

*Parties, Programs and Policies:
A Comparative and Theoretical Perspective*

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I. Policy and Ideology as a Unifying Research Perspective

The feature of political parties which gives them their central role in democracies, and which also renders them such a fascinating object of study, is their presence at so many levels of our societies. They exist both among mass and elite, in electorates and in governments. In between, they group activists and local and State legislators, as well as affiliated bodies from women's leagues to sports clubs, co-operatives to labor unions.

This complexity, more or less evident in the different party families and across cultures, fulfill an essential representational purpose: no less diverse organization can claim to speak on behalf of society or the nation as the political party can. But it also makes parties difficult objects of research, particularly from an analytic and comparative point of view.

One can clearly do a historical or institutional study of a particular party, balancing developments at all its levels. When the aim is to explain party behavior in general, it is necessary to focus on some key feature which enables us to pose, and hopefully to answer, the important questions about their role in democratic policy-making. The problem is, which aspects of parties should one select as the focus? Studies of party government may give different answers to studies of party organization—one shows no diminution and even a strengthening of the role of parties as monopolists of political representation, while the other gives rise to theses of decline (Wattenberg 1990, but see Scarrow, forthcoming).

It is my contention that attempts to build a truly comparative theory of political parties should concentrate on the aspect which binds all their diverse components together and provides a basis for linking their government actions with their electoral appeals—that is, party ideology and policies. Ideology, I take to be core political attitudes and stances; policy, the package currently endorsed. The two are related but vary to some extent independently. Current policy packages may reflect ideology to a greater or

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The American Review of Politics, Vol. 14, Winter, 1993: 695-716
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a lesser extent, depending on strategic considerations (but never ignoring it entirely, as we shall see).

It is in its emphasis on the anchoring effects of ideology that the approach differs from spatial models in the Downsian tradition (Downs 1957, 102-140; Shepsle 1974; for an overall review cf. Riker and Ordeshook 1973; Budge and Farlie 1977, 131-184), where policy-stands are totally subordinated to office-seeking, so that parties are free to move anywhere in policy space to where electoral preferences are concentrated. To assume that parties can say anything in order to gain votes is, however, to ignore the developmental theory of party formation which stresses the incorporation of particular social cleavages into basic party identity (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). It is also to ignore the essential function of parties to provide labels and records for candidates offering themselves for election (Greenstein 1970, 39-40).

Taking account of standing ideology and incorporating it into party theory also explains how the party can keep its activists loyal and the diverse parts of its organization together. They all have a payoff and a sense of identity which they would not have if the party shifted from being right-wing at one election to left-wing at the next. Whatever the bitterness between revisionist and fundamentalist factions within a party, disputes usually turn out to be more about strategy and tactics at a particular juncture than real surrender on deep rooted principles or abandonment of the core groups to which the party appeals.

A case in point is the famous Bad Godesburg conference of the German Social Democrats in 1959, hailed as a repudiation of the party's Marxist heritage and in turn giving rise to general academic theses of the 'end of ideology' (Bell 1962) and of the growth of catch-all (that is, pragmatic office-seeking) parties (Kirchheimer 1966). But what real difference did Bad Godesburg make to the party's ideological stand? We can see this by examining a map of the party's movements on a left-right scale (Figure 1—the construction of this is explained below). This shows:

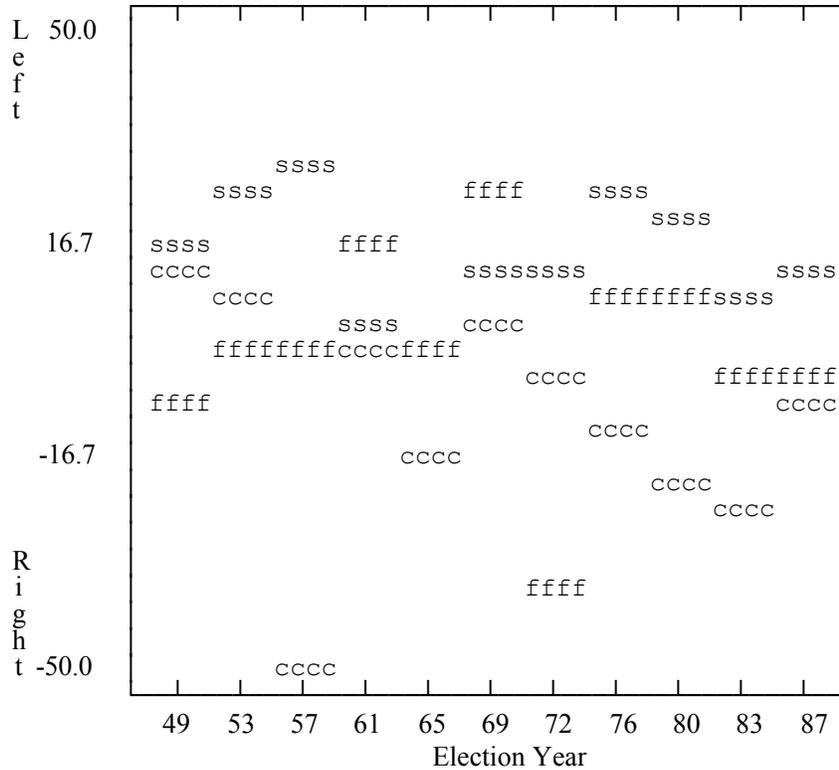
(a) that Bad Godesburg was part of a rightward move by the party, which, however,

(b) still distinguished it from its rivals the Christian and Liberal Democrats—their paths have in fact never crossed in Left-Right policy terms, and

(c) did not prevent it from going as far left in 1980 as it was in 1949!

A similar point can be made about what are often taken as the epitome of the loose catch all party—the American Democrats and Republicans. Looking at their policy positions in the same Left-Right policy space as for Germany shows that they consistently differentiate themselves from each

Figure 1. Left-Right Orientation of Three German Parties' Programs, 1950-1987

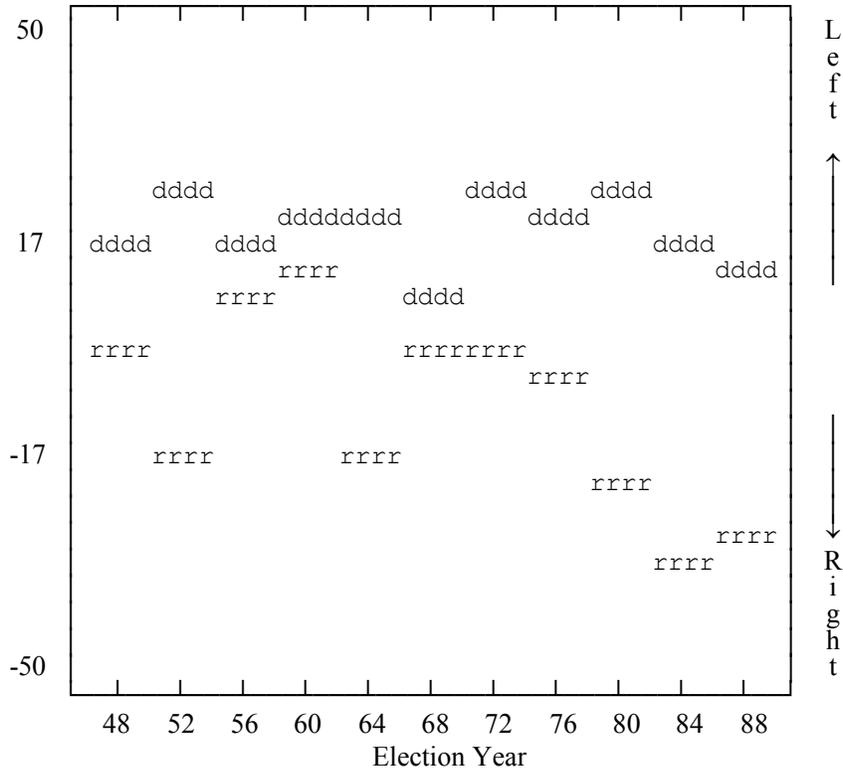


- c = Christian Democratic / Christian Social Union (Christlich Demokratische / Soziale Union)
- f = Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei)
- s = Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands)

other on such matters as support for welfare, government intervention, foreign aid, and defence, individual initiative and freedom (see Figure 2). Indeed, they remain as far apart as many European parties on these points, and more so than many.

Emphasizing ideology does not of course rule out strategic change. As Figures 1 and 2 show, parties may choose to emphasize or de-emphasize their basic commitments without abandoning them, depending on electoral

Figure 2. Left-Right Orientation of U.S. Party Platforms, 1945-1985



d = Democratic Platforms' Left-Right Orientation
 r = Republican Platforms' Left-Right Orientation

prospects and who controls the leadership. (The two again are closely linked, as the most direct way to change policy is to change men as well as measures).

Policy and ideology are thus the features of political parties which stand at the confluence of internal organization and factional struggle, group identity and public electoral appeal, candidate selection and government activity. Theoretically, they allow us to marry a rational choice approach with the theory of party development, tracing out the continuing influence of party origins on the strategic moves a party makes in electoral competition, as well as the types of coalition partner it prefers, the activities it pursues in government, and the ministries it will take if forced to share them out

(Budge and Keman 1990, 32-158). All are connected because all are driven by policy concerns which have their roots in ideological commitments—which also bind parties to their core supporters.

II. Using Electoral Programs to Measure Policy and Ideology

The exciting development of the past 20 years is that we have found a way to come to grips with party policy and ideology through systematic analysis of party electoral programs (the platform, in American terminology). This enables us to formulate the theoretical focus sketched above in a concrete way. It has also changed our conception of party theory itself, at both a spatial and a general level.

The need to make data theoretically relevant, and then to operationalize theories in data-terms so as to permit a confrontation, has cruelly exposed ambiguities and underspecification of quite vital assumptions in existing theories. The first result of the systematic collection of data to answer fundamental theoretical questions has thus been an improvement in the clarity and scope of theoretical models themselves (Budge and Laver 1992, 4-9).

All this activity has taken its start from the party electoral program. It is worthwhile reflecting that parties are not only distinguished from other political entities by running candidates for office—the classic difference from interest groups (Finer 1958). They are also unique in periodically producing a comprehensive medium term plan for the whole of their society, even extending it to the world as a whole! No other party document is quite so comprehensive as the electoral programs, and no other is so authoritatively and formally endorsed as a statement on behalf of the whole party, rather than of a particular candidate or faction.

In countries where it is not widely read and distributed it nonetheless strongly influences media discussion during the election campaign (Rohrbach 1991). Thus party decisions about how to present their position in the election program have an important effect on the public perceptions which lead to campaign success. They also produce or reflect shifts of influence within the party itself (Strom 1990) and are passionately debated by activists as a result, forming a crucial element in self-definitions of what the party is for.

It is curious that a text which in so many ways enshrines party distinctiveness and binds its different elements together should have been neglected in systematic research until recently. This is perhaps due to a concentration on the electoral party on the one hand and the legislative party on the other, where the 'party' was seen as constituted by the aggregate views and behavior of the relevant groups. The party program, which could have put both

into a wider context, was ignored because of a widespread assumption that it was designed purely for electoral purposes and quickly discarded thereafter.

Recent research has shown that platform commitments *do* get carried through into general government action (Ginsberg 1976). They are related to government programs, even when these are formulated by coalition governments (Budge and Laver 1993), and also to a key feature of government activity—spending in different policy areas—over a range of ten countries (Klingemann, Hofferbert, Budge et al., forthcoming). These findings demonstrate how far the platform serves as a guide to action for parties in government. This is natural and almost inevitable when one thinks about it, since the platform is the only agreed and comprehensively worked out plan the party leaders have and they have no time to devise another one. Politicians cannot cynically discard their program once they are elected to office. They need it to tell them what to do.

Such guidance comes from the policies in the document, which as we have indicated are heavily influenced by party ideology as well as by campaign considerations. What form do these take? A natural first approach is to look for specific pledges—promises to do certain things in certain ways. Once identified these can be traced through the government's legislative and administrative program to see how far they have been carried out. The problem here, however, as research on explicit pledge commitments shows, is that:

- (a) specific pledges constitute a small minority of statements in the documents;
- (b) which are mostly made in regard to peripheral areas of policy and rarely relate to central national problems;
- (c) while two-thirds to three-quarters of specific pledges get carried out, they cannot therefore offer the government an integrated plan of action (Rose 1980; Rallings 1987—for an exception, however, see Kalogeropoulou 1989).

The extent to which parties fulfill pledges offers some counter to easy cynicism about neglect of programs while in government (see also Page 1978; Pomper 1968). But clearly the absence of pledges in central areas of policy runs counter to some of the assertions just made about the relevance of the platform to most government activity.

This is only true, however, if we assume that the sole guides to government action are such specific pledges and commitments. The fact that these constitute a minuscule proportion of the whole text should alert us to the possibility that this is not the case. Parties do not, after all, write, and keenly debate, these detailed documents (increasingly the length of a short paperback) just to cover space. The rest of the text has a purpose—first to

get internal party support, then to convince the electorate to vote for the party, then to guide government action.

To understand how commitments are expressed it helps to consider the nature of the platform and of its equivalents in other countries. Typically, after a short preamble stressing the importance of the election and of voting for the party, the text is broken into short chapters each dealing with a particular policy area. In these chapters the past record of party concerns and measures is listed, a history of recent developments is given, the importance of various problems is emphasized, and a promise is made of party attention to the area in government. That is all. Only rarely is a pledge of specific action given. This is entirely understandable, since so many intervening factors might affect a pledge to cut unemployment by two million within two years, for example. Such a specific promise would open the party to internal disputes in getting the platform approved, and also give a gratuitous target for rival parties to criticize if the party formed (part of) a government which failed to deliver.

The absence of such specific goals has fueled criticism of platforms as mere rhetoric to fool electors. But consider what a document composed this way *is* doing—which is incidentally much more sensible than designating particular actions in a situation of uncertainty. The rather general and discursive presentation in the platform is in fact *setting priorities for government action*. It is saying to electors—and to the party itself—these are the areas we are going to concentrate on in government. Primarily this might be reflected in spending (Budge and Hofferbert 1990) since the willingness to spend (or cut money) is a key test of commitment to the policy area. But it can also affect legislative and administrative output, upgrading of relevant agencies and ministries, etc.

The main thrust of party electoral programs is thus to emphasize certain policy areas. Like Holmes' dog which did not bark in the night, the document is also important for what it leaves out. Certain policy areas are either not mentioned at all or only mentioned briefly. References to other parties' policies are even fewer—why should a party give any free publicity to rival policies? As the other parties are doing the same thing, it is often difficult purely from the content of party documents to tell if they come from the same election or not. Their description of the state of the world is quite different—the one concentrating, for example, on threatening international conjunctures calling for a strong defence and stability and solidarity at home, the other(s) emphasizing the breakdown of domestic services and the economy, the suffering of minorities and the need for decisive internal intervention.

**Table 1. Category Headings and Domains Used
in the Comparative Coding of Party Election Programs**

<i>Domain 1 External Relations</i>		<i>Domain 4 Economy</i>		<i>Domain 6 Fabric of Society</i>	
101	Foreign special relationships: positive	401	Enterprise	601	Defense of national way of life: positive
102	Foreign special relationships: negative	402	Incentives	602	Defense of national way of life: negative
103	Decolonization	403	Regulation of capitalism	603	Traditional morality: positive
104	Military: positive	404	Economic planning	604	Traditional morality: negative
105	Military: negative	405	Corporatism	605	Law and order
106	Peace	406	Protectionism: positive	606	National effort, social harmony
107	Internationalism: positive	407	Protectionism: negative	607	Communalism, pluralism, pillarization: positive
108	European Community: positive	408	Economic goals	608	Communalism, pluralism, pillarization: negative
109	Internationalism: negative	409	Keynesian		
110	European Community: negative	410	Productivity		
		411	Technology and infrastructure		
<i>Domain 2 Freedom and Democracy</i>		412	Controlled economy		
201	Freedom and domestic human rights	413	Nationalization		
202	Democracy	414	Economic orthodoxy and efficiency	<i>Domain 7 Social Groups</i>	
203	Constitutionalism: positive			701	Labor groups: positive
204	Constitutionalism: negative	<i>Domain 5 Welfare and Quality of Life</i>		702	Labor groups: negative
		501	Environmental protection	703	Agriculture and farmers
<i>Domain 3 Government</i>		502	Art, sport, leisure and media	704	Other economic groups
301	Decentralization: positive	503	Social justice	705	Underprivileged minority groups
302	Decentralization: negative	504	Social services expansion: positive	706	Non-economic demographic groups
303	Government efficiency	505	Social services expansion: negative		
304	Government corruption	506	Education pro-expansion		
305	Government effectiveness and authority	507	Education anti-expansion		

These differences in the key campaign document support an important revision of party competition theory, which is described in the next section. The immediate consequence however is to suggest a coding scheme for quantifying election programs comparably, across countries, by counting sentences into categories which cover the broad spectrum of possible policies. These are shown in Table 1. The original 54 categories have been used by the Manifesto Research Group of the European Consortium for Political Research to code over 1200 election programs in 25 countries. In spite of imperfections (too many detailed categories introduced to satisfy country specialists that *their* country was adequately covered), the categories and the codings have proved very robust, producing basically the same results whatever recombinations and corrections have been tried. One of these is shown in Table 2—a reduction of the 54 categories to 20 whose meaning seemed less ambiguous than the original detailed ones.

This stability of results increases confidence that the original message of the documents is getting through whatever ‘noise’ is produced by the categorizations. The relative success of the latter increases confidence in the basic assumption on which they are based; that is, that parties compete by emphasizing favorable topics and de-emphasizing unfavorable topics, rather than by arguing for different policies on the same topics. Doubts by some collaborators that this could possibly be so led, in fact, to the insertion of some pro- and con- categories into the coding, but experience shows that only one of these, usually expressing positive support, is emphasized in any one party’s program. After all, if you oppose the social services from which a majority of electors benefit, it is damaging to say so directly when you can get the same message through by mentioning them little and stressing the need to cut taxes.

A party policy is expressed as the particular set of percentaged references (sentences)¹ it makes in a specific election program over the range of topics either in the 54-category or reduced 20-category codings. Its ideology can most directly be regarded as the average of these over the post-war period. For purposes of spatial analyses these categories can be regarded as each constituting a dimension, leading to the multi-dimensional policy space explored below (Section 5). For more familiar reduced representation spaces they can be converted into ones analogous to the type suggested by Downs (1957 102-140), as follows:

- (a) findings from extensive factor analyses of the data (Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987, 392-399) showed that the leading dimension of party conflict to emerge in 14 out of 19 countries was a Left-Right one;
- (b) on the basis of this a Left-Right scale was constructed out of the reduced 20 dimensional categorization shown in Table 2 contrasting Peace

Table 2. Combination of 54 Policy-coding Categories into 20

New Category	Old Categories
State intervention	403 Regulation of capitalism 404 Economic planning 406 Protectionism: positive 412 Controlled economy 413 Nationalization
Quality of life	501 Environmental protection 502 Art, sport, leisure and media
Peace and co-operation	103 Decolonization 105 Military: negative 106 Peace 107 Internationalism: positive
Anti-establishment views	204 Constitutionalism: negative 304 Government corruption 602 Defense of national way of life: negative 604 Traditional morality: negative
Capitalist economics	401 Free enterprise 402 Incentives 407 Protectionism: negative 414 Economic orthodoxy and efficiency 505 Social service expansion: negative
Social conservatism	203 Constitutionalism: positive 305 Government effectiveness and authority 601 National way of life: positive 603 Traditional morality: positive 605 Law and order 606 National effort, social harmony
Productivity and technology	410 Productivity 411 Technology and infrastructure
CODING CATEGORIES RETAINED INTACT:	
104 Military: positive	
108 European Community: positive	
110 European Community: negative	
201 Freedom and domestic human rights	
202 Democracy	
301 Decentralization: positive	
303 Government efficiency	
503 Social justice	
504 Social services expansion: positive	
506 Education: positive	
701 Labor groups: positive	
703 Agriculture and farmers	
705 Underprivileged minorities	

and Co-operation, State Intervention, Democracy, Social Service Expansion and Support for Labor on the Left, with Support for Military Spending and Defense Alliances, Capitalist Economics, Freedom and Social Conservatism, on the Right. No other variables correlated with this scale and no other general dimension emerged over all countries.

Positions of a program on the Left-Right scale can be simply estimated by summing the percentage references to Right-wing topics and percentage references to Left-wing topics, and subtracting summed Left percentages from summed Right percentages. This gives the 'maps' of party positions illustrated in Figs 1 and 2 above. These are the best 'reduced' representation we can get of party positions but of course it omits the additional information that we can get by placing them in the full multidimensional space (Laver and Budge 1992, 25-30).

Our one dimension is clearly a Left-Right policy dimension. Its analogies to that used by spatial modelers in the Downsian tradition should not blind us, however, to the fact that the assumptions it is based on and the properties it possesses are very different. Movement along the dimension is powered by emphasis or de-emphasis of different preferred policy areas rather than by adjustment of stands on topics of common concern. This implies that mobility will be much less than envisaged by most spatial models. Parties will rarely leave their broad ideological area (left, right or center) or 'leapfrog' other parties.

Exploring the implications of this, however, takes us away from data-analysis to a discussion of theory. In Section 3 we consider a modification of Downsian models of party competition in the shape of Saliency Theory, which is both suggested by the data and justifies the shape it takes. In Section 4 we look at implications for the behavior of parties in government and in Section 5 at the question of voting cycles particularly in regard to the multi-dimensional representation. The question here is, given the way parties compete and electors react, do voting cycles really constitute a serious practical or theoretical problem for democracies?

III. The Saliency Theory of Voting and Party Competition

Far from being a digression, the detailed consideration we have given to the nature and analysis of programmatic statements aids theoretical development. For too long formal theories about parties have developed in isolation from the actual party behavior they want to explain. What party programs tell us about the nature of ideological movement and policy change is very germane to the specification of spatial models. Saliency theory, which both justifies and develops the kind of approach to coding which we have applied, illustrates this perfectly.

Most models of party competition, spatial or otherwise, are essentially confrontational in nature—indeed, they take it as so axiomatic that party competition *is* confrontational that they usually fail to list it among their assumptions. A confrontational theory is one which assumes that parties put forward contrasting policies on the same issue (or set of issues) such as, in Downs' example, the extent of government intervention. As we have seen, however, when a Left-wing party advocates intervention to deal with admitted problems the right does not oppose this directly—to do so might be seen as condoning the problem. Instead it stresses other social priorities and values such as individual freedom. In this way it can suggest that these priorities which it is better placed to carry out are more important than the ones its rival stresses. The Left is well advised not to counter a policy of lowering taxes with one for keeping them the same or increasing them, but instead to stress the merits of welfare and healthcare which the Right in turn can hardly oppose. A struggle for votes thus becomes a struggle to make one's own priorities uppermost in the election campaign.

Building on this point, David Robertson (1976) proposed Saliency Theory as a way of reconciling certain theoretical inconsistencies within Downs' spatial theory. Downs assumed that parties competing for votes arrayed themselves, by means of their policy pronouncements on various alternatives, along a one-dimensional policy continuum trying to get their rival proposals as close as possible to the major concentrations of voters. Electors signal their preference by voting for the party whose place on the continuum comes closest to their own. In the election, the party closest to the greater number of electors gets the most votes, which then gives it a prominent or (if it got a majority) unique role in the formation of the government. It thus has a mandate to carry through the policies which had attracted the plurality or majority of votes.

Downs' model requires that parties have the policy flexibility or mobility to move left or right, as anticipated electoral advantage is perceived. He assumes that the parties can easily place themselves at any point on the continuum. They can do this because leaders are themselves indifferent about policies. They are motivated exclusively by the desire for office and will stand for whatever policies serve that desire. Hence they will alter party policy and their position on the left-right continuum so as to attract the most votes. Note that this will work only if electors believe parties will do in government what they promise in elections, so the parties also have good if self-ish motives for carrying through their mandate.

A difficulty in Downs' model comes in specifying how parties move in relation to each other. Specifically, can they 'leapfrog' each other's positions so as to get ever closer to the major concentrations of electors? This might

lead to continual movement and confusion as parties jostled each other to get ever closer to the last vote needed to win—that of the ‘median voter.’ Downs, therefore, at one point in his argument bans leapfrogging by parties (1957, 122-3). But this prohibition then enables one of the parties to station itself between the major electoral concentration(s) and its rival(s), thus invariably winning as the other(s) would be unable to get any closer to the potential votes (Barry 1970, 119).

Besides the logical inconsistency in regard to leapfrogging, Downs’ argument also lacks a broader kind of plausibility. If politicians are ideologically indifferent to policy but relentlessly eager to get into office, why do those in losing parties not simply join the winning party—especially given that the Downsian model has a short time perspective, centering on the current election and government? If carried to extremes this argument would predict new parties at each election, as losers pulled out of their old ones and the governing party[ies] split in the approach to the election, with leaders jockeying for new, favorable, unique electoral positions.

Clearly this does not happen—presumably because, whatever their desire for office, leaders are also attached to their party’s enduring ideological stance (cf. Budge and Laver 1986). Robertson points out that this attachment alone would preclude their free movement along a policy continuum, since at a certain point they would feel the strain of ideological compromise. (Not to mention the pressures of activists.)

There is, however, another reason why parties cannot move freely from end to end of the continuum. If they did so they would endanger essential and indelible associations with particular policies and issues—whether because of ideological commitment, previous history, actions in government, association with certain support groups, or a mixture of all these factors. In other words, even if parties wanted to repudiate their past for short term advantage, they could not easily do so and would not be believed if they tried. Previous actions cast doubt on present promises when the two are not consistent. Parties are expected to stand for something, and each party is expected to stand for something that separates it from the competition.

This is exactly Robertson’s point. Past and present priorities must be largely consistent to be believed. In spatial terms this means that parties’ ability to move along the type of continuum postulated by Downs is severely limited. In particular, parties will not be able or willing to leapfrog: Labor cannot rationally pretend to be Conservatives, nor Communists to be Christian Democrats, nor Republicans to be Democrats. Parties would lose both support and credibility if they did.

However, there is flexibility. Parties will be wary of repudiating previous priorities, to be sure. But there is nothing to prevent them

selectively emphasizing or de-emphasizing items from their ideological repertoire. We can conceive movement along the spatial continuum as constituted by emphases or de-emphases on traditional issues, along with some picking up of new issues. The process allows parties to push themselves toward the middle from their particular end. But they will stick to their own ‘side’ of the center, and they will rarely leapfrog.

These implications of the saliency approach immediately modify the kinds of theoretical assumptions one can make even about recognizably Left-Right continua, such as those in Figures 1 and 2 above. If parties can move only to a limited extent they must pick up the majority of their vote from longstanding core supporters in their own segment of the policy space. They must need relatively strong inducements to move out of this area; they will not be continually on the search for clusters of voters to whom they can adjust their policy positions. Indeed, such clusters, other than committed supporters indissolubly attached to a particular party, may be rather hard to identify.

Robertson does, however, suggest a type of ‘rational expectations’ hypothesis which accounts for party movement even under conditions of imperfect information and uncertainty. He suggests that policy change depends on leaders’ judgements about prospects for the next election. If that is judged to be a foregone conclusion, either in terms of one’s own party or another being bound to pick up the crucial votes, there is no payoff from seeking extra votes. Both winning and losing parties therefore will remain firmly anchored within their ideological area. The winner does so because no policy concessions need be made and a relatively hard-line position can be staked out in anticipation of government. Loser(s) remain ideologically pure because their leadership will need to defend their position internally against challenges after losing the election, and the best way of doing so is to stick closely to the party line.

However, when leaders judge the next election to be genuinely competitive there is obviously an incentive to pick up extra votes. No matter how few these are they may make all the difference in a finely balanced contest.

Leaders’ judgements about the likely election result thus power strategic party movement. These judgements are most probably related to the actual distribution and policy preferences of electors. But they are not *necessarily* accurate and it is they which affect policy adjustments and not the actual distribution of voters. The model thus allows for misperceptions and mistakes—unlike Downsian-style models which depend on perfect knowledge of the electoral distribution of preferences.

An important implication of the model, which also renders it more flexible than mainstream Downsian ones, is that there is no need for a

pile-up of electors at the center (or indeed at any other given point) to make it work. Parties are motivated to pick up even a few extra votes by moving inwards. Thus to check this model we do not need distributions of electors paralleling a chart of party policy positions. The latter, with some knowledge of what politicians expected the result to be in the run-up to the election, is all that is required to check the reasoning.

This 'limited competition' model provides a possible explanation for the policy changes we observe in such countries as Germany and the United States (Figures 1 and 2), accounting at the same time for the parties' equally obvious tendency to stay in broadly their own area of the policy continuum and to avoid leapfrogging. Tests of these ideas already carried out for Britain and the United States yield broad support (Budge and Farlie 1977, 424-433). The 'mapping' of party movements, which is now possible (on the basis of the program codings) for some 20 post-war democracies, offers the opportunity to test them more definitively, and research along these lines is currently in progress (Budge, forthcoming).

IV. Saliency Theory and Party Behavior in Government

The implications of saliency theory do not stop with electoral competition but extend into what parties can be expected to do in government. Linking up explanations of elections with explanations of government functioning and behavior has been increasingly seen as the way forward in coalition theory (Austen-Smith and Banks 1988). Saliency ideas carry through naturally from one level to the other, as follows:

(a) Parties are primarily motivated by a desire to push their (ideologically influenced) policy through. The best way of doing this is normally to form a single party majority or minority government. Failing these, they may seek to form a coalition with like-minded parties. If an opportunity arises, however, of getting salient policies enacted from outside government (e.g., as the price of support for other party[ies'] minority government), they will not be averse to doing so. Minimum winning coalitions are not relevant for policy-pursuing parties (Budge and Laver 1986).

(b) The compromises necessary to form government legislative coalitions are facilitated by the specialized nature of parties' policy interests. Parties have strong interests in certain areas which emerge from their founding ideologies and from the core support groups this ties them into. (For a specification of these see Budge and Farlie 1983, 41-56; and Budge and Keman 1990, 89-98.) As we noted in our characterization of election competition, these are not the same; indeed, the essence of competition is to oppose *different* priorities.

As the parties' concerns are different, compromises can be made by agreeing to follow both simultaneously. Even enhanced welfare and tax reductions can be reconciled by cutting third areas such as defense, or borrowing, or creating inflation, or expanding the economy. There are no necessary connections between policy areas, only contingent ones: the classic basis for log-rolling. However, while log-rolling is usually conceived as applying to distributional questions, differential saliency renders its application possible across a range of policies.

(c) Parties' policy commitments to their ideologically based priorities means that they are motivated to get policies through—in or out of government. They cannot abandon their priorities, because leaders identify and are identified with them; party bodies and activists support them; associated groups back them; and party voters expect them. Naturally the party record will be more intensely scrutinised when it is in government, and comparative research shows that government parties have an advantage in getting their priorities reflected in government activities (Budge and Laver 1993, Budge and Hofferbert 1990; Budge and Keman 1990, 132-158). Nonetheless, other parties also succeed in getting their priorities through, especially in the policy-areas most salient to them. Both a classic government-mandate process powered by electoral success and a more general agenda-influencing process seem to operate in most party democracies. Both are squarely in line with saliency ideas, because they show the parties' priorities being catered for, in large part because the other parties can also pursue their priorities at the same time.

(d) Party priorities have also been shown to affect other aspects of government functioning, notably the distribution of ministries among coalition partners (Budge and Keman 1990, 89-128). Parties try to secure those ministries which fall within the policy areas salient to them. Possession of a Ministry may enable a party to 'bend' policy in its own direction, through administrative measures, defining rules in favor of related groups, etc.

It is highly unlikely that ministries can operate in total autonomy, however. General priorities are decided by the government as a whole, even though possession of the relevant Ministry again gives parties a strategic position in general debate. Rather, it is likely that parties pursue policy advantages simultaneously at all levels in government: in terms of government composition (trying either to monopolize government themselves or to let in like-minded parties); in getting as many of their priorities incorporated into the government program as possible; in getting as many ministries of concern as possible; and in pushing for their own priorities at all relevant levels whenever they can during the government's life.

It is difficult to pack all these concerns into one spatial model. Policy-based theories of government formation, even when based on priorities and on multi-dimensional as well as unidimensional representations, explain the governments which actually form in eight coalition-based systems (in the sense that the parties forming them are relatively agreed on policy). However, other combinations equally agreed on policy did not form—that is to say, the models are inefficient because they designate a large number of alternative governments which *could* also form (Budge and Laver 1993).

To generate unique predictions it will probably be necessary to take relative size and position on long-standing ideological cleavages, as well as current policy, into account. This has been done successfully by Budge and Keman (1990), but non-spatially. The challenge is now to translate this into a spatial formulation which will hold these factors in balance and generate successful predictions. Saliency theory gives a basis for this.

V. Multidimensionality, Separability and Voting Cycles

Several references have been made to the use of a multidimensional policy-space, formed by regarding the twenty ‘recombined’ categories of Table 1 as each forming a dimension. The multi-dimensional spaces used to analyze party behavior are more commonly two or three-dimensional rather than twenty-dimensional. As mentioned in Section 2, however, it was impossible to find any general dimension other than a left-right one which applied even across eight or ten countries in our analysis of party programs. The best summary representation was therefore the Left-Right unidimensional one; and there was no general intermediate representation between that and the full twenty dimensions derived from the original coding.

Using twenty dimensions immediately raised problems of measuring distance between parties and between parties and governments. As each dimension represented a priority emphasized by some but not all party[ies], the question immediately arose of whether multi-dimensional distances were best conceived of in Euclidian terms, where distances were some kind of combination of positions on (interdependent) dimensions; or whether distances were best measured separately on each dimension and then simply added up or combined in some other way.

Both priority-based coding of the documents and the more generalized assumptions of saliency theory support the second approach: parties deliberately separate out policy areas from each other by emphasizing some and de-emphasizing others, thus implying that there is no inherent connection between them. Experiments with six different metrics on our data indicated that a ‘City Block’ metric, which measured policy-distance as the sum of

party distances on the separate dimensions, was optimal. The plausible nature of results, both for separate countries and in comparative analyses, further confirmed this judgement retrospectively (Laver and Budge 1992).

This decision was of course a technical and operational one, designed to allow measurements of policy closeness and payoffs in coalition governments. However, it turns out to have theoretical implications which are central to what has been taken by some as the central problem of social decision processes—the question of voting cycles and ‘natural,’ stable equilibria in policy choices (Arrow 1969).

The problem is familiar and can be simply summarized here: a minimal definition of rationality is transitivity of preferences. That is, a rational individual who prefers policy A to policy B, and policy B to C must logically prefer A to policy C. But if there are three or more people and three or more policy options, it is always possible that majority decisions do not produce clear or stable orderings of preference. For example:

- Committee member 1 prefers A to B and B to C;
- Member 2 prefers B to C and C to A;
- Member 3 prefers C to A and A to B.

In this circumstance, there is a majority for A over B. There is a majority for B over C. And a majority for C over A. Thus rational, transitive preference orders lead to an intransitive collective ordering, otherwise known as a voting cycle, since decisions would go round and round with no clear stopping point.

This critique is devastating for democratic policy making. It seems to suggest that no matter how hard individuals try to be rational, democratic policy decisions will often fail to reflect majority preferences, because no real majority can exist in many cases. This possibility can be avoided where policy choices take a one-dimensional form, as there is always an equilibrium point centered around the position of the median voter. It seems unlikely, however, that such spaces can represent the full complexity of the social choices being made. To capture these, multidimensional policy representations are needed. And here—with possible exceptions for two-dimensional representations (Schofield 1986)—no policy position can be found to which there is not at least one alternative preferred by a majority. This is the famous ‘chaos theorem’ (McKelvey 1979). No generally preferred policy, election outcome, or decision can emerge out of most (multidimensional) policy spaces.

Various solutions have been suggested to this problem, the best-known being the ‘structure-induced equilibrium’ which suggested that the need for real-life parties to operate within specific structures (in the U.S. context the legislative committee system) imposed a set of constraints on bargaining

which negated the effects of the chaos theorem (Shepsle and Weingast 1981).

This suggestion, however, still carries the negative implication that democracy can save itself only by essentially arbitrary and artificial means, by imposing institutional arrangements which favor the elite or some other privileged participant. The majority which emerges does not reflect an inherent or natural preference of society but only an imposed one. In political systems which justify themselves in terms of reflecting the (natural) will of the people, this cannot be a real solution to the implied anti-democratic critique.

Ordeshook (1986), however, has made the important observation that where the dimensions of a multi-dimensional space are separable, voting cycles are absent. This is for the same reason that excludes their appearance in a one-dimensional policy-space—namely the existence of a natural equilibrium point round the preferences of the median person. Where dimensions are separable, this equilibrium is found on each in turn: only then are positions aggregated in some way. To take a concrete example which ties in with the research described above, parties seeking to form a majority coalition government on the basis of policy cohesiveness can examine distances on each dimension in turn, then add them up. The closest grouping that emerges from this aggregation of distances will be unchallenged by any alternative combination with a majority.

Now if it is the case that politicians and electors do see the world in terms of separable policy areas, as our research suggests (on a method of electoral decision under these terms, see Budge and Farlie, 1983), voting cycles are naturally and non-artificially avoided. They are not avoided because of arbitrary institutional arrangements, but because democratic policy processes actually *use* non-Euclidian reasoning about the problems that confront them.

What this implies in substantive terms is that welfare allocations are decided without reference to tax base for example, as well as separately from defence, law and order, transport and all the other issue areas that constitute the political agenda. Strong evidence for such separation emerges from research into budgetary allocations (Klingemann, Hofferbert, Budge et al., forthcoming). Even as between expenditure and taxes, no necessary constraints exist, as governments can finance increases in one area by reductions in others—by borrowing, inflation or even gambling on revenue increases next year. Connections between different substantive policies seem even more tenuous and *naturally* so, as we clearly lack knowledge of the effects of action in one area or the other. Political decision making seems

inherently compartmentalized as a rational cost-economizing response to uncertainty.

Such a reasoning squares our theoretical conclusions with the general failure to find decision cycles actually operative in democratic procedures. Rather than continuing to believe in their imminent appearance once arbitrary institutional constraints are removed, we should recognize that the basic nature of democratic choices largely rules them out.

VI. Conclusions: The Mutual Strengthening of Theory and Data

A rather technical investigation of how to measure policy-distances between parties thus turns out to have far-reaching implications for a major theoretical problem in the study of parties. This is emblematic of the approach suggested here, of proceeding in parallel with data-investigation and theoretical development. Theory justifies and focuses empirical investigation, while wrestling with problems of evidence both sharpens and clarifies theory. This is true of many areas of research, of course, but is nowhere truer than in the field of parties, governments and elections.

Survey-based investigations have increasingly become election- and country-specific, while formal theories have developed more in terms of mathematical tractability than of the realism of their assumptions. The new kind of information provided by election programs promises to bring data and theory together again, partly because it relates directly to the policy-spaces in which formal models place the political parties. Creating these empirically then raises questions about the kind of theory really needed to account for party movement. Hopefully the suggestions made here on the basis of recent research go some way to answering these.

NOTES

¹Actually, quasi-sentences were the basis of coding. A quasi-sentence is a statement that can stand on its own both grammatically and substantively (it is *usually* a sentence). Cf. Budge, Robertson, Hearl, eds. (1987, 24).

²The average could be either the mean or the median of the post-war distribution of percentages over policy areas. Or it could be the area between quartiles or the most extreme position taken by the party or the 'pure' left and right positions at the end of the continua. While all these operationalizations are related, the exact one chosen will depend on research purposes.

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