To the CPW community,

Thanks for taking the time to read this latest draft of the general theory chapter of my dissertation. I apologize at the outset for the length—at the moment it is a Franken-chapter which combines bits and pieces of material from several other places. There are also several sections scattered throughout the text that have not been written yet; I’ve included summaries of what’s supposed to go in there to help move the argument along.

I’m most interested in getting feedback on the theory in Sections 3.2. through 3.4., so please feel free to skim or skip the first two sections.

I would also ask that you not concern yourself too much about the coding of individual cases in Table 3.1; these classifications are from an earlier version of the dataset and I’ve made quite a few changes since that don’t appear here. I include them here mostly to give a sense of what I mean by a “first incumbent” party.

Also, most of the definitional and measurement questions you might have I’ve attempted to address in earlier chapters; so it’s safe to assume I’ve thought about what a dominant party is, for instance. Comments on the theory here are more what I’m looking for.

Here’s a few issues I’d be especially interested in hearing from you about:

• I’m hoping to test several of the predictions from this chapter with the large-N data I’ve collected. I would be very interested in your thoughts about strategies for empirically evaluating various parts of the theory I’ve presented here.

• I had a collection of formal models in mind as I wrote sections 3.2 and 3.4, as you may be able to tell. I’ve gone back and forth about whether to introduce these into the text directly. Do you think the chapter would benefit from formalizing more of the argument?

• I’m always looking for additional examples, so if you know of particularly good illustrations of some of the general phenomena I’m describing, I’m all ears. Or counter-examples, too.

• It’s been a bear to synthesize all this material into a coherent whole, and I wish it hung together better than it does right now. Thoughts about how to streamline would be very helpful.

Thanks!

Kharis

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CHAPTER 3. A THEORY OF PARTY SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT IN NEWLY CONTESTED ELECTORAL REGIMES

—“The dominant party wears itself out in office, it loses its vigor, its arteries harden...every domination bears within itself the seeds of its own destruction.” (Duverger 1959: 312).

In the previous chapter, I presented data on ruling party duration in all regimes in which winning contested, multi-party elections was the main path to power—what I termed electorally contested regimes, or ECRs. Two key findings emerged from an analysis of those data.

First, the large majority of dominant parties were the first incumbents in an ECR—that is, the first party to occupy the new regime’s chief executive office. I found that ruling parties were much less likely to endure more than 20 years if they took office in an ECR that had already experienced a partisan rotation of power than if they were the initial ruling party in the regime. Second, being the first incumbent was not sufficient to survive a long time in office. There was as much variance in first-incumbent survival times as there was among non-first-incumbents. To put these two observations more succinctly, (almost) all long-lasting ruling parties are first incumbents, but not all first incumbents last long.

In this chapter I present a theory of party system development that accounts for these findings. Duverger’s early writing on dominant parties, quoted in the epigraph, serves as something of a source of inspiration for this undertaking. By detailing the mechanisms through which first incumbents are able, or not, to maintain and reproduce the initial advantages they enjoy over competitors in the party system, I aim to explain how dominant party decline proceeds—how, to borrow Duverger’s evocative metaphor, the sclerosis of incumbency sets in. And by specifying conditions under which initial ruling parties are most likely to endure indefinitely, I hope to elaborate more precisely what is required for the dominant party’s “seeds of destruction” to begin to flower.
The argument proceeds as follows. I begin by considering how party systems might evolve from their initial arrangement at the beginning of an ECR. Electoral competition in new ECRs, I argue, is much like that among firms in a formerly uncontested market newly-opened to new entrants. Initial conditions matter a great deal for the subsequent shape of the party system and its development over time. In particular, the strength of the initial incumbent—the reach and discipline of its party organization, the value of its party brand, and the degree of control it has in shaping the institutions of the new regime—go a long way toward determining its initial electoral success and its long-term ability to fend off challenges from opposition parties.

The second section considers the other side of the equation: new party entry into the market for votes. Despite the importance of initial incumbent advantages, we cannot understand how large these advantages are without also knowing something about the competition. All opposition parties that wish to compete for power in elections face a set of collective action problems, of which three are central: recruitment, of activists and candidates; coordination, of candidates and opposition supporters, and of nominations across opposition parties; and branding, such that the party attracts and maintains a following of partisans in the electorate and its endorsement is valuable to candidates. Opposition parties have to find ways to mitigate all of these problems in order to pose a credible electoral challenge to the incumbent.

The third section considers the factors that are most likely to affect the asymmetry of competition in elections—that is, the degree to which the incumbent is at a systematic advantage over opposition parties. I discuss three mechanisms through which initial ruling party advantages are reproduced over time: the level of state coercion, the resources available to each side, and the ability of one side or the other to determine the issues over which the election will be contested. The discussion demonstrates how initial incumbent advantages can persist indefinitely, leading to highly asymmetric competition and a prediction of long-lived single-party rule despite regular, contested elections. On the other hand, it also shows how opposition parties at a major disadvantage in one area, such as resources, are not necessarily doomed if they enjoy an
advantage in another area—particularly issue salience. The expected duration of first incumbents is a function of the net asymmetry between incumbent and opposition parties.

The fourth section evaluates how the regime’s formal institutions can affect the asymmetry of competition. I focus on three institutional choices that can affect the difficulty of recruitment and coordination in elections: the electoral system, the type of regime, and the distribution of authority between central and local governments. I show that electoral competition for the chief executive in presidential regimes, all else equal, should be inherently less asymmetric than in parliamentary regimes. In contrast, the effects of electoral systems themselves, are indeterminate, while greater authority vested in local offices should also reduce the asymmetry of competition.

In the fifth section, I consider how social cleavage structures affect asymmetric competition. I argue that identity cleavages—differences based around religion, language, race, or ethnicity—provide a set of differences around which to contest elections that are particularly potent in new ECRs. The net effect of identity cleavages on the degree of asymmetry depends in turn on the salience of the cleavages, the underlying size of the identity groups, and each party’s relationship to those groups.

The sixth section concludes with a restatement of the central predictions of the theory about first incumbent duration in power, including the initial conditions under which first incumbents take power, the formal institutions of the regime, and the country’s social cleavage structure.

3.1. Ruling Party Longevity in Electorally Contested Regimes

3.1.1. Party Systems and First-Mover Advantages
Most dominant parties began as the first incumbents in newly-founded electoral contested regimes (ECRs). By *first incumbents*, I mean the incumbent to hold office in the period directly following the establishment of a regular pattern of rules and institutions that collectively govern how executive power is allocated, and where multi-party elections are the crucial element in this allocation. And by *dominant parties*, I mean parties than controlled the chief executive office of the central government for an “extraordinary” period of time—for which I have used 20 years as a rough cut-off.¹

Let us begin here by considering how we might characterize the typical party system at the beginning of an ECR, and then ask why some first incumbents remain dominant while others do not. Recall that the regime is new; multi-party elections for the chief executive have either not previously been held, or have not mattered for the control of state executive authority. Now they do. In this situation, does the party system approximate a stable equilibrium, in which each party’s supporters are more or less “locked in,” there are few independents, and party support shifts only at the margins? Or does the party system appear completely out of equilibrium, with few strong partisans, many independents, and the potential for huge shifts in support from one party to another between elections or even over a single campaign cycle?

Strange as it may seem to the casual reader, recent work on dominant parties has tended to assume the first—that dominant party systems have existed since their beginning in a kind of equilibrium state, and that in order for incumbents to lose in these systems requires a shock of some kind that fundamentally alters the patterns of competition (Pempel 1990; Magaloni 2006; Greene 2007). Thus, the focus in this work has been on identifying mechanisms of dominant party decline rather than those that cause them to persist. Yet the second seems a much more apt description of reality at the beginning of an electorally-contested regime: the lifting of restrictions on opposition party formation fundamentally changes the nature of political competition for state

¹ For a full statement of this definition, see Chapter 1. For a discussion of the coding rules used to identify dominant parties and the comparison set, and a listing of parties that meet these criteria, see Chapter 2.
power. Now it is channeled first and foremost through elections and other formal institutions, and all contestants for power have to adjust accordingly. There is not necessarily a tried-and-true pattern for winning votes; nor is it necessarily obvious to like-minded voters whom to support. The whole exercise of choosing leaders at the ballot box is all very new, and will require a period of adjustment from everybody involved before winners and losers are sorted out. Thus, in order to explain why dominant parties persist in power, the phenomenon we need to explain is not the breakdown of a political equilibrium—that is a given—but consequences of the starting conditions for what follows!

An analogy from economics may help illustrate the point. Consider a market for a good that has until now been monopolized by a single firm—due, say, to a drug patent. The market has just been legally opened to competition—the patent has expired—and new firms can now enter the market and compete for customers with their own products. At this moment, is the market in equilibrium or not? Do we expect the former monopolist’s market share to shift only at the margins once competitors are allowed to enter? Clearly, the expiration of the patent has introduced precisely the kind of shock that disequilibrates a market—indeed, the only question is not if competitors will gain market share, but rather, how much, how fast?

So too, I would submit, is the effect on the party system at the beginning of a newly-contested electoral regime. Legalizing opposition parties is a major shock to a formerly monopolized party system, with profound consequences for both the incumbent and the aspiring upstarts. It may be, as I will show with some examples in a moment, that the former monopolist proves exceptionally adept, and opposition parties inept, at handling this transition and maintaining its dominant role, producing what looks like a stable dominant party system. But this outcome should not be assumed. In fact, one expects that the more “natural” evolution of the party system should proceed with the entry of additional parties, the erosion of the incumbent’s vote share, and the ruling party’s eventual replacement by someone new.
First Mover Advantage

If we accept that new party systems are in a state of disequilibrium, then let us return to our market analogy for a moment, and consider how the end of monopolies can occur. Competition in new markets can be initiated in several ways. The patent example is one: prohibitions on entry into a market monopolized by a single firm are removed all at once, competition floods in, and the former monopolist tries to hang on to as much of the market as it can. Another is when a monopoly ends through the break-up of the firm. The telecommunications market in the United States in the 1980s is a good example of this pattern—a court order led the monopolist AT&T to be split into several regional companies, the so-called “Baby Bells.” A third pattern is when a firm develops products for a completely new market, as Microsoft did with its Windows operating system in the 1980s, building an effective monopoly and then retaining most of its market share in the face of later entry by competitors. The rise and fall of Eastman Kodak’s control of the market for film shows a similar, although ultimately less successful, history. A fourth pattern is when there are several firms that together form an oligopoly; deregulation or cartel-busting then leads to new firm entry and mergers, as in the U.S. airline industry after 1978.

These examples give us a sense of how initial market conditions may shape the subsequent patterns of competition, and they also suggest a possible explanation for how markets come to be dominated by a single firm. More than in the other cases, the Microsofts and Kodaks of the world enjoyed what economists term first-mover advantages—long-term benefits of being the first (or one of the first) firms to enter a market (Mueller 1997). These initial benefits can endure as a consequence both of demand-side and supply-side factors.

On the former, firms may benefit from being first to the market when there exist high uncertainties about the quality of new products, as for instance with automobiles, so that later entries to the market are viewed by consumers as much riskier than earlier, more proven entries. First mover advantages also tend to persist for goods that have strong buyer inertia due to habit
formation, in which the customer learns about the product by consuming it rather than by receiving information from experts or impartial observers, also tend to advantage the first firms in the market. Colgate, for instance, was the first company to sell toothpaste in squeezable tubes, over a century ago, and has been a leading toothpaste brand in the United States ever since.

On the supply side, first-mover advantages are likely to accrue in industries in which there are high set-up and sunk costs; large economies of scale, which if they take time to capture, give the initial entrant more time to expand and benefit from these economies while later entrants start up; and large learning-by-doing advantages, in which the process of creating the new product is complicated, and initial entrants gain large advantages by being further up the learning curve than later entrants (Mueller 1997). An industry that satisfies all three requirements is commercial airliner production, where the huge capital investments and complicated development of new models of jets have limited their production in the United States to a single company, Boeing.

First-Mover Advantage in Party Systems

Although the analogy is not perfect, the first-mover advantage concept ports well to the political context, and it suggests several factors that may affect the party system’s development after an ECR has been established. On the demand side, the most obvious political parallel is to the development of political “brand loyalty”—what we more commonly refer to as “partisanship.” As a large literature has demonstrated, partisan loyalties, once established, are quite robust over time (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960). There is, then, a clear mechanism in politics through which the first parties in the electoral arena can retain their head-start in the competition for votes: partisanship.

On the supply side, too, parties face high start-up costs, compounded by the high uncertainty about prospects for eventual success. Parties also benefit from clear economies of scale in election campaigns—resources invested to increase the value of the party brand can raise
all the parties’ candidates, not just a handful (Aldrich 1995). And in some political contexts, there is clear learning-by-doing; elected officials campaigning for office often only know little more than what worked in the last election, and strategies for nominating candidates and mobilizing potential supporters often evolve gradually over decades (Fenno 1978). Those parties that entered the market first have had longer to solve coordination problems and figure out the most effective way to translate party resources into votes.

Yet as with the examples from the business world, we can point to wide variation in the success of first-movers whose source is not readily apparent—simply being the first incumbent is not enough to endure for long in many, if not most, cases. These generic first-mover advantages may hold under some conditions, but they clearly do not in others. To say more we will have to take a more fine-grained look at cases of first-mover parties in the real world, a task I turn to next.

3.1.2. Patterns of First-Mover Advantage in Electorally-Contested Regimes

How does first-mover advantage vary in new electorally-contested regimes? Is there anything about the patterns of first-mover duration that would suggest why some parties stay in power longer than others? To answer these questions, I have collected data on the duration of all ruling parties in electorally-contested regimes (ECRs) from 1950-2006. (I discuss how these data were collected in detail in Chapter 2.)

A natural way to begin exploring this data is by looking at the origins of the regime. ECRs originate in one of three ways. The first group entered the dataset at independence, then established a pattern of regular, contested multi-party elections. While the majority of these regimes are post-colonial states, and located primarily in Asia or Africa, also included in this group are new states created out of the partition of old ones—for instance, Slovakia and the Czech Republic in 1993, and the post-Yugoslavian republics at various points in the 1990s. This
group also includes states that were formerly occupied by foreign powers, as were West Germany, Austria, Italy, and Japan after World War II.

I term the first incumbents in these regimes founder parties: they typically lead a pro-independence coalition, then assume power upon independence and contest the following multi-party elections to remain in power. A prominent example of a founder party is the Indian National Congress, which as the main representative of Indians in negotiations with the British assumed power when the Indian Dominion was created out of partition. Congress won the first post-independence elections in 1951-52 and retained control of the national government until 1977. Other parties that fit this description include the BDP in Botswana, the PPP in Gambia, the UMNO in Malaysia, the Independence Alliance in Mauritius, the PAP in Singapore, and the UNP in Sri Lanka.

The second group of regimes consists of pre-existing states in which there is a transition to an electorally contested regime in which the incumbent runs. Included here are both former one-party states and military dictatorships which legalize opposition parties. In turn, the first contested elections in these new ECRs lead to one of two outcomes—either the incumbent wins and retains power, or a non-incumbent wins and replaces the former autocrat in the executive. For instance, in Kenya, the incumbent KANU party had held power continuously since the country’s independence, and opposition parties had been banned from 1969-1991. The first contested, multi-party election for president was held in December 1992; the ERC began with that election. Because the incumbent president, Daniel arap Moi, won re-election, KANU is the first ruling party in the dataset in the Kenyan case. Ruling parties that successfully retain power after initiating multi-party elections I term hegemonic parties. Other examples that fit this

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2 For reasons I detail below, it is rare for a founder party to lose the first election after formal independence. Examples include the PUP in Belize in December 1984 and the UWP in St. Lucia in July 1979.
description well include the Colorado Party in Paraguay in May 1989, the MPRP in Mongolia in July 1990, the CCM in Tanzania in October 1995, and the KMT in March 1996.\footnote{Dating the election which ushers in a period of truly meaningful multi-party competition in an autocratic state can be a difficult task when the incumbent retains power. The transition from closed to competitive autocracy in Mexico, for instance, has no obvious break point; one could make a reasonable case for an election as early as 1946, when the incumbent first won less than 90% of the vote, or as late as 1988, when its vote share fell below 70% for the first time.}

In some cases, the incumbent party actually loses the elections it initiates (or perhaps more accurately, is forced to initiate). For instance, like in Kenya, a period of one-party rule in Zambia ended at about the same time with multi-party elections in October 1991; however, there the long-time president Kenneth Kaunda and his UNIP lost badly in the first multi-party elections. The candidate that defeated Kaunda, Frederick Chiluba, and his party the MMD are thus recorded as the first ruling party in the Zambian case. Those who take power by defeating a long-time incumbent in the first elections, such as the MMD in Zambia, I term incumbent-defeaters. Other examples of first incumbents which fit this description include the PPP/CIVIC coalition in Guyana in October 1992, the UDF in Malawi in May 1994, and the PRB in Benin in March 1991.

The third group of regimes are former closed autocracies in pre-existing states in which the former autocratic leadership does not run in the first multi-party election and there is effectively no representative of the incumbent party or leader in the race. This pattern is common in many “pacted transitions,” frequently away from military rule, and usually leads to an open-seat electoral contest at the beginning of the new regime. Examples of first incumbents who were open-seat winners include the URC in Argentina in October 1983, the PMDB in Brazil in March 1985, the AD in Portugal in December 1979, the ADEMA in Mali in May 1992, and the DP in Thailand in September 1992.

Thus, we have four ways the first ruling party in an ECR can come to power: (1) founder parties lead the country to independence, (2) hegemonic parties initiate multi-party elections and successfully retain power, (3) incumbent-defeater parties win the first election against the autocratic incumbent, and (4) open-seat winner parties take office after besting other former
oppositions in the first election. The first incumbent parties in each of these categories are listed in Table 3.1.

I should note here that not all first incumbents fall neatly into one or another of these categories. These are meant as Weberian ideal-types rather than a tidy ordering of the world of first incumbents; one should not get too caught up in the details that differentiate one group from another. The point instead is to suggest how ruling party origins may systematically affect the advantages they enjoy over other parties in subsequent electoral competition. And in turn, knowing how these advantages vary with party origins in turn can help us predict which parties are most likely to endure an extraordinarily long time in power.

In particular, there appears to be a steady decline in average ruling party advantages as we move from the first of these categories to the last—from founder parties to open-seat winners. On average, the most formidable first ruling parties appear to be founders. The most robust of these have strong, disciplined party organizations built well before independence, tested in the struggles with a foreign colonial power, and with both impressive territorial breadth and social depth. Founder parties also enjoy a strong “halo effect” in the first elections from their close association in the minds of voters with the creation of the new state itself. Moreover, there is good reason to expect at least some of these advantages to endure indefinitely. For instance, the replacement or expansion of the colonial-era bureaucracy gives founder parties a chance to fill new posts with civil servants sympathetic to the party’s own agenda, and to create an enduring source of patronage. The party’s appointees will fill the courts and local administrations long after its halo has faded. And in many cases, the party itself has a central role in shaping the institutions of state, including the rules governing the conduct of elections, which it will undoubtedly be tempted to manipulate to its own partisan advantage.
Most of these advantages appear to be enjoyed by hegemonic first incumbents, as well. Hegemonic parties begin in the ECR as the extant monopolist—there are no other serious competitors on the scene, either because they have been previously prevented from forming or because they have been forcibly merged into the ruling party. They typically enjoy access to resources that dwarf anything available to upstart opposition parties, and they have controlled and exploited these resources for a long time. In theory, at least, they also possess a massive organizational advantage—hegemonic parties often have enrolled a huge fraction of the population as party members and have branches throughout the country. Also, like founders, hegemonic parties can appoint the civil servants that populate the bureaucracy and the judges in the courts, and they exert considerable control over the pace and timing of the transition and over the rules that structure subsequent multi-party competition. The major weakness of hegemonic parties, in contrast to founders, is their brand. It has tarnished by the accumulated dirt of decades of authoritarian practice—so much so, in some cases, that a majority are willing to vote for just about any alternative on the ballot.

Incumbent-defeaters may inherit the coercive apparatus of the state that the ruling party employed so well to its own advantage. They get newfound access to resources, and to agenda-setting ability. But on average, they should be less advantaged than hegemonic parties. For one, the former hegemon may still be around; civil servants may retain some sympathy for it; its control of state resources may be weakened only gradually, and its organization may persist. Thus, on balance, we should expect incumbent-defeater ruling parties to enjoy fewer advantages over the competition at the advent of their tenure in office than do hegemonic and founder parties, and by extension, to endure less long in office, all else equal.

The least advantaged of all first-movers should be the open-seat winners. In these cases, the pace and timing of the transition to an ECR has not been controlled by the eventual winner; nor has the new ruling party been able in most cases to fundamentally shape the institutions that they take charge of. They typically enjoy little organizational or resource advantages over their
competitors in the party system, and those they do are usually ephemeral. Thus, we should expect that open-seat winners endure the shortest, on average, of all first-mover parties.

*Regional Patterns of First-Mover Longevity*

In addition to first-mover party origins, differences in ruling party longevity across regions are also fertile ground for generating explanations. It is probably apparent by now that there are also distinctive regional and temporal patterns in the adoption of multi-party elections and in ruling party fates in those elections. The Third Wave of democracy (1974-1995ish) in particular stands out as a time of distinct patterns. Here I look at where in the world long-lived first-mover parties occur, and what differentiates them from their contemporaries.

*Eastern Europe*

Many of the shortest-lived first incumbents in Third-Wave democracies were in Eastern Europe: the winners of the first fully contested elections in Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia each lasted less than two years in office. The shared legacy of communism makes this region distinct: in most cases, the incumbent Communist Party was so reviled by much of the electorate that it effectively broke apart before the first fully contested elections were held. In Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Moldova, and Slovenia, the opposition was able to remove the communist leadership in the first elections or even earlier. However, these initial successes of the coalitions again the communist regime masked especially fractious and undisciplined party structures, and the new leaders had limited organizational capacity to keep members in line or pursue coordinated campaign and policy strategies. As a consequence, coalitions broke apart, and the party system in some cases became nearly atomized. Several leaders were replaced even before the next election; those who did not lost power after a new parliament was voted into office.
There were a couple (brief) exceptions to this pattern: the Communist Party in Hungary managed to win a plurality in the 1990 elections there, but that success was quite short-lived, as protests led to the resignation of the prime minister, the breakup of the party, and accession of a non-partisan PM to oversee constitutional reforms; a non-communist coalition won the next election. In Albania, the former Communists hung on by winning an election in March 1991, but they, too succumbed to popular pressure and gave way to a caretaker government in December 1991; a non-communist coalition took power there in April 1992. And in Romania, the violent end of the Ceausescu dictatorship was followed by the continued rule of other former Communist Party elites in a renamed communist party that won reelection under a new constitution; a definitive break did not come until November 1996. But overall, Communist incumbents almost invariably lost office because of a two-fold disadvantage: they had little or no organizational experience running in and winning contested elections, and the communist “brand” was quite toxic to most voters, who were eager to vote for just about anything else.

Most notable for our purposes, however, is that no long-lived first-movers emerged out of the post-communist transition in Eastern Europe. The ruling parties that come the closest are in the post-Yugoslavian republics in the Balkans: in Serbia, at 105 months (a little less than nine years), Croatia at 103, and Macedonia at 86. Across the region, the non-communist coalitions that came to power proved just as weak and fractious in many cases as the communists who preceded them. The reasons for this pattern are not obvious, but may have their roots in the suddenness of the transition and the lack of any preexisting organized opposition in these regimes.

*Post-Soviet Republics*

The breakup of the USSR spawned a handful of new ECRs, but the pattern of party competition was significantly different from Eastern Europe despite superficially similar communist legacies. Across the former USSR, the leaders who took power either upon independence or through the first multi-party election became entrenched, mainly through
repression. There was nothing that resembled reasonably fair electoral competition in any post-
Soviet republic save Moldova after the first wave of post-independence elections. Instead, a
common pattern of strongmen and weak parties now prevails across most of the region.

The biggest exception to this pattern, figuratively and literally, is Russia, where there is
now the only dominant party in the region. Compared to dominant parties elsewhere, Russia’s
ruling party is unusual in that it formed well after the breakup of the USSR: there remained fierce
domestic political opposition to Russian president Boris Yeltsin throughout the 1990s, and he
barely won the 1996 election. Only after Vladimir Putin succeeded him did the political elite in
Russia coalesce into United Russia, and opposition parties fade into near-irrelevance (cf. Reuter
2010).

*Latin America*

The feature that distinguishes the beginning of most Latin American ECRs is the absence
of an incumbent autocrat running in the first elections. Most of Latin American regimes were led
by military dictators, and between 1978 and 1990, most followed a similar pattern of a pacted
transition to democracy that concluded with direct election of the president. Either through a
gradual transition or an abrupt collapse of support for the military regime, the first multi-party
elections were effectively open-seat contests: the long-time dictators did not run. This pattern
also held for transitions in Spain, Portugal, and Greece. Notably, none of the winners in any of
these “open-seat” transitions became dominant; the longest-lived were in Chile, where presidents
from the Concertacion alliance held power for 20 years (until 2010), and in El Salvador, where
over 20 years four successive presidents were from ARENA.

*Sub-Saharan Africa*

Like Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet republics, most of the African cases had little
history of multi-party contests prior to 1990. Indeed, the political history of much of the
continent is remarkably similar. The typical African country gained independence in a wave of decolonization that reached its apex in 1960. The leading pro-independence force then contested and usually won the first national elections. Subsequent competition became increasingly circumscribed by the election winners, eventually culminating in the banning of opposition parties outright (only X sub-Saharan African countries even made a pretense of holding contested elections by 1970), and in turn in many cases sparking military coups and leading to vicious cycles of military rule. By 1990, only six countries—the Gambia (beginning with independence in 1965), Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa (for white citizens only), Senegal (beginning in 1978), and Zimbabwe—had in the previous 20 years held multi-party contests in which the national executive was at stake.

Thus, when the Third Wave swept across Africa in the early 1990s, very few countries had any tradition of multi-party electoral competition in their entire history as independent countries. Incumbents had formerly enjoyed a complete monopoly in the “market” for political parties, and in those countries where restrictions on new parties were lifted, opposition coalitions had to be developed from scratch. As a consequence, incumbent party candidates started out at a tremendous advantage in many of these new ECRs, and the majority managed either to win or were overthrown by extra-constitutional means. Nevertheless, in some instances upstart oppositions still managed to take power through the electoral process: the first elections removed long-time autocrats from office in Benin, Cape Verde, Malawi, Madagascar, Sao Tome and Principe, and Zambia.

Most dominant parties in sub-Saharan Africa today are of the hegemonic kind—they transitioned out of closed autocracy and retained power in multi-party elections which they oversaw. Examples include the ruling parties in Seychelles, Djibouti, Cameroon, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Ethiopia. The ability to control the rules governing multi-party elections, along with a substantial dose of repression in some cases, appears to be the chief similarity between these cases. There are also four dominant parties that began as something like founders,
in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. The first three have maintained high levels of support in reasonably fair elections—the relatively strong performance of these economies, combined with a lasting “halo effect” in South Africa and Namibia, are the most obvious similarities there. In contrast, the incumbent party in Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF, has had to resort increasingly to brutal repression and outright fraud to retain office as Zimbabwe’s economy has cratered.

**Middle East and North Africa**

The countries of the Middle East and North Africa also share distinct characteristics, but here the modal pattern has been a dearth of meaningful elections altogether—elections, when they are even held, are not the decisive means to obtain and retain political power. The Third Wave barely touched the region; Lebanon and Turkey were the main exceptions, and Lebanon’s state remained so weak and foreign and private armed domestic groups so powerful that elections never decisively determined who held executive power. Other regimes in the region ostensibly held multi-party elections, as in Egypt and Algeria, but the activities of the opposition were so circumscribed by the incumbent as to eliminate any possibility of ruling party turnover at the ballot box.

Thus, the only cases in the region to appear in the dataset are Turkey and Israel. The long duration (1947-1977) of Israel’s founding party, Labor, appears to have something in common with the post-colonial first-mover parties as well; although elections were reasonably free and fair from the beginning of the state, Labor’s initial advantages and “halo effect” appear so large that it took 25 years for opposition parties to emerge as serious electoral threats.

**South, Southeast, and East Asia**

The paths by which first-movers came to power in ECRs in Asia are quite varied. As part of the Third Wave, a number of highly autocratic states introduced direct, multi-party competition
for the executive. In some cases, the ruling party won those elections: as in Mongolia in 1990, Taiwan in 1996 and South Korea in 1987, and arguably in Cambodia in 1998. In others, elections led to the removal from power of the autocrat and his party, as in the Philippines in 1986 and Indonesia in 1999. Still others featured a Latin-American style transition away from military rule with an open-seat contest, as in Thailand in 1992.

The first-mover parties that lasted longest in power in the region were founders in India, Malaysia, and Singapore. Interestingly, first-movers were defeated rather quickly in similar-looking situations elsewhere in the region. For instance, much like Congress in India, in Sri Lanka the United National Party (UNP), a pre-existing, multi-ethnic congress-style party, led the country to independence and first assumed power in 1947. But the UNP faced a serious electoral challenge within a decade from the Sri Lanka Freedom party, a breakaway from UNP that explicitly advocated policies discriminating against the minority Tamils in favor of the majority Sinhalese. The SLFP headed an opposition that won the 1956 election, implemented a Sinhalese-only language policy, and played on rising Sinhalese nationalism. Thus, the UNP was split apart by ethnic divisions in a way the Indian National Congress never was, despite their both being diverse, multi-ethnic coalitions.

Another interesting comparison is Mauritius, whose ethnically diverse pro-independence coalition took power in 1968. Much like the ruling party in Malaysia, it faced a political threat from an ethnically-based leftist party that caused it to suspend elections for a time; yet unlike Malaysia, in Mauritius the ruling party eventually not only restored elections but allowed the opposition full opportunity to compete, and it ceded power to its former adversary when it eventually in 1982. These and several other examples from the region suggest that ethnic differences may play an important role in sustaining or undermining first-mover party support—a topic I take up later in the chapter.

*The Island States: Oceania and the Caribbean*
Finally, a sizeable number of ECRs in the dataset are small island states, found mostly in the Caribbean, the Pacific, and the Indian Oceans. Despite being quite far-flung, these cases fall pretty easily into one of two patterns. Most of the former British colonies, such as the Bahamas, St. Lucia, or Trinidad and Tobago, enjoyed considerable political autonomy long before independence, and had long traditions of multi-party competition for a legislative assembly. Thus, there were relatively stable party systems established in most of these countries at independence. In contrast, there were no preexisting parties at all in many of the Pacific micro-states, such as Kiribati or Palau, and parties emerged only gradually after independence and remain weak in most.

Interestingly, there are a couple of instances of long-lasting single-party rule in the Caribbean, despite the tradition of multi-party competition: in Trinidad and Tobago, and Antigua and Barbuda. The only Pacific island state that appears to have a long-lived ruling party is in Samoa, where the Human Rights Protection Party was founded and took power in 1982, a full 20 years after independence. There, the reason for its persistence in office appears to be the slow development of partisan alternatives.

3.1.3. General Advantages Shared by Long-Lived First-Movers

Can we generalize across these widely disparate cases of first-mover parties? As the previous section demonstrated, there are distinct regional and temporal patterns in the duration of first incumbents in ECRs. But I think we can nevertheless draw some deeper conclusions that cross regional and historical divides. What the longest-lived first-mover parties appear to share in common are three fundamental advantages: (1) a strong party brand, (2) a well-developed, hierarchical, and “thick” party organization, and (3) initial control of the institutions of state which shape and constrain subsequent partisan competition for power.
Party Brand

First, most dominant parties enjoyed a strong brand identity from the beginning of their entry into electoral politics. Long-lived founders, in particular, benefitted from a tremendous amount of popularity and goodwill among the electorate for leading the country to independence—what I term a “halo effect.” A good example is the support enjoyed by African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa at the end of apartheid; the party had a terrifically positive image among black voters, such that voting for the ANC in effect meant voting not merely for a new leader but for black self-determination.

Such popularity makes it almost impossible for new parties to compete in elections in the short run. But it also may serve to convert initial ruling party popularity into lasting advantages, in two ways: it can effectively “lock in” a large chunk of the electoral as loyal partisan voters, and it can serve as a coordination device for both voters and candidates. These advantages are likely to endure as long as there is no opposition party brand that serves the same purposes.

It is for these reasons, I would argue, that having a prior history of multi-party competition is negatively related to one-party dominance. Latin America is a particularly good illustration of this pattern; there, military dictatorships merely interrupted an established pattern of fierce two-party contestation for office that stretched back more than a century. In Colombia, for instance, the Liberals and Conservatives had emerged as the two main political parties by the 1840s. Similar rivalries occurred between the Colorados and Blancos in Uruguay, the Liberals and Radicals in Argentina, the Liberals and Conservatives in Ecuador, the Liberals and Nationals in Honduras, the Liberals and Conservatives in Panama, and the DA and COPEI in Venezuela.

The two dominant parties in the region—the Colorados in Paraguay and the PRI in Mexico—are exceptions to this pattern that prove the rule. Paraguay did have a period of two-party competition between the Liberals and Colorados, but it was superseded by a one-party dictatorship backed by the military that lasted 50 years, and continued military influence in
electoral politics prevented the Liberal Party from challenging until the late 1990s. Mexico had little tradition of partisan competition for elected office prior to the incorporation of local and regional political elites into the forerunner of the PRI in 1929; the main opposition PAN was not founded until 1939, 10 years later. Thus, the preexistence of a well-known opposition party brand appears to make long periods of one-party rule less likely.

Like Mexico, most of the post-colonial world did not have any previous multi-party tradition before independence. An absence of organized opposition was common among long-lived first-mover parties in former colonies: founder parties were virtually the only ones on the scene at independence in Botswana, Gambia, India, Israel, Malaysia, Namibia, and Singapore. In these countries, opposition party brands had to be developed from scratch. This ruling party brand advantage can persist decades in some instances: in South Africa and Namibia, opposition parties have still not made much headway nearly 20 years after independence, and in Botswana, over 40 years has done little to improve the opposition’s image among the electorate.

The absence of other strong partisan alternatives may also explain why all four of the former Axis powers—Austria, West Germany, Italy, and Japan—had long-lived ruling parties after World War II. In all four, the fascist parties that had assumed a leading role at the end of the pre-war party system were thoroughly discredited by the results of the war. And the beginning of the Cold War greatly reduced the appeal of communist and (to some extent) socialist parties as well. In Austria, West Germany, and Italy, at least, then, the only parties in the post-war party system with a prominent prewar history were center-right Christian Democratic parties, giving them a brand advantage over their competitors.

The party brand story can also help explain why so many one-party autocracies are defeated in elections despite enjoying huge organizational and institutional advantages. In short, few dictators are really popular. Most voters happily vote against the party responsible for decades of economic decline and brutal repression of dissent when given a real chance. In the worst autocracies, the ruling party’s brand becomes toxic. The Communist Party brand, for
instance, was badly tarnished in most countries in Eastern Europe by the time the first multi-party elections were held there; it is not a coincidence that most communist parties throughout the region were renamed. A similar level of voter hostility was evident in South Africa toward the National Party, which was still strongly associated with the white supremacist governments of the previous era; few blacks would consider voting for it in 1994.

Party Organization

SECTION SUMMARY:
- In ECRs, parties (1) regulate access to office, (2) form long coalitions to prevent policy cycling, (3) provide economies of scale in running for office (Aldrich 1995).
- The first ruling parties vary in their ability to do all of these things
- Founder and hegemonic parties usually have well-developed party organizations: lots of members, many party branches. Therefore, they are initially better positioned to do these things than opposition parties.
- Incumbent-defeaters and open-seat winners generally have less-developed party organizations.

Control over Formation of New Regime

SECTION SUMMARY:
- Rule-writing advantage: hegemonic parties usually have near-complete control over the design of institutions that shape politics in the multi-party era. Founders often do as well. Incumbent-defeaters and open-seat winners typically do not.
- Appointment advantage: hegemonic and founder parties usually appoint the entire civil service, judicial system, and security apparatus. These institutions will generally be favorable to them as a result. Incumbent-defeaters and open-seat winners will not generally have such favorable treatment from the institutions of state.
- Timing advantage: hegemonic parties often can control the pace and timing of key reforms that inaugurate the multi-party regime—so they can adopt reforms only when confident they will not lose as a result. Founders, incumbent-defeaters, and open-seat winners do not have this advantage.

3.2. Opposition Parties in New Electorally Contested Regimes
Opposition movements can spend so much time and energy fighting against “splitters” within their own ranks that they never get around to challenging the incumbent ruler.

Disagreements which appear petty, parochial, and downright silly to outside observers can be fought with amazing ferocity by the participants in the movement. Unfortunately for oppositions, the same character traits that attract people to opposition movements—idealism, a heightened sense of right and wrong and of injustice, a stubborn defiance in the face of long odds or public ostracism, a refusal to “sell out” one’s principles to further short-term goals—also make it difficult for the core membership to accept the give-and-take and compromises normally required to succeed in politics. As a consequence, opposition party leaders are often more concerned with struggles over the “correct” interpretation of an ideological point, with the development of an official doctrine for the movement and its defense against challenges, and with the outmaneuvering of opposition rivals, than with actions that might actually threaten the incumbent’s grasp on power.

Fiery temperaments are not the greatest obstacle for opposition movements in ECRs, however. Were it possible for an opposition to be composed entirely of completely level-headed, rational members with identical goals and ideological dispositions, its members would still face a fundamental problem that challenged their ability to maintain the unity, discipline, and activism of their movement. This is the problem of collective action.

3.2.1. Political Parties and Collective Action

Collective action is simply the coordination of efforts of members in a group in order to achieve some mutually beneficial outcome (Olson 1965). For example, a country’s consumers can be considered a group with a common interest in lower tariffs (ensuring cheaper products) or better product labeling (ensuring easier comparisons). Likewise, members of opposition parties
can be thought of as individuals with a common interest in capturing power or in changing the status quo, and for whom collective action typically entails recruiting members, mobilizing supporters, campaigning for elections, and disseminating information to the public at large.

The most well-known type of collective action problem arises when it is rational for individuals in groups with a clear common interest not to engage in actions beneficial to the group. If members are motivated entirely by material rewards, they typically have no reason to volunteer to participate in group activities. The reason is that for each member, the marginal benefit of participating is less than the marginal cost, regardless of what other group members choose to do. If other members of the group engage in actions that lead to gains for the whole group—say, joining a street rally that is attacked by forces of the incumbent regime but that raises awareness of and elicits sympathy for the opposition movement—an individual opposition member can reap all of the gains without having to suffer any of the costs by simply staying home, a phenomenon commonly termed “free-riding.” If other members of the group do not engage in such actions, then it certainly does not pay for a rational individual to protest by herself—as one person, the effects of her efforts will be negligible, and she will have nothing to show for her commitment of time, money, and personal well-being. Thus, as in many other contexts requiring some kind of collective action, opposition parties cannot rely on the simple material interests of their members to motivate their participation in actions that effectively further their common interests.

A number of barriers to opposition party success stem from this fundamental problem, such that party development depends critically on opposition leaders’ ability to solve or mitigate such problems. These tasks are at their most daunting in newly-established parties, where the institutions that facilitate collective action have to be developed from scratch. In what follows I consider three distinct classes of problems that must be overcome for an opposition party to have any chance of winning the next election against the incumbent. These are problems of recruitment, coordination, and branding. I review each in turn.
3.2.1. Recruitment Problems

The first challenge a new party’s leaders face is to recruit people to join it. Parties need people to do everything from running as candidates and writing election manifestos to knocking on doors, answering phones, and putting out press releases. There are, simply put, two ways to get these people: pay them, or convince them to volunteer. Both can be problematic for new opposition parties.

Sources of Funding for New Parties

Paying party workers is simple and straightforward, but it is also a strategy unavailable to parties without a consistent source of funding—and new opposition parties tend to be at a great disadvantage in fundraising. For one, an important source of party funding across most ECRs is donations from business. Businesses, however, tend to donate to influence decisions on laws and regulations that affect them, and they have a clear incentive to direct most donations to the party in power, unless there is a strong prospect that the incumbent is likely to go down to defeat soon. And even with an unpopular incumbent, rare indeed is the brand-new party that, lacking in candidates, members, and recognition among the public, can still credibly claim to be on the cusp of power.

Opposition parties may alternatively rely on a wealthy benefactor or two to pay the bills, but these are hardly a panacea—major donors are undoubtedly going to want a major say as well in shaping the party’s political agenda and probably also in its organization and tactics. Thus, attracting large donors requires finding some that passionately support the party’s cause. Relying on small donors can problematic, too—the party cannot promise anything material in return to
most of those donors, so they must find a cause that both appeals to a large number of individuals and about which they are passionate enough to donate.

Alternative sources of funding are sometimes available to new parties, as well. Some oppositions are supported by funds from abroad; the United States and European Union have provided financial support to opposition parties in Venezuela and Belarus, for example. Opposition parties sometimes can even receive funding from public sources within the country; in Taiwan, for instance, all parties winning seats in the legislature now become eligible for public funds in proportion to their seat share. To the extent these alternative sources of funding are available, they should improve new parties’ prospects of success.4

*Parties of Volunteers*

Despite these possible sources of revenue, it is generally true that new opposition parties have far fewer financial resources to tap than does the party in government. For these resource-poor parties, the primary alternative is to attract large numbers of volunteers—individuals who are willing to devote a great deal of time and energy to party activities without receiving financial compensation.

Parties recruit volunteers through two types of appeals. One is by promising a material payoff “down the road,” holding out the promise of the benefits of power and office once the party wins an election. However, much like the problem with soliciting donations from business, this pitch becomes less attractive the more remote the party’s prospects of gaining power appear. That leaves resource-poor parties with poor short-term electoral prospects with only one strategy: promoting a cause that attracts passionate supporters. Most third parties in the United States follow this model. The Libertarian Party, for instance, attracts members by advocating a life philosophy—self-reliance, individual responsibility, and a belief in the efficiency of free markets—as much as a set of public policies. Those who participate in the party’s activities,

4 Examples of new opposition parties that own their own businesses?
whether as candidates or organizers, generally do so not out of a belief that they will soon be in power but out of a desire to disseminate their views more widely in society. A similar dedication to “The Cause” before winning office characterizes the membership of other third parties such as the Socialist Party, the Green Party, and the Constitution Party.

As these examples suggest, such causes can attract many new members in a short time to an upstart political party, many of whom are willing to donate time, energy, and their own material resources to further the party’s activities. But, as usual, there is a catch: these members look quite different from the electorate at large. They are (1) motivated by ideology much more than material rewards, and (2) hold quite extreme views relative to the median voter in the electorate.

On the first point, a party membership made up entirely of ideologues is more susceptible to disruptive splits over questions of party doctrine than one that is entirely oriented toward winning the next election. The minutiae of policy manifestoes, the “correct” path for the party to pursue in its activities, even the party’s positions on the proper way to live one’s daily life—these serve as the sole motivation for many party members’ participation, and are thus topics of immense importance to them. Disputes over ideology thus have a special ability to sow permanent discord and division within an opposition party’s ranks.

This strong interest in questions of party doctrine can perhaps be overcome by more centralized decision-making within the party, but that merely generates another problem. As Kaare Strom (1990: 575-6) has perceptively observed, the leadership of labor-intensive parties often has an incentive to renege on policy promises to its volunteer activists, either to position the party to win more votes, or to cut deals with the incumbent to obtain government portfolios or advance a particular policy objective. Would-be party activists will recognize that leadership promises are not credible, and party activism will therefore be undersupplied—fewer people will join the party, and those that do will be less willing to work, and less enthusiastically, for the
party’s stated goals, than if the party leadership’s stated policy preferences were completely credible to its rank-and-file membership.

There are at least three ways parties may overcome this commitment problem, each with its own drawbacks (Strom 1990). First, parties can decentralize intra-party policy decisions—moving them from a select group of core leaders to an open vote of the full party membership, for example. This strategy, however, merely makes more intractable the problem of suboptimal policy positions: as we just noted, the preferences of the median voter in the party membership are much more extreme than those of the median voter in the electorate. Opposition candidates will therefore be at a systematic competitive disadvantage relative to the incumbent party’s candidates, and would be unable to reposition themselves more moderately even if they wanted to.

Thus, a party composed of ideologically-motivated activists and instrumentally-motivated candidates is likely to experience persistent disagreements over the party’s stated policy positions and its allocation of endorsements and resources (Aldrich 1995: 50). Greater intra-party democracy thus increases the motivation of party activists but prevents the party’s candidates from adopting policy positions that maximize their expected vote share. Such restrictions can prove debilitating to the party leaders’ efforts to compete in elections. For instance, the leaders of the British Labour party struggled for decades to delete a commitment to large-scale nationalization of British enterprise; both Neil Kinnock and John Smith failed to abolish this clause, and only when Tony Blair succeeded did the Labour Party again defeat the Conservatives (Strom and Muller 1999: 10).

A second possibility is for leaders to make themselves directly accountable to the party membership, through short terms and direct elections. This strategy makes leaders more responsive to party opinion, but also more vulnerable to intra-party defeat, and thus to discount future benefits in favor of short-term gains. And opposition leaders who are motivated by the benefits of office and who highly discount the future will be easier (i.e. cheaper) for the incumbent to woo away. The demise of the Japanese Socialist Party is instructive on this point.
After several decades in opposition, the JSP finally joined the longtime incumbent Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in a coalition government in 1994. The move allowed its leader to become prime minister for the first time in over 40 years, but also required that it abandon a number of its long-held policy differences with the LDP. As a consequence, the party’s traditional supporters abandoned it in droves in the next election, and it all but ceased to be a viable party (Scheiner 2006: 41-42). The LDP subsequently controlled the prime minister’s office for the next 15 years.

To prevent the possibility of leadership defection, parties can also restrict recruitment to party offices to existing activists—that is, party nominees may all be required to have spent time, say, doing constituent service and organizing in local neighborhoods. The problem with this strategy is that it leads to suboptimal candidates—the skills that make a good local canvasser and local party hack are not necessarily (or likely) to be the same as those which make a good candidate for elected office.

Thus, new, labor-intensive opposition parties are especially likely to suffer from at least one of three problems: (1) sub-optimal policy positions, (2) political leaders who are susceptible to cooptation by the ruling party, or (3) uninspiring candidates.

The Party System Effects of the Recruitment Problem

In long-standing multi-party systems such as that in the United States, this description of the recruitment problem typically only characterizes minor parties. The nomination of whichever main party is out of power remains quite valuable to would-be candidates because it has long been the only alternative to the party in power. But in newly-established ECRs, it is quite likely that recruitment problems will bedevil all the opposition parties to a greater or lesser extent. And the consequences for the party system may endure indefinitely.
As Ken Greene (2007) has argued, opposition parties which form to challenge entrenched incumbents tend to be founded by individuals who share similarly extreme ideological views as those they attract to join them, and who are equally unwilling to sacrifice policy preferences for the sake of winning office. As a consequence, the parties they form end up as niche parties, able to secure an enthusiastic but small bloc of support in the electorate, and unable to recruit strong candidates (such as those with previous governing experience or successful track records in business) who could moderate the party’s policy positions and present a serious challenge to the ruling party’s dominance. The initial incumbent then benefits from its greatly superior ability to recruit or develop pragmatic, office-seeking candidates over ideological, policy motivated ones, and it also enjoys a centrist position in the party system, as opposition parties formed at the extremes remain bound by their activists to suboptimal policy positions.

In sum, then, recruitment problems are one mechanism through which initial ruling party advantages can be perpetuated indefinitely in the party system. Not all opposition parties face these problems, of course—they are most severe, as I have noted, in new party systems in which opposition parties are both resource-poor and face a low probability of holding power any time soon. The difficulty of the opposition recruitment problem is likely to decline as opposition parties become better-funded, for instance. They may also matter much less if the incumbent is quite unpopular and therefore unlikely to win the next election. Then potential candidates who are motivated chiefly by the benefits of holding office—possibly including many members of the incumbent party!—will want to join the opposition party that it views as the new incumbent-in-waiting—I phenomenon I will refer to as bandwagoning.

Note, however, that the identity of the incumbent-in-waiting is sometimes not-at-all obvious, especially if no other party has ever held power in the regime, or if the opposition is divided between several different equally-sized parties. Recruitment problems, then, are likely to be less severe among opposition parties who have actually held power in the past, all else equal.
Promises of the spoils of office to candidates and party volunteers are a lot more credible if the party has a proven track record in office.

If we take this argument to its conclusion, recruitment problems should be less debilitating to opposition parties in regimes that have already had a partisan turnover. Put simply, instances of extraordinary ruling party duration should be rarer in ECRs with an established pattern of partisan rotation in power than in those without.

3.2.2. Coordination Problems

The second class of problems that an opposition party must overcome to be able to win an election and take power are those of coordination. To maximize the probability of defeating the incumbent, coordination is required between party elites, candidates, and their supporters in elections. And in parliamentary regimes, it may also be required after elections, when negotiations to form a government begin.

*Election Coordination: Team Up in the Election or Go It Alone?*

Any time an opposition party’s leaders decide to contest elections, they face another coordination problem. In newly-contested regimes which the incumbent party is expected to win the (usually large) majority of seats and offices up for election, an opposition movement needs to ensure that votes for opposition candidates are distributed as efficiently as possible—that is, not split between two or more candidates or parties. The ideal outcome from an opposition’s point of view is to have only a single candidate or slate of candidates which captures the votes of all opponents of the ruling party. The more candidates who run for a given office, and the more opposition parties which contest a particular election, the more difficult it will be for voters who
support the opposition to coordinate their votes in a way that maximizes the chance that
incumbent party candidates will be defeated.

The December 2007 parliamentary election in Kyrgyzstan provides a stark illustration of
how poor coordination can decimate oppositions and contribute to incumbent party victory.
There, despite the use of closed-list PR, which normally provides the best opportunities for
minority party representation in parliament of any electoral system, the party of president
Kurmanbek Bakiyev was able to win 71 of the 90 seats in the country’s parliament with only 48%
of the popular vote; the other 19 went to two small parties allied with the president. The
opposition was completely shut out of the elections because only one party, Ata Meken, managed
to clear the 5% electoral threshold, and even it failed to meet the second electoral requirement—
that parties win at least 0.5% of the vote in each of the country’s regions.\(^5\) Allegations of
widespread voting irregularities aside, better coordination by opposition voters on Ata Meken
would undoubtedly have allowed the party to pass the electoral thresholds and capture a sizeable
number of seats in parliament. Closed-list PR, even with the threshold requirements and the
inevitable election shenanigans of the ruling party, should not pose so large an obstacle to
opposition parties as to shut *all* of them out of parliament.

For voters, endorsements from opposition parties with an established “reputation for
viability” provide a ready solution to this coordination problem, as Gary Cox has noted (1997:
159). Such endorsements provide two valuable pieces of information: (1) the endorsed
candidates will further the goals of the opposition if elected, and (2) past experience indicates that
most other opposition supporters are also likely to vote for the same candidate(s), making them
obvious coordination points. The role of the party nomination and endorsement process is key:
without party endorsements, “groups of like-minded voters might end up splitting their votes sub-
optimally among a superabundance of similar candidates” (*ibid.*). For the same reasons that
endorsements are valuable to opposition supporters, they will also be desirable for aspirants to

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elected office: “to the extent that the endorsement holds sway as a focal coordination device among some set of voters, it insulates endorsees from strategic desertion, and, indeed, operates to make them a net beneficiary of strategic voting” (160).

But how are “reputations for viability” established, especially in new ECRs in which the opposition has never before contested, let alone won seats? Cox argues that such reputations require a party to establish “a monopoly on endorsing within a given segment of opinion, having beaten out or co-opted all other would-be coordination devices” (160). Thus, the ideal scenario is for all the opposition to coalesce around a single party which (1) monopolizes, or very nearly so, the entire anti-incumbent vote, and thereby (2) determines the viability of candidates through its endorsement procedures—those who win the party’s endorsements receive the votes of all opposition supporters.

But what if more than one opposition party exists, both of whom can lay equal claim to the title of “most viable” representative of the opposition? Such parties may be able to negotiate an agreement through which they merge forces. But because of the recruitment problem, opposition parties tend to be ideologically driven rather than motivated primarily by the material benefits of capturing office, and opposition coalitions more often than not will require the cooperation of parties from opposite ends of the political spectrum—a union about which activists in the parties are not likely to be enthusiastic. Likewise, for an opposition coalition’s endorsement to provide reliable information about the beliefs of candidates, the coalition’s own statements need to be credible. For example, in hopes of defeating the long-time ruling party UMNO in Malaysia, four opposition parties formed a coalition, the Barisan Alternatif, to contest the 1999 general elections. Yet the coalition required the pro-Islamic and indigenous Malay party PAS to join forces with the liberal democrats of the DAP, the majority of whom were ethnic Chinese or Indians and who strongly opposed PAS’s goal of transforming Malaysia into a *de jure* Islamic state.
In sum, solving this coordination problem is a major challenge for opposition movements. Many dominant parties have been sustained as much by the failure of opposition voters and elites to coordinate on a single slate of candidates as they have by their own ability to remain popular with the electorate.

*Coordination in Government Formation: The “Sell Your Soul” Problem*

**SUMMARY VERSION:**
- In presidential regimes, winning the presidential race delivers the whole executive to the party’s candidate. Thus, the need to coordinate after elections to form a government is exclusively a problem of parliamentary regimes.
- Opposition parties may have to decide between joining the incumbent as a coalition partner or cooperating with several other opposition parties to exclude the incumbent from office. But if opposition parties are ideological opposites, then each may prefer joining the incumbent to working with each other. Thus, incumbents can persist in office even when they control much less than a majority of seats.
- The difficulties of coordination at this stage may account for several of the long-lived ruling parties in West European democracies; e.g. CSV in Luxembourg, VU in Liechtenstein, the NLP in Norway, and the SAP in Sweden.
- Opposition party leaders may also have to decide between compromising core party principles to join the government and remaining in opposition. Gaining offices in government may provide a former opposition with opportunities to achieve long-held policy goals, and to reward its supporters with offices. But ideologically-motivated party activists may abandon the party if it compromises, as may its core supporters. This is the “sell your soul” problem.

*The Party System Effects of Coordination Problems*

At the party system level, electoral coordination problems are likely to inhibit opposition victory most at early stages of party development. Once several election cycles have passed, both voters and party elites should have a much clearer idea of which parties are viable and which are not. Learning over time appears less certain to improve coordination at the government formation stage, however, if more than one opposition party appears viable.

Second, the more ideologically-motivated and extreme opposition parties are, the more difficult coordination will be both in elections and in government formation. Because severe recruitment problems lead to more extreme opposition parties, there is a multiplicative effect here: as recruitment becomes more difficult, so does coordination.
Finally, the extra coordination that must occur in parliamentary regimes suggests that long-lived ruling parties should be more likely there than in presidential regimes, a point I take up at length in section 3.4.

3.2.3. Branding Problems

The third class of problems that opposition parties must overcome involve the party *brand*. Put simply, party labels are club goods. All of a party’s candidates, regardless of whether they contributed to the appeal of the party label or not, benefit when that party increases its popularity among the electorate. Thus, all political parties face yet another collective action problem with regard to their party image—it is on occasion rational for individual candidates who belong to the party and receive its endorsement to pursue policies that are individually beneficial but damage the value of party’s label as a whole.

A new party’s long-term electoral prospects depend greatly on its ability to add value to the party label. That is, for a party’s endorsements to be valuable, it needs to build a “brand name” that will “cue an established reputation” within the electorate. Much as travelers know that McDonald’s provides a certain product with standards for cleanliness and service, party affiliation can convey a great deal of information to voters about what a typical candidate of the political party is like (Aldrich 1995: 49). The more voters the party’s “brand” alone can deliver for its candidates at election time, the more valuable is the party’s endorsement, the more appealing the party will be to aspirants for elected office, and the more competitive the party will be in elections against the incumbent.

But developing a valuable political brand from scratch is no simple task. For a party’s endorsement to convey useful information to voters about what candidates will do once in office, parties must maintain a high degree of consistency and homogeneity of belief within the party—
enough at least to agree upon and implement a common platform. This in turn requires that parties develop effective procedures to manage three key party tasks: (1) arbitrate disagreements over the party’s goals, (2) punish behavior that damages the party’s reputation, and (3) resolve competition over party nominations while keeping those on the losing end from leaving the party and running as independents. Developing a party organization that can effectively resolve these three challenges is crucial to building value in the party’s “brand.” Opposition parties unable to agree on a common policy platform, campaign strategy, and allocations of resources and nominations do not contribute much to their nominees’ chances of winning office and are therefore usually doomed to electoral irrelevance.

3.3. Asymmetric Electoral Competition in New Electorally Contested Regimes

In section 3.1, I reviewed some of the features that long-lived ruling parties appeared to share in common. In section 3.2, I discussed several problems that tend to hinder the development of new opposition parties into real threats to take power through elections. In this section, I consider how incumbent party advantages and difficulties are relative—we cannot say much about one party’s organizational advantage, for instance, without also implicitly comparing it to other parties in the system. In particular, we want to know the conditions under which incumbent parties possess large, systematic advantages over any and all opposition parties—advantages that make electoral competition highly asymmetric.

3.3.1. Asymmetric Competition
By asymmetric competition, I mean electoral competition in which one party benefits from a set of systematic advantages that allow them on average to out-recruit, out-coordinate, and out-campaign all others. In a highly asymmetric electoral environment, one party—presumably the incumbent—has a systematic advantage, averaged across all races and over several elections, in elections that determine control of the chief executive. Put differently, for two identical candidates running against one another in a typical electoral district, all else held constant, the candidate nominated by the incumbent party will have a higher likelihood of winning imply by virtue of being that party’s candidate.

We should expect ruling parties to endure longer in a contested electoral environment the more asymmetric is partisan competition. Existing work on competitive authoritarianism (e.g. Levitsky and Way 2010) and dominant parties (e.g. Magaloni 2006) highlights three factors that systematically increase the asymmetry of partisan competition in elections: (1) the level of state coercion applied against the opposition, (2) the incumbent’s ability to tap state resources for partisan ends, and (3) the degree to which the issue agenda is controlled by the incumbent. The greater each of these is, the more the ruling party will be able to out-recruit, out-coordinate, and out-message its opponents in elections.

... In the following three subsections I consider each of these factors in more detail. The discussion of each is intended to identify the mechanisms through which initial ruling party advantages are reproduced over time.

3.3.2. Coercion

One factor which leads to more asymmetric competition is the degree of coercion applied by the incumbent regime against potential and actual opposition challengers. Coercion as I use it
here is the use of state resources, personnel, and laws, backed by the implicit threat of force, to inhibit, compel, or otherwise shape political activity. In new ECRs, most incumbent parties enjoy a systematic advantage over their opponents in deciding how the coercive capacity of the state should be employed, ranging from the ability to amend the legal code to direct command of police forces and the civil service, and a strong incentive to use that capacity to their own benefit.

Coercion employed by the incumbent to partisan ends raises the costs to potential challengers of running for office in two ways. First, it lowers the probability of their victory, by denying them access to media, banning or limiting their campaign activities, denying them funds or forcing them to deal with costly and deliberately difficult procedures for registering their candidacies. The fewer opportunities they have to get their message out, and the greater the resource disparity between their campaign and the incumbent’s, the more difficult attracting votes will be. Thus, for instance, Singapore’s high bar for candidacies and strict rules for filing paperwork have been used selectively, to prevent the most compelling opposition challengers from getting on the ballot.

Second, coercion raises the personal cost of campaigning. Opposition candidates in illiberal regimes frequently must endure arbitrary detentions by security forces, surprise audits of their taxes, harassment of their families, friends, and supporters, and worse—threats of physical violence, beatings, jailings, and even killings of supporters or relatives.

These personal costs are large and quite commonly borne by opposition figures across the more authoritarian ERCs, as a few examples should make clear. In Zimbabwe, opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai was arrested and severely beaten in police custody in the run-up to the 2007 presidential election there. In South Korea, future president Kim Dae-Jung was seriously injured in suspicious car accident shortly after an election in 1972; he then fled to Japan, where he was kidnapped by South Korean agents and nearly dumped in the Pacific before the U.S. intervened to secure his release. In Egypt, the opposition candidate Ayman Nour finished as the leading challenger to Hosni Mubarak in the 2005 presidential election, and was rewarded with a
five-year prison term. A similar fate awaited Sarath Fonseka in Sri Lanka after he challenged incumbent president Rahinda Majapaksa and lost in the 2010 presidential election there. In Malaysia, a prominent ruling party defector-turned-opposition-challenger, Anwar Ibrahim, was charged with sodomy—a particularly scandalous crime in that conservative, predominantly Muslim country—and sentenced to several years in prison. In Taiwan, the wife of future president Chen Shui-bian was permanently crippled when she was hit and deliberately run over by a truck shortly after his first election campaign in 1985, and the mother and daughters of another opposition leader were stabbed to death in their home in 1980 while it was under 24-hour surveillance by the police. Perhaps no attack on an opposition figure was more brazen than that of the Ferdinand Marcos regime in the Philippines, against Benigno Aquino, Jr., a populist senator who was shot at point-blank range shortly after stepping off a plane at the Manila airport on return from exile in August 1983.

Such personal tragedies are a very real possible cost of running against incumbents in regimes with high levels of coercion. Even the bravest and most foolhardy opposition activists would have to think long and hard about volunteering to lead an opposition campaign when faced with the possibility of such brutal retaliation by the regime.

But even when a ruling party is not using the forces of the state to jail and murder its opponents, there are a large array of other tools of the state that can be employed for insidious ends. Sudden tax audits, for instance, were a favorite of the leadership in Russia. In Taiwan, a tax auditor was even stationed inside the Pirate King Restaurant after its owners provided funds to the opposition party (Arrigo 1994).

Coercion, then, works to maintain incumbent advantages primarily through its effect on recruitment: fewer candidates are willing to bear the large personal costs of running in races in which they have little chance of victory. And the more formidable the potential candidate, the more state resources likely will be arrayed against him to “discourage” him from running.
3.3.3. Resources

Despite the occasional use of coercion and fraud to bolster their candidates, ruling parties in ECRs by definition do not rely primarily on overt repression to remain in power. As many others have noted in recent years, financial resources can serve as an effective substitute for overt coercion, and can achieve much the same level of electoral asymmetry through much less bloody and potentially delegitimizing means (e.g. Magaloni 2006; Scheiner 2006; Greene 2007).

SUMMARY:
• Resources can substitute for coercion—can achieve much of the same results through less bloody means.
• At the elite level, state resources can be used to encourage high-quality, pragmatic, office-seeking candidates to join the incumbent rather than the opposition.
• At the mass level, state resources can be used to build and maintain voter support, ranging from legal measures like pork-barrel spending to extra-legal ones like vote-buying. Much of this goes under the name of “clientelism.”
• The mechanism by which initial ruling party advantages are reproduced indefinitely is simply through control of the state. As long as the incumbent can use state resources for partisan purposes, and as long as these resources remain adequate, the asymmetry between incumbents and oppositions remains.

3.3.4. Agenda Control

SUMMARY:
• Ruling parties vary in their ability to control the political agenda. Agenda control can be used to highlight issues that divide the opposition, and to bury those which advantage it.
• One way some first incumbents are uniquely advantaged is in their ability to declare certain issues “off-limits” in the political sphere. Examples: secular nature of state in Turkey, Taiwan’s status vis-à-vis China, prosecution of former military regime leaders in Chile.
• Another way incumbents can control the agenda is through control of the media. If most media is state- or party-owned, disadvantageous issues are kept out of public discourse.
• A less obvious way is through restrictions on campaigns. Severe limits on campaign activities benefit incumbents with higher name recognition than their challengers, as for instance occurs in Japan (McElwain 2006).

As coercion decreases, restrictions on what people can talk about decline, and resource and organizational advantages erode, what is left to keep ruling parties in power? There are two
remaining factors that can systematically affect the symmetry of competition, and that have received much less attention in recent years in writing on dominant party systems: institutions and social structure. Nevertheless, I will argue, considered together they are just as fundamentally important to understanding asymmetric competition as coercion, resources, and control of the agenda. These are the formal institutions of the regime, and the social cleavage structure of the electorate.

3.4. Institutional Effects on Asymmetric Competition

By institutions, I mean at minimum variation in three features of the formal rules that govern the selection of regime leaders and the authority they hold. The first is the electoral system: how are the members of the executive and legislature selected? The second is executive selection: is the system presidential, parliamentary, or something in between? The third is administrative centralization—how much authority is vested in local offices, rather than central government bureaucrats, and are local officials elected or appointed?

3.4.1. Electoral System

In previous work on dominant party systems, the focus has been almost exclusively on the electoral system. But there is no agreement even about what types of electoral systems are most likely to lead to dominant party systems, let alone any commonly accepted explanation for why. Different scholars, for instance, have asserted that dominance is especially likely to be sustained under Proportional Representation (Pempel 1990), Single Non-Transferable Vote (Cox 1997), plurality rule in single member districts (Greene 2007), Mixed-Member Majoritarian
(Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2001) and Party Bloc Vote (Mauzy 2001). Viewed collectively, this is a remarkably tangled and contradictory set of claims. They are necessarily at odds with one another: to say that PR makes dominant parties more likely is to assert as well that other non-PR systems make dominance less likely.

In what follows, I show that the way to resolve these claims is to recognize that they are derived from one of two different theories about how electoral rules should affect the difficulty of opposition competition against the incumbent. One set focuses exclusively on recruitment problems as the source of opposition disadvantages in dominant party systems, while the other focuses on coordination. And as it turns out, the same factor that increases the difficulty of one problem decreases the difficulty of the other.

How the Electoral System Affects Recruitment Problems

The account of the recruitment problem in the previous section was institution-free. But in fact, the electoral system should directly affect the difficulty of recruiting pragmatist candidates by raising or lowering the bar for capturing a seat. High district magnitudes—that is, the number of seats to be awarded in a district—enable challenger parties to win seats with a lower share of the popular vote, while low district magnitudes raise the share needed to win seats. By this account, elections held under plurality rules, such as first-past-the-post single-member districts (SMDs), place oppositions at a greater recruitment disadvantage than do more permissive electoral rules, such as SNTV or PR.

To state the prediction more generally, the threshold of exclusion—the highest percentage of the vote a candidate or party can win in a district and still be denied a seat—is inversely related
to the likelihood that opposition challengers are office seekers versus ideologues.\textsuperscript{6} That is, the higher the threshold of exclusion, the higher the percentage of the vote an opposition candidate must win in order to be guaranteed a seat, and therefore the greater the relative impact of an unfair playing field tilted in favor of the incumbent party’s candidates. For example, a threshold of exclusion of only 10%, as would occur under SNTV rules in a district with a magnitude of 9, is much easier for a single opposition candidate to overcome than one of 50%, as occurs in plurality-winner SMDs. Therefore, raising district magnitudes under SNTV rules (that is, lowering the average threshold of exclusion) mitigates the recruitment problem—opposition parties can win seats with a lower share of the total district vote, so their endorsements become more valuable to higher-quality, office-seeking candidates. By this same logic, lowering district magnitudes (i.e. raising the average district threshold) results in more ideologically-motivated challengers, all else equal, and therefore a greater advantage for the incumbent party in electoral competition.

The argument applies equally to countries that employ some form of proportional representation to elect their legislatures. Here, typically, voters cast a ballot not for a candidate but for a party list\textsuperscript{7}, and all parties crossing some threshold percentage of the total vote are awarded seats in proportion to their share of the vote. The main feature that matters, again, is the threshold of exclusion; in most PR systems this is simply the legal vote threshold or, if there are multiple districts with low magnitudes, $T = 1/(M+1)$. PR systems typically have average thresholds an order of magnitude lower than single member districts—on the order of between

\textsuperscript{6} The threshold of exclusion is the highest fraction of the vote that a candidate (or party, or slate of candidates) can win and still not be awarded a seat in a district under a given set of electoral rules. Under SMDs, the threshold of exclusion is 0.5—two candidates can both win exactly half the votes, and one loses in a coin flip. In multi-member districts, the threshold is a direct expression of the district magnitude. A district with 9 seats awarded under single non-transferable vote (SNTV) rules has a threshold of exclusion of $1/(9+1) = 1/10$, or 10% of all votes cast. The general formula is given by $T = v/(M+v) * 100\%$, where $M$ is the district magnitude and $v$ is the number of votes each voter can cast (Lijphart and Grofman 1986: 157).

\textsuperscript{7} This vote may be indirect—in open-list systems, voters cast a ballot for a candidate in addition to, or in place of, a party, but votes for all members of the party are pooled among them to determine how many seats each party gets (Carey and Shugart 1995).
1% and 5% of the district vote rather than the 50% in SMDs. Thus, opposition party recruitment, all else equal, should be much easier in PR systems than majoritarian ones—as long as they are able to attract enough votes to win seats, opposition parties can guarantee seats in the legislature to strong candidates by ranking them at the top of their lists.

This line of argument suggests that in countries which employ list PR to elect the legislature, such as Italy and Israel, new opposition parties should face relatively mild recruitment problems. By contrast, in countries that employ high district thresholds, such as Malaysia and Botswana, new opposition parties should face more severe recruitment problems. And in fact, in both those countries, the SMD-P electoral systems have often produced highly disproportionate conversions of votes into party seats in parliament, consistently to the incumbent party’s benefit (Du Toit 1999; Case 2005, Mauzy 2008).

The severity of opposition recruitment problems under high electoral thresholds is perhaps best illustrated in Singapore, which employs party bloc vote (PBV) to elect its parliament. Under PBV rules, voters cast a single ballot for a slate of candidates running in a multi-member district, and the slate that wins a plurality is assigned all the seats. Thus, a party winning a plurality of 40% in a 5-member district would win all five seats. In this way, PBV is akin to SMDs on steroids in terms of its potential for grossly disproportionate conversions of vote shares into seat shares. The use of party bloc vote may explain what one observer of Singapore’s party system calls “the surprising under-supply of professional and articulate candidates willing to join the opposition….Opposition members, if they want to take on the PAP aggressively, must be prepared to be totally blameless as individuals and be armed with masses of correct information.”

The high electoral hurdle “makes the rewards too little and the risks too high for talented and educated people to join the opposition in general” (Jesudason 1999: 163). To make matters even

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8 An additional difference is the greater importance of gerrymandering and malapportionment in single member districts than in high-magnitude PR. The ruling coalition in Malaysia, among others, has made frequent use of such tactics to disadvantage the opposition.

9 An example perhaps more familiar to many readers is the U.S. Electoral College, used to elect the president, which in practice functions as a party bloc vote system.
more difficult for the opposition, Singapore electoral law requires party slates to include candidates from different ethnic groups in the multi-member districts—enough of a challenge for an opposition divided along racial and socioeconomic lines that the incumbent party slates faced no opposition in seven of fourteen such constituencies in the last election. Indeed, recruitment problems have been severe enough among the opposition parties that a majority of the seats held by the incumbent People’s Action Party are uncontested in most elections, guaranteeing the party’s continued hold on power even before election day (Case 2005).

To recap, we have the following prediction: *as the threshold of exclusion rises, so does the difficulty of recruiting moderate candidates to the opposition, all else equal.*

Stated more formally, the claim is as follows. Let $D_R$ be the difficulty of recruitment, $T_e$ be the electoral threshold of exclusion of the median district, and $X_R$ be the vector of all other variables that affect $D_R$. Then:

$$ (1) \quad D_R = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_e + \beta_2 X_R $$

and

$$ (2) \quad \beta_1 > 0. $$

*How the Electoral System Affects Coordination Problems*

One argument that appears consistently in writings on dominant party systems is that multi-partism (as opposed to two-partism) is a precondition for the emergence of one-party dominance. Pempel, for instance, argues that when multiple parties win seats in the legislature, “one party typically needs far less than 50 percent of the seats in parliament to be dominant…[T]he plurality party enjoys a particularly favored bargaining position vis-à-vis other parties. Forming a government without the plurality party is extremely difficult; including it is almost essential” (1990: 336-7). Put differently, multi-partism increases the difficulty of coordination between opposition candidates and parties that is required to prevent incumbents
from retaining power. Electoral rules can affect the difficulty of coordination between different challenger parties at both the election stage and the government formation stage. I consider the election stage here; coordination at the government formation stage is considered in the next section (3.4.2).

Coordination problems in elections are twofold. First, in order for opposition parties to win seats, they must agree on the optimal number of candidates to run against the incumbent party’s candidates. In turn, opposition voters themselves must coordinate on a single challenger or set of challengers in order to maximize the expected number of seats the opposition wins.

In single member districts with a plurality winner rule—that is, those with a magnitude of one and no preference order ranking procedure—this coordination problem is quite simple. The optimal number of nominees is one. The incumbent party candidate will almost certainly win the seat if opposition voters fail to coordinate on a single challenger. Opposition elites can remove this possibility by agreeing on a single nominee to represent the opposition camp. Thus, if elites in all opposition parties want to maximize the number of seats the opposition camp as a whole wins with a given level of support in the electorate, they have clear incentives to nominate jointly a single candidate in each district.

This dual coordination problem—parties need to agree on how many candidates to nominate, and voters need to coordinate on the opposition nominees—becomes much more complex as district magnitude increases. Raising the district magnitude from one to five, for example, greatly complicates both challenges for the opposition. Rather than simply to decide who to nominate as their candidate, they now have to decide as well how many to nominate—an anywhere from one to five candidates. And rather than direct all opposition supporters to vote for the same single candidate, they must now develop a way to get voters to distribute votes as evenly as possible across all nominees. Determining the optimal number of candidates requires good

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10 This is, of course, the same logic that underpins Duverger’s (1954) Law—that countries which employ SMDs with plurality rule will tend toward two-partism.
estimates of the level of support the combined opposition will receive on election day—
information which may be hard to come by, especially if voting patterns are volatile or some
parties and candidates have never before run in the district. And getting voters to distribute votes
evenly across all opposition nominees requires a loyal and relatively sophisticated block of
supporters willing to follow party instructions and vote strategically rather than sincerely—also
unlikely when parties are new or there is great uncertainty about what other voters will do.

First-mover incumbent parties face the same coordination challenges, but by virtue of
their experience from past elections, firmer grasp on large blocks of voters, and control of
resources to reward voting groups for following the party’s allocation strategy (or to punish
candidates from deviating from it), they are systematically better equipped to mitigate these
coordination problems. For this reason, some scholars (e.g. Cox 1996, 1997) have argued that
electoral systems which feature high average district magnitudes and no vote pooling, such as
those found under SNTV in Japan and Taiwan, tend to be super-proportional—that is, incumbent
parties do systematically better at converting votes into seats than do challenger parties. This
“seat bonus” gained through superior coordination in turn helps cushion the dominant party
against loss of support in the electorate.

What previous work has not generally noted, however, is that, although opposition
coordination at the government formation stage can be quite difficult, at the election stage
coordination problems are usually benign in proportional representation (PR) systems. This is for
two reasons. First, PR systems generally have high district magnitudes—necessary to ensure that
the translation of votes into seats is relatively direct and proportional. High district magnitudes,
however, correspond to low thresholds of exclusion. Therefore, as long as opposition parties are
able to win enough of the vote to cross the threshold for seats, there is no need to worry about
coordinating with other parties on election day.11 Second, because votes are awarded to parties

11 This is not to deny that major coordination failures can occur despite low thresholds—the fragmentation
of the party system in Poland in 1993(?), and Ukraine in (XXXX) inhibited voter coordination and led to at
rather than candidates, and because there is pooling across all candidates of the same party, there is little need for opposition parties to get their own voters to coordinate on candidates. They need only get them to cast a ballot for the party, and the PR rules will do the rest. Thus, coordination failures at the election stage are unlikely to contribute to gross disproportionality in the conversion of votes into seats, and therefore are unlikely to play a role in preventing opposition parties from knocking off the incumbent.

To recap, then, we have two predictions here. First, in electoral systems without vote pooling, such as SNTV, the difficulty of coordination rises as the threshold of exclusion falls. Second, in electoral systems with vote pooling, such as PR, the difficulty of coordination is unrelated to the threshold of exclusion.

Let us state the first of these predictions more formally. Let $D_C$ be the difficulty of recruitment, $T_e$ be the electoral threshold of exclusion of the median district, and $X_C$ be the vector of all other variables that affect $D_C$. Then:

$$D_C = \beta_0 + \beta_3 T_e + \beta_4 X_C$$

and

$$\beta_3 < 0.$$}

**How the Electoral System Affects Coordination in Government Formation**

The second coordination problem that is structured by the electoral system arises at the government formation stage. In parliamentary regimes, this process will determine which parties control the prime minister’s seat and the allocation of ministerial portfolios in the executive. Because presidential systems are winner-take-all—the winning presidential candidate typically

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least 20% of all votes being cast for parties that did not cross the threshold. However, such failures are usually one-time events: both party elites and voters tend to learn quickly and settle on a much smaller set of viable parties in the next election. Coordination failure in one election cannot explain why dominant parties rule for decades.
has near-complete control over the executive—coordination in government formation is almost exclusively a problem facing oppositions in parliamentary systems. The coordination problem arises when opposition winners differ either (1) from one district to another or (2) from one another in the same district.

The first problem occurs frequently in SMD electoral systems, where the effective number of candidates is typically two. Despite intimations by prominent scholars to the contrary (e.g. Duverger 1954: 216-17; Riker 1976: 101; Aldrich 1995: 285), there is in fact no a priori reason to expect an opposition winner in one district to be from the same party as an opposition winner in another (Cox 1999). For instance, although India employs the same Westminster-style first-past-the-post, single-member district system that Britain and the US do, the existence of many regionally-based parties ensure a very high effective number of parties in the Indian national parliament (Chhibber and Kollman 2004). Coordination at the government formation stage there is self-evidently more difficult than it is in other more homogeneous countries with Westminster-style systems.

The second problem—coordination in forming a legislative majority among multiple opposition winners from within the same district—occurs frequently in PR systems, which typically have few districts and high magnitudes. A good example is Israel, which elects its legislature from a single nation-wide district with 120 seats and a low threshold of 2%. The low barrier to new party entry has allowed small, ideologically-motivated parties to win many seats between them, raising both the number of and the ideological distance between opposition parties. This appears to be a key reason every prime minister from 1948 to 1977 was from the Labor Party, even though it never controlled a majority of legislative seats during that time period (Levite and Tarrow 1983; Hazan 1998: 153). Thus, while a high district magnitude in PR systems frees opposition elites from having to coordinate before election day and opposition supporters from having to vote strategically, it increases the difficulty of opposition cross-party
coordination at the government formation stage, and thereby helps sustain a central role for the incumbent party in government.

In general, however, PR in high district magnitudes leads on average to more parties in the legislature than does plurality rule in SMDs. Thus, PR on balance appears to lead to more difficult coordination problems at the government formation stage than does SMD-P.

The Indeterminate Effect of Electoral Rules on Opposition Party Competitiveness

The previous two subsections presented predictions about how electoral rules should affect two kinds of opposition problems: recruitment and coordination. Ultimately, we are interested primarily in the net effect of the difficulty of both of these problems in combination on the likelihood that ruling parties persist in power, rather than either one in isolation. And it is when one combines both sets of arguments into an overall measure of the level of difficulty presented by a given set of electoral rules that an important ambiguity becomes apparent. This is that the threshold of exclusion—what I have termed $T_c$ in the formal expressions—has opposite effects on the two types of problems. Increasing $T_c$ should make recruitment harder, all else equal. But it should make coordination easier.

To see this more formally, note the contrasting coefficient signs in (2) and (4). If we believe that the likelihood that an opposition party wins is negatively related to the sum of $D_R$ and $D_C$, then the threshold of exclusion by itself does not allow us to predict which electoral systems on net are more difficult to compete in, and therefore are more likely to sustain one-party dominance. Lower thresholds of exclusion increase the complexity of the coordination problem, but they also mitigate the recruitment problem. And while PR provides a coordination advantage at the election stage, the net effect on difficulty of coordination is reduced or even reversed by the increased coordination problems at the government formation stage.

In sum, the logic laid out here ends in a rather disappointing conclusion: the effect of electoral rules on ruling party duration is indeterminate. Dominant party systems appear equally
possible under SNTV, PR, and plurality rule SMDs—we cannot a priori identify any major class of electoral system as especially prone, or hostile, to long spells of one-party rule.

3.4.2. Regime Type

In contrast to the finding about electoral systems, regime-type differences have unambiguous effects on the difficulty of opposition collective action. Put simply, presidential regimes are on balance both easier for oppositions to recruit in and to coordinate in than are parliamentary regimes. Thus, long-lived one-party rule should be much less likely in presidential regimes than parliamentary ones.

By regime type, I mean the way the chief executive is chosen and held accountable. The chief executive in presidential regimes, the president, has a fixed term in office, does not depend on legislative confidence, and is directly elected in a popular, nation-wide vote. The chief executive in parliamentary regimes, the prime minister, is selected by the legislature, depends on the confidence of the legislature for his control of the office, and can be removed before his term is up without extraordinary measures. In addition, cabinet appointments are shared among members of the legislature, whereas in presidential regimes these appointments usually cannot be individuals who are also legislators.

Of all these differences, the crucial one is the method of executive selection: by the legislature, or through a popular vote. These two methods of selection turn out to have widely different effects on both recruitment and coordination problems. Let’s consider each in turn.

*How Regime Type Affects Recruitment Problems*

There are two reasons why opposition recruitment should be easier in presidential than in parliamentary regimes. The first is the value of the office at stake: the “size of the prize” (Hicken
and Stoll 2008). Potential opposition challengers are more likely to risk harassment by the authorities, loss of career opportunities in the private sector, personal threats against them and their family members, and other potentially large costs of running against the dominant party if the potential rewards are also large. Fewer candidates will be willing to suffer harassment and physical threats for a shot at local drain commissioner than at the presidency. Presidential races are especially attractive to ambitious opposition figures because they are winner-take-all: an opposition victory removes the incumbent from executive power in one fell swoop and transfers full control to the winner. As a consequence, opposition candidates for president often risk great harm to themselves for a shot at national power. In Zimbabwe, for example, the opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai endured beatings and jail time to challenge the incumbent Robert Mugabe. Such intimidation did not keep him out of the race, and in order to retain power the ruling party had to resort to ever more-brutal tactics against opposition supporters, and eventually, massive electoral fraud.

In contrast, parliamentary systems tend to offer ambitious individuals a much less straightforward way to national power than do presidential ones. In parliamentary regimes, winning control of the executive typically requires recruiting not just one popular candidate who can win a single national race, but putting forward a whole slate of attractive candidates and winning many races—a task which typically requires investing valuable time and resources in developing a party organization. This problem is not so severe if the electoral rule is PR in a single nation-wide district, and if there is a strong party vote, but it appears likely to worsen as the number of districts grows and the personal appeal of candidates becomes more important. At the extreme, in a country with many single-member districts and a long-time governing party,

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12 The same logic applies to other offices as well. Legislative offices that afford their occupants a great number of resources and autonomy present a bigger prize than do those that come with few. Challengers for the US Senate should be willing to pay a higher cost than those for a House seat, on average. The likelihood that a challenger will end up as part of the majority may also affect the value of the office—winning a seat as a Democrat when that party controls the House is likely to be more attractive than winning the same seat as a Republican.
recruiting enough candidates who can win pluralities in their districts is quite difficult. The main way out of this dilemma appears to be to develop a single opposition party that has a consistent message and partisan appeal over and above the attractiveness of any of its candidates. But this, too, likely will require building a strong party organization. Thus, recruitment problems, while not impossible to overcome, should be more severe for opposition parties on average in parliamentary regimes than in presidential ones.

SUMMARY:
• The second reason is the “superstar effect”: oppositions only need to put forward one high-quality candidate in presidential races, while in parliamentary races they need as many as possible. A shallow political bench is less damaging to a party’s chances of winning power in presidential than parliamentary regimes.

*How Regime Type Affects Coordination Problems*

SUMMARY:
Why coordination should be easier for oppositions in presidential regimes:
• The cost of losing is higher (all-or-nothing prize), and the reward of winning is higher. So opposition parties face a stronger incentive to cooperate lest everyone in opposition get nothing.
• The nature of the coordination problem is easier: nominate one guy, and get everyone to support him. That’s it. In parliamentary regimes, by contrast, opposition parties may have to work out complicated nomination agreements that cover races in hundreds of districts.

Why coordination problems are more damaging for incumbents in presidential than parliamentary regimes:
• All-or-nothing race means coming in second or third gets the incumbent nothing, while in a parliamentary regime the incumbent may still enjoy a centrist position and therefore remain in government.
• The exit option is much more attractive to strong candidates in the ruling party who don’t get the nomination. If they have strong name recognition and high positives among voters, then the more personal nature of presidential campaigns allows them to maximize these advantages.
• Thus, we also should see more ruling party splits in presidential than in parliamentary regimes, all else equal.

3.4.3. *The (De)centralization of Political Authority*

SUMMARY:
• The combination of local elections and independent authority of local officials provides a potential solution to opposition recruitment problems.
In these circumstances, opposition parties can pursue a “ground-up” party-building strategy that uses local party strongholds as stepping stones to national power.

Local offices, such as mayors or governors, also provide a great opportunity for opposition parties to develop their own high-quality candidates for national office.

Local executive offices—mayors and governors—are more valuable as stepping stones in presidential than in parliamentary regimes.

3.5. The Effects of Social Structure on Asymmetric Competition

MAIN TOPICS:

- Identity issues as a counter-measure to resource competition
- Group size as an intervening variable

3.6. Some Predictions about First-Mover Longevity

3.6.1. Regime Type

3.6.2. Ethnicity

3.6.3. Other Implications

3.7. Conclusion

What’s next:

- large-N test (Ch. 4), followed by case studies of Taiwan (Ch. 5) and Malaysia (Ch. 6)
REFERENCES


Table 3.1. Parties with First-Mover Advantage -- Duration in Power

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<th>Regime Begins</th>
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* Incumbent still in power; tenure through December 2006
1 Ruling party removed by coup
2 Ruling party suspended elections or unilaterally extended term during tenure