll*?
Limits to Party’s Efforts

- Why would parties in government be limited in ability to solve collective action problems?
- American political parties generally thought of as being weak parties, why?
- Parties limited in coercing their members to vote against self-interest, why?
- American parties gaining strength in party unity, why?
  Implications for collective accountability?
- Recall *greater correlation* between presidential & congressional election outcomes: ↑ nationalization of elections & collective accountability
- Comparative parties known for *formal* means of party discipline (withholding campaign funds, denying nominations primarily)
What is a Political Party?

Overcoming Collective Action

Procedural Cartel (Partisan) Model

Congressional Party Unity during the Post-War Period, 1946-2016

U.S. House

Mean Party Unity
- Democratic Majority
- Democratic Minority
- Republican Majority
- Republican Minority

Congressional Party Unity

1.0
0.9
0.8
0.7
0.6
0.5
0.4


Point ranges indicate distance between 25% percentile to 75% quantile with respect to party unity.
Greater Partisan Conflict in the U.S. House
Greater Partisan Conflict in the U.S. Senate

Proportion of Party Unity Votes in U.S. Senate

- Yearly data from 1970q1 to 2020q1
- Trend line showing increasing proportion of party unity votes
Key Points:

▶ Traditional view is that parties are dysfunctional “teams” of politicians individually accountable
▶ Parties fundamentally “long coalitions” and aggregation of group interests in society
▶ Group interests work towards giving nominations to like-minded candidates
▶ Parties are comprised of “long coalitions”, akin to a collection of factions
▶ Legislatures comprised of members with varying self-interest
▶ Parties in government help solve collective action by setting the agenda & providing members with stable coalitions & operating like a procedural cartel
▶ Parties in government strengthen brand & heuristic, necessary mechanism of overcoming collective action in electoral arena