

## **Democracy and Tyranny**

### Democracy made famous by its critics

**Plato (428/427 BC-348/347 BC)**

**Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859)**

## Fear of Majority Tyranny

Imagine then a fleet or a ship in which there is a captain who is taller and stronger than any of the crew, but he is a little deaf and has a similar infirmity in sight, and his knowledge of navigation is not much better. The sailors are quarrelling with one another about the steering—every one is of the opinion that he has a right to steer, though he has never learned the art of navigation and cannot tell who taught him or when he learned, and will further assert that it cannot be taught, and they are ready to cut in pieces any one who says the contrary. They throng about the captain, begging and praying him to commit the helm to them; and if at any time they do not prevail, but others are preferred to them, they kill the others or throw them overboard, and having first chained up the noble captain's senses with drink or some narcotic drug, they mutiny and take possession of the ship and make free with the stores; thus, eating and drinking, they proceed on their voyage in such a manner as might be expected of them. Him who is their partisan and cleverly aids them in their plot for getting the ship out of the captain's hands into their own whether by force or persuasion, they compliment with the name of sailor, pilot, able seaman, and abuse the other sort of man, whom they call a good-for-nothing; but that the true pilot must pay attention to the year and seasons and sky and stars and winds, and whatever else belongs to his art, if he intends to be really qualified for the command of a ship .... Now in vessels which are in a state of mutiny and by sailors who are mutineers, how will the true pilot be regarded? Will he not be called by them a prater, a star-gazer, a good-for-nothing?

Plato, *The Republic* (c. 380 BC)

## Fear of Majority Tyranny

Suppose a man was in charge of a large and powerful animal, and made a study of its moods and wants; he would learn when to approach and handle it, when and why it was especially savage or gentle, what the different noises it made meant, and what tone of voice to use to soothe or annoy it. All this he might learn by long experience and familiarity, and then call it a science, and reduce it to a system and set up to teach it. But he would not really know which of the creature's tastes and desires was admirable or shameful, good or bad, right or wrong; he would simply use the terms on the basis of its reactions, calling what pleased it good, what annoyed it bad

Plato, *The Republic* (c. 380 BC)

## Fear of Majority Tyranny

When I see that the right and the means of absolute command are conferred on any power whatever, be it called a people or a king, an aristocracy or a democracy, a monarchy or a republic, I say there is the germ of tyranny, and I seek to live elsewhere, under other laws. In my opinion, the main evil of the present democratic institutions of the United States does not arise, as is often asserted in Europe, from their weakness, but from their irresistible strength. I am not so much alarmed at the excessive liberty which reigns in that country as at the inadequate securities which one finds there against tyranny. an individual or a party is wronged in the United States, to whom can he apply for redress? If to public opinion, public opinion constitutes the majority; if to the legislature, it represents the majority and implicitly obeys it; if to the executive power, it is appointed by the majority and serves as a passive tool in its hands. The public force consists of the majority under arms; the jury is the majority invested with the right of hearing judicial cases; and in certain states even the judges are elected by the majority. However iniquitous or absurd the measure of which you complain, you must submit to it as well as you can.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1830)

## Democracy realizing the Enlightenment's challenge?

Politics based on science?  
Respect for individual rights?

Not very promising...

## The Federalist Response

James Madison  
(1751-1836)

Alexander Hamilton  
(1755-1804)

John Jay  
(1745-1829)

## Publius

Publius Varerius Publicola, the consul who had reputedly restored the Roman Republic in 509 BC following the expulsion of the last king, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus

## Majority Tyranny and Factions

By a faction, I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adversed to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community

Madison, Federalist # 10

The CAUSES of faction cannot be removed ... relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its EFFECTS

The latent causes of faction are ... sown in the nature of man; and we see them everywhere brought into different degrees of activity, according to the different circumstances of civil society ... So strong is this propensity of mankind to fall into mutual animosities, that where no substantial occasion presents itself, the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions and excite their most violent conflicts. But the most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society. Those who are creditors, and those who are debtors, fall under a like discrimination. A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations, and divide them into different classes, actuated by different sentiments and views. The regulation of these various and interfering interests forms the principal task of modern legislation, and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of the government.

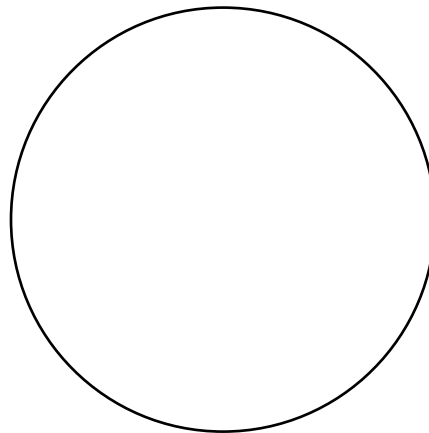
Madison, Federalist # 10

“...a republican remedy for the diseases most incident to republican government..”

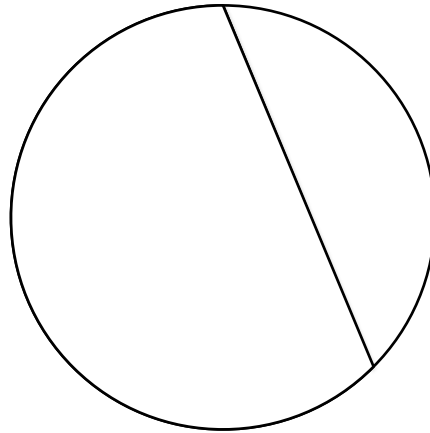
The smaller the society, the fewer probably will be the distinct parties and interests composing it; the fewer the distinct parties and interests, the more frequently will a majority be found of the same party; and the smaller the number of individuals composing a majority, and the smaller the compass within which they are placed, the more easily will they concert and execute their plans of oppression. Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength, and to act in unison with each other. Besides other impediments, it may be remarked that, where there is a consciousness of unjust or dishonorable purposes, communication is always checked by distrust in proportion to the number whose concurrence is necessary. Hence, it clearly appears, that the same advantage which a republic has over a democracy, in controlling the effects of faction, is enjoyed by a large over a small republic,-- is enjoyed by the Union over the States composing it.

Madison, Federalist # 10

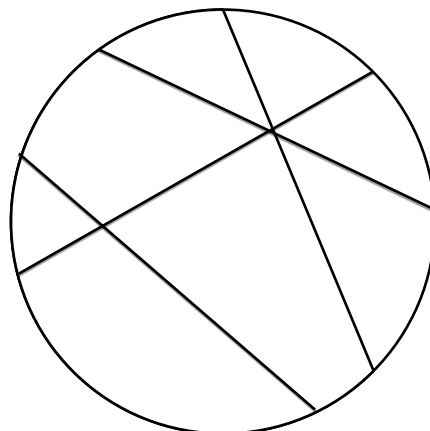
## Society without factions



## Majority faction



## Cross-cutting cleavages



## Democracy versus “Non-tyrannical Republic”

[T]he great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in giving to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others. The provision for defense must in this, as in all other cases, be made commensurate to the danger of attack. Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government ... If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.

Madison, Federalist # 51

## Veto points

- Bill of Rights
- Supermajority requirements
- Separation of powers
- Bicameralism
- Federalism



## Majority Rule & Democratic Competition

### **The General Will: Public vs. Private Interest**

“There is often a great difference between the will of all [what all individuals want] and the general will; the general will studies only the common interest while the will of all studies private interest, and is indeed no more than the sum of individual desires. But if we take away from these same wills, the pluses and minuses which cancel each other out, the balance which remains is the general will.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 1762

### The Possibility of Voting Cycles

Voter	Preferences
I	A > B > C
II	C > A > B
III	B > C > A

I & II prefer A to B

I & III prefer B to C

II & III prefer C to A

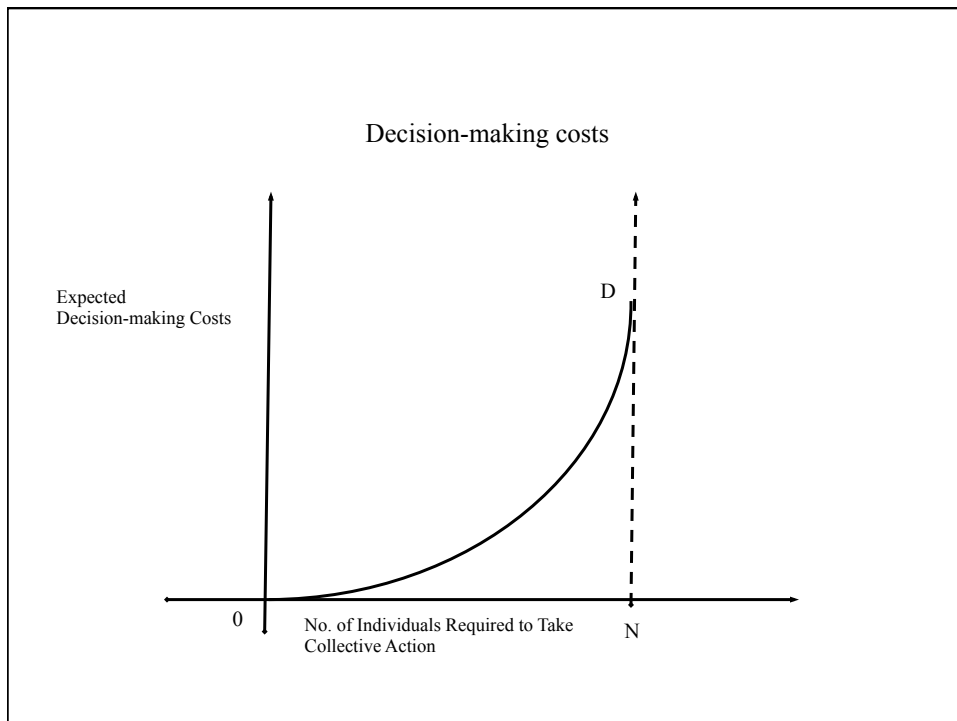
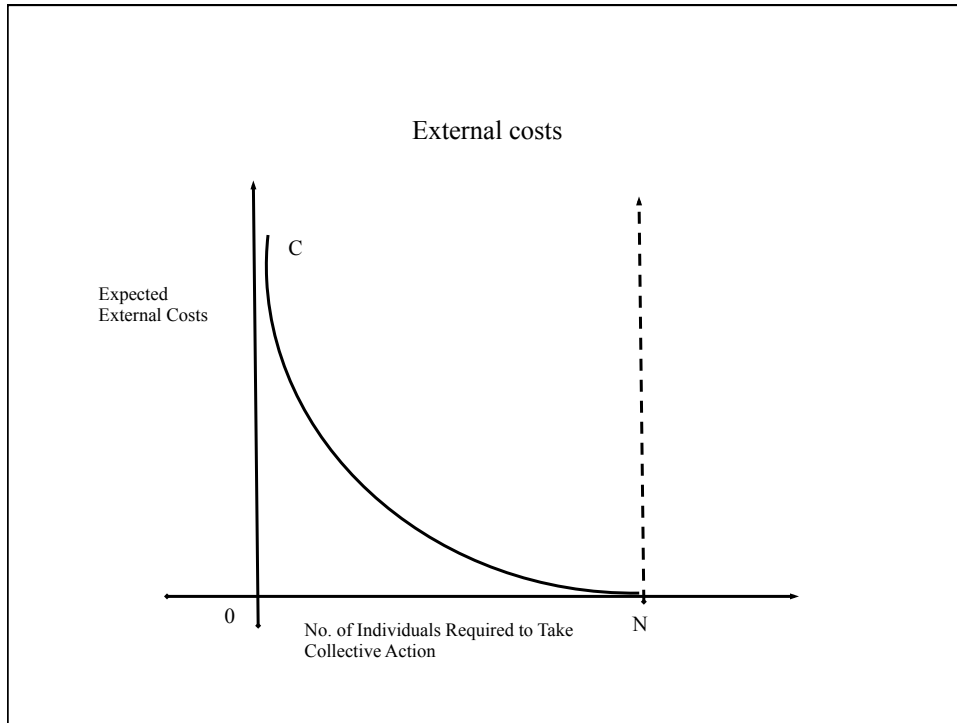
### Locke on Majority Rule

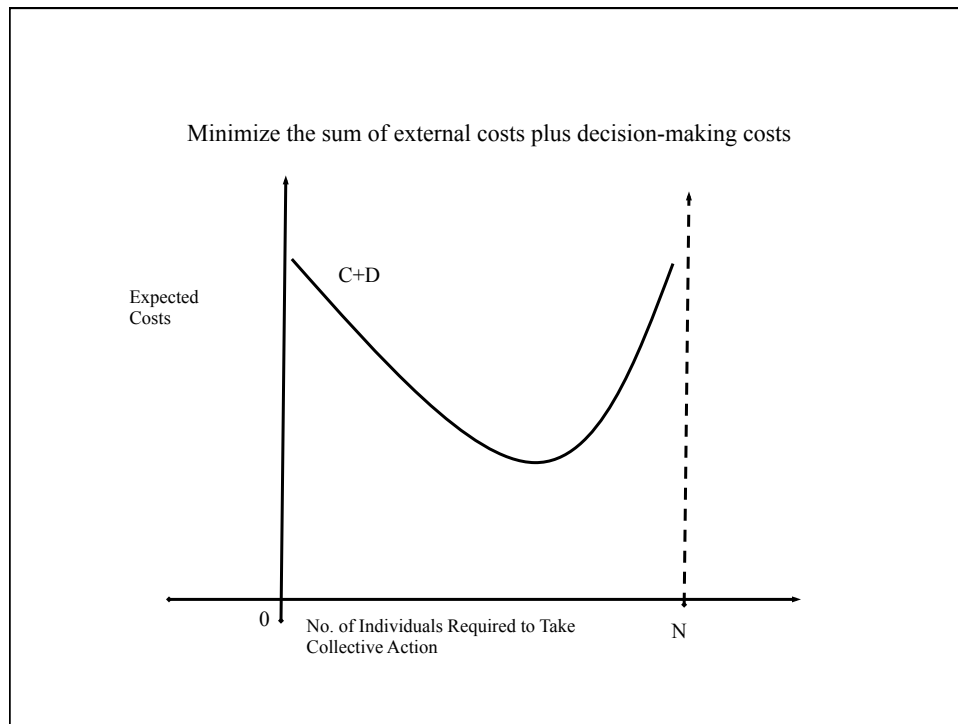
For when any number of men have, by the consent of every individual, made a community, they have thereby made that community one body, with a power to act as one body, which is only by the will and determination of the majority. For that which acts any community, being only the consent of the individuals of it, and it being necessary to that which is one body to move one way; it is necessary the body should move that way whither the greater force carries it, which is the consent of the majority: or else it is impossible it should act or continue one body, one Community, which the consent of every individual that united into it, agreed that it should; and so every one is bound by that consent to be concluded by the majority. And therefore we see that in assemblies empowered to act by positive laws where no number is set by that positive law which empowers them, the act of the majority passes for the act of the whole, and of course determines, as having by the law of nature and reason, the power of the whole.

*Locke Second Treatise of Government, 1690 §96*

But why *majority* rule?

James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent* (1962)





## Majority v. unanimity rule

Brian Barry, *Political Argument* (1965)

Douglas Rae,

- “Decision rules and individual values in constitutional choice (1969)
- “The limits of consensual decision” (1975)

## Non-domination & Pluralist Competition

*Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy, 1942*

Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950)

## **Minimalist Democracy**

**“The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”**

*Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy, 1942*

## Schumpeter's market analogy

AKA

Democracy as shopping

## Schumpeter's market analogy

### **Economy**

- Consumers
- Firms
- Profits
- Products
- Consumer sovereignty

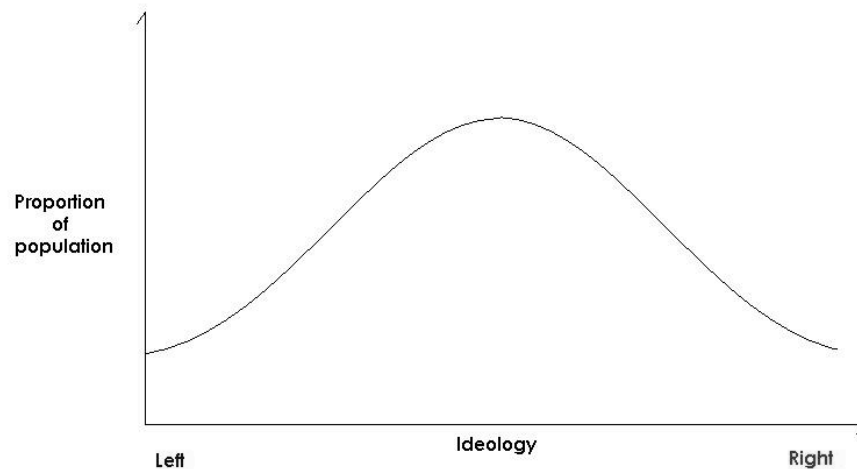
### **Polity**

- Voters
- Parties
- Votes
- Legislation
- Democratic legitimacy

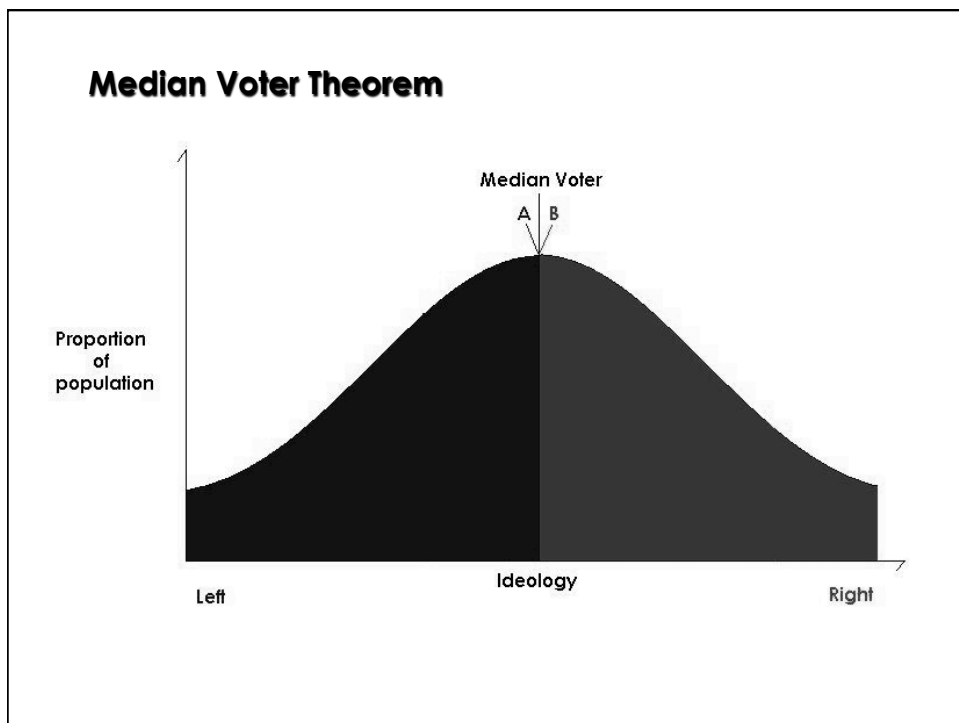
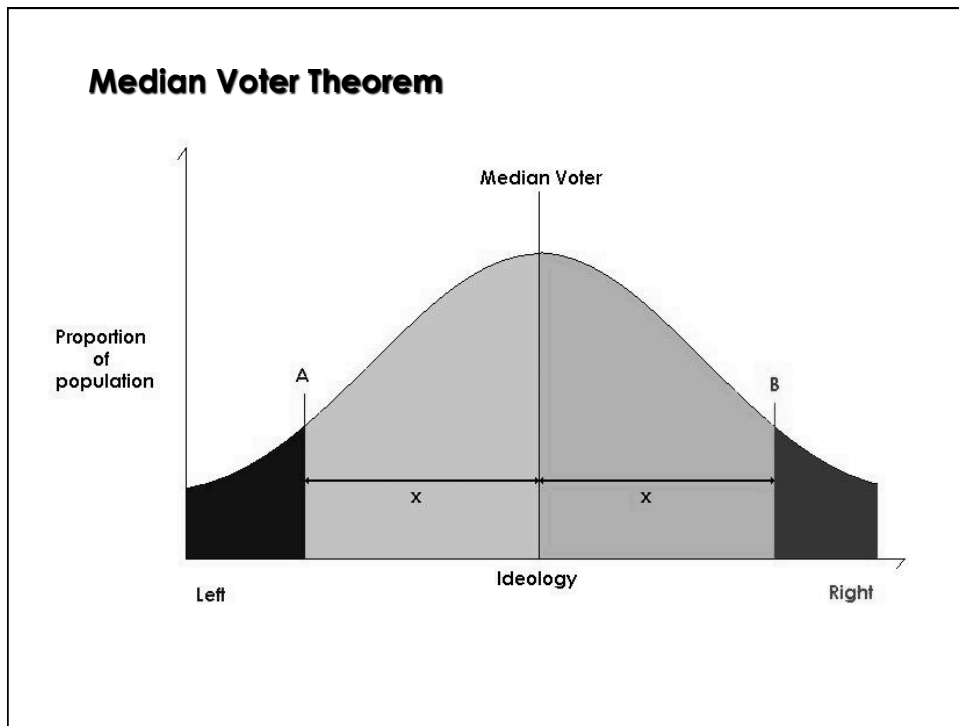
## Dynamics of Schumpeterian competition

- Harold Hotelling, “Stability in competition” (1929)
- Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1959)

### Median Voter Theorem



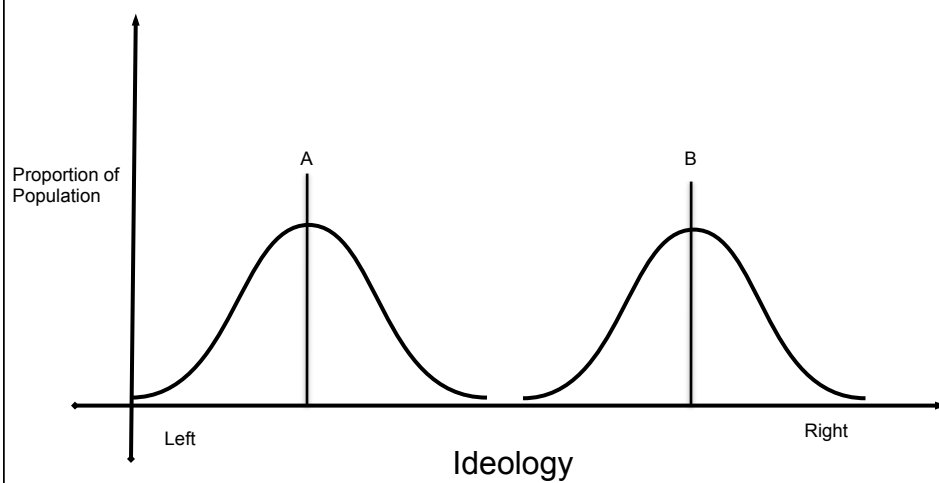


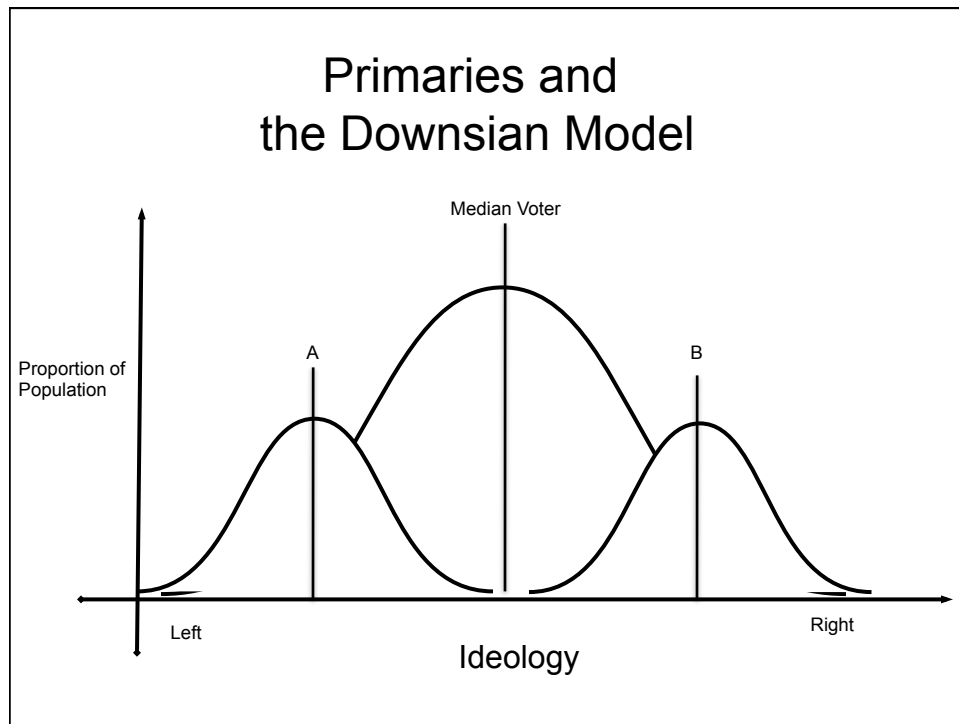


Question:

What will they compete over?

### Primaries and the Downsian Model





## Possible objects of competition

Personalities

Policies

Pork

## Problems with Schumpeter

Oligopolistic competition

Role of money in politics

Undervalues participation

Minimalist

## Enduring insight:

Non-domination  
is democracy's animating ideal