DOMINANT PARTY SYSTEMS CONFERENCE
University of Michigan
May 9-10, 2014

The maintenance and decline of dominant party systems in the developed world: inter- and intra-party interpretations

Dr Françoise Boucek
Lecturer in European Politics and Policy
School of Politics and International Relations
Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS
Email: f.boucek@qmul.ac.uk Tel: +44(0)20 7882 8583 Website
The maintenance and decline of dominant party systems in the developed world: inter- and intra-party interpretations

Like the passage from adolescence into adulthood, the transformation of a dominant party system into a competitive multiparty democracy can be regarded as a phase in the evolution of a democratic polity. The decline in one-party dominance indicates democratic progress and its breakdown democratic maturity. Some teenagers sail through adolescence. Others battle with its contradictions and conflicts for years before becoming adults. The same is true of democracies and their party systems.

By the end of the 20th century, democracies in the developed world had matured and one-party dominance belonged in the past. In the 1970s and 1980s in Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Britain, Canada, Australia and Israel long-lived dominant parties had been replaced in office by opposition parties. Regular party alternation in government normalised as the party systems of these post-industrial societies became more diverse and competitive even as former long-term incumbents returned to office sometimes for several consecutive terms.

However, the most remarkable cases of breakdown in party dominance happened in the mid-1990s in Italy and Japan. The most enduring dominant parties – the Christian Democratic Party of Italy (DC) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) – were kicked out of power for the first time after almost half-a-century of continuous rule.

In Italy the Christian Democrats – the senior member in 51 coalition governments - imploded in 1994 after a slow rot and a two-year massive investigation of political corruption causing the expulsion of the old political class. This political earthquake and dealigning election prompted constitutional reforms marking the end of Italy’s so-called first republic. However, as explained later, Italy’s party system remains fragmented and government instability has returned.

Meanwhile in Japan in 1992 the LDP which had ruled the country continuously since its foundation in 1955 (and again between 1996 and 2009) was thrown out of office following political scandals and factional defections. However, despite electoral reform in 1994 party alternation in government has been convulsive due to Japan’s degenerative party system. In December 2012, the LDP roared back to power with a majority of 294 seats in the House of Representatives. Yet, at the previous general election, in 2009, they were left with a mere 119 out of 480 seats in the lower house, their worst defeat on record.

Political earthquakes in other established democracies saw dominant parties humiliatedly thrown out of office. In Britain, the Conservatives’ aura as the natural party of government was shattered in 1997 by Tony Blair’s New Labour landslide following 18 years of Conservative rule under Margaret Thatcher and John Major. The Conservative Party flat-lined in the polls for a decade until David Cameron, their fourth leader in eight years, returned them to power in 2010 but in a coalition with the Liberal Democrats since the election produced a ‘hung’ parliament.
In Canada, the Liberal Party which had ruled the country for some 80 years since the nation’s founding in 1867 (although not continuously) was relegated to third place in the 2011 elections leaving them with a dismal 34 seats in the 308-seat Canadian House of Commons. However, their national hegemony had begun to fade in 1984 when Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau stepped down as party leader after 16 years at the helm. While the Liberals bounced back into power from 1993-2006 under Jean Chrétien, this was largely due to an even more fatal implosion of the Progressive Conservatives and their slow reconstruction as the Conservative Party of Canada.

The emergence of one-party dominance is often rooted in country-specific historical, political and economic conditions associated with nation building and regime change including the formation of a movement for national unity and independence, a new constitutional settlement, a party system realignment following a watershed election and so on.

The maintenance of dominance, though, is usually multi-causal. The exception, in my view, is the African National Congress (ANC) in post-apartheid South Africa. Its 20-year dominance can be wholly explained through the persistence of the racial cleavage for mobilising a large majority of voters. So long as the racial cleavage remains electorally salient only a split in the ANC could break down its dominance and give opposition parties a chance to be included in a government coalition without the ANC (but possibly including a breakaway party).

My own research (Boucek, 2012) and collaborative work with international scholars (Bogaards and Boucek 2010)\(^1\) show that in established democracies dominant parties endure by regularly winning a plurality of votes in a first step. In this paper I use the concept of coalition building to provide a simplified narrative and structure of argument demonstrating that dominant parties endure thanks to their capacity to build lasting coalitions of voters, parties and factions.

Of course, no single theory can explain party dominance completely and particular circumstances and conditions differed in each of the cases mentioned above. However, one common causal influence explaining their dismissal from office was the breakdown in party unity. In my recent book - *Factional Politics: How Dominant Parties Impplode or Stabilize*\(^2\) (Boucek, 2012) I conclude that **party unity is a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition for party dominance** but it is difficult to maintain in the long run. My case studies of the British Conservative Party, the Liberal Party of Canada, the Italian Christian Democrats and Japan’s Liberal Democrats demonstrate through various methodologies that one key factor in the maintenance of one-party dominance is the incumbent’s capacity to stay together as a party in the long run. Conversely, I show that party disunity and the failure to prevent exit is often the primary cause of breakdowns in dominance.

In sum, the intra-party dimension of competition is a critical factor in explaining the maintenance and the decline of dominant parties. Theories that overlook this dimension may reach premature conclusions about dominant parties’ resilience and under-estimate the potential for disunity.

---
1. Two of these authors (Amir Abedi and Kenneth F. Greene) are participants at this conference.
2. My book published in Oct 2012 is available at a 20% discount in the US and Canada (discount flyers available at the conference) or quote promo code XP356ED when ordering your copy at [www.palgrave-usa.com](http://www.palgrave-usa.com) or email your order to [sales@palgrave-usa.com](mailto:sales@palgrave-usa.com)
My paper’s first section focuses on political parties’ capacity to build lasting coalitions of voters to maintain electoral dominance. This is explained from three different perspectives: sociological, institutional and spatial/strategic. The second section analyses the capacity to build multiparty government coalitions and cabinets using Italy’s Christian Democrats as exemplar. The third section focuses on internal coalitions of factions and how parties maintain unity within party ranks. This reveals a paradox: factionalism can become entrenched and destabilising if factions wield a veto. In the DC and to a lesser extent the LDP institutionalised factions created perverse incentives and brand devaluation leading to a decline and eventual breakdown of one-party dominance.

Building coalitions of voters

Dominant parties’ capacity to win more popular support than their competitors skews party competition to their advantage. This is explained from sociological, institutional and strategic perspectives which are self-reinforcing rather than mutually-exclusive.

Socio-structural explanations

Mobilising large groups of voters may involve activating social divisions (cleavage theory); relying on party identification to give partisan cues to core voters (less relevant in Europe than in the US); making catch-all appeals to voters under multiparty competition or ‘median’ voter appeals under two-party dynamics (the latter also more relevant in the exceptional American case than in European multiparty systems with polypodal preference distributions); shaping and re-shaping voters’ preferences (including changing voters’ societal status); making targeted appeals to swing groups of voters (risky and hard to sustain); campaigning on a party’s record in government (encouraging retrospective voting) etc.

According to cleavage theory parties appeal to voters on the basis of social group affiliations based on class, religion, language, ethnicity, race etc. Such cleavages are often regionally-based as in the case of the German Christian Social Union in Catholic Bavaria and the Liberal Party of Canada in French-speaking Quebec. But voter de-alignment may push parties to act as brokers in mediating the interests of different societal groups as in Canada until the mid-20th century when new regional parties forced the Liberals to ditch a style of localised ‘brokerage politics’ in favour of pan-Canadian campaigns.

In post-industrial democracies, social cleavages have become less salient in mobilising voters than in the past (due to partisan realignment and a hollowing out of the state) forcing parties to adopt

---

3 However, quirks of majoritarian voting systems can occasionally deliver more seats to a party with a smaller aggregate share of the popular vote than the best placed party (as in the UK in 1974) but this is rare even under biased electoral systems such as single-member plurality rule (SMP).

4 Under Wilfrid Laurier the Liberals’ national appeal was based on: ‘a nationwide coalition of supporters, an expansionary role for government, an intimate connection with business, and an accommodation between the French and the English’ (Clarkson, 2005: 8). But a puzzling survey suggests that Liberal electoral dominance has rested on a significant religious cleavage in English-speaking central and eastern Canada where the Liberals receive a disproportionate share of the Catholic vote without which their dominance ‘would disappear’ (Blais, 2005).
more catch all strategies. Parties may also engage in social engineering by seeking to change an electorate’s structure. For instance British Conservatives under Thatcher encouraged local authorities to sell their stock of public housing to tenants, hence transforming traditional Labour supporters into property owners and Conservative voters (Dunleavy, 1991:120-1). The creation of a new working class in Thatcher’s Britain was also bolstered by the sale of public shares in newly privatised utilities which transformed thousands of voters into small stockholders. This partisan social engineering swelled the ranks of Conservative supporters associated with private sector employment, business and home ownership (Sanders, 1992: 188-9).

Cultivating links with specific sectional interests helps consolidate a party’s core vote. The British Labour Party which grew out of the trade union movement in the early 20th century relied on them for much of its funding and leadership selection when the party is in opposition. This was demonstrated by the election of Ed Miliband in 2010 against his brother David who had much more cabinet experience (although reforms under Ed Miliband aim to sever this financial umbilical cord).

In Japan, the LDP’s traditional bedrock support came from small rice farmers in over-represented rural districts and from businesses in the construction industry. In Italy, the Christian Democrats built their mass appeal by garnering the support of occupational groups and trade union organisations including the Confederation of Small Farmers (Cultivatori Diretti), the Italian Confederation of Labour Movement (CISL) and ACLI (Italian Christian Workers’ Association), the Movimento Laureati (the Movement of Catholic University Graduates), the Church and the construction industry.

In Sweden, the Social Democrats whose dominance coincided with the creation of a universal welfare system owed much of their pre-war electoral support to the agrarian movement within the red-green alliance and its post-war support to the labour movement, notably the Landsorganisationen federation and the white-collar union federation TCO (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The welfare state reforms of the past three decades have weakened these links enabling opposition parties in 1976 to finally dislodge the SAP from office for the first time since 1945.

**Institutional explanations**

From an institutional perspective, one-party dominance is explained primarily through the effects of voting systems on governments and executive-legislative relations. Reductive voting systems such as single-member plurality (SMP) have the capacity to skew party competition by exaggerating parties’ wins and losses giving the party with the plurality of votes a commanding majority.

According to the Duvergerian logic, SMP (which translates the popular vote into a disproportional share of seats) concentrates party systems, penalises third parties whose support isn’t geographically concentrated and generates single-party majority government (Duverger, 1956; Cox, 1997; Lijphart, 1999). It is now a canon in political science that this hypothesis applies only at district-level but it encompasses both the mechanical effects of voting systems (generated by the formulae used to translate votes into seats, the thresholds of representation, the magnitude and

---

footnote: One of the most notable examples was British Telecom. Two million people applied for BT shares in its 1984 sell-off including two Conservative MPs who made multiple applications and had to resign.
boundaries of electoral districts and so on) and psychological effects which encourage voters to cast strategic votes when their preferred party stands little chance of winning the local seat.

Through their reductive effect on the number of parties, restrictive electoral systems like SMP give dominant parties comparative advantages as shown in my longitudinal survey of seven dominant party systems using different voting systems\(^6\) (Boucek, 1998; see also Dunleavy and Boucek, 2003).

For the last few decades in Britain, the artificial majority victories produced by SMP at Westminster benefited the Conservatives before 1979 and Labour recently\(^7\). This advantage drove both parties to act as if they enjoyed dominant status and as if opposition parties were completely irrelevant. From the 1930s to the 1970s when Britain was still a two-party democracy, the combined vote share of the two main parties stood at over 90 per cent (see Figure 1). However, in 1974, it dropped sharply to 75 per cent and to just 65.5 per cent in 2010 which produced a ‘hung’ parliament and coalition government.

This bias heavily penalised the third party: the Liberal Democrats, who have accumulated ‘wasted votes’ across the country since the 1970s marking the end of Britain’s two-party system. Nowadays, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) is even more penalised by SMP since they consistently fail to gain any Westminster representation but manage to win seats in the European Parliament under PR. UKIP currently have 8 seats and the latest polls (YouGov 24-25 April 2014) indicate they might even come in first place ahead of Labour and the Conservatives at the forthcoming (22 May 2014) European Parliament elections.

Consider these examples. In 1964 the Labour Party won nearly the same percentage of the popular vote as in their 1997 landslide under Tony Blair (44.1 per cent vs. 44.4 per cent). However, they ended up with 317 seats (just half the seats in the chamber) giving them a bare majority of only 4 seats compared to 63.6 per cent of the seats in 1997 (a total of 418 seats and a majority of 179 seats over all other parties). In 1970, Labour lost the general election with only one percentage point less of the popular vote than in 1964. Labour’s re-election landslide in June 2001 was even more disproportional than in 1997: a 62.5 per cent share of seats in return a 40.7 per cent share of the nationwide vote. This was a seat/vote ratio of 1.53, even bigger than the previous record of 1.44 in 1983 when the Conservatives’ 42.4 per cent of the vote translated into 61.1 per cent of the seats (thanks to the split in the Labour Party\(^8\)). See Figure 1.

---

\(^6\) This study includes four dominant party systems using majoritarian voting systems (Britain and Canada under SMP, France under two-ballot plurality, and Japan under the old single non-transferable voting system) and three types of PR (Sweden, Ireland, and Italy under the old preference voting system). I calculated the effective number of electoral parties (N\(_e\)), the effective number of legislative parties (N\(_s\)) and the relative reduction in the number of parties (RRP) in time series for these party systems during the post-war period.

\(^7\) Recent research shows that Labour’s advantage is less a function of malapportionment (addressed in a review of constituency boundaries) and more a function of vote distribution and to a less extent abstention resulting from Labour’s ability to win relatively small inner city seats and constituencies with lower turnout (Borisyuk, Thrasher, Johnston, and Rallings: 2010a and 2010b).

\(^8\) The Conservatives won big in 1983 as a result of a split in the Labour Party (the ‘Gang of Four’ defected to form the Social Democratic Party along with 19 backbench MPs). Labour and the third party - the Alliance made up of the Liberals and the new SDP, now called the Liberal Democrats - each received a little over a quarter of the national vote but Labour won 209 seats and the Alliance only 23.
In 2010, despite the Labour-to-Conservative five per cent swing (the largest since Thatcher came to power in 1979) and the fact that the Conservatives won more seats than at any time since 1931, they were 19 seats short of a majority and had to form a coalition government (although the Conservatives are still the dominant party in England\textsuperscript{9}). This first peacetime coalition government in 70 years proves that the British party system is now a standard European multi-party system although multi-partism continues to be artificially suppressed by plurality rule voting at general elections (Boucek, 2010). The disproportional character of Labour’s landslide victories in 1997 and 2001 put electoral reform on the agenda. It was one of the Conservatives’ concessions to the Liberal Democrats in their 2010 coalition agreement but the alternative vote system was rejected by British voters in a 2011 referendum.

\textbf{Figure 1}

In Canada, the national dominance of the Liberal Party historically rested on concentrated support in at least one of the two most populous provinces – Ontario and Quebec - which together account for approximately 60 per cent of the seats in the federal parliament. So as long as the Liberals won big in one of those two provinces, their dominance was assured\textsuperscript{10}. However, for the last two decades their

\textsuperscript{9} In 2010, 298 of the 306 seats won by the Conservatives were in England. Labour won 26 of the 37 Welsh seats with only 36 per cent of the popular vote in Wales.

\textsuperscript{10} A compelling study of the Canadian party system as a case of ‘polarized pluralism’ shows that outside Quebec the Liberals have dominated district-level three-party competition on a left-right ordering while on the
traditional Quebec stronghold has eroded due to the entry of a separatist party in the national parliament and the declining saliency of the ‘national unity’ question.

The Liberals also derived a comparative advantage from SMP. My time-series analysis of the relative reduction in the effective number of parties (RRP) shows that the Liberals’ periods of dominance (1935-1957, 1963-1984, and 1993-2006) are marked by wide distortions between the effective number of electoral parties (N_e) and the effective number of legislative parties (N_s) (Boucek, 2001). The biggest gaps are elections when the Liberals seized power back from the Progressive Conservatives (in 1935, 1963, and 1993) when the RRP stood at 41 per cent, 19 per cent, and 38 per cent respectively. When the then Progressive Conservatives won big (in 1958 and 1984) the RRP was also very high (around 38 per cent) but, importantly, these were also majorities of the popular vote, a feat never achieved by the Liberals.

SMP produces shocks in the Canadian national party system as in 1984, 1993 and 2011 pointing to a notoriously volatile electorate but also a regionalised party system with quirky and unpredictable election outcomes. For example, in the 1993 watershed election, the Progressive Conservatives collapsed from being a majority governing party to winning just two seats in the Canadian House of Commons. This left the Bloc Québécois - a new separatist party advocating the country’s break-up - as the official opposition. The Bloc had only the fourth largest share of the popular vote but the second-largest share of federal seats, all in Quebec. This allowed the Liberals to sweep back into power after almost a decade in opposition when the Liberals seized power back from the Progressive Conservatives in 1993 when the RRP stood at 38 per cent, and 38 per cent respectively. When the then Progressive Conservatives won big (in 1958 and 1984) the RRP was also very high (around 38 per cent) but, importantly, these were also majorities of the popular vote, a feat never achieved by the Liberals.

Curiously, despite a nearly 50 per cent failure rate by the two major Canadian parties to gain absolute majorities since WW2, single-party government remains the norm at federal level. Until quite recently, there were few pressures to reform the voting system for federal elections (although not for provincial ones). Regular landslide elections suggested that SMP wasn’t dysfunctional since it could produce government with absolute majorities. On top of this the presence of regional parties with geographically concentrated electorates mitigated the reductive effect of SMP on the national party system. Plus, the need for partisan coordination across geographical regions is weaker in Canada’s federal system than in unitary systems like Britain due to the decoupling of provincial politics from national politics (Johnston, 2008; see also Abedi and Schneider, 2010).

In contrast, permissive voting systems that translate votes into seats more proportionally are less biased towards dominant parties and less penalising to minority parties because they erect fewer barriers to entry. In Italy the Christian Democrats derived virtually no advantage from the mechanical effects of the old list preference voting system due to large district magnitude and national question they control a pole within each segment: the pro-Quebec pole outside Quebec and the pro-Canada pole inside Quebec. (Johnston, 2008)

11 There were 32 electoral colleges for 630 members of the Chamber of Deputies with magnitude ranging from one to thirty six members per college except for the Valle d’Aosta constituency which had a single-seat.
absence of a minimum threshold of entry. However, there was a lot of scope for party manipulation and for district-level factional competition to sustain a corrupt exchange vote, also the case in Japan.

In Japan the single non-transferable vote in multi-member constituencies (SNTV) - not a true proportional system – gave the LDP a comparative advantage from the start by skewing party competition through its 1955 multiparty merger (Boucek, 1998 and 2001). Having gained 58 per cent of the vote and 61.5 per cent of the seats in the Lower House of the Diet in 1958 the new LDP cut the number of competing parties by half and established its dominance. Electoral competition became two-way contests between two unequal parties - the conservative LDP and the much smaller Socialists (JSP).

In Italy and Japan co-partisan competition under the old voting systems generated partisan advantages for the dominant parties through their internal factions. DC and LDP factions became major players in the mobilisation of the personal vote and distribution of campaign resources to local candidates. Faction leaders acted as brokers on behalf of individual candidates or slates of candidates between local interests and supporters. In Italy DC factions controlled candidate placement on party lists and provided endorsements, funds and newspaper support beyond those available by the party. In Japan LDP factions coordinated local party nomination and vote division - a strategy that Japan’s opposition parties were slow to emulate (Cox, 1997; Christensen, 2000: 180; Boucek: 2012 Ch 6). By channelling funds directly to factions and 小選挙区 instead of the central party organisation, interest groups and clientele networks enabled LDP and DC faction leaders to build local power bases and stake claims in the party organisation.

The introduction of mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) electoral systems in both countries was meant to generate majoritarian politics and eradicate clientelism and the machine politics of factions. In Italy this initially produced more stable patterns of bipolar competition and longer-lasting governments (mainly under Berlusconi) but without any significant reduction in the number of electoral parties or improvement in the quality of democracy. More worrying, government coalition instability has now returned (63 different governments in 68 years and counting) along with party splits, ‘anti-politics’ movements and politicians fiddling with the electoral law. The reform of the flawed Electoral Law 270 pushed by Berlusconi in 2005 is presently waiting for Senate approval.

In Japan the electoral reform has not generated stable bipolar competition as was expected. Party alternation in government between two political forces (the DPJ and LDP) has involved huge national swings in support of one party or another since 2005 partly due to an increase in floating voters\(^\text{12}\). One key change of the new MMM voting system, though, is that politicians no longer have to compete for votes against co-partisans in individual districts. This has weakened the candidate-specific focus of electoral campaigns under the old SNTV. It has also stripped faction leaders of their role as providers of campaign funding and pork-barrel perks to individual candidates. What all this means is that there are fewer incentives for aspiring politicians to cultivate the personal vote and

\(^{12}\) It is misguided to interpret Japan’s 2012 national result and party alternation in office as the arrival in Japan of Anglo-American two-party competition and two-bloc partisan consolidation as predicated by the Duvergerian logic. Such analysis is characteristic of American-centre bias in political science which fails to acknowledge the exceptionalism of the American two party system which is unique in established democracies.
belong to factions nowadays. And, elections are now more about parties than individuals. Japanese parties have even recently adopted national policy manifestos.

Naturally, in countries with weak political institutions incumbents have more institutional opportunities to compromise the outcomes of elections than in developed democracies. However, ruling parties can still boost their advantage through ‘gerrymandering’ (USA), malapportionment (Ireland under Fianna Fáil’s dominance before 1979), blocking demands for electoral reform (Japan and Italy in the 1980s and 1990s), loading the dice in the design of new electoral laws (Italy regularly) and interference in the running of elections (Mexico and Southern Italy).

**Catch-all strategies and spatial explanations**

Dominant parties are notorious for being pragmatic and ‘catch-all’ (Kirchheimer, 1966). The emergence of catch-all parties in Western Europe in the 1970s was primarily a response to the decline of traditional cleavages in post-materialist societies creating class dealignment and partisan realignment with the entry of new parties. Orientated towards power rather than ideology, catch-all parties adapt pragmatically to changing electoral market conditions and rising volatility to broaden their appeal and capture the ‘median’ voter.

Downsian competition predicts that parties will compete to accommodate voters’ preferences by converging on the median voter’s position which under two-party dynamics is expected to be located somewhere close to the centre of the political spectrum under unimodal preference distribution (Downs, 1957: 95-138). There is ample evidence of long-lived government parties de-emphasising doctrine to maximise votes and capture the median voter while neutralising opponents.

In Scandinavia’s unipolar party systems, ideological cohesion sustained social-democratic parties in power for decades. The dominant party systems of Sweden, Norway and Denmark were characterised by one-party dominance - a large catch-all social democratic (or Labour) party confronting a collection of smaller moderate ‘bourgeois’ opponents located in the centre and right of the ideological space. These dominant parties had such a strong hold on government that people sometimes spoke of a ‘statist’ political party (Lane and Ersson, 2008).

In Sweden the Social Democratic Party (SAP) ruled as if it was a majority government from 1945-76, first on the basis of government cooperation with the Agrarian Party (up to 1957), then in a minority government with the tacit support of the Communist Party and more recently with the support of ‘new politics’ parties. Under such one-dimensional coalition formation (backed by consensual politics and neo-corporatism) Scandinavian dominant parties could capture the median voter and downplay ideology. The SAP went so far as to declare in a manifesto that their party had ‘never been especially interested in theoretical discussions’ (Misgeld, Molin, and Åmark, 1992: 152). This was a rational strategy which allowed the SAP to regain office in the midst of a home-grown economic crisis in 1994 on a programme of tax rises and public spending cuts not normally associated with social democratic parties.
The SAP kept rival parties out of power until 1976 when the three moderate ‘bourgeois parties’ formed an electoral alliance which produced the first non-SAP government in half a century. The opposition parties’ coordination failures and dominant parties’ cohesion explain why long term political dominance has been the rule in many West European countries during the 20th century. This was possible in Scandinavia where the distribution of preferences on the main competitive dimension - welfare state policy - was skewed to the right which hampered opposition parties’ coalition strategies (McGann, 2002). This is shown below on Figure 2b illustrating Sweden’s party system under the dominance of the Social Democrats (SAP) with the location of the ‘median’ boter in red.

Figure 2: normal distribution of voters preference v. skewed distribution in Sweden

The Italian Christian Democratic Party (DC) was also a catch-all party operating in a multiparty system. It was described as 'a party for all seasons' thanks to its ability to juggle issues to accommodate shifting electoral interests (Pasquino, 1979 and 1980). It successfully repositioned itself after WW2 when Alcide de Gasperi created a successful mass Catholic party by transforming

---

Subsequently, the SAP became more vulnerable as the field of competition expanded with the entry in the Riksdag of the Greens in 1988, two new parties in 1991 (the Christian Democrats and the right-wing New Democracy) and a new far-right anti-immigrant party (Sweden Democrats) in 2010 which enabled a governing centre-right coalition to be re-elected for the first time (under prime minister Fredrik Reinfeldt) when Sweden Democrats’ held the balance of power with their 20 seats.
the wartime anti-fascist solidarity into Church-sponsored anti-communism. This polarised Italian politics between left and right on economic and social issues (Levite and Tarrow, 1983: 313-5) and enabled the DC to position itself as a centrist party while neutering its main opponent, the large Communist Party (PCI) who were portrayed as a threat to democratic stability. Indeed, to the extent that ideology had any place in post-war Italian politics, anti-communism was the issue that shaped the DC’s national coalition strategies and intra-party politics throughout the period. However, this didn’t prevent the DC from making electoral alliances with the Communists for local and regional elections.

In Japan, weak partisanship facilitated the creation of the LDP in 1955 from a broad multi-party merger. Its catch-all nature and lack of national policy manifestos kept the LDP relatively free of ideological divisions while in office for half a century. It has been described as a broad coalition of all major social groups willing to co-opt opposition issues (Inoguchi, 1990: 193) and a catch-all party that ‘solidly holds the Dowsonian centre’ (Scheiner, 2006: 168) and ‘is able to tack with the prevailing strong winds and alter, even if belatedly, its previous policies when they proved to be unpopular later on’ (Krauss and Pekkanen 2011: 14).

In Great Britain and Canada non-ideological politics have enabled British Conservatives and Canadian Liberals at different times to embrace opposite sides of the same issue, for instance protectionism and free trade, state interventionism and laissez-faire economics, foreign engagement and appeasement. In 19th century Britain Conservative dominance has been explained through the party’s pragmatism and selective use of ideology to bolster its status as the ‘natural party of government’ (Seldon, 1994).

However, even under two-party dynamics, parties may prefer to move away from the political centre ground (effectively taking the median voter with them) in order to win new tranches of voters, accommodate changes in electoral tastes, re-shape voters’ preferences or reorient the political agenda, although at the risk of polarising national politics and party opinion. In the early 1980s, Thatcher’s Conservatives abandoned the British post-war model of consensus politics by moving clearly to the right with a radical program to de-nationalise public services while reasserting state authority (Gamble, 1988) without touching the National Health Service (NHS).

This radical neo-liberal government program opposed by many British voters and trade unions triggered waves of industrial action. Only a divided opposition (due to the 1981 Labour Party’s split amplified by the bias of plurality voting) gave the Conservatives a landslide win in 1983. After a third victory in 1987 Thatcher became fixated on the polarising issues of European Monetary Union and the ‘poll tax’ which she triggered her own downfall in an internal coup in 1990. The deeply unpopular Conservatives were re-elected against the odds in 1992 thanks to moderate leader John Major whose prime-ministership was nevertheless wrecked by Thatcher’s legacy of factional divisions (Boucek, 2012: chapter 4). After 18 years in opposition, Labour under Tony Blair learned the value of non-ideological politics. It discarded its class doctrines in the early 1990s (notably through the removal of Clause IV from the party’s constitution14) and the Labour government

---

14 Clause VI committed the Labour Party to the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange. In 1960, Hugh Gaitskell had tried unsuccessfully to remove it from the Labour Party’s constitution.
adopted practical policies to raise standards in public services which Blair defended as ‘what matters is what works’.

Incumbency advantages boost dominant parties’ electoral strategies. Due to space constraints I cannot elaborate much. Suffice it to say that ruling parties can endogenise their information and campaign advantages. In most western democracies state broadcasting monopolies have now been abolished making outright control of public information difficult (except in Italy where Berlusconi’s media empire still dominates). However, governing parties can shape public perceptions by putting their own ‘spin’ on political events, by initiating news leaks to selected media and by restraining public access to government information (for an example, see Boucek, 2012: 20). They can restrict public access to government information by exploiting regulatory loopholes and restraining freedom of information. They also have a comparative advantage in campaign finance especially in Europe (excluding Britain) where parties tend to be subsidised by the state and campaign funding is apportioned on the basis of individual party shares of legislative seats. This gives dominant parties the lion’s share of campaign finance at the expense of minority parties who are deprived of funding if their popular support falls below a set threshold. Opposition parties’ capacity to compete is hampered not only by their lack of public finance but also by limited private funding as individuals, business groups and trade unions prefer to back election winners rather than losers.

**Building coalitions of parties**

The maintenance of dominance also rests on the ruling party’s capacity to form viable multiparty coalition governments and cabinets. It is determined by the degree of party system fragmentation and ideological distance between opposition parties, which can prevent them from forming connected winning coalitions to beat dominant centrist parties. In most democracies, the party with the largest share of the popular vote forms the government on its own or as the senior member of a coalition. Laver and Schofield argue that, in theory, if parties care only about policy and if politics really are one-dimensional, then the party who controls the median legislator will be in a dominant bargaining position and always ends up in government (Laver and Schofield, 1990: 80).

This inter-party coalition capacity can be enhanced by asymmetric preference distribution (as mentioned above for Scandinavia) or by increased competition due to factional defections, entry of new parties and so on. In Ireland in 1973, Fianna Fáil had been in power continuously since 1957 but was unseated by a coalition between Fine Gael and Labour. To regain office, Fianna Fáil had to form its own coalition with the Progressive Democrats in 1989 and with Labour in 1992.

Perhaps the most impressive example of this enduring capacity is the Italian DC, senior partner in all 51 coalition governments until its break up in 1994. Sartori explains the DC’s long term rule in Italy in terms of the presence of bipolar oppositions in a model of ‘polarized pluralism’ (Sartori, 1976). Party systems with large centre parties facing numerous competitors to the left and right tend to perpetuate long term rule by centrist parties. The left and right can never agree on an alternative to the centrist government party, as each is further from the other than from the government. Hence, while centrist parties do not necessarily govern alone, they govern continuously because their
competitors are unable to co-ordinate on an alternative that exclude them.

Given these conditions, in theory one may question why in post-war Italy coalition governments were frequently surplus majority coalitions and minority governments rather than minimum winning coalitions (Laver and Schofield, 1990: 71; Lijphart, 1999) as predicted by rational coalition theory (Riker, 1962).

In practice though, carrying extra passengers in a coalition may be a source of stability because it provides insurance against coalition break-ups, factional exits and uncertain legislative outcomes. In the first instance, this enabled Italy’s DC leaders to bind smaller coalition partners by making their exit threats less credible. A coalition withdrawal after the investiture vote would require a full scale government resignation and thus the formation of a new one which would be costly (Laver and Schofield, 1990: 86). Second, the extra legislative slack from a surplus majority removes leverage from factions whose policy positions on some issues may be closer to those of other parties not in the coalition. Such factions will be disinclined to defect knowing that they aren’t pivotal to government survival. Third, surplus majorities can facilitate legislative management and increase government efficiency. In Italy until 1988, the secret ballot was used frequently in the Chamber of Deputies making party discipline difficult to enforce and legislative outcomes difficult to predict. A surplus majority increased the likelihood that party leaders could deliver enough votes on key measures.

The idea of bargaining leverage indicates how pivotal individual parties and factions are in making and breaking interparty and intraparty coalitions and consequently in maximising payoffs. Coalition pivotality can be measured with power indices such as the Shapley-Shubik index or the Banzhaf index which draw attention to the notion of players who pivot: that is, those who can convert losing coalitions into winning coalitions. These indices estimate at specific points in time how pivotal individual parties (or factions) are in forming winning coalitions or in breaking existing ones.

The normalized Banzhaf index of power used here shows the number of times a player’s defection is pivotal in any winning coalition (Banzhaf, 1965). Given the legislative strength of a given party (or faction), the index computes in how many of all the possible winning coalitions above the 50 per cent threshold that party is a necessary partner. Despite the fact that the index is policy blind and thus assumes that all coalitions are equally probable, it nevertheless shows that parties who are decisive in many coalition alternatives have good chances of being included in government.

More importantly, by identifying the dominant player in bargaining games the index goes a long way in explaining why potential minimum winning coalitions fail to materialize - precisely because of problems of policy/ideological distance between parties or factions.

*Italy’s Christian Democrats (DC)*

I use the Banzhaf index to calculate the pivotal power of all the parties in the Italian Chamber of Deputies over several phases of DC dominance. Readers should note that I also use the same index to analyse inter-factional bargaining in time series in the DC and LDP (Boucek, 2012: chapters 7 and 8). The selected examples displayed on Table 3 demonstrate different scenarios of intra-party
fragmentation analysed in detail elsewhere (Boucek, 2010b: 130-31).

The results are normalised so that the total bargaining power of all the parties (or factions) add up to 1.00 (although this may not show on the tables due to rounding). The figures reported in Tables 1 and Table 2 show the proportion of seats and the fractional share of pivots for each of the parties competing in selected Italian elections (1958, 1972, 1976 and 1987) corresponding to different types of DC-led government coalitions involving different models of interparty bargaining as a result of changes in the party system’s balance of power. (Table 3 does the same for DC factions to examine internal coalition building).

The DC played a pivotal role in the formation of every multiparty government in Italy between 1945-1993 despite gaining an absolute parliamentary majority only in 1948. Prime Minister De Gasperi invited other parties to join the Christian Democrats in government to consolidate Italy’s fragile democracy and demonstrate to the American government the country’s willingness to join the fight against communism, an implicit condition for Italy’s receipt of Marshall Aid. For the next quarter century, Communist delegitimation became the linchpin of the DC’s coalition strategies based on the so-called *conventio ad excludendum* - an unwritten agreement to exclude the anti-system parties: the Communists (PCI) and the neo-fascist (MSI) from DC-led governments (Arian and Barnes, 1974: 597-599; Levite and Tarrow, 1983; Hine, 1993: 96-107). Readers will note that there is a 10 year overlap in the periods covered in Table 1 and Table 2 which focuses on the declining period of DC dominance from 1983-92 when the Socialists (PSI) played a prominent coalition role in keeping the Communists out. It shows how increased competition (resulting from the entry of new parties and the split of the Communists in the early 1990s) affects the coalition power of individual parties and the overall bargaining structure in the party system.

→ Insert Table 1 about here ←
1. **Centre right coalitions and Communist neutralization (1958-63)**

During this period, the DC dominated the legislative party system and formed centre-right coalitions with the Social Democrats (PSDI), the Republicans (PRI), and the Liberals (PLI). As Table 1 shows, the DC was strongly pivotal. For instance, in 1958, its 46 per cent seat share translated in a 70 per cent share of pivots. In other words, its coalition potential was very disproportional to its size. Of the six governments that formed during this period, four were minority single-party governments and two were DC-led multiparty coalitions that included the small PSDI (July 1958-Feb 1959) and even smaller PRI (Feb 1962-June 1963).

Internally, the DC was relatively concentrated. The party contained three observable factions although the effective number of factions \( N_f \) was 2.1\(^{15} \) due to the size of the majority De Gasperi faction which dominated the party national council. As Table 3 demonstrates in 1949, it held all the pivotal power and could dictate the party agenda since the other factions were dummies.

2. **Centre left coalitions and Communist neutralization (1963-76)**

This period is marked by centre-left coalitions initiated in 1963 when the DC dumped the Liberals in favour of the Socialists (PSI). This opening to the left was a pre-emptive strike by Prime Minister Aldo Moro to deter the formation of a Communist-Socialist alliance which would have been strong enough to defeat the DC. However, as the PCI vote and seat shares increased and those of the DC gradually declined, the PSI became more and more pivotal to government formation. Their participation would satisfy the ‘minimum winning’ criterion but the DC continued to carry surplus passengers (usually the PSDI and/or the PRI) as insurance against a PCI-PSI alliance.

Internally, the DC had become much more fragmented as a result of organisational reforms adopted in 1964 to allocate power to factions in various party organs in proportion to their size. In 1969 the DC contained seven observable factions [although the effective number of factions \( N_f \) was five] and no faction held majority control over the party congress. However, the plurality faction (*Impegno Democratico* - faction 3 in Table 3) enjoyed bargaining power disproportional to its size.

3. **Single-party government of national solidarity and Communist co-optation (1976-79)**

In the mid-1970s, Italy went through a severe national crisis marked by terrorist violence and economic recession. This prompted the DC to engineer a *rapprochement* with the Communists culminating in a ‘historic compromise’ in 1976 and the formation of a single-party (*monocolore*) government of national solidarity. This seismic general election saw the DC lose the ‘median’ voter to the small left-of-centre Republican Party. But more importantly, the Communists gained 34.4% of the popular vote (4.3 per cent behind the DC) and 34 per cent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. But numerically neither the DC nor the PCI could govern alone. The DC did not include the Communists in cabinet but gave them parliamentary committee memberships in exchange for their ‘constructive abstention’ on key bills such as the introduction of income policies.

\(^{15} \) For calculations of the effective number of factions in the DC and LDP in time series see Boucek, 2010b and 2012.
In sum, the DC kept inter-party competition in equilibrium by conniving with the opposition to blend a *de jure* anti-communist electoral strategy with *de facto* communist co-optation, first in the ‘parastate’ (in local and regional government) and then in the government of national unity. However, the kidnap and murder of Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades in the spring of 1978 brought this DC-PCI cooperation to an abrupt end. The PCI was dumped in favour of the Socialists (PSI) and Liberals (PLI). As Table 1 demonstrates, by 1976, the bargaining structure in the party system had changed as the centre of gravity shifted to the left translating into a significant drop in the pivotal power of the DC (from .53 to .42) whose seat share had stayed the same as in 1972.

This shift in the balance of power was to the benefit of the Socialists and detriment of the Communists whose share of pivots remained very disproportional to their parliamentary representation. With 227 seats in the Chamber of Deputies in 1976, the Communists were no more pivotal than the Socialists with their 35 seats (as Table 1 shows each had a .13 share of pivots).

![Table 2](image-url)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1983 Election</th>
<th></th>
<th>1987 Election</th>
<th></th>
<th>1992 Election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%Seats</td>
<td>Power*</td>
<td>%Seats</td>
<td>Power*</td>
<td>%Seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCI‡</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSI§</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PdUP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSDI</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLI</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSI[*]</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radicals</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern League</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Rete</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The normalised Banzhaf index of power is calculated using the software programme designed by Thomas König and Thomas Bräuninger (Mannheim Centre for European Social Research). Because of rounding, the scores might not add up to 1.00.

‡Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) after 1991.
§Socialist Unity Party (PSU) after 1990.
[*] Renamed Destra Nazionale.

PCI: Communists; PSI: Socialists; PSDI: Social Democrats; PRI: Republicans; DC: Christian Democrats; PLI: Liberals; MSI: Social Movement.
Internally, the factional balance of power reflected this shift to the left. Left factions gained more pivotality. However, internal factional defections and splits had raised the total number of factions to nine (effective number of factions: 7.8). Since no dominant faction controlled the party the factions had to coalesce into three main blocks at the 1976 congress (Table 4). Each factional bloc offered delegates a separate program backed by a separate motion-list. For a detailed analysis of the complicated interplay between inter-party and intra-party dynamics during this critical period, see Boucek, 2012: 157-163.

4. Multiparty coalitions (pentapartito) excluding the Communists (1979-92)

As the DC reverted to forming surplus multiparty coalitions that included the PSI, PLI, PSDI, and PRI, the Socialists’ participation became critical to government survival. The DC’s bargaining leverage was eroding in favour of the Socialists (PSI). Under Bettino Craxi, it became a decisive partner in DC-led coalition governments. Without the support of the Communists and neo-fascist MSI (the old anti-system parties located at each extreme of the ideological spectrum), no winning coalition could be formed that didn’t include the Socialists. As Table 2 demonstrates, in 1983 and 1987, the Socialists (PSI) and the Communists (PCI) were as pivotal in coalition terms even though in 1983 the Communists had 37 per cent more MPs than the Socialists and 53 per cent more MPs in 1987.

The PSI used this bargaining leverage to extract substantive payoffs from coalition partners and to destabilise government. They gained control of many important ministries such as Finance, Public Sector, and Defense and the top executive: the presidency in 1981 and the prime ministership in 1983 (Craxi was prime minister until 198716). To satisfy the lust for office of its junior coalition

---

16 Craxi was a corrupt politician, ineffective chief executive and very poor party leader. He failed to sort out Italy’s deficit, ignored demands for constitutional reform and presided over a very factionalized and corrupt Socialist Party who became the target of Milan investigating magistrates who brought down the political
partner, the DC created new cabinet and non-cabinet posts with no particular policy responsibilities. The Socialists used their blackmail potential to destabilise governments and were responsible for four of five government crises in the early 1980s. Internally, the DC has become hyper-fractionalised (12 observable factions by 1982), unstable and ungovernable.

Party system de-alignment at the end of the Cold War put an end to these unstable DC-led government coalitions. Anti-communism became irrelevant as an issue to rally support. Party competition intensified as a result of the split of the Communist Party in 1991 and the entry of new parties, notably the Northern League and anti-Mafia La Rete. In 1991, the government fell when the Republicans withdrew from the five-party (pentapartito) coalition which triggered a major realigning election in April 1992 when the DC’s share of the vote fell below 30 per cent for the first time in its history.

This was the tipping point in the DC’s collapse. Their support disintegrated in a series of local and regional elections over the next 18 months. Election defeats combined with factional disputes over constitutional reform and wide-ranging arrests of corrupt politicians in the ‘clean hands’ judicial investigation brought down Italy’s postwar political establishment and precipitated the implosion of the dominant Christian Democrats during their last congress in January 1994.

Coalition dominance is also about agenda control. By controlling the structural constraints of coalition bargaining, dominant parties can use procedural devices and institutional arrangements to maximise their own payoffs. For example, an incoming Italian government must gain the approval of the legislature through an investiture vote before taking office. Such investiture decision rules favour the ‘candidate government’ because abstentions effectively count in the government’s favour.

Implicit rules for selecting the Prime Minister are also biased in favour of the candidate government. Conventions give the senior coalition partner a leading role in the selection and distribution of cabinet and non-cabinet appointments, the chairmanships and composition of parliamentary committees and many other important political appointments that have the capacity to embed ruling parties in government.

Until 1992, Italy’s DC monopolised the chairmanships of all standing committees of both houses of parliament, managed their agendas and organised their consultations with others. Hence, in the long run, executive dominance gives long-term incumbents agenda-setting powers and a proprietary lock-in over the spoils of office which can be transformed into partisan resources to skew competition and maintain single party dominance.

---

17 For example, Andreotti’s 1976 government of solidarity had the support of only 258 out of 630 deputies but the minority government gained office comfortably due to the high level of abstentions in the investiture vote (Strom, Budge, and Laver, 1994).
Building coalitions of factions

Theories of one-party dominance cannot ignore intra-party competition since parties are not unitary actors but coalitions of individuals, sub-party groups and factions with diverse attitudes, interests and ambitions. Due to their large size and heterogeneity dominant parties are, by definition, more exposed to intra-party competition than smaller and more homogenous rival parties. Hence, we need to explain how party unity is maintained over time and to identify the conditions under which disunity might cause a decline or breakdown in dominance.

If unity is so essential for electoral success (and research suggests that cohesion is a good predictor of performance) then how can we explain that the most long-lasting dominant parties in western democracies – the DC and LDP - were also the most notoriously factionalized? And how did dominant parties like the UK’s Conservatives and Canada’s Liberals lose power after much shorter periods of internal strife? That’s the puzzle of my recent book which investigates the factors leading some dominant parties to degenerate into fatal factionalism and others to retain power by keeping factionalism in check (Boucek, 2012). A few conclusions are summarised below.

Party unity, factional cooperation and the maintenance of dominance

Factions can play a constructive role in building integrated parties under centripetal competition (Boucek 2009). By providing a structure of co-operation between separate leadership groups, factions can diversify party appeals and accelerate party integration. They can articulate the opinions and policy preferences of separate societal groups and mobilise separate memberships and communities of interests within a single organisation.

This form of ‘cooperative factionalism’ (Boucek, 2009) characterised the LDP and DC in the early days. The original DC factions resulted from various political groups who coalesced in 1945 around de Gasperi, former leader of the pre-war Popular Party of Italy (PPI) and Prime Minister of eight consecutive governments from 1945-53. Their cooperation during his leadership created a successful catch-all party easing Italy’s delicate transition from fascism to democracy.

The factionalism of Japan’s LDP is rooted in the 1955 merger of Liberals and Democrats which brought together eight different leadership groups with clearly separate memberships. After the Liberals lost their parliamentary majority in 1953, prolonged bargaining between all post-war Japanese parties was suddenly transformed by the reunification of left- and right-wing Socialists, prompting the Liberals and Democrats to merge. The LDP’s catch-all nature reflects the amalgamation of these various components from the Liberal and Democratic parties and pre-war bureaucrats like Hayato Ikeda and Eisaku Satō.

After the formative stage, inclusive rules and procedures for factional power-sharing cemented party unity in the DC and LDP. Faction leaders weren’t only decisive players in candidate selection as explained earlier but also in controlling leadership selection and the internal distribution and partisan resources including the allocation of government posts (Boucek, 2012: 135-142). Initially factions played a useful role as vehicles for the local mobilisation of the vote and national
coordination of elections and as instruments of intra-party democracy. Other non-majoritarian arrangements de-emphasising unity and partisanship helped dampen the competition for policy claims inside these dominant parties, thus relaxing the need for legislative discipline.

In contrast, in executive-dominant majoritarian democracies the pressures for party unity generate strong and cohesive political parties, which discourage factionalism but put a heavy burden of discipline on the party leader. This can be a source of strength by providing leaders with opportunities to introduce radical programmes without a strong party mandate such as Thatcher’s deflationary policies and Trudeau’s constitutional reforms. However, it can also be a source of weakness by stifling debate and making leaders feel invincible and prone to unilateral decisions and polarisation as with Thatcher’s ‘poll tax’ and Trudeau’s Quebec’s constitutional status. In the long run, party leaders must rely on discipline and social norms to thwart dissent and maintain trust in a caucus whose members hold the key to their survival. Otherwise, dissidents’ collective action risks destabilising parties and triggering the overthrow of sitting incumbents as in the case of Thatcher, Chrétien and nearly Major. Leaders’ willingness to compromise with dissidents and avoid threat power can be decisive in maintaining unity in dominant parties especially in competitive electoral markets – i.e. declining dominant party systems - where dissidents gain bargaining leverage.

**Competitive factionalism, defections and the breakdown of dominance**

Sooner or later, all ruling parties are likely to become losers as discontent and factional competition lead to party splits. Dissidents defecting to the opposition enlarge the field of competition, giving the opposition a real chance to compete. Hence, critical defections are frequently the main drivers of regime change following long periods of one-party dominance.

Dominant parties’ capacity to maintain unity over time declines as growth in the internal competition for election, ideological/policy and career claims push dissidents and the deprived to challenge the leadership through collective action and defection. The effectiveness of this collective action is shaped by institutions (as already explained) and determined by the size of a government’s majority which affects dissidents’ bargaining leverage and exit costs although the ideological location, size and cohesion of dissident factions also affect the credibility of their exit threats.

In Japan, the LDP’s first (albeit brief) loss of power in 1993 resulted from the defection of two dissident factions who allied to bring down the government in a motion of confidence before defecting to form breakaway parties. The members of the Mitsuzuka faction formed the new Sakigake (Harbinger Party) and the members of the Hata-Ozawa faction formed the Shinseito (‘New Born’ Party). In this expanded field of competition, a multiparty coalition was able to dislodge the LDP from power after four decades of one-party rule. In Italy, the defection from the DC of reform-minded elites frustrated by the party’s failure to change played a major role in the DC’s rapid decline in a series of elections in the early 1990s and its final implosion in 1994.

Factional struggles were also major contributors to the downfall and scale of defeat of dominant partiers in Britain and Canada. And, they contributed significantly to ending the dominance of the Congress party in India in 1989 (India’s first ‘hung’ parliament), the Kuomintang (KMT) in Taiwan in
2001, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in Mexico in 2000\textsuperscript{18} and the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) in Malaysia in 2008, to name only a few (Friedman and Wong, 2008). In one-party states such as China and the former Soviet Union, party factionalisation and splits are precursors of regime delegitimation and dismantling (Friedman, 2008; Ishiyama, 2008).

Organisational incentives that entrench factions in power can harm democracy and subtract value from a party brand. As faction leaders rather than the party leadership controlled office-seekers’ campaign benefits and office-holders’ career benefits in the DC and LDP, politicians switched their loyalty from the party and towards factions. This weakened partisanship and cohesion and provided ideal conditions for clientelism and machine politics. Party members became rent-seekers operating within intricate local networks run by self-serving regional oligarchs in Italy and faction-linked köenkai in Japan. In time, the privatisation of incentives through factions contributed to the declining popularity of the Italian Christian Democrats and Japanese Liberal Democrats.

To maximise their organisational clout, DC power-brokers were incentivised to split from existing factions and set up new ones. This increased party fragmentation and transformed factions into veto players creating collective action dilemmas and decisional stalemate inside the DC. At national congresses faction leaders would make deals behind closed doors which resulted in complicated and unstable factional alliances (Table 4). Faction leaders used their blackmail veto power in the national organisation to block much-needed party reforms under Zaccagnini in the 1970s and De Mita in the 1980s. Fragmentation of the LDP was moderated by district magnitude under SNTV and the seniority system regulating career advancement which discouraged elite faction-hopping.

In both parties, leadership selection resulted from factional bargaining in fragile ad-hoc factional alliances generated by the DC’s congressional motion-lists system and the LDP’s presidential primaries. Apart from pushing factions to decentralise their operations and become embedded in the party grassroots, these factionalised contests produced party leaders without clear mandates and revolving-door prime ministers. Paradoxically, the only strong LDP leaders (Nakasone and Koizumi) were those prepared to split their party.

Institutionalised factionalism was also counterproductive in national policymaking. The Italian and Japanese prime ministers lacked policy-making authority and statutory powers to bind cabinets or discipline representatives whose careers depended on factional affiliation rather than loyalty to the party leader. Disincentives to legislative cohesion in Italy’s reactive parliament generated by perverse procedural and consociational arrangements allowed rebels to escape the consequences of their actions producing gridlock, incoherent policies and unaccountable governments. In the Japanese non-partisan Diet, dissent was a non-issue. Members toed the party line without compulsion since public policy was made outside of parliament within ‘iron triangles’ and other institutions and legislative careers and advancement were determined by extra-parliamentary organisations such as the Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC) and LDP factions.

\textsuperscript{18} In 2000, the PRI lost the presidency for the first time after 71 years of political dominance although previous internal conflicts and state-level splits had increased the party’s vulnerability since 1987. In his brilliant book Kenneth Greene explains this dominance in terms of the PRI’s power to bias electoral competition by turning public resources into patronage goods (Greene, 2007).
My research also shows that electoral market conditions affect dominant parties’ exposure to factionalism and defections. One-party dominance breaks down when changes in the electoral market increase the vulnerability of ruling parties shifting dissidents’ trade-offs between voice and exit. The leadership’s failed responses to deterioration in the quality of governance may trigger critical defections and the loss of power. In a sub-competitive electoral market such as a dominant party system where the governing party or coalition has a large working majority exit threats by dissidents and disgruntled office-holders wouldn’t be credible. Their support would be unlikely to be pivotal to government survival although they might still organise as a faction to voice discontent. However, in a competitive market these actors would gain bargaining leverage because their support would be more critical to government survival making their exit threats more credible and creating opportunities for collective action.

Table 4: Christian Democratic Party of Italy, factional strength and pivotal power, 1976 national congress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress (thirteenth)</th>
<th>List</th>
<th>Factions</th>
<th>Support (per cent)</th>
<th>Banzhaf power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pro-Zaccagnini factions: <em>(Rifondazione Del Partito)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Forze Nuove</em>: Donat-Cattin</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Base</em> (De Mita)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Morotei</em></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rumor, Gullotti</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pro-Forlani factions: ‘<em>Unita e rinnovamento</em>’ (Daf)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Dorotei</em></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Andreotti</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fanfani</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dissident fanfaniani: ‘<em>Autonomia per il rinnovamento</em>’ (Arnaud, Prandini, Becciu)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Data from Leonardi and Wertman (1989) as before, and Galli (1993) Mezzo secolo di Dc.*

My book’s chapter 2 illustrates the market for political consent under two opposite demand scenarios affecting dissidents’ bargaining leverage and exit costs.
In Britain the Conservatives’ reduced majority in 1992 increased the bargaining leverage of a minority eurosceptic faction whose legislative rebellions greatly undermined the authority of Prime Minister John Major as the Conservatives’ narrow majority dwindled to zero by the end of their fourth consecutive parliament (for a detailed analysis of these conflicts applying game theory, see Boucek, 2012 chapter 4). In 1997, the Conservatives adopted a parliamentary mass-membership hybrid system to protect future leaders and sitting prime ministers from any messy coups like the one suffered by Thatcher in 1990 and nearly by Major in the 1995 leadership challenge. However, the 2001 party membership runoff race between the two front runners selected by MPs produced majority failure which cost the Conservatives dearly.

Similar exit opportunities prevailed in Italy and Japan in the early 1990s when the competitive playing field expanded with new parties’ entry and old parties’ splits. These conditions made exit more attractive for intra-party dissidents disgruntled by their corrupt political masters and party leaders’ failures to effectively respond to brand deterioration.

In Italy, the 1992 realigning election was the tipping point pushing DC supporters and party members (reformist politicians, the rank and file and grassroots) to abandon this value-destroying brand, leading to DC splintering into four groupings at its final congress in 1994.

In Japan, reformist politicians faced strong disincentives to mobilise because their defection threats wouldn’t be credible. When the LDP’s parliamentary majority was vulnerable due to scandals, the party relied on independent MPs to get its government bills passed. So long as opposition forces remained weak, fragmented and uncoordinated, the collective action needed to unseat the LDP was bound to fail explaining why defection plots foundered in 1960, 1966 and 1974 and why the breakaway Liberal Club rejoined the LDP in 1986. However, in the early 1990s, political scandals boosted the ranks of floating voters providing the right conditions for collective action by opposition forces and LDP dissidents to coalesce. Trading off voice for exit, defectors joined the opposition, deprived the LDP of its majority and drove it from power after 38 years of continuous rule.

**Conclusion**

One-party dominance in the developed world prevailed mainly during the second half of the 20th century. In this paper, I explained ruling parties’ success in maintaining themselves in power through the short-cut of coalition building. The first section analysing parties’ strategies in building coalitions of voters was explained from sociological, institutional and strategic perspectives and supported by cross-country evidence.

From a sociological perspective, ruling parties mobilise large groups of voters from diverse socio-economic and geographic backgrounds by activating salient cleavages, re-structuring electorates and cultivating links with specific sectional interests. However, in post-industrial societies, partisan dealignment and the hollowing out of the state have weakened partisanship making parties’ catch-all strategies more difficult to sustain.

Institutionally, dominant parties’ advantages are boosted by reductive voting systems in majoritarian democracies (Britain and Canada) where single-member plurality rule (SMP) exaggerates the
victories of majority parties. In contrast, permissive electoral systems in non-majoritarian consensus democracies (Italy and Japan) are less advantageous to dominant parties. However, the old voting systems used in Italy and Japan which allowed co-partisan competition provided opportunities for machine politics and the development of the exchange vote through by factions.

Strategically, ruling parties seek to maintain centrist support and capture the median voter through spatial positioning and by repositioning themselves in response to shifting voter preferences. This was demonstrated through various examples including the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP). Its dominance rested on its cohesion and the asymmetric distribution of preferences skewed to the right which hampered opposition parties’ coalition strategies.

The second section analysed dominant parties’ capacity to form durable government coalitions which rests on the degree of party system fragmentation and the ideological distance between opposition parties. These factors can prevent opposition parties from forming connected winning coalitions to beat dominant centrist parties. It was examined through snapshots of the bargaining leverage of Italy’s Christian Democrats in forming multiparty coalition governments at different periods including inter-factional bargaining.

The final section examined dominant parties’ capacity to maintain unity within party ranks. My research suggests that party unity is a necessary albeit insufficient condition for party dominance. However, unity is difficult to maintain in the long run because conflict and competitive pressures grow the longer parties are in government. These internal pressures increase the risk of dissen
dence and factional defections which may lead to a breakdown in one-party dominance if dissen
dence is pivotal. The adoption of inclusive rules and procedures such as the ones adopted by the LDP and DC to give factions proportional stakes in the organization may ease internal cooperation. However, they can also produce negative trade-offs accelerating exit.

Bibliography


