"Parties in Congress: A to Z (Part 1)"
Prof. Anthony Madonna
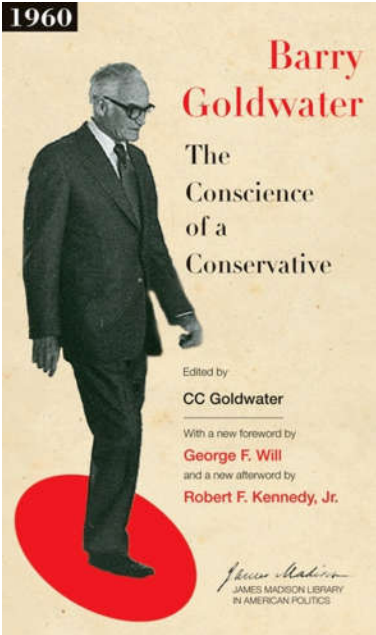POLS 4620E
Lecture #18
University of Georgia

Party Theories

Ideology v. Party (the Debate):

Can you show a member's party affiliation *independently influences* a member's vote once you control for the member's ideology?

In other words, does someone like former Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA) have an ideologically conservative voting record because he's a Republican OR is he a Republican because he is ideologically conservative?

Ideology

1960

Barry Goldwater

The Conscience of a Conservative

Edited by
CC Goldwater

With a new foreword by
George F. Will
and a new afterword by
Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

JAMES MADISON LIBRARY IN AMERICAN POLITICS

What is it?

Is it substantive?

Is it simply methodological? Meaning, is it primarily a number political observers use to predict behavior?

If it's substantive is it just a cue for voters or is there a deeper meaning and utility for it?

Certainly it provides a cue. A "conservative" is generally associated with lower taxes.

There is also a measurement component. It helps us predict policy output, which is useful.

Party Theories

Why do we care?

A really important question…

Do we vote for the member **_OR_** the party?

Knowing the influence of party helps voters make that choice.

It also helps analysts better predict legislative outcomes.

Mike Garcia @MikeGarcia2020 · May 14
US House candidate, CA-25
I'd like to give a special thanks to everyone who supported our effort. I'm honored to serve on behalf of the people of #CA25. Whether you voted for me or not, I promise to be an independent voice on your behalf in Washington.

MIKE GARCIA

0:51   22.1K views

226   628   2.9K

Above: Newly elected Rep. Mike Garcia (R-CA), who campaigned aggressively on being an "independent voice" in Washington.

Finally, if the goal is to fix problems stemming from "polarization," knowing the impact of parties is key. If parties are already impactful, then further strengthening them is unlikely to fix polarizations.

Party Theories

Above: Senate Republicans surround Senator Jeff Flake (R-AZ) after he waivered on a pivotal vote during the Judiciary Committee hearings on Supreme Court Appointee Brett Kavanaugh in 2018.

<u>Why might they matter independent of preferences?</u>

There is electoral value in maintaining a coherent partisan "brand name." It provides a useful cue for voters.

Parties can provide electoral resources by way of campaign cash. Moreover, they can offer institutional resources that may also help members campaigns (committees assignments, legislative favors, etc.).

Party pressure: members socialize with fellow partisans and do not want to alienate them.

Members are willing to trade their support on many issues, as they may not hold fixed positions on everything.

Party Theories

<u>Why might they **NOT** matter?</u>

In U.S. politics, members are expected to mobilize their own resources to win primary elections.

They represent geographic districts that incentivize them to defect from the party line when necessary.

Above: The top two delegate winners in the 2016 Republican primary, neither of whom enjoyed much support from the party establishment.

Legislative and Executive branch ambition does not reward members who campaign as loyal partisans.

Leadership resources to induce party loyalty are limited.

Party Theories: CPG

Above: Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA).

Conditional Party Government (Aldrich and Rohde) ("CPG")

Parties due have an independent impact on member behavior when the "conditions" are met.

Specifically, when intra-party homogeneity and inter-party heterogeneity are both high, the majority party should be more successful in structuring the House floor.

This is because rank and file members centralize authority to the Speaker and other leaders in a variety of ways (more control over committee appointments, allow them to use restrictive rules more, etc...).

Party Theories: CPG

How do the conditions in CPG work? To answer that, consider a hypothetical 11 member legislature organized on an ideological (left-right) unidimensional spectrum. There are six majority party Democrats ("**D**") and five minority party Republicans ("**R**").

When should power be centralized leading to more party effects?
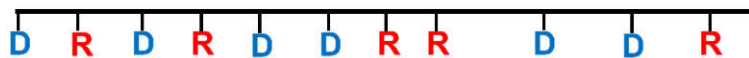
In the Figure above, neither condition is met. The majority Democratic party is not ideologically homogenous. Democrats are spread out all over the ideological spectrum. Nor are the two parties ideologically heterogenous, Republicans and Democrats overlap ideologically.

So power should be dispersed.

Party Theories: CPG
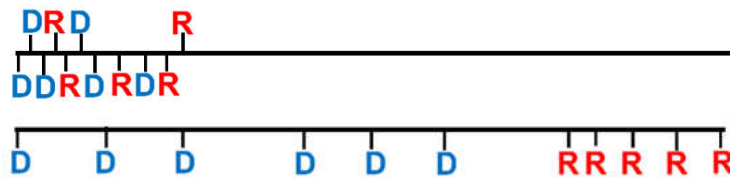
In both of the figures above, only one condition is met. In the top figure, the majority party is ideologically homogenous (i.e. the Democrats are all fairly liberal). However, interparty heterogeneity is low (i.e. the Republicans are also fairly liberal and the parties overlap). Accordingly, there is no need for the majority to centralize power.

In the second figure, interparty (between party) heterogeneity is high. There is a lot of ideological spread between the Democratic and Republican Party medians. However, intraparty homogeneity is low. Majority Party Democrats are spread out all over the ideological spectrum. Thus, centralizing power in the hands of a speaker is risky as they may move on policies where there is policy disagreement.

So power should be dispersed in both cases.

Party Theories: CPG
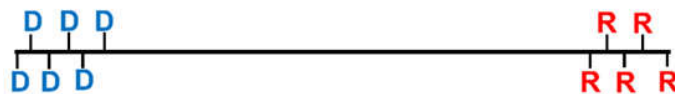
In the Figure above, both conditions are met. The Majority Party Democrats are ideologically cohesive and there is significant spread between them and the Republican Party. Accordingly, they should centralize power under a Speaker.

These centralized powers will allow the Speaker and Majority Party to push through policies at a quick rate, thus allowing them to maximize policy gain.

So power should be centralized.

Party Theories: PCT

Party Cartel Theory (Cox and McCubbins)

Party Cartel Theory ("PCT") concurs in the argument that parties have an independent impact on member behavior.

Above: Former Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL) became the high-ranking elected official in American history to receive a prison sentence in 2016. He was released 13 months later.

The House majority party's ability to employ negative agenda-control powers is unconditional. The House majority's control over the Rules Committee has been exercised throughout congressional history and tilts policy outcomes towards the majority.

Specifically, under PCT, the majority party is always able to keep divisive outcomes off the floor and "Hastert Rule" violations should always be low.

Party Theories: Pivotal Politics

Pivotal Politics (Krehbiel)

The theory of pivotal politics argues that parties do not have an independent impact on member behavior.

The key observation underlying it is that legislation must bypass numerous veto players in the legislative process before it becomes law. The pivotal player is then determined by ordering legislators by ideology in a unidimensional, spatial model and applying the relevant decision rule.

So in the contemporary House, the pivotal player is likely to be the House floor or committee median.

GENERAL SPEECHES - ONE HOUR
REP. DAVID SCOTT
D-Georgia, 13th District
Mableton, Jonesboro, Union City

Above: Rep. David Scott (D-GA), a member of the Blue Dog Coalition.

Questions, Concerns, Angry Rants?

Next: A to Z Debate