

# Information, Participation, and Choice

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*An Economic Theory of Democracy  
in Perspective*

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*Ann Arbor*

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## CHAPTER 12

# Toward an Institution-Rich Theory of Political Competition with a Supply Side Component

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The Downsian model of two-party competition is based on victory-oriented political parties and candidates. Anthony Downs adopts the self-interest axiom as a “cornerstone of analysis” (1957b, 28). A voter is assumed to be “rational” in the sense of having well-defined preferences over the issue space that lead the voter to choose among the electoral alternatives “that which ranks highest in his preference ordering” (1957a, 6). Candidates’ actions are similarly motivated by self-interest in that they formulate policies in order to “attain the income, prestige, and power which come from being in office” (1957a, 28) (i.e., “parties formulate policies to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policies” [28]). Candidates thus locate so as to maximize their probability of election, based on their perception of voter preferences.<sup>1</sup>

In its very simplest incarnation, competition over a single ideological policy dimension, the Downsian model gives rise to a prediction of the convergence of candidates to the preference of the median voter. *An Economic Theory of Democracy* has led a generation of public choice scholars on a long quest to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for party convergence. In the process, more attention has been paid to technical issues (see, e.g., the review in Riker and Ordeshook 1972, 342–43, tables 12.1 and 12.2), and less to what actually happens in real world elections, than at first blush might seem desirable. But the often rococo theoretical explorations of the formal literature on spatial models have helped us understand how robust the

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1. What we refer to as the “Downsian model” is a spatial model in the tradition of Hotelling (1929) and Smithies (1941). Two parties (one of whom is the incumbent government) compete for the votes of a large electorate on the basis of their spatial locations. There is an inherent danger in trying to characterize *the* Downsian approach (see Grofman 1987 and this volume).

convergence result is, and how modifications to Downs's initial set of assumptions affect the predicted outcomes. There is, however, one basic problem. On many of the most important issues that divide the nation, parties and candidates in the United States simply do not look like Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Nor does party competition look like the random walks over issue space that are predicted by the next generation of models of political competition over a set of multidimensional issues (see, e.g., Riker 1982a). Similarly, in multidimensional issue competition, when the incumbent is constrained by reputation or other factors to a subset of the policy space, under the usual simple Downsian assumptions the challenger can be expected to be able to find a position that can defeat the incumbent, yet incumbents, in fact, rarely lose.

### **Stylized Facts That Any Model of Party Competition in the United States Must Seek to Explain**

1a. By and large there is a considerable divergence in the policy positions of candidates of opposite parties who run against each other in U.S. congressional elections (Sullivan and Uslander 1978).

1b. Almost without exception, there is a divergence in policy preferences (as measured by Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) or American Constitutional Union (ACU) scores) between members of Congress of the opposite parties, even after statistically controlling for the characteristics of the constituencies each represents (Bullock and Brady 1983; Poole and Rosenthal 1985).

1c. There is a striking divergence in the ADA scores of senators of *opposite parties* elected from the *same state*—roughly 40 points (on a 100-point scale) over the period 1962–84 (Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer 1990). However, there is also a striking similarity in the ADA scores of senators from the *same state* elected from the *same party*, or when a seat changes hands to a member of the same party (Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer 1990).

1d. When a House seat changes party affiliation, there is a considerable difference in the voting patterns (ADA scores) of the old and the new incumbent (Fiorina 1974). However, there is little change in voting behavior when the seat changes hands but remains under the control of the same party.

2a. Many states have exhibited noncompetitive policies for state office for long periods of time, with one party clearly dominant over the course of two or more decades. There are important regional aspects to the geographic pattern of party control.

2b. U.S. politics at the national level has exhibited decades-long periods of oscillation, with one party “the sun” (the majority party) and the other “the moon” (the minority party), to use Samuel Lubell’s (1952) apt phrasing.

2c. Many incumbents are reelected time and time again, often by large margins.

The failure of the simple Downsian model to match up with empirical observations such as those identified here might make it appear that all the effort devoted to elaborating Downsian models of party competition has been much ado about nothing. But this conclusion is premature. Downs provides the basis for modeling party competition, but *An Economic Theory of Democracy* should certainly not be regarded as the last word. Rather, we can return to Downs's original postulates to see how they must be modified in order to fashion a more realistic and empirically descriptive model of political competition. Moreover, in rereading Downs's work we can be attentive to subtleties in Downs's own analysis of political competition that are missed in most of the subsequent efforts to formally model Downsian ideas. In so doing, we are led to what I refer to as an "institution-rich" theory of politics, with a substantial "supply side" component.

Let us now turn to an inventory of the assumptions underlying the simplest Downsian model.

In addition to the basic assumption of a context of democratic politics (see especially Downs 1957b, 23–24, 30) there are nine key assumptions of the basic Downsian model.

1. There are only two political parties.
2. Elections take place within a single constituency.
- 3a. There is a single election.
- 3b. The election chooses a single candidate.
- 3c. The election is decided by a plurality vote.
4. Policies can be located along a single (left-right) dimension.
5. Candidate policy positions are well-defined.
- 6a. Candidate policy positions are estimated by each voter.
- 6b. Voters care only about the next election.
- 6c. Voters care only about which candidate/party will enact policies closest to the preferences of the voter.
7. Parties/candidates care only about winning.
8. Candidates are part of a unified party team.
9. Eligible voters go to the polls if the expected benefits of their vote's contribution to the election of their candidate exceeds the "costs" of voting.

Assumption 9 is discussed in the chapters on voter turnout in this volume, and I say nothing further about it here. Assumptions 1 through 8, on which I focus, give rise to the implication of Tweedledum-Tweedledee politics, with both candidates choosing policy positions of the median voter, that

is customarily seen as the defining aspect of a Downsian approach to two-party political competition. Also, in this ultrasimplified model, elections would be expected to be decided by relatively narrow margins (since candidates are expected to be identical in their only *relevant* attributes, i.e., their policy preferences or anticipated policy choices).

However, there are plausible modifications of *each* of these assumptions that can give rise to predictions of nonconvergence or noncompetitive politics. Indeed, while assumptions 1–9 are often thought of as *the* Downsian model, Downs (1957b) is actually far more sophisticated and sensitive to the nuances of U.S. (and non-U.S.) electoral politics and to the reality of an imperfect information universe. However, like most seminal works, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* is no longer read. Rather, the classic comic book simplification of Downs is now part of the common memory of the political science discipline.

In focusing on the first eight of the assumptions I review theoretical developments since Downs's that help us better understand how electoral politics in the United States actually works. I focus on party competition (especially the conditions for party convergence) and only have a few things to say about the vast literature on voter choice (see Grofman 1987; Enelow and Hinich 1984). Also, I do not attempt to deal with the implications of Downs's work for multiparty nonplurality elections except in passing, nor do I deal with the policy aspects of Downs's work (see chap. 15).

### **Modifying the Assumptions of the Basic Downsian Model**

#### Two-Candidate Competition

If we permit more than two candidates/parties, then the convergence argument does not go through in any straightforward fashion, even for plurality competition in a single dimension, and certainly not for electoral competition under any form of proportional representation. However, Maurice Duverger (1951) argues that, over the course of several elections, for plurality-based elections, there will be pressure to reduce the field of competition down to two parties—effectively, a center-right party and a center-left party. Downs considers this question and reaches similar conclusions (see especially Downs 1957b, 139–41), but he is apparently unfamiliar with the work of Duverger.

According to Duverger there will be a psychological effect, voter unwillingness to vote for parties with no chance of victory (known in the public choice literature as “sophisticated voting”), and a mechanical effect, the convergence of left-wing and right-wing parties toward locations nearer to the center, thus squeezing out centrist parties. Downs (1957b, chap. 3, see also

298, proposition 9) similarly argues that, in multicandidate/multiparty elections, voters may have an incentive to vote for a party/candidate other than the one the voters most prefer.

The scope and empirical validity of what William H. Riker (1982a) refers to as "Duverger's hypothesis" remains in dispute (Riker 1982a; Sartori 1986; Duverger 1984; Taagepera and Grofman 1987; Cox 1987). Rein Taagepera and I (1987), for example, claim that the mechanisms generating empirical support for Duverger's hypothesis hold only in politics characterized by unidimensional politics. Our views on the interaction of electoral structure and ideological distribution are similar in spirit to those of Downs, although the only extensive discussion on this point in *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (Downs 1957b, 123–25) focuses on the unidimensional case.

Steven J. Brams (1980) and Brams and Philip Straffin (1982) have looked at the "entry" problem: "Where must two political parties locate so as to be able to discourage the likelihood of a third party preempting their vote support?" The result of those modeling efforts suggests that concern to deter entry will usually imply that, in plurality-based elections over a single dimension, parties will *not* converge to the median. Other relevant work, much of it dealing with elections under rules other than simple plurality, includes Cox 1987; Eaton and Lipsey 1975; Greenberg and Shepsle 1987; and Rapoport, Felsenthal, and Maoz 1988. Shepsle and Cohen 1990 and Cox 1990, taken in conjunction, provide an excellent review of the formal modeling literature relevant to entry and multicandidate or multiparty competition.

### Single Constituency

David Austen-Smith (1984, 1986) points out that parties must compete simultaneously in a number of different constituencies and examines the implications of such concurrent competition for the Downsian model. Unfortunately, Austen-Smith generally posits a single-party position that is adopted in all constituencies. Recent work on the causes of divided party rule for the presidency and the Congress suggests that we must be especially attentive to the differences between "national" Democrats (and the issues on which they campaign) and the views espoused by local Democratic congressional and legislative candidates—with the former able to achieve and hold office despite the failure of the national Democratic ticket (Jacobson 1990).

I believe that, in fact, parties adapt to the constituencies in which they compete, but within the constraints set by national differences (party images). In particular, I believe that James Coleman (1970) is correct in ruling out the possibility of the two parties leapfrogging each other so that the candidate of the rightmost party is to the left of the candidate of the leftmost party. Thus, in the United States, we expect to see Democrats to the left of Republicans in

*each* constituency, even though a Democrat in a conservative constituency may be far to the right of his or her party's national median, just as a Republican elected in a liberal constituency may be far to the left of his or her party's national median. This is indeed what we find (for the Senate see Poole and Rosenthal 1985; Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer 1990; and for the House Brady and Lynn 1973; Fiorina 1974; and Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer 1991). The metaphor I like to use for party competition is that a party label is like a franchise—it imposes certain constraints on what you can expect to get, but a McDonald's in Tokyo offers a menu that is tilted toward Japanese tastes (e.g., fishburgers).

### Single Election with a Single Candidate

Coleman (1970, 1972) and Peter Aranson and Peter C. Ordeshook (1972) look at the implication of a primary competition on candidate strategy. If candidates must win both a primary and a general election, they will locate between the overall median and the median location of the party electorate.

Martin Wattenberg and I (chap. 11) look at voter choice for the tie-in bundle consisting of a president and a vice-president. Several authors (Baron 1984; Fiorina 1989) have suggested that some voters look not just at a single election but at the "balance" across several elections (e.g., preferring a Democratic Congress if there is a Republican president). In light of the 1988 election, this view is now becoming part of the common wisdom (see especially Jacobson 1990). In principle, of course, we could treat such preferences as part of a sophisticated "expectational" model of a multiactor political game.

Also, as Downs himself clearly recognizes (Downs 1957b, chap. 16, proposition 10), voters may look beyond a single election to influence their party by a protest vote to shift its policies in a particular election, or with the hope of creating in the long-run a viable alternative to the existing parties. In the United States, third-party movements have often been the vehicle for introducing new policy ideas, or they have been way stations on the way to realignment (as may have been true for George Wallace voters in 1968: Grofman, Glazer, and Handley 1988).

### Single Dimension

Downs (1957b, 54–62) describes how, if there is more than one policy choice to be made, there will not be a policy platform that can be adopted that is invulnerable to defeat, when voters differ in their intensities of preferences across different issues. There is now a vast literature on the absence of an equilibrium outcome when there is more than one policy dimension (see



relatively nontechnical reviews of much of this literature in Riker 1982a; Feld and Grofman 1985). However, recent work has suggested that, when voting is probabilistic and not deterministic, even when issues are multidimensional, equilibria are very likely to result (see an excellent review of this work in Coughlin 1990a; cf. Coughlin 1990b). Also, there is a considerable body of recent literature about the near-core properties of the area within four radii of the center of the yolk (McKelvey 1986; Feld et al. 1987).<sup>2</sup>

Downs suggests that parties will use ideology as a shorthand way of communicating issue positions to the voters. As James R. Simmons (1987, 4) rather sarcastically points out, however,

textbook writers almost invariably ascribe the number of U.S. political parties and their tactics to the distribution of opinion of potential voters along a left-right ideological continuum. Few writers see any contradiction between this view of party motivation and their description of American opinion in other chapters which is portrayed as disorganized, incoherent, inconsistent and dispersed among many dimensions. . . . Nor does there seem to be much reason for parties to organize their public policy offerings according to the left-right scaling if so few voters are informed or view issues in these ways.

One answer to this puzzle is provided by Scott L. Feld and myself (1986, 1988b). We argue that ideological consistency is best viewed as a "collective" phenomenon and thus, even though most voters may not be ideological, the electorate's majority rule decision processes approximate closely, if not perfectly, ideological (single-peaked) choices.<sup>3</sup> One reason that elite perceptions of a right-left continuum are possible is that the meaning of left and right is not fixed. Remarkably, the left-right dimension seems almost infinitely stretchable to contain diverse issues (e.g., ecological issues, feminist issues, race-related issues).

Downs's own views about convergence to the center are actually considerably more complex than the usual modeling that is used to represent them. In particular, Downs allows for parties to have a mix of centrist and extremist positions.

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2. The relevance of this recent literature on the microstructure of majority rule preferences in multidimensional issue space for models of candidate competition remains largely unexplored.

3. According to Simmons (1987, 4), "The primary textbook explanation for the continuing relevance of Downs is the presence of a small subset of the public (activists, opinion-leaders, elites, etc.) with beliefs that are consistent with the model and whose extensive participation in the political process prevents the differences between the major parties from disappearing altogether." However, Simmons claims that "this interpretation begs the question of why the existing parties concentrate on these 'customers' rather than the demand of the much larger non-ideological mass, many of whom don't vote."

Each party casts some policies into the other's territory in order to convince voters there that its net position is near them. In such maneuvering, there is much room for skill because voters assign different weights to the policies. . . . However, each party will sprinkle these moderate policies with a few extreme stands in order to please far-out voters. . . . Therefore, it is possible to detect on which side of the midpoint each party is actually located by looking at the extremist policies it espouses. (135)<sup>4</sup>

One aspect of Downs's work that has only recently seen development is his emphasis on the possibility of putting together winning coalitions based on minority groups with intense preferences for the outcomes on particular issue dimensions. There has been a spate of recent empirical work on single issue constituencies such as antiabortion activists or strong feminists. Thomas H. Hammond and Brian D. Humes (chap. 9) develop the idea of political competition across multiple issue dimensions of differing interest to different voters.

#### Well-defined Candidate Positions

Downs (297, proposition 3) argues that, in two-party competition, party policies will be vague, yet this point is not recognized in many neo-Downsian models (see, however, Shepsle 1972; and literature review in chap. 3). In my work, I argued that a ring of uncertainty about candidate location is created when candidates are allowed to "finagle" (i.e., to move ever so slightly from an initial position in order to improve their likelihood of defeating a challenger). In that work (Wuffle et al. 1989), my coauthors and I show that here are positions from which incumbents can, by finagling, stay safe from defeat. Benjamin I. Page (1978) offers perhaps the most extensive empirical discussion of candidate ambiguity, in the context of U.S. presidential politics.

Another limitation of the notion that candidates have well-defined positions known to all the voters is that voter preferences (and voter party loyalties) condition voter perceptions of candidate issue positions (as well as affect voter perceptions of incumbent performance), so that different voters will see candidates in different locations. The most-sophisticated empirical work on such rationalization and reciprocal causation phenomena is found in papers by Page and Calvin C. Jones (1979) and Gregory B. Markus and Philip E. Converse (1979).

I should also note that Downs (1957b, 137-39) provides a brief but intriguing discussion of a potential contradiction in his model: it is in the interests of parties to be ambiguous but of voters to have clear-cut choices.

4. Downs goes on to say, "In fact, this may be the only way to tell the two parties apart ideologically, since most of their politics are conglomerated in an overlapping mass in the middle of the scale."

According to Downs (139), "if parties succeed in obscuring their policy decisions in a mist of generalities, and voters are unable to discover what their votes really mean, a *rationality crisis* develops."

#### Policy-Driven Voters with an Election-Specific Time Frame

There is not a complete model in *An Economic Theory of Democracy* on how voters come to form expectations of which policies each candidate is expected actually to *implement* (see however, Downs 1957b, 41–47, 107–11), although Downs is clear that voters need not simply take the policy positions announced by each candidate as the position that the candidate would actually be *expected* to implement. Thus, Downs clearly recognizes that the candidate's campaign location (what is commonly referred to as the candidate's *platform*) need not coincide with the location that the candidate succeeds in implementing after election (in chap. 3, referred to as the candidate's *issue performance*).<sup>5</sup>

Downs recognizes the possibility that

10. some voters use the party affiliation of the candidate as a cue about the candidate's policy views.

Downs also considers it likely that

11. When it is available, some voters use information about a candidate's past *performance* to develop expectations about the candidate's future behavior (see 298, proposition 8).

Indeed, in our view, Downs should be credited as the grandfather of the theory of retrospective voting, even if Morris P. Fiorina's clear exposition of the thesis entitles him to paternity.

As I have elaborated elsewhere (Grofman 1987), most of the early attempts to test what I called assumption 6 neglect the development of voter expectations about candidate policy *performance*. Instead they assume

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5. I regard it as useful to make a further distinction, by distinguishing expectations that may be formed about an intermediate state, namely the location that the candidate seeks to implement once in office (what is referred to in chap. 3 as the candidate's *issue effort*), from either platform or issue performance. In particular, even if John Ferejohn (chap. 7), following Downs, is correct that politicians seek to implement their promises, there will often be circumstances in which it is essentially impossible for them to do so. Frequently, I would argue, the likelihood that a politician will be unable to deliver on promises can be anticipated by the voter (see Grofman 1987).

- 6.' Voters choose the candidate whose (announced) policy stands are closest to their own.

But assumption 6' is explicitly rejected by Downs (See especially Downs 1957b, 39).

Also, voters may care about matters other than the anticipated policy differences between the candidates/parties. Among the factors that may be relevant are demographic attributes of the candidate (the traditional "balanced ticket" in sectional or ethnic terms, and the "friends and neighbors" effects of V. O. Key, Jr.); other generalized attributes of the candidate (e.g., competence, trustworthiness—see e.g., chap 8); party loyalty (Campbell et al. 1960; cf. chap. 1); a "benefit of the doubt" awarded to incumbents on non-policy grounds such as risk avoidance (Feld and Grofman 1991); and aspects of the support coalition of the candidate, that is, (southern) whites' unwillingness to vote for the candidate whom blacks support (Glazer, Grofman, and Owen 1991).

As noted, one way in which voters violate the basic Downsian assumption that they are policy maximizing is by giving the benefit of the doubt to a candidate or to a party, for example, by continuing to vote for a given candidate/party as long as the policy positions of the opposing candidate/party is not "significantly" better (closer to the voters' own preferred position). Feld and I (1991) show that, when all voters give their preferred candidate even a very small benefit of the doubt, that candidate, by choosing a location properly (i.e., centrally), can become invulnerable to defeat even though, otherwise, the voting game would lack a core. We also show that a sufficiently large benefit of the doubt from a small, randomly located set of voters (based, for example, on that candidate's constituent service) can also guarantee a "centrist" candidate invulnerability to challenge, or even provide the candidate with a very large margin of victory. In such situations, if the candidate who enjoys the benefit of the doubt is vulnerable at all, it can be shown that the only locations that can defeat him or her are ones that are nonidentical to his or her position. Indeed, the greater the benefit of the doubt, the further away must any location be that can defeat the candidate enjoying the benefit of the doubt.

The difference in voter behavior depending upon which party/candidate holds a given position violates the standard assumption of the simplified Downsian model that office seekers' exchange of locations would simply reverse vote choices, an assumption that we may think of as that of "anonymous competition." However, as suggested earlier, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* anticipates the view that risk-averse voters, in a situation of uncertainty, will give incumbents—whose probable behavior in office can be better estimated—a benefit of the doubt (see also chap. 2).

Still another complication introduced by Downs is the possibility of "extremist" voters choosing not to vote if the party they would otherwise support has become too centrist. This is intended to hold the party to a more ideologically pure position. According to Downs, if the ideological distribution of voters is bimodal and if abstention by extremists is practiced, "a two-party system need not lead to the convergence on moderation that Hotelling and Smithies predicted" (Downs 1957b, 118). There have been several attempts to make this intuition more precise, beginning with Gerald Garvey (1966) and Aranson and Ordeshook (1972).

Other routes to avoid convergence, based largely on voter rather than candidate behavior, revolve around the notion that voters take their cues less from what a candidate says than from other information available about the candidate, such as the nature of the groups that support the candidate and which voters who are expected to vote for him or her.<sup>6</sup> The notion of voter choice as being driven by the nature of the party/candidate support coalition has been developed by several authors, including John H. Aldrich (1983a), Amihai Glazer, myself, and Guillermo Owen (1991),<sup>7</sup> and, Timothy J. Feddersen (1991).

Still another complication to the notion that voters are choosing the candidate/party that lies closest to their preferences is the notion that voters are choosing probabilistically rather than deterministically. There is now a sizable literature on probabilistic voting (see the excellent review in Coughlin 1990b).

Still another wrinkle on voter choice is the view that voter choice is directional rather than positional. The most important model is that of G. Rabinowitz and S. MacDonald (1989). Their work has both theoretical and empirical components. Grofman (1987) develops a neo-Downsian model in which voters discount candidate policy positions by looking only at expected movement relative to the status quo. Thus, as the status quo shifts, voter *choices* can shift even though voter *preferences* for policy outcomes remain the same. I argue this model helps account for moderate voters sometimes choosing "conservative" and sometimes "liberal" candidates—to move a status quo back toward the center, which has shifted too far toward one or the other extreme.

### Election-oriented Parties

On the second night of the 1988 Democratic convention, an ABC reporter for the local D.C. affiliate interviewed a delegate who was asked what he wanted

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6. See review in chapter 3.

7. See also chapter 5.

to see come out of the convention. Without hesitation the delegate said, "We want to win." The reporter then opined, "We've just seen the 'soul' of the Democratic party." We must recognize, however, some important caveats to such a Vince Lombardian portrait of American politics. U.S. politicians do have policy positions to which they are attached (e.g., Dukakis never retreated from his opposition to the death penalty, albeit, in the age of videotape replay, flip-flopping has become more difficult). Moreover, party images tend to be durable, and there are rational incentives for party consistency (Downs 1957b; chap. 7). It helps to recognize that, for parties—absent realignment-like shocks—vote-maximizing occurs (1) at the margin and (2) primarily in the long-run (by replacement of those politicians associated with politically nonviable positions).

Downs asserts (1957b, 300, proposition 24) that "political parties tend to maintain ideological positions that are consistent over time unless they suffer drastic defeats, in which case they change their ideologies to resemble those of the party that defeated them." We believe that Downs is right about this, but the time frame for change may not be a single election. It took a series of massive election defeats before the Republican party reconciled itself to the basic elements of the New Deal. Indeed, we might argue, paralleling Thomas S. Kuhn's (1970) claims about the importance of cohort change for acceptance of "paradigm" shifts in the sciences, that it was only as a new generation of politicians came to power in the Republican party that the Republican party position could shift to reflect the new political realities (for example, Thomas Dewey didn't learn—he just kept losing; Hoover never learned).<sup>8</sup>

In my view, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of inertia and hardened arteries (both metaphorically and literally) in understanding political change (or rather, the lack thereof).<sup>9</sup> Also, short-run constraints on policy movement (e.g., the probability of credibility if a politician attempts to repudiate past positions) mean that even politicians who themselves care for nothing but winning, will often act *as if* they had fixed policy positions.

8. If both parties have policy concerns, and if parties are concerned only with winning and not with plurality maximizing, the paradoxical result is that, in the short-run, there may be little or no pressure for convergence to a median position. The majority party need not change its position much because it is virtually assured of election since its policies are already relatively close to those of the median voter. The minority party won't change its position much because, regardless of what it does, until voter preferences change, it will still lose the election—while maintaining its position preserves ideological purity.

9. Compare the discussion of rates of party convergence in chapter 10. The comedian Severn Darden, then with the Second City comedy troupe, had a routine in which he asked whether or not fish could think. He concluded that they could, but given life-threatening changes in their environment, *could not do so fast enough* to avoid death by starvation. In this regard, political parties are a lot like fish.

Furthermore, the model of parties as coalitions of voters, developed by scholars such as Aldrich (1983a, 1983b) and Glazer, myself, and Owen (1991), argues for stability in party positions absent fundamental realignments in voter coalitions. From the perspective of parties as coalitions of voters, the received view in the public choice literature that the legislator is "a placeholder opportunistically building up an *ad hoc majority* for the next election" (Riker and Weingast 1988, 396, emphasis added) misses the key point about the relative underlying durability of party coalitions.

Reinhard Selten (1971), Donald A. Wittman (1973, 1983), Manfred Holler (1978), T. Ingemann Hansen and Charles Stuart (1984), and Henry W. Chappell, Jr., and William R. Keech (1986), among others, have modeled two-party (unidimensional) political party competition as one in which parties (or candidates), rather than merely seeking a vote-maximizing location as in the classical Hotelling-Downs framework, trade off the probability of their winning an election against the achievement of desired policy goals. Wittman (1990) provides a thorough review of the formal modeling work that introduces policy-oriented concerns. He shows that allowing policy motivations permits a much more realistic picture of party divergence.<sup>10</sup>

As Wittman (1983) observes, candidates/parties guaranteed election ought to be more likely to indulge their policy preferences than are candidates/parties in a more competitive situation where the pressure to converge to the median voter location is stronger (cf. Fiorina 1974). Wittman (1983) reviews a considerable body of evidence from U.S. congressional and senatorial elections that supports this conclusion. What Wittman (1983) does not note, but what follows straightforwardly from the logic of his analysis, is that the same is true for parties that are certain to lose; that is, such parties can be free to "indulge" their policy preferences.<sup>11</sup>

### Unified Party Team

Once we recognize that there is intraparty competition as well as interparty competition, then we need to modify the assumption that all candidates of a given party can be treated as identical in their goals. Once we add in primaries

10. A Wuffle (1985) carries the idea of policy orientation to its *reductio ad absurdum* by permitting parties to derive utility even if the policy goals they seek are implemented by the opposing party.

11. If both parties have policy concerns, and if parties are concerned only with winning and not with plurality maximizing, the paradoxical result is that, in the short-run, there may be little or no pressure for convergence to a median position. The majority party need not change its position much because it is virtually assured of election since its policies are already relatively close to those of the median voter. The minority party won't change its position much because, regardless of what it does, until voter preferences change, it will still lose the election—while maintaining its position preserves ideological purity.

as a means of resolving intraparty disputes (see discussion of assumption 3), the argument for convergence disappears—although exactly what should replace it is not completely clear.

Aldrich (1983b) shows that party activists, if they have policy preferences, will shift the location of their party's candidates away from the overall median toward those of the party activists. Moreover, the role of party activists, when combined with primaries and with the importance of durable "party images," virtually guarantees that there will be a self-selection and weeding out process in which candidates gravitate to and are chosen by the party whose policy positions most resemble their own.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in recognizing these complicating factors, contra the classic comic book version of *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, we would expect that candidates will in general be closer to the median voter in their own party than to the overall median voter. As noted earlier, this is what the empirical data show (see, e.g., McCrone and Stone 1986; Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer 1990; cf. Shapiro et al. 1990).

Yet another modification of the view that parties can best be viewed as unified actors comes from the work of Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson (1989). The standard Downsian model of political competition is a demand side model—a model driven by voter preferences. In that model, vote-maximizing parties *react* to voter preferences by seeking a winning location. The party that best anticipates the views of the electorate by appropriately choosing its platform wins. In contrast, Carmines and Stimson have what I call a *supply side* model of politics, albeit the term is mine not theirs. In their model, competition within the party among party leaders and activists leads to replacement of old internal cadres by new ones—a process that may be accelerated by external events such as a recession. A change in party leadership and elites in turn often triggers a concomitant change in the proposed and perceived policy positions of the party. They emphasize the role of leadership rather than treating political parties as passive respondents to changing currents of public opinion.

Carmines and Stimson illustrate the critical role of leadership in U.S. Party competition by examining the consequences of decisions by national party leaders over a three-year period (1963–65), which led to a complete reversal of the racial stance of the two political parties. The key events included the decision by Johnson to press for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the opposition to those pieces of legislation by Barry Goldwater and the party activists who supported his takeover of the

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12. Glazer (personal communication, 1988), for example, assumes that primary voters will seek a candidate who can win the general election, but that would seem to me to be only one of the concerns influencing voter choice in a primary. Also, expectations of winability are conditioned by preferences; that is, there is a "wishful thinking" effect, frequently one of some magnitude (Granberg and Brent 1983; Uhlaner and Grofman 1985).



party machinery in 1964. The consequences included a dramatic gain for the Democrats among black voters, especially those southern blacks who were newly enfranchised, and an almost equally dramatic decline in southern white support for the Democratic national ticket—triggering a sectional realignment at the presidential level. The choices made by party leaders in the 1960s have largely shaped the nature of national party competition ever since (see, e.g., Edsall and Edsall 1991). As Carmines and Stimson emphasize, the party issue positions define the options open to the voters and thus structure the characteristics of the voter coalitions that support each party.<sup>13</sup>

### Discussion

Although the notion of Tweedledum-Tweedledee politics is fundamentally misguided, what is certainly true is that in 1988 (as in 1964 and 1972 and 1980) there has been an attempt to define the political “mainstream” and to argue that one’s opponent isn’t in it. Success in such an endeavor, for example, making *liberal* a dirty word, suggests that Downs is in some ways fundamentally right in treating two-party competition as a quest for the center, even though we need a more institutionally rich model to capture the complex realities of political competition in the United States. That model must take into account institutional features of U.S. election practices such as the role of multiple (and frequently simultaneous) elections taking place at different levels of government and in overlapping constituencies in shaping both voter perceptions of party differences and voter and party strategies, the modifications to the standard model required by the existence of the electoral college and the president and vice-president package, and barriers to registration that require turnout to be a premeditated act. In addition that model must contain a supply side component that recognizes factors such as the role of party activists in motivating party divergence and defining party images.

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13. Carole Jean Uhlaner, in chapter 4 and in her earlier work, emphasizes the entrepreneurial role of group leaders in motivating political participation. A similar argument is set forth in Hansen and Rosenstone 1984.