Lecture 22

Elections

November 27, 2006

I. REPRESENTATION RULES

1.Key idea

Different electoral rules of the game generate very different dynamics of political competition with very different long term effects on democratic life.

- Of particular importance = the rules of electoral competition and representation shape the number and strength of political parties

2. Basic Structure of US system

Single member districts with plurality voting, also called "first past the post single member districts": Whoever gets the most votes wins.

- Example: Three candidates, one gets 34% of the vote, the other two each gets 32% of the vote. The first candidate is elected.

- Consequence: *two party duopoly* because of fear of wasting vote on third parties.

- This encourages "lesser of two evils voting"

3. Voting rules in the past in the US

"Fusion voting" in 19th Century US:

Basic idea: two parties could nominate the same candidate, so that candidate could appear o9n the ballot more than once, under different "party lines." This increased the strength of third parties and their role in elections.

- Most important case in the 19th century = The Populist Party

- Still exists in a few places, like New York. New York has the strongest third parties in the nation.

4. Alternative voting rules that might increase the democraticness of elections

- *Proportional Representation* [PR]: multi-member districts with each party running multiple candidates on a "party list". Candidates are elected proportionately to the vote for the party.

- *Instant Run-off voting* [IRV]: You rank-order the candidates on the ballot when you vote.

Instant Run-off Elections: How it works

Candidates	1st place votes	2nd choices			Vote count after first round	Vote count after second round
		A	B	C		
A	1700	-	1500	200	1700 = 28%	X
B	2100	1500	-	600	2100 = 35%	3600 = 60%
C	2200	300	2000	-	2200 = 37%	2400 = 40%

II. ELECTORAL DISTRICTS

Hypothetical Example
of How District Boundaries can affect Electoral Outcomes

District Number	Votes for Democratic candidate	Votes for Republican candidate	Winner in election
1	2 million	100,000	Democrat
2	1 million	1.1 million	Republican
3	1 million	1.1 million	Republican
Total	4 million	2.3 million	1 Democrat, 2 Republicans

Packing & Cracking
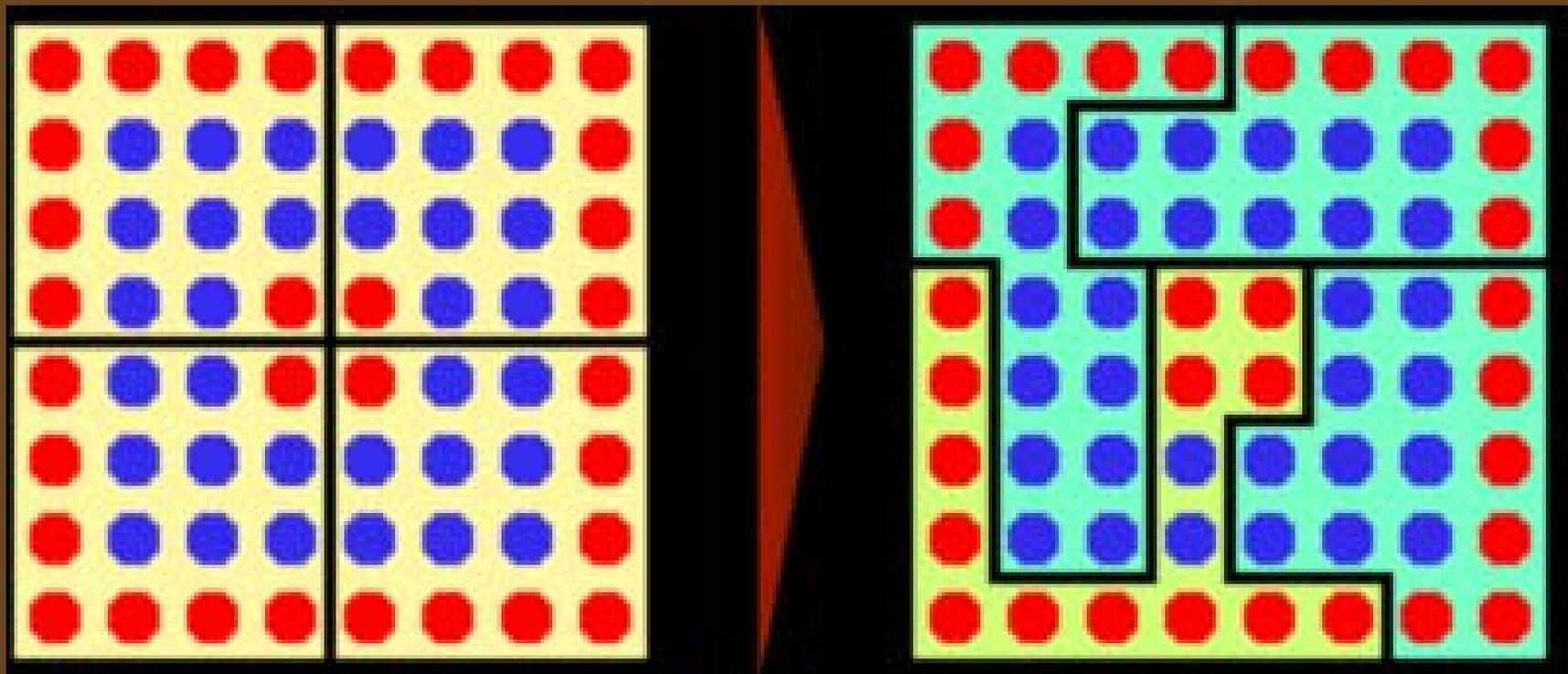
Redrawing the balanced electoral districts in this example creates a guaranteed 3-to-1 advantage in representation for the blue voters. Here, 14 red voters are *packed* into the green district and the remaining 18 are *cracked* across the 3 blue districts.

Congressional District 25

III. MONEY AND POLITICS

1.Campaign Finance: the problem

The Problem: It costs an enormous amount to run for national public office, and almost always the candidate with the most money wins. Does this undermine equality of citizens in a democracy?

The legal context: 1976 Supreme Court case of *Buckley vs Valeo.*

Basic ruling declared that most restrictions on campaign spending amount to restrictions on free speech.

The Government cannot restrict:
- Candidates spending from their own pockets
- Overall level of spending
- "Independent expenditures" on issue ads
- Only real limits = on direct contributions to candidates (but there are ways to get around this).

Consequences:

- Candidates without strong financial networks or personal fortunes cannot run for office: the Senate is filled with millionaires.

- Candidates get the vast portion of their money from wealthy individuals and corporations: only 4% of the population contributes anything, and 1/4 of 1% contribute 80% of all contributions to federal candidates.

- There is a strong correlation of the votes of politicians and their sources of funding. Example: The 213 members of congress who voted to spend almost half a billion more on B-2 stealth bombers received on average $2100 from the contractor; the 210 who voted against only got $100. [Note: this does not prove *quid-pro-quo*]

2. Campaign Finance: solutions

(i) *The Patchwork Option* – keep adding targeted restrictions and provisions. The McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform is an example.

(ii) *Direct Public Funding:* The "Clean Elections Act"
- Candidates who participate agree to accept only public funding
- To qualify, need a specified number of $5 contributions
- Special provisions for "start-up funds"
- No matching funds: all candidates get the same
- Clean Election candidates get more money if outspent by privately funded candidates

2. Campaign Finance: solutions

(iii) *The Patriot Card* (Bruce Ackerman proposal)

- Every registered voter gets (for example)) a $50 political credit card when they register to vote.

- This card can be used to make contributions to any political candidate or political organization.

- with 130 million registered voters, this comes to a maximum of $6.5 billion dollars per year for all elections

- If a candidate gets any private contributions they cannot use any patriot money. This is like single-payer in health care.

- There is no limit to how much money a candidate can get through patriot donations.

- allocating patriot money is therefore itself an egalitarian political act – candidates first campaign for patriot dollars and then for votes, but both are based on equality of citizens.