

“Political Party / Coalition Formation and Sustainability”

A Literature Review – Dr. Euel Elliot

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Introduction

The attempt of this literature review is to survey, identify and summarize existing literature on the aspect of the formation of new political parties and political coalitions across the globe, and the relevant conditions that exist to facilitate the surfacing of such entities. The role of society, electoral system, adequate representation and new climates and cultures all help bring about the establishment of new political institutions. Political opposition always plays a strong role in creating and sustaining both coalitions and new political (third) parties. Overall, the literature indicates that a single entity alone cannot determine a successful outcome for a new party or political coalition. Getting onto an electoral ballot itself presents its own challenges, but even after winning, sustainability is not guaranteed. The various reasons for success and failure are outlined in the literature and summarized below, but overall, a new political party is a response to the inadequacy of the current political party in power to carry out the will of the people. The literature uses various countries as examples, under both the two-party system and the multi-party system in existing democracies.

New Party Formation

In his article on Taubeneck's Laws, Peter Argersinger writes about the formation and ultimate dissolution of the People's/Populist Party in the United States in the late 19th century. He examines the role of Herman E. Taubeneck (and the laws set down by him) upon the creation of the party in 1891. This paper is a historical piece, and provides an analysis of the political climate in the United States during that time which led to the development of this particular third party. Argersinger summarizes Taubeneck's laws "postulate a model for the creation and evolution of movements and parties" (Argersinger, 2002). Taubeneck's first law states "discontent must become intense before [people] leave old grooves, old parties... and align

themselves under a new banner with those who have been their adversaries in the past.”

(Argersinger, 2002) This implies that the formation of a third party is directly influenced by the operations of the major parties in the United States. Therefore, there exists a reasonable amount of opposition to current party practices, and furthermore, no movement on the part of the major opposing party, that would enable the decision for people to create a third party to challenge the existing powers. Argersinger then proceeds to cite major examples from the late nineteenth century as evidence to this effect. Taubeneck’s second and third laws outline the reasons for discontent within the people, stating that existing governments facilitate the creation of third parties by “either making bad laws, or in refusing to legislate on some new issues” and that “all existing parties... must turn a deaf ear to the demands of the people.” (Argersinger, 2002)

Argersinger adequately displays the political climate during the late 19th century that exemplifies the need for the creation of the Populist Party. Taubeneck also laid out the “critical elements” that a third party needed to survive in the “winner-take-all” two-party system of the United States. Taubeneck claimed that the leader of the new party would need to be an “original thinker” that could adequately disseminate the critical problems at the time and prescribe “a remedy which will give the desired relief”. The party would also need “speakers and a press to present the demands of the party to the people”, and finally a “cold-blooded calculator, the practical politician to direct campaign strategy” (Argersinger, 2002). Argersinger displays the route the Populist Party took in achieving these goals, and furthermore, displayed how Taubeneck prescribed alignment with the weaker party in certain states in order to maximize the chances of attaining a popular majority. Ultimately, Argersinger argues, that it was this concept of fusion with existing parties that led to the downfall of the Populist Party. Argersinger states that the different constraints facing the participants of the Populist Party negate the inference that

Taubeneck's "Laws" are indeed all encompassing, though they do provide an adequate lens with which to view the dissolution of said party, thus leading to fighting within the party itself and its inability to provide a "national platform" with which they could campaign. (Argersinger, 2002)

On the aspect of minority representation in governments, Claudia Diehl et al presents the voting behavior of Turkish immigrants in the German political system. She utilizes German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) data to show that immigrants display a level of political interest that belies their "marginal legal status" (Diehl & Blohm, 2001). This displays the issue of alienation, in that the foreign political system and the political processes hold little interest for the immigrants. Therefore, Diehl finds that immigrants are more likely to form their own political coalitions in order to get represented, but even in those cases, interest is marginal at best. The most likely reason for this is the fact that the immigrants, as minorities, would not feel it possible to attain adequate representation, and thus tend to shy away from the political institutions of the host nation. She states "The findings... suggest that the political attitudes and behavioral intentions of immigrants are characterized more by apathy than by a potential for ethnic political mobilization" (Diehl & Blohm, 2001). Diehl concludes that this apathy is borne from an exclusion from the political process for an extended period, such that even when the immigrants gain the right to vote, they are unlikely to align themselves with established parties. This has implications for the formation of new parties based on attaining representation for the immigrants at a future point in time, especially when the immigrants are able to assimilate and grow in numbers.

After the advent of World War II, India gained independence from the British in 1947. In the early 20th century, however, there was severe political unrest within the borders of what is now India. Manali Desai wrote an article chronicling the rise of communist parties in two

separate states within India (Kerala and West Bengal), known as the CSP in Kerala and the CPI in Bengal (Desai, 2001). Both parties were formed in the 1920's, however the conditions under which each formed were different (according to Desai), and hence lead to different outcomes for each party. The Kerala CSP enjoyed considerable popularity, while the Bengal CPI did not. What Desai points out is that while each party was formed with the same purpose (to eliminate the exploitation of the proletariat), the conditions of formation were different. India has always maintained a "Caste" system whereby social classes are determined by birth, and the work performed was limited to the employment of the overall Caste itself. Today, the caste system remains, but is more academic in nature and no longer justifies the working conditions of each Caste's members. This exploitation of one Caste over the other provided fodder for social movements during the time India was fighting for independence. Desai notes, however, that the conditions for the lower Caste's in Kerala were far worse than in Bengal before and during the 1920's (Desai, 2001). Concurrently, the political parties viewed Russia as a model of eradicating class distinctions, leading to the rise of communist parties in both states. The British colonialists freely let the class distinctions continue since they were deemed a significant part of Indian culture. Moreover, the nationalist Congress Party of India barely addressed class struggles as they vied to gain independence from the British. Desai states that this led to a political void in India as far as the plight of the lower class workers was concerned. Desai argues that the "chance of leftist party ascendancy within this [nationalist] movement also rests on (1) dominant class formation, that is, the level of political organization of the dominant classes, and (2) the organizational strength of competing parties and organizations" (Desai, 2001). In Kerala, there was an absence of opposition from a clear dominant class, and were successful because they represented the majority working class citizens. Bengal's CPI party faced greater resistance from

the upper class during the same era, largely because the social class distinctions were not that prominent in the region. Furthermore, Desai points out “A common explanation for the limited influence and growth of the Bengal CPI during the nationalistic period is that the class origins of the Communist organizers gave their politics a strongly elitist bent” (Desai, 2001). The origins of the CSP in Kerala were also part of the upper class and faced similar problems, “however... the fact that the caste barriers between them [upper and lower classes] were already crumbling by the mid-1930s, in no small part because of the efforts of the younger generation of upper caste reformers. This kind of structural transformation was not in evidence in Bengal during the 1930s” (Desai, 2001). What Desai strives to point out is that while there is evidence of social unrest leading to the formation of a new political party, the movements need to arise from a grassroots level rather than an elite few establishing their views on the population in order to be successful.

Ingrid Biezen presents three distinct theories of party formation in her article “On the theory and practice of party formation and adaptation in new democracies”. She states that first, political parties can go through random changes over time, so that the newly forming party serves to fill a political void left in the wake of such a change. Second, existing political parties create and maintain the same platform over time, creating the need for new parties to react to the platform and establish their own platforms as a response to the established political party. Both these theories are rather unrealistic, so the third theory proposes that each political party reacts to the conditions and the social environment present in the state. Hence, they strive to develop policies that would capture the maximum number of voters. Every competing and new party would essentially be a rival, but would seek to implement exactly the same policies as a reaction to the will of the people. Therefore, the only reason competing parties exist is to ensure the other

parties react to the will of the people (Van Biezen, 2005). As far as policies are concerned, selecting one party over the other will make no difference to policy outcomes. The major issue here is the methods utilized in dealing with a particular issue. Political parties may react differently to the same issues, and some parties would be more successful than another in implementing a policy to achieve the desired outcome. Over time, however, all competing parties would converge to the exact same policy response to a given issue, as long as it is perceived to be in line with the will (or for the good of) the people.

As the world changes and we face new challenges to sustainable growth and development, new political agenda's surface allowing for new political party formation. A case in point is the "Green Parties" surfacing worldwide in recent times. Green parties represent the need for ecological and environmental conservation in developed countries, largely brought on by evidence of global warming, tearing down of forestry and the like. However, support for Green parties has been lukewarm in most regions. Matthias Kaelberer writes about the rise of the Green parties in France and Germany, and seeks to explain the disparities in popularity between the two (Kaelberer, 1998). The most common argument for the popularity of Green parties lies within post-materialism (claims Kaelberer). Post-materialism is an economic doctrine that stresses the need for long-term ecological sustainability over short-term income gains. However, Kaelberer states, that is post-materialism were the only factor for the popularity for Green parties, the disparity between election results for Germany (where the Green party gained a significant amount of popularity as early as 1983) and France (Green party successfully gained seats in the national assembly as late as 1997) would not exist (Kaelberer, 1998). Furthermore, lesser post-materialist states saw the success of the Green parties earlier (Belgium is cited as an example) as opposed to the states with greater post-materialist leanings. The other factors in his

analysis are the strength of social movements (as evidenced “by the relative ease with which the German Greens established themselves on the national level as opposed to their French counterparts” (Kaelberer, 1998)). He also states the importance of electoral systems whereby “Green parties are more likely to be successful in systems with proportional representation” (Kaelberer, 1998), but there is no guarantee of this since France does indeed have an electoral system with proportional representation. Kaelberer claims that the answer lies in the “logic of party competition”. He states that in order to achieve success, there exists a “political space” for the parties to occupy, and that strategies must be employed for the parties to effectively occupy this “space”. In order to distinguish between Green parties that strategize versus parties’ that do not, Kaelberer suggests that the main difference between the German and French Greens were that German Greens were more of a “Rainbow Green Party”, in that they sought to “represent a broad alliance of ecological, youth, feminist, peace, minority and new left groups” (Kaelberer, 1998). By contrast, the French Green party was more “Purist” in nature, in that they followed simply their ecological agenda. By this difference, Kaelberer demonstrates the importance of appealing to the “Median Voter” as a characteristic of gaining support for newly found political parties.

David Olson chronicles the formation of political parties in post-communism central Europe in his article (Olson, 1998). He finds that party organization was “a small set of activists who made broad issue appeals, thus resembling the American model of parties, while the patterns in party system more resembled those of multi-party western Europe” (Olson, 1998). This is not at all a surprising development since political parties would emerge from various parts of the state, but would try to appeal to everybody in order to attain the greatest number of seats in parliament. Olson gives several examples of this issue at work, with multiple coalitions

forming as a result to first try to “cope with the electoral laws” and then to establish broad unity on similar issues. Over time, however, the broad coalitions would begin to assimilate with each other wherever they are adjacent on the policy spectrum, to maximize the possibility of attaining a majority. Over time, the major coalitions (or political parties) would begin to show signs of stability, as both the party in power assimilates the smaller parties, as do the majority opposition parties. Olson provides evidence from the “Visegrad 4: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. He identifies that the countries in question are in a current state of formation; and that valuable lessons can be learned from their individual political development over time. Olson next suggests sets of questions to be tackled by further research as the post-communist states stabilize. He poses questions in the realm of “candidate nominations, party finance, party participants/organizational form, parliamentary/external party units, coalitions, patterns of system/country and developmental paths” in an attempt to guide further research (Olson, 1998).

Johanna Kristin Birnir attempts to outline the effects of party formation costs as possible hindrances to the formation of new political parties (Birnir, 2004). In her paper on “Stabilizing Party Systems and Excluding Segments of Society” Birnir uses evidence from Latin America and their indigenous populations (in addition to their representation within their political systems) to outline possible party-formation costs that hinder representative political institutions. She defines party formation as “the appearance of a new party on the electoral scene” and states that it “is influenced by such institutions as ballot-access regulations” (Birnir, 2004). She identifies pre-election requirements for new parties as (1) “Popular support, obtaining a specified number of signatures” (2) “Spatially distributed popular support” and (3) “Financial viability, pay a specified fee to appear on a ballot”. Post election requirements are also categorized as (1) “popular support” and (2) “Financial viability, paying a specified amount in a fine if electoral

showing does not reach a specified threshold” (Birbir, 2004). This particular paper is different from the above three in that it focuses on the mechanics of actually attaining representation for groups via new political parties. Therefore, the voting requirements affect the formation of new parties especially if the group is smaller than the vote thresholds require. Effectively geographically concentrated groups have a greater chance of attaining representation; however, if the spatial requirements of collecting votes are large, then geographically concentrated groups have a lower chance of representation. The second point of note is that economically disadvantaged groups would always tend to have a smaller share of representation due to financial constraints. She does note, however, that financial requirements can be overcome (over time and with sympathy), but it is close to impossible to change the spatial composition of a particular group leading to spatial requirements completely barring the formation of a new party. She concludes “while spatial requirements can exclude large groups, financial requirements are likely to hinder small groups from competing” (Birbir, 2004). Furthermore, post-election requirements do not seem to pose as large a problem for political parties, thus groups competing for the first time face greater difficulties, adding to the exclusionary problems in the electoral process. She cites evidence from Latin America, suggesting that “indigenous parties appear only when spatial registration requirements are removed” (Birbir, 2004).

Earlier in the 19th century, the island of Puerto Rico was a Spanish colony. Astrid Cubano-Iguina chronicles the rise of party politics in the island (directly after the Spanish Revolution in September 1868) in his article on Political Culture and Male Mass-Party Formation in Puerto Rico (Cubano-Iguina, 1998). Astrid offers an example of third party formulation and their ultimate fusion with a majority party, which preceded the occupation of Puerto Rico by the United States in July 1898. The party in question was called the Partido

Autonomista Puertorriqueno (PAP). Iguina writes that after the revolution, and the subsequent overthrow of Queen Isabel II in Spain, two major parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives were formed. These parties were a part of the resultant Spanish democracy, which the Puerto Ricans adopted to avoid severing ties with Spain. In 1887, the PAP was formed as a third party in Puerto Rican politics to fulfill the need for a “decentralized administration that would develop and implement a reform program that would reduce public spending while actively providing some kind of subsidy and markets for sugar” (Cubango-Iguina, 1998). Sugar, at the time, was the main product of Puerto Rico, and the economic crisis of the mid-1880s resulted in the formation of the PAP in a bid for Puerto Ricans to get their voices heard in the Spanish parliament. This aspect underlines the importance of economic instability in the formation of third parties in democratic systems. Dr. Salvador Brau was instrumental in the formation of the PAP, and thusly, he states, “The fray of the written word is not sufficient. The sense of brotherhood that comes from being present in the same meeting place is also indispensable; ... modern political groups [are formed] ... with the conservative right representing the old tradition, a moderate center between extreme tendencies, and the vehement left that prepares for future evolutions. It is from the equilibrium among these three tendencies that variety and harmony are born” (Cubango-Iguina, 1998). Therefore, Iguina claims that a decentralized party structure is necessary and the physical presence and participation of the citizens is essential for new party development. The reliance upon “oral propaganda” is evident here, since people tend not to trust simply the written word of new party proposals. Eventually, however, the assimilation of the PAP into the Liberal party demonstrates (according to Iguina) the social tensions that arise out of trying to bridge class divisions. The PAP was even accused of being a party of elite “power-seekers” set out to further exploit the working class. (Cubango-Iguina, 1998).

In most of the literature dealing with political parties, there is an inherent assumption that voters will tend to align themselves with the parties that represent their particular demands. Therefore, voters are seen as rational agents choosing the political party that maximizes their utility in the political arena. Niemi et al investigates the possibility of parental influences in shaping future party alignments in their paper “Issues and Inheritance in the Formation of Party Identification” (Niemi & Jennings, 1991). They state that the changing party alignments of voters represent a shift in policy preferences, such that, regardless of familial affiliations, voters will still seek utility maximizing policy outcomes. Using a longitudinal study from the Center of Political Studies at the University of Michigan, Niemi et al analyze data across three generations to test to see if the party affiliations are relatively unstable across generations. Their results show that while parental influences do not diminish, party affiliations are most volatile for adults in their 20’s and 30’s, after which party affiliations seldom change (Niemi & Jennings, 1991). What this suggests is that policy issues play a greater role in political party choices for individuals overall. Put in the context of third parties, these results are indicative of the future realignments of political parties. It indicates that since political party loyalty is largely based on issues, established parties have a greater incentive to respond to the needs of the current political climate, and third parties can enter and fill a policy “void” if necessary. The only issue unaccounted for is the method that voters use to view a particular policy, which is influenced by familial considerations.

Coalition Formation

There is a considerable body of literature that focuses on the failing of national governments and the circumstances surrounding each. Established parties in any electoral system, are usually not under the threat of an immediate collapse, since there is considerable

support for the party even in the face of destructive issues. But, newly formed parties and coalitions often do not enjoy the same faith as established political parties. Jonathan Boston et al presents the case of the New Zealand First Coalition, as an insight into why newly formed governments and coalitions are unstable and offers evidence as to what factors impact cabinet durability and how existing political parties can be harmed by forming coalitions (Boston, Church, & Pearse, 2004). New Zealand had two major parties (National and Labour) before the mid 1990's when the country shifted to a Mixed Member Proportional electoral system from the earlier "winner-take-all" system. This allowed the populist New Zealand First Party (NZF) to hold the balance of power between the National and Labour parties. The NZF formed a coalition government with the National party (Boston et al., 2004). Boston et al lists a number of events involving funds misappropriation, member assault, and tax evasion among others led to the replacing of the Prime Minister, demotion of the coalition from majority to minority and eventual dissolution of the coalition itself. Boston et al, goes on to categorize the structural attributes of the coalition that led to its eventual demise. The three major categories of attributes are (1) Cabinet, (2) party system and (3) institutional rules of government formation and termination (Boston et al., 2004). For the cabinet attributes, Boston states "the numerical strength of the coalition... should have made it less vulnerable than alternative governing arrangements". Furthermore, the "Ideological Connectedness" was not a factor in this case since both parties vied for support from the NZF, and the coalition was formed with the party more likely to take a flexible policy stance. Finally, the "Formation process" and the resulting negotiations indicate that the NZF was more interested in winning policy battles rather than "forming a workable government" (Boston et al., 2004). The coalition formation further led to a "polarization" and "fractionalization" of the party system, the increase of which is shown to hurt the existence of

sustained governments. Finally, the institutional rules of government formation and termination such as investiture rules, power of dissolution and the electoral term, all are shown by Boston to have a negative effect on the sustainability of coalitions (Boston et al., 2004). This would suggest further reasons for alienating third parties by the established majority parties in establishing and maintaining governments.

Anke Gerber et al establishes a game theory model for political coalition formation in their paper “Political compromise and endogenous formation of coalitions” (Gerber & Ortuno-Ortin, 1998). They state that while political theory gives the median-voter model, that in a two party system, both parties will try to achieve the majority of the votes by setting policy agendas appealing to the maximum number of voters needed to win an election, the actual policy platforms of the two parties will tend to be as polarized as possible. Gerber states that in order to get re-elected, however, parties will tend to implement policies that would appease 51% of the voting citizens. Using the game-theory approach, Gerber shows that while party platforms are as polarized as possible, policy implementation will converge toward a compromise, allowing the possibility of coalition formation in the two-party system (Gerber & Ortuno-Ortin, 1998). The intuition here is that for two member games, the winning party will still not implement their polarized policies in order to maximize the outcome of the second game. Third parties, however, can challenge this by introducing a more median-voter based approach of compromised policies, in which case the original two-parties would then tend to implement policies suggested by the third party.

Peter M. Siavelis writes in his paper on coalition building in Chile, that there are certain factors that need to take place to facilitate the building of coalitions. He states “the incentives to form and maintain these coalitions will be highest when: (1) Candidate selection is facilitated by

relative equality in the support of electoral sub-pacts within the coalition; (2) A likely presidential victory provides governments with the ability to compensate coalition members who lose competitive parliamentary races at the hands of other coalition members; and (3) Elections are concurrent” (Siavelis, 2005). Siavelis states that Chile is unique in that no single party has attained more than 25% of the vote in a single election for quite some time, suggesting that forming coalitions is the only way to attain a clear majority. A great deal of coalition building in the Chilean dimension depends on negotiations between the parties, usually leading to ministerial positions as rewards for support (Siavelis, 2005).

Henk Wilke et al set out to study the two major theories of political coalition formation, “Minimum Range Theory” and “Minimal Resource Theory”, against empirical evidence to see if the theories are applicable. Minimal Resource suggests that parties “will coalesce if there are just enough seats to gain a majority”. Minimum Range theory suggests that parties will “coalesce which have a minimum difference with regard to their political orientation” (Wilke, Pruyn, & de Vries, 1978). Wilke then attempts to test these theories out with a series of controlled experiments. Wilke concludes that the Minimum Range theory is actually confirmed with each experiment displaying the validity of coalition formation with like-minded groups. Minimal resource theory can only partially explain coalition behavior, since majority of the parties will not align with parties that do not share the same political viewpoint, lest they risk alienation from their constituents (Wilke et al., 1978).

Non-Formation

One of the most significant reasons for the formation of a new political party is that it rejects current political doctrine (or the people implementing said doctrine) and proposes to achieve and implement a “new way” of thinking. Loren Goldner writes about how the

socialist/communist movement never took hold in the United States, even at a time when it was gaining significant popularity worldwide. In his paper “On the Non-Formation of a Working-Class Political Party in the United States 1900-45”, Goldner points to the unique ideologies of the citizens of the United States that hindered the success of the socialist party in the US (Goldner, 2003). The success of a reformist movement hinges on the level of support gathered for said movement by its leaders. Goldner’s analysis begins with stating the importance of religion in the culture of the United States, especially when there are so many different types of religious activities going on within its borders. This very “absence of a single strong authority” and the practice of “dissident Protestantism” is a possible reason for the immobilization of socialist regimes (Goldner, 2003). Because of the fragmentation of religion, and based on the skepticism of any new doctrine in American theology, Goldner links these aspects to the skepticism of new political doctrines. Furthermore, Goldner states “the special role of religion resulting from the absence of an absolutist experience and an established church... made possible a kind of political solution that deprived the working class movement of a sharp focus for its political energies... the presence of [an established church] in most of catholic Europe, produced anti-clerical movements linked to radicalism and socialism” (Goldner, 2003). This means that the support for a new political party displaying radical tendencies was never acceptable to the American psyche because it had not experienced a firm set of beliefs in its history. Therefore, coupled with the American Socialist Party’s inability to establish a relationship with any trade-union movement, the United States never quite received the firm challenge from Socialist doctrine. “The American SP... produced no body of theory of note. Its most impressive left-wing figure, Debs, was a great indigenous working class leader but not someone capable of political leadership” (Goldner, 2003). Since the ASP never truly established

its doctrine, it could not gather the support necessary to challenge existing political parties. It is important to include this paper in this review because it underlines the importance of support needed to form a new political party, and the importance of a leader as outlined by Taubeneck's laws.

Conclusion

Taubeneck's laws represent a good guideline as to when the atmosphere is ripe to form a potentially successful new political party. Based on the literature, any new party/coalition would have a higher chance to be successful if:

1. There is specific voter support for the political party at the grassroots level
2. The supporting population is not geographically limited and the group being represented is large
3. There is considerable amount of funding
4. The existing political parties are unable to adequately carry out the will of the people, or there is significant discontent within the population
5. There is a policy/political space that can be filled
6. There is a clear goal for the party/coalition and the policies it is trying to achieve are apparent to all
7. There is a charismatic leader that can be procured to garner political support
8. In the case of coalitions, there are ideological similarities between the two groups
9. The party platform can possibly appeal to a range of voters wider than the original intended underrepresented group
10. There exists an avenue to deliver materials illuminating the citizenry to the party platform
11. Actual policy implementation targets the well being of the median-voter

12. The changing social climate is taken into account such that the party platform does not contradict the needs of the individuals

For the 12 points outlined above, they represent the perfect situation in which a regime change can be successful. In addition, specific incidents like the change in a state's electoral system, or a switch of the system of government (from communism to democracy for example), can provide fertile ground to sow the seeds for new parties. Furthermore, it is important to note that new political parties have been more successful in multi-party government systems in Europe, rather than the two-party, winner-take-all system in the United States.

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