

Key terms + ideas

- dual legitimacy
- cabinet vs. regime instability
- Duverger's Law
- grand coalition
- segmented autonomy
- 1995 Dayton Peace Accords
- plurality vs. PR systems
- mutual veto

Key questions

Q: What is an institution?

A: Institutions are rules and procedures that constrain or enable political and economic actors' behavior to shape social, political, and economic interaction. We often think of institutions as semi-autonomous entities that shape social outcomes. They can be formal (like rules of constitutions or laws) or informal restraints (like taboos, customs, or traditions). For example, the Democratic Party is a political institution that structures and influences political competition in the United States.

Q: What is median voter theorem? How is it different from Duverger's Law?

A: While both concepts are related to voting behavior, the median voter theorem explains a candidate's policies preferences as a function of the party system, whereas Duverger's Law outlines voting systems influence the party system. The median voter theorem describes how candidates choose policy priorities in a majority-rule voting system. Since appealing to the median voter- or a voter in the middle of the political spectrum— helps a candidate maximize support from the electorate under majority-rule, the theorem suggests that a candidate whose policies best align with the median voter has a strong chance of winning. In contrast to the median voter theorem's explanation of candidate's policy preferences, Duverger's Law is concerned with the structure of electoral systems. It posits that in a first-past-the-post voting system, where the winner is the one with the most votes, there is a tendency to develop two major political parties because voters who support smaller parties often switch to larger ones to avoid wasting their vote.

Q: What are the different types of constitutional and electoral systems discussed this week? Are they exclusive?

A: There are two types of constitutional systems: (a) presidential, and (b) parliamentary democracy. There are three types of electoral systems: (1) plurality, (2) proportional representation (also known as PR), and (3) a mix of plurality and PR. They are not exclusive; this typology describes 6 different democratic institutional arrangements.

Q: What is consociational democracy?

A: Consociational democracy is a political regime that counteracts the 'centrifugal tendencies' of a plural societies through elite cooperation (Lijphart 1977, 1). It is defined by four traits: (1) the presence of grand coalition, (2) mutual veto to protect minority interests, (3) a proportional representation electoral system, and (4) a high degree of sect autonomy.

Week's readings

- Linz, "The Perils of Presidentialism," pp. 51-70.
- Shugart and Carey, "Presidents and Assemblies," pp. 1-15 and 28-54.
- Reilly, "Electoral Systems for Divided Societies," pp 156-170.
- Lijphart, "Democracy in Plural Societies," pp. 1-2; 16-52.
- Howard, "The Ethnocracy Trap" pp. 155-169.

Review questions

Check your understanding of this week's material and key ideas with the following questions.

1. How does consociational democracy differ from ethnocracy?
2. According to the authors this week, what are the benefits and drawbacks of presidentialism? What are its alternatives?
3. If you were helping design the constitution of a country, would you implement presidentialism or parliamentarism? Outline your reasoning.
4. How might informal institutions play a role in the discussion of presidentialism v. parliamentarism? How might they exacerbate the situation?
5. What aspects of Linz's argument most apply to the United States? What has changed since his piece was published, and why does it matter for understanding our current moment?
6. Howard poses the question of what would have happened had the U.S., post-Civil war, been divided into racially based political parties. Do you agree? Why or why not?
7. Would proportional representation reduce the appeal of populist candidates?