

Bipartisanship of the voter is a first necessity in democracies

Why only two parties?

In all the variants of indirect democracies today, either the number of votes or the number of electoral-constituencies won is translated into a ruling executive. In case of the latter, the number of constituencies (as in India) or some form of intermediate aggregation (like a state in the USA) determines the ruling executive for a fixed term. Note that a 'direct' democracy where all policy decisions are voted for is an unviable form of governance except in the smallest of nations. Elections in these large indirect democracies are won by a 'first-past-post' principle i.e. the contestant with the maximum number of votes is the winner, regardless of the number of contestants and the fraction of votes received. This electoral system along with the wish of every voter to be a serious participant in the final outcome, results in a *mathematically evident* truth that *only two* dominant parties/blocks prevail over the long term, regardless of the number and complexity of issues relevant to the electorate.

The two parties:

Now the voter can be swayed by a host of complex issues and this is tricky for both the dominant political blocks. In their own interest, voters are free to choose the more committed and promising choice among two. The two political blocks on the other hand have their challenges in addressing an electorate that is very diverse in economic and intellectual bearings. Unfortunately this is easily accomplished 'in aggregate' by inciting raw emotions rather than taking well-reasoned positions on every complex issue. Thus we have two of the strongest emotions of humans to tap into, 'hate' and 'fear'; the other emotion 'love' being unhelpful in this sport for a gainful division of votes. This results in only two fundamental choices as a first approximation, one each, available to the two dominant blocks. The emotions of fear and hate do make politics simpler, and the two dominant blocks are forced to maintain this façade as a real consistent distinction among the two, just to entice both their loyal and their prospective voters. Let us look at these two seemingly viable alternatives available to a political organization.

Party of the Persecuted:

This party uses *fear* as the first weapon for mobilization, especially when the opponent is in power. This fear could be related to a loss of their economic or social freedoms and a threat to their social and religious identity. More the division in identities more is the harvest of fear, and thus, a self-serving proliferation of sub-identities is strongly encouraged. Of course, protection of

genuine diversity among the electorate is mostly unintended and the overall social cohesion takes a beating. Fear also helps blind the voters' attention from this party's poor performance. When the fight gets real tough, the reserved weapon of hate is unleashed even on people indulging in genuine debate on relevant issues.

Party of the Patriots:

This party uses *hatred* as a weapon of choice in mobilization, especially when the opponent is in power. The hatred is best directed at perceived treachery against the nation, thus drawing a majority constituency to its membership. Naturally, any minority constituency is a favorite target for exclusion, if it does not fall in line with a convenient version of nationalism. Many times, external threats to the nation also come in handy for this party during elections. If hatred falls short of the mark, fear is pulled out from the deep. A voter's fear of irrelevance is very gainful at the poll, especially when this party promises resurgence of a disgruntled majority.

Mitigation:

The above template of a binary political spectrum, with some overlay of local flavors based on geography and economics, seems inevitable in any democracy today. This unintended consequence is a product of a winner-takes-all electoral system and the nature of human mind. The hope that information technology will seed innumerable voices of reason in such dark clouds still remains a reasonable promise. Mark Twain seems all the more relevant in this information age by his "A lie goes halfway around the world before truth ties its shoes" remark. In such circumstances, how do the voters maximize their well-being? It is evident that the voters can not afford to be loyalists of either of the two political blocks, and a polarized society generously rewards the worst in politics. The voters can choose the better of two real options on the ballot on any given day, and this could be the party that is momentarily least consumed by the above described electoral forces.

But it is equally important for any voter to actively exhibit bipartisanship in their opinion on policy decisions, and shun political loyalties which are primarily hostages of fear or hatred. Note that media and the political executive are largely sensitive to well expressed public opinion, in their own economic and political interests. Active bipartisanship of the voter helps remove entrenched politics of fear and hatred running along election cycles, and moreover, ensures progressive actions are politically more rewarding than demagoguery.