

The Dynamics of Dominance

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What explains how long parties are in power in parliamentary democracies and why they change? Understanding change (and lack of change) in power is one of the central tasks of political science, yet the existing literature on parliamentary government has largely ignored the question of actual changes in parties in government, focusing instead on cabinet duration and change. The scholarship on dominant party systems suggests many causes, but includes few systematic analyses. This paper suggests a framework through which we can analyze dominance, focusing on the three challenges that dominant parties must continually overcome: vote acquisition, electoral coordination, and parliamentary coordination. It applies this framework to four countries that have had dominant party systems: Ireland, Japan, Norway and Sweden. Existing theories of dominance are not consistent with the end of dominance in these countries and this paper suggests that a Rikerian model of party competition be the beset hope for a unified theory of dominant party system dynamics.

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Introduction

What explains how certain parties in parliamentary democracies remain in power for decades? What explains their eventual loss of power? Dominant parties remain in power for decades or generations. The Social Democrats in Sweden were in power uninterrupted from 1936 to 1976, the Christian Democrats in Italy from 1945 to 1993, the Liberal Democrats in Japan from 1955 to 1993, to name a few of the more prominent examples. The existing literature on dominant parties does not generally help us explain the dynamics of dominant party systems – they either tend to be primarily descriptive (Duverger 1954, Sartori 1976, and to a certain extent Pempel 1990), primarily explanations of party popularity or vote share (Przeworski and Sprague 1986, Esping-Andersen 1985) or static institutional explanations (Cox 1997, McGann 2002).

In this paper, I focus on three challenges facing would-be dominant parties: vote acquisition, electoral coordination and parliamentary coordination. I review dominance in four countries: Ireland, Japan, Norway and Sweden, arguing that a systematic analysis of the dynamics of dominant parties requires understanding all three challenges, thus incorporating structural and institutional variables, as well as understanding the strategies that parties take. While existing theories of dominance do not explain the dynamics of dominance, the empirical record suggests that application of a Rikerian model of party competition might serve best.

The following section reviews the literature on dominant party systems, and is followed by presenting the systematic framework for evaluating the dynamics of dominance. I then present brief overviews of changes in dominance in Ireland, Japan, Norway and Sweden that illustrate the importance of considering vote acquisition, electoral coordination and parliamentary coordination in understanding the dynamics of dominance. Finally I review

theories of dominant party systems, suggesting that a Rikerian multidimensional model of party competition best captures fundamental causes of changes in dominance.

Understanding Dominant Party Systems

In categorizing party systems, little consensus has been reached for a definition of dominant party systems.¹ Scholars have defined dominance from their own theoretical perspectives or empirical purposes. Sartori's (1976) definition of predominance requires three consecutive elections with a clear majority in the parliament. Pempel (1990) has four criteria for dominance, primarily differing from Sartori in terms of longevity: 30+ years of rule.

The term 'dominant party' was popularized by Duverger in his seminal 1951 book. Duverger described the category of 'dominant parties' as one of his four types of development of the party system (along with alternation, stable distribution and leftism). He argued that the dominant party type could be assumed by any of the other three. Duverger defined dominance by its consequences: 'A party is dominant when it is identified with an epoch; when its doctrines, ideas, methods, its style, so to speak, coincide with those of the epoch.'

In 1974 Arian and Barnes published the first significant article that explicitly examines the nature of dominant party systems, focusing on Italy and Israel. Arian and Barnes argue that a dominant party system is dependent on the performance of the dominant party: 'So long as the dominant party performs intelligently, the opposition can do little that is effective. Even bad decisions will not be disastrous unless the opposition is in a position to take advantage of them, and it seldom is.' (p. 600)

¹ See Sartori (1976), who comments on a 'confusion' in the usage of the term, and things have only gotten worse since then.

Levite and Tarrow (1983) extended Arian and Barnes to include an examination of the decline of dominance in Italy and Israel. They emphasize the importance of actions by the opposition parties in the survival and eventual downfall of dominant party systems. While Arian and Barnes essentially deny opposition parties agency, Levite and Tarrow emphasize the role played by opposition parties taking steps to attempt to gain legitimacy as a contender for government, which is made possible by national crises.

The most extensive work to date exclusively on dominant party systems in established democracies is *Uncommon Democracies* (1990), edited by T.J. Pempel. In the conclusion, Pempel focuses on a 'cycle of dominance' which includes a clear beginning, a process of maintenance, and then various crises that the party overcomes to remain in power. The beginning, characterized as a 'mobilization crisis', and the maintenance of dominance by overcoming political crises, are based in a set of historical circumstances which provide the dominant party an advantageous position in regards to the most salient cleavages, and by the strategic actions of the dominant parties. The end of dominance is attributable to the eventual inability of the dominant party to either maintain its base, or to overcome a crisis.

The scholars above evaluate dominant party systems largely in a descriptive manner. Unfortunately, their theories give little systematic predictive or explanatory power. For example, the cycle of dominance suggested by Pempel is difficult to distinguish from the cyclical nature of other competitive party systems: parties come to power, face challenges, and eventually fall from power in the face of some challenge or crisis they cannot overcome.

From another tradition in the party systems literature comes a different explanation of party dominance. The number and ideological location of parties in a political system is not only affected by the electoral system, but by the nature of cleavages in a society. Attempts to explain

the number and size of parties have often rested on cleavage structure. Older scholarship (such as Duverger) argued that the number of parties in a PR system represented the number of salient cleavages, but more recent scholarship has argued for a view of number of parties as a result of a multiplicative function of cleavages and electoral system permissiveness (see Sartori, 1976; Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 1994; Amorim-Neto and Cox, 1997). While the argument is rarely made explicit, given a cleavage structure where the major salient issues divide a population into a unified majority (or near-majority) and fragmented minority, one could easily imagine a dominant party system resulting.

Dahl and Tufte (1973), argues that size correlates with homogeneity, and a homogeneous community is likely to lead to a one-party system. Dahl and Tufte focus on this argument within states, comparing party organizations and representative institutions at national, regional and local levels. Dag Anckar (1997) expands this analysis to small Pacific island states. States with populations of approximately 100,000 or less are very likely to have either a no-party or dominant party system, a rare occurrence in larger island states. While the size argument does not hold for explaining dominant party systems in larger states, the analysis suggests that the roots of dominance may be in the demography or the cleavage structure of society. A unified majority or large plurality of society faced with a divided opposition (as has been suggested in numerous African cases, see Bogaards 2004). Explanations of dominance in this sociological tradition might suggest that changes in demography and social cleavages would be the root cause of changes in dominance.

The literature on party systems have drawn not only such sociological perspectives, but on models of ideological competition, often building on the Downs' 1957 classic. Both Riker (1982) and Sartori (1976) develop specific models of one-party dominance in light of broader

theory on political parties. Riker, in a paper which defends and updates Duverger's Law, suggests that the reason for Congress domination of Indian politics based on the central ideological location of the party. He argues that the left and right fail to agree on a possible candidate at the district level that would be able to challenge the Congress candidate successfully, thus Congress candidates are Condorcet winners. Implicitly, the end of dominance could occur when the left and right succeed in an allying against the center.

Sartori's approach to polarized pluralism has somewhat similar consequences, focusing primarily at the parliamentary level. Sartori argues that a large, centrally positioned party with bilateral opposition from both the left and the right causes centrifugal effects on other parties' ideological stances (inhibiting strategic moves toward the largest party), and also enjoys the dominant position in any coalition building. Laver and Schofield (1990) suggest an adaptation of Sartori's arguments regarding polarized pluralism, using the case of Italy. Using a model of coalition formation in which coalitions are formed along a unidimensional left-right ideological space, following the logic of Black and Downs, the median party will dominate coalition formation. Formal models of coalition government generally suggest that a centrally located party may be dominate coalition formation (Laver and Shepsle 1996).

While some scholars have looked at the nature of ideological competition, others have focused on the role of institutions in supporting dominance. Cox (1997) reconceptualizes the above arguments concerning central position in ideological space as an issue of strategic coordination. He argues that coordination failure among the opposition parties and coordination success by the dominant party are a major factor behind party dominance. The inability of a left-right coalition to form against the center is an instance of coordination failure, as the central

ideological location of the Christian Democrats or Congress allowed them to achieve coordination success in electoral campaigning and government formation.

Looking at the case of Japan, Cox concludes that there may be institutional incentives for coordination failure and success in the electoral system that are not driven by ideological concerns. The difficulty in effectively dividing the vote in Japan's SNTV electoral system with medium sized (3-5 member) districts creates a need for strategic coordination among voters and candidates, which is more efficiently done using the resources gained by being the party in power. This echoes the argument of Reed (1994a), which suggests the multimember districts with a strong personal vote may contribute to dominance.

McGann (2002), like Cox, focuses on institutional explanations for party dominance. The differences are significant however, as he focuses on Western Europe rather than Japan and the institutional cause is how the electoral system affects party motivations. Simply put, for a party to be dominant, the opposition must have incentive to remain divided and to not (jointly) maximize their votes. Following Strøm (1990), he argues that institutions affect party motivations, and systems that create a "comfortable spot for principled losers" – in effect, essentially all proportional representation systems – may encourage dominant parties.

Explanations such as Cox and McGann, emphasizes the role of institutions in shaping incentives of parties and voters. Both Cox and McGann present static explanations for dominance: they explain why dominant parties may be advantaged by the incentives created by certain institutions in parliamentary democracies. However neither Cox nor McGann provide any systematic theory for explaining change in dominance absent institutional reform.

The Framework

The approaches to explaining dominant party systems then are extremely varied – some scholars focus on institutions, others on ideological competition between parties, others on demographic or other societal characteristics. All of them have some prima facie validity – they seem more or less reasonable, consistent with the empirical record. However given the plethora of competing explanations it is worth trying to systematically analyze the roots of dominance.

This section suggests a simple framework for analyzing dominance – a lens through which we can empirically analyze the dynamics of dominant party systems and evaluate the utility of the existing theories of dominance. I argue that obtaining and maintaining control of government can be analytical separated into three steps: capturing votes in parliamentary elections, translating those votes into seats in parliament, and translating seats in parliament into control of government. These three challenges for would-be dominant parties are referred to hereafter as vote acquisition, electoral coordination and parliamentary coordination.

This framework rests on a delegative model of parliamentary democracy (see Strøm 2003). The definition of a parliamentary democracy is its ‘efficient’ secret – the accountability of the executive to parliament. In parliamentary democracy, control of government rests on the support of parliament. The party or parties that control a majority of seats in parliament can control government. Naturally there is not a one to one relationship between share of parliamentary seats and control of government. Government formation is based on coordination among parties and MPs, and governed by parliamentary rules. In a Westminster-style system, the result is generally quite predictable: the majority party takes office. In multiparty systems where there is no majority party (the more common case) complex coalition bargaining often occurs.

Even in single party governments, parliamentary coordination is important. Single party governments depend on *intraparty* coordination, not *interparty* coordination. By using the label political parties, we are already implying some form of coordination among MPs of the same party. Multiparty coalition governments require both intraparty and interparty parliamentary coordination. Understanding parliamentary coordination is the key to explaining the translation of seats in parliament into control of government.

Parliamentary seats are in turn a function of popular votes. The translation of votes into seats depends of course on the electoral system (see Taagepera and Shugart 1989) and also electoral coordination (Cox 1997, 1999). An electoral system is the rules which govern the translation of votes to seats, primarily districting, ballot type, and rules of vote allocation. Electoral coordination is the strategic interaction of voters, candidates and parties who coordinate so as to elect their preferred candidates. Understanding electoral coordination is the key to explaining the translation of popular votes into seats in parliament.

Finally, there is the most obvious challenge that parties face in entering and remaining in government: ensuring that the party garners sufficient votes. Without votes there are no seats, and ultimately no place in government. This is particularly difficult for governing parties to sustain over time. Governing parties tend to be on the losing end of the competition for votes – they lose votes in elections roughly two-thirds of all elections in established democracies (Rose and Mackie, 1983, Narud and Valen forthcoming).

Theoretically, changes in vote acquisition, electoral coordination or parliamentary coordination could be sufficient to cause a change in dominance. A dominant party could fail to maintain its vote share, fail to translate those votes effectively into seats, or fail to translate their parliamentary seats, any of which could upset their ability control of government. This is not

simply a pointless parsing of parliamentarism; the following section shows empirically that understanding all three challenges is actually necessary to understand the loss of dominance. I briefly review six instances of changes in dominance from four nations: Ireland, Japan, Norway and Sweden, highlighting the significance of the three challenges. Ignoring vote acquisition, electoral coordination or parliamentary coordination leaves one with an incomplete picture of the dynamics of dominance.

The Dynamics of Dominance

Norway 1963

While Sweden has always been considered the paradigmatic case of successful European social democracy, in the early postwar period the position of the Norwegian social democrats looked at least as strong, perhaps stronger, than that of their Swedish counterparts. Like their Swedish counterparts, the Norwegian social democrats were in power continuously from the mid-1930s, and after WWII had been more successful – while in Sweden the social democrats relied on the parliamentary support of the Agrarians in the 1950s, in Norway they were a majority party for the first decade and a half following WWII.

In the 1961 election the Labour Party failed to attain a majority of seats for the first time in the postwar era, and its control of government was dependent upon two seats held by the newly formed Socialist People's Party (SF). The Socialist People's Party had been formed from former members of the Labour Party who left the party over the issue of NATO membership. The Labour Party polled 46.8% of the vote overall in the 1961 election, down 1.5% from the previous election, but higher than the first three postwar elections. However, in the earlier elections the greater electoral system was much less proportional, and Labour was able to secure

solid parliamentary majorities in each election. The four seats Labour lost in 1961 were enough to deny it a majority, but following the election it remained in government, dependent on the legislative support of the two seats held by the Socialist People's Party. The Norwegian Communists (NKP) and the SF jointly polled 5.3 percent of the popular vote, but only elected two members (out of 150) to the Storting, both from the SF.

The no-confidence vote that Einar Gerhardsen lost in August of 1963 was the fourth that his minority government had faced since 1961. The three prior votes had failed because the Socialist People's Party's two representatives supported the government, knowing that a vote against the Labour government would inevitably lead to a non-socialist coalition government. While a government that fails a no-confidence vote may call early elections in most parliamentary democracies, Norway has no provision for early elections, so a successful no-confidence vote must lead to government replacement rather than elections.

However, in 1963 in a rare (at least for the era) instance of nonsocialist-extreme left cooperation, the Gerhardsen government fell on a no-confidence vote relating to its handling of the Kings Bay controversy in which the government stonewalled an investigation into possible oversights in a mining disaster (for more details see Rokkan 1966). Given the public outcry regarding the government's handling of the issue, it was not surprising that the non-socialist parties would propose a no-confidence measure on the issue. Even when parties have no chance of passing their motion, frequently political parties use them to call attention to issues and policies which might embarrass the government (Bergman, Müller, Strøm, Blomgren 2003). More surprisingly, the Socialist People's Party supported the vote.

The Lyng government that replaced the Social Democrats did not last long. Knowing that it did not have sufficient parliamentary support to govern, it provoked its own demise by

calling a confidence vote on its budget proposal (Strøm 1990). Twenty-eight years of social democratic government (a significant portion as a government in exile during WWII) were followed by just twenty-eight days of non-socialist government before the social democrats returned to power. Gerhardsen and the social democrats again formed a minority government, which remained for the final two years of the parliamentary term.

Japan 1993

The loss of power of the Liberal Democrats in Japan in 1993 in many ways mirrors the Norwegian case thirty years earlier. As in the Norwegian case, the loss of power by the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan in 1993 shows the critical importance of understanding parliamentary coordination. The 1993 Lower House election, after which the LDP lost power for the first time since it was formed thirty-eight years earlier, was precipitated by a split in the ruling party and a failed no-confidence vote. And following the 1993 election it was far from certain that the LDP would be ousted from power: they remained the largest party following the election, and the other parties were small and fragmented. However after lengthy coalition bargaining an eight-party coalition was formed that excluded the LDP, which entered the opposition for the first time. The eight-party coalition government fell after a year in office, and the LDP has been in office either in coalition or by itself, since August 1994.

The loss of power of the Liberal Democratic Party in 1993 can be seen as occurring in three distinct stages. First, there were the splits in the party and loss of a no-confidence vote, supported by many of the recent defectors from the party. Prime Minister Miyazawa then called an election in which the LDP failed to achieve a majority, although it remained more than twice the size of any other party. Finally, following the election, coalition bargaining took place in

which the LDP failed to convince any party to enter coalition with it, and ended up on the outside looking.

The factors leading to the split in the LDP have been analyzed extensively (see especially Cox and Rosenbluth 1995, Kato 1998, Reed and Scheiner 2003). Reed and Scheiner's recent work emphasizes the importance of two factors in explaining the split: the most important consideration was the policy divisions over the issue of political reform, and a secondary factor revolved around the degree of electoral vulnerability (p. 489). Analysis of the 1993 election also strongly supports the contention that MPs who split from the party and supported reform significantly improved their electoral performance (Reed 1994b).

While the vulnerable former LDP members who broke from the party in 1993 improved their electoral performance, support for LDP candidates who did not split from the party did not decline markedly. And with fewer established candidates in the 1993 election, the LDP failed to reestablish the parliamentary majority it had lost to the split. As Kabashima and Reed (2001, 630) note, the loss of the LDP majority required both the departure of the 46 incumbent LDP members to new parties, and an election in which the LDP was not popular enough to be able to successfully replace them.

However the LDP did remain the largest party following the 1993 election, and most coalition theories would predict, given its near-majority size and the diversity of policy preferences among the other parties, it would be able to retain its dominant position in government by forming a coalition with one or more of the smaller parties. But as Curtis (1999) notes, the issue of electoral reform dominated the coalition formation process, allowing an unprecedented eight party coalition that excluded the LDP to form government, relegating the Liberal Democrats to the opposition for the first time in their history.

The similarities between Norway 1963 and Japan 1993 are somewhat surprising. The loss of power in both cases primarily revolves around parliamentary coordination, both inter- and intra-party. Both began with intraparty splits (the break-off of SF from DNA in Norway, the splits of the NFP, Sakigake and others from the LDP in Japan), in both cases the splinter parties received sufficient popular support in the subsequent election to deny the dominant party a parliamentary majority. In Norway, the splinter group at first supported a minority social democratic government, but withdrew support briefly after two years, ending twenty-eight continuous years of social democratic government. In Japan, the splintered parties formed a coalition government with the former opposition parties following the election, but this government fell and was replaced by a coalition of the dominant party with its longtime opposition the JSP after only one year.

Norway 1965

The loss of power of the social democrats in 1963 was considered by many to be a fluke – if there had been serious consequences to the Socialist People’s Party (SF) for voting against the Social Democrats, perhaps it might never have occurred. But as the socialist bloc retained its parliamentary majority, no policy reversals could be expected, nor was it possible for an early election to be called. So in many ways the loss of power the social democrats loss of power in 1963 was inconsequential – except that it served to distinguish the SF from the dominant social democrats. And in the 1965 parliamentary election, one can see that the strategies that the Socialist People’s Party took in their first parliamentary term paid off handsomely in terms of increased vote share. The SF increased their share of the popular vote from 2.4% to 6%, drawing votes largely from former Labour and Communist Party supporters. Unfortunately for the party,

and for the socialist bloc as a whole, although the SF more than doubled its vote share, it elected the same number of MPs (2). And the votes lost by the social democrats were sufficient to give the nonsocialist bloc a parliamentary majority.

In fact, in the 1965 and 1969 Norwegian elections although the socialist bloc remained the choice of a majority of voters, it was unable to translate that popular majority into a majority of parliamentary seats. In the 1940s and 1950s the socialist bloc had a significant advantage in converting votes to seats. This advantage reversed in the 1960s as nonsocialist electoral cooperation improved and socialist bloc support fragmented and the nonsocialists improved their electoral coordination. In 1957 there were 23 socialist bloc lists that did not elect a single candidate, and 6.1% of the socialist bloc's total vote was wasted on these lists. In 1965 there were 34 socialist lists that didn't elect a single candidate and over 10% of the total socialist bloc vote was wasted. Nearly the exact reverse holds true for the nonsocialist bloc – in 1957 nearly 11% of their total votes were wasted, whereas only 6.1% of their total votes were wasted in 1965.

Looking at the district-level data also allows us to estimate the impact of electoral coordination more directly. Of the eleven seats that changed hands across the two blocs between 1957 and 1965, only one change was due to shifts in voter support. The remaining must be explained by changes in electoral coordination. In fact, government changed hands six hands between 1963 and 1973 in Norway: four times due to changes in parliamentary coordination, and twice due to changes in electoral coordination. Throughout this entire period the Norwegian socialist bloc maintained similar popular support to their Swedish neighbors, but were unable to convert that as successfully into control of parliamentary seats and government (see Nyblade, Chapter 6).

Ireland 1973

The social democrats and their allies were supported by a popular majority in Norway in the 1960s, but were unable to maintain dominance because they were unsuccessful at translating that support into control of governance. Fianna Fail's dominance in Ireland on the other hand, at least in the 1960s, was based on the inability of the opposition to translate their support into parliamentary seats, and dominance ended when the opposition finally coordinated successfully.

Fianna Fail (FF) was in power for thirty-four of forty years from 1932 to 1973. They competed as the 'natural' governing party, in many ways they fit Duverger's description of a dominant party to the letter. So what happened in 1973 that caused Fianna Fail to lose their majority in the Dail? There are a number of reasons to expect Fianna Fail to be weaker in 1973 than it had been in the 1960s. In May 1970, scandal over arms smuggling to Northern Ireland erupted, two Fianna Fail Ministers were dismissed by the Taoiseach (PM) Jack Lynch, and another resigned in protest. Although the two ministers were acquitted of the charges at trial, there was a significant rift in FF over the issue, with two ministers and another TD leaving the party. Another challenge that Fianna Fail faced in 1973 was allegations of poor economic management. The 1973 election predated the oil crisis and double-digit inflation and job losses that followed, but inflation in Ireland in the late 1960s was already well above 5% every year, and between 1969 and 1972 averaged more than 7%.

Despite this, Jack Lynch called an early election in February 1973 and the party seemed poised to return to office. Its popularity was at a similar level to that in 1969, and in fact, when all the votes were totaled, first preferences for Fianna Fail increased from 1969 to 1973—a result even more impressive when one realizes it does not count the significant number of votes that

went to several former Fianna Fail TDs who stood for election in 1973. In the Irish election system voters do not simply choose one candidate or party, so aggregate first preferences do not tell the whole story. Fianna Fail actually lost six seats in the election and its parliamentary majority, despite gaining votes.

Voters in Ireland have the opportunity to rank all candidates for election the Dail (Parliament) in their district, and three to five TDs (MPs) are elected from each district. In this single transferable vote system, when counting the ballots, both surplus votes (excess votes for a candidate above the necessary quota) and votes for a candidate that is eliminated are transferred (where possible) to other candidates still in contention (see Sinnott 1995).

In 1973 the two major opposition parties, Labour and Fine Gael, explicitly orchestrated a pre-election coalition and coordinated their campaigns for the first time since the 1950s. They both improved their ability to translate votes into seats in 1973, with Labour increasing its share of seats in the Dail despite losing nearly one-fifth of its popular support. This was largely due to Labour and Fine Gael voters who had previously plumped for their party (listed preferences only for their preferred party's candidates) following their parties' recommendations and listing preferences for the other coalition candidates as well. In 1969 Fine Gael and Labour voters transferred to candidates of the other opposition party at a rate of 30%, however on average the rate increased to roughly 70% in 1973 (Sinnott 1995).

Eleven seats switched hands between Fianna Fail and the coalition parties. Fianna Fail gained seats at the expense of Fine Gael in three districts, Fine Gael gained seats from Fianna Fail in five districts, and Labour gained three seats at the expense of Fianna Fail, for a net gain to the coalition of five seats. In the three districts where Fianna Fail gained seats, the gain was largely due to an increase in popular support as expressed in voters' first preferences. However

changes in first preferences do not explain the districts in which the coalition gained seats.

Fianna Fail lost seats to the coalition in eight districts in 1973, and Fianna Fail actually increased first preference vote share in five of these. The other three districts also clearly showed signs that the switch was due to changing electoral coordination rather than first preferences.² In all eight districts, the number of non-transferable votes in the final count declined—from an average of 5.9% of the total in 1969 to 1.5% in 1973. In each of these districts a Labour or Fine Gael candidate had been runner-up in 1969, and in six of the eight districts had lost by fewer votes than had been in the non-transferable pile.

The underlying cause of change in power was not in first preferences of voters over party, but the degree to which votes transferred among candidates. In most of the districts, Fianna Fail candidates received a greater proportion of first preferences in 1973 than in 1969. But Fianna Fail's dominance in Ireland through the 1960s was in spite of greater vote acquisition by the opposition – it was premised on inefficient opposition translation of votes to seats. So, when the ballots that were wasted in transfers among eliminated candidates dropped significantly in 1973 with the improved electoral coordination of the opposition, Fianna Fail lost power.

Japan 1989

While the 1965 Norwegian and 1973 Irish elections point to dominant parties losing due to issues of electoral coordination, there are other clear examples in which dominant parties have lost elections primarily due to declining popular support. The 1989 Upper House election in Japan is a prime example. The election remains to this day the only nationwide election in which

² In two three-seat districts, Fianna Fail's vote share declined but remained above 50%, which given perfect plumping would result in two FF TDs elected, however only one was. In another three-seat district the coalition had a popular majority in 1969 but only elected one TD, but rectified the coordination failure in 1973.

the Liberal Democratic Party not only failed to garner a majority of seats up for election but also came in second behind another party. It also was the first time in which the party failed to maintain its parliamentary majority in either chamber of parliament, forcing it to compromise with opposition parties in order to advance its legislative agenda. In the 1989 election, the LDP actually polled fewer votes and garnered fewer seats than its longtime main opponent, the Japan Socialist Party—a party that had been in long-term decline since the 1960s.

Every three years half of the 252 seats of the Upper House of the Diet are up for election. The electoral system was modified beginning with the 1983 election. In the post-1983 House of Councillors, 100 seats are elected from a proportional representation list, and 152 from prefecture-wide constituencies with district magnitude between one and four (based roughly on the population of the prefectures), each voter getting one ballot for the PR list and one for the prefectural districts.

The results of the 1989 election are striking. The LDP won 73 seats in the 1986 election, but fewer than half that number in the 1989 election. The JSP more than doubled their seat share in both PR and in the prefectural districts, in total going from 20 total seats in 1986 to 46 in 1989. In addition, eleven candidates elected under the banner of the newly formed trade federation Rengo were elected in 1989.

In analyzing the failure of the dominant party in this election, one must explore why voters abandoned the dominant party in such large numbers. The LDP lost more than ten percentage points of the vote in the proportional representation ballot (from 38.6% to 27.3%) and nearly fifteen percentage points (45.1% to 30.7%) in the prefectural districts. LDP votes declined by nearly one-third in three years.

News reports and scholarship based on aggregate election results suggest that a combination of political finance scandal, unpopular new taxes, popularity of the JSP leader, and declining agricultural sector support for the LDP all contributed to the election outcome. Not just the 'floating' voters, but many regular LDP supporters abandoned the party (Baerwald 1989, Yanai and Tanifuji 1990, Kobayashi 1991). Individual-level analysis of the 1989 election, drawing on a nationwide election survey (Nyblade, Chapter 7) suggests that those moderate voters who had supported the LDP in 1986 and felt that reform and taxes were major issues were significantly more likely to abandon the LDP in the 1989 election, controlling for all other variables. Similar results were *not* found for agriculture, and demographic and regional variables had no significant impact.

Sweden 1976

The Swedish social democrats to many are the archetypal dominant party. They have been in power more than sixty of the last seventy years. They came to power during the Great Depression, and remained in power for forty consecutive years until being voted out of office in 1976. They were returned to power six years later, and have had only one other stint in opposition since then (from 1991 to 1994).

As with the LDP loss of the 1989 House of Councillors election in Japan, there it is quite clear that the 1976 election in Sweden was not an issue of electoral or parliamentary coordination. Although dominance in earlier years had been in part due to parliamentary coordination with the Agrarian Party, in the 1960s and early 1970s the Swedish social democrats governed alone, although frequently dependent on the support of the Communist Party.

The 1970s witnessed a decline in popular support for the Social Democrats and a rise in support for the Centre Party (the former Agrarians). In 1973, the socialist and non-socialist blocs evenly divided the parliamentary seats. Although the social democrats remained in government, several times ties in parliamentary votes (including major issues such as the budget) were broken by drawing lots. In 1976, the Social Democrats were voted out of office decisively.

A number of factors likely contributed to the outcome of the 1976 election (Holmberg, et al 1977, Petersson 1977). In fact, some might say that everything worked against the Social Democrats: inflation and unemployment were large issues, largely due to the oil shocks (see Krauss and Pierre 1990). Furthermore, manifesto evidence suggests that the Social Democrats moved significantly to the left for the 1976 election, further than might have appealed to the bulk of voters (see Nyblade, Chapter 6). Lewin (1988) emphasizes the importance of the issue of nuclear power in the outcome of the election.

One might suggest say that everything was working against the SAP in the 1976 election, and also in 1979 and 1991. The economy was bad, especially in 1976 and 1991. From a Downsian perspective, the SAP appeared to be moving left in 1976 and again was perhaps too left in 1991 (although it was more right in 1991 than in any other election). And the significant non-left-right issues worked against the SAP, notably the nuclear power issue in 1976 (as in 1973 and in 1979), and the issue of immigration in 1991. It is also fairly clear that in each case in which the socialists lost power, it was not a case of changes in parliamentary or electoral coordination, but driven by changing vote acquisition.

Toward A Unified Theory of Dominance?

The empirical examples discussed above are those of the decline of dominance. A more complete analysis requires examining vote acquisition, electoral coordination and parliamentary coordination as they contributed to the rise and maintenance of party dominance. Even a somewhat perfunctory glance shows variation during the period of dominance. For example, in discussing the Swedish case above, emphasis was placed on changes in voter behavior in 1976. However, the Swedish social democrats have also been quite dependent on effective parliamentary coordination. They have not had a majority of parliamentary seats since the electoral reform took effect in 1970, and frequently were a minority government before that as well. Sometimes they were only dependent on the Communists (now the Left Party), who were reliable in their support of the Social Democrats in parliament for the first few decades following WWII, but recently the SAP has become also dependent on support by the Greens as well.

Similarly, discussion of the 1989 election and 1993 change of government emphasized the importance of parliamentary coordination and voting behavior in the Japanese case, but the significant advantages gained by the LDP in the translation of votes to seats, most especially in the SNTV-MMD Lower House electoral system, was crucial in maintaining LDP dominance (cf. Reed 1994a, Cox 1997). A comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of dominance requires understanding how the three challenges of vote acquisition, electoral coordination and parliamentary coordination are met in each case over time.

The origins, maintenance of dominance rest on meeting all three challenges, and the loss of dominance can come from failing at any of the three challenges. This presents a challenge for a unified theory of dominance: a unified theory must be able to explain behavior at multiple levels: it must be able to explain vote acquisition, electoral coordination and parliamentary

coordination. None of the theories or analyses of dominant parties reviewed above meets this challenge in a manner consistent with the empirical record.

The institutional theories suggested by Reed, Cox and McGann, may help explain important institutional incentives that advantage dominant parties, but cannot be considered complete theory of the dynamics of dominance. Neither can static societal and demographic factors, such as the underlying cleavage structure of a society. The problem is the classic one of a constant not being able to explain a variable. While these theories can help us understand the challenges that oppositions must overcome in ousting a dominant party, they do not actually help explain the dynamics of dominance.

The descriptive theories of the dynamics of dominance, such as Pempel (1990), run into a similar problem, although for a very different reason. They may accurately describe the dynamics of dominance, but they do not help develop theoretically our understanding of the dynamics of dominance. They do not help develop hypotheses as to when dominance occurs or what leads to the end of dominance, beyond a suggestion that a crisis is involved.

The theories above suggest factors that might influence dominance, but cannot provide a full theory of dominance as they fail to elucidate a general theory of party competition.

Dominance is an outcome of party competition in which one party wins (enters government) and others losing (remaining outside government). Several theorists have attempted to understand dominance in the context of a Downsian model of party competition. Riker (1982) suggests that the central ideological location of Congress in India, with viable opposition on both the left and right, gives them a significant electoral advantage, while Sartori (1976) and Laver and Schofield (1990) suggest that the same advantage can occur in the parliamentary arena.

However, the six cases of the decline of dominance examined in the previous section should highlight that a simple unidimensional Downsian model of party competition is not sufficient for explaining the dynamics of dominance. In fact, only the two cases (Japan 1989, Sweden 1976) are even consistent with a Downsian model of party competition, and in those two cases, there are a number of reasons to believe that factors other than the left-right dimension was the cause of the election loss.

Nyblade (2003, Chapter 5) suggests an alternative, “Rikerian” model of issue competition might be more appropriate than a Downsian model in many cases. Following Riker (1986), the emphasis is on how political actors attempt to instigate or take advantage of changing issues and issue dimensionality in order to improve their electoral performance and their position in coalition bargaining. This alternative model of party competition, which suggests a dynamic view of issue dimensionality, and emphasizes the agency of parties as they compete, is more in line with the theories of issue voting, issue ownership and salience theory, which has recently gained more prominence (e.g., Petrocik 1996, Alvarez and Nagler 1998, van der Brug 2004).

Every case discussed in this paper is at least compatible with a Rikerian model in which parties compete attempt to take advantage of wedge issues. Understanding the dynamics of dominance in Norway clearly requires a multidimensional, dynamic model of issue space, as the King’s Bay issue joined SF with the nonsocialist bloc (however briefly) in 1963, and the divisions within the socialist bloc over issues of foreign affairs (NATO membership) were largely responsible for their failure at electoral coordination in 1965 and 1969. Fianna Fail’s second period of dominance lasted from 1956 to 1973. But in 1965 and 1969, Fianna Fail received fewer votes than Fine Gael and Labour combined. However, the two opposition parties were hampered in translating their first votes into seats because they could not agree to cooperate

due to their distinct policy positions. However in 1973, the two parties chose to combine forces, emphasize issues that united them against Fianna Fail, and successfully convinced their voters that those were the key issues to the election. Although Fianna Fail's first vote share actually increased in number in 1973, they lost power because they were unable to translate them into a parliamentary majority.

Both the Japanese and Swedish cases are less unequivocally cases of Rikerian competition, but in both cases the evidence suggests that it at least played a major role. The results of the Swedish election of 1976 is compatible with models of economic voting, Downsian competition, and Rikerian issue competition. Some scholars (notably Levin 1988) consider the issue of nuclear power, taken advantage of by the Agrarian (Centre) Party, to be decisive.

In Japan, the changes in popular vote in 1989 was largely attributable to changes in voter support to the LDP largely from three issue areas: agriculture, taxes and corruption (Baerwald 1989, Yanai and Tanifuji 1990). In 1993, the role of the reform issue in both the LDP split (Reed and Scheiner 2003) and election outcome (Reed 2003) is well established, as is the role of electoral reform in the coalition negotiations that followed the election (Curtis 1999). Analyses of election studies in both Sweden and Japan suggest that Rikerian competition at least contributed to the election results in 1976 and 1989 respectively (Nyblade, Chapters 5 and 6).

5. Conclusion

Dominant parties in parliamentary democracies often evoke suspicion, both popularly and among scholars. To paraphrase Duverger (1954: 312), how is it that these parties manage to defy for decades the inevitable rhythmic swing of the pendulum of voter opinion? There are many factors discussed in the literature, which this paper has not sought to adjudicate between.

Rather than explaining dominance, this paper has focused on the dynamics of dominance, primarily focusing on the decline of dominant parties in four established parliamentary democracies.

There are two main conclusions from this paper. First if one attempts to develop a unified explanation for party dominance it is vital that one consider vote acquisition, electoral coordination, *and* parliamentary coordination. All are necessary to establish and maintain dominance, and each can be implicated as the proximate cause to the end of dominance in many cases. Failure by dominant parties in maintaining sufficient voter support is the primary cause of election losses by dominant parties in Sweden in 1976 and Japan in 1989. Failure by dominant parties in electoral coordination led to declines in success in vote to seat translation and loss of power in Ireland in 1973 and Norway in 1965. And failure in both intra- and inter-party parliamentary coordination can be implicated in the loss of power of dominant parties in Norway in 1963 and Japan in 1993.

The second conclusion builds on the first: any unified theory of dominance, one that seeks to understand the rise and fall of dominant parties, must be able to explain changes in vote acquisition, electoral coordination and parliamentary coordination. Static theories drawing on political institutions, demographics or other characteristics of society are likely to be inadequate. A theory of dominance should be placed within a broader theory of political party competition. The examination of the four countries in this paper suggests that a standard Downsian model of parties competing by changing positions on a fixed unidimensional issue space is inconsistent with the empirical record. However, a Rikerian model of party competition, in which parties compete by attempting to take advantage of issues that disadvantage other parties can help explain the successes and failures of dominant parties in Ireland, Japan, Norway and Sweden.

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