



**MIROSLAV
NOVÁK**

FAMOUS BUT
MISUNDERSTOOD:
THREE ESSAYS ON
MAURICE DUVERGER'S
POLITICAL
SCIENCE

Famous but Misunderstood

Three Essays on Maurice Duverger's Political Science

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INTRODUCTION

In this book, the reading of which does not require a mastery of statistical methods and for which only an elementary knowledge of empirical political science is sufficient, I focus on three areas of Maurice Duverger's (1917–2014) political science that I believe are not well understood in the academic literature, and which I compare in particular with the later work of Giovanni Sartori (1924–2017) and Arend Lijphart (*1936):

- (1) the so-called “Duverger's laws” (on the relations between electoral and party systems),
- (2) typologies of pluralist party systems,
- (3) empirical theories of democracy.

These fields are very closely related. Regarding parties, party systems and Duverger's laws concerning the dependencies between party systems and electoral systems, Duverger raised the issue primarily with his seminal 1951 work *Les partis politiques* (*Political Parties*). The book has been translated into eleven languages, including English, German, Italian,

Spanish, and Czech. Exactly a quarter of a century after this pioneering monograph by Duverger, Sartori's important and justly acclaimed book *Parties and Party Systems* (1976, 2nd edition 2005) was published. Here Sartori formulated a sophisticated typology of party systems that had the ambition to surpass all previous classifications. Moreover, in another work, which he adapted into his book *Comparative Constitutional Engineering* (1994), Sartori attempted the most thorough "reformulation" of Duverger's laws.

Although there is a very large and high-quality literature on Duverger's laws, it rarely deals more thoroughly with Duverger's own interpretation and even misinterprets it on more than one occasion. This is what I attempt to remedy here. I focus on methodological interpretations, drawing among other sources on Duverger's own methodological work *Méthodes des sciences sociales* (1964).

While almost all the work on Duverger's laws is limited to the question of the relationship between electoral systems and the number of parties, I explained that, since according to Duverger the number of parties is not decisive, it goes without saying that in his laws, Duverger does not limit himself to taking into account the number of parties alone.

In the second part, I show in detail that, contrary to what almost all the literature claims, Duverger outlined a real typology of pluralist party systems as early as the beginning of the 1950s, and did not limit himself to a simple classification of pluralist party systems according to the number of parties. As I have clearly demonstrated, Duverger does not even consider the number of parties as a key element of party systems. Giovanni Sartori and Peter Mair (1951–2011), among others, later make similar judgments.

Moreover, both Duverger and Sartori judge that what determines the character of democracy is above all the party system and its main aspects. According to Duverger, these main aspects are mainly bipolar (or dualistic) or, on the contrary, multipolar (or non-dualistic) in character. For Sartori, the main aspect is above all "polarization" in the sense of ideological (or other) distance between the relevant political actors (mainly parties). In Sartori's words, the party system indicates whether a democracy is stable or unstable, functional

or dysfunctional, solid or vulnerable, etc. Duverger's explicit ambition, as he made it clear, for example in his preface to the tenth edition of his aforementioned pioneering book *Les partis politiques* in 1981 (thirty years after its first original publication), was to provide a basic typology of modern political systems, especially democratic ones. Duverger concretized this long-standing ambition, especially in his late 1988 monograph *La nostalgie de l'impuissance*, where he distinguishes between "resolute" and "powerless" democracies.

This ambition of Duverger's has been noticed by a few contemporary political scientists, first of all by the Swedish specialists in comparative politics Jan-Erik Lane (*1946) and Svante Ersson (*1947), who have contrasted these two forms of democracy with Arend Lijphart's typology of two models of democracy, that is, majoritarian and consensus democracy, and especially with Lijphart's preference for the consensus model.¹

Duverger's work on pluralist party systems and types of democracy cannot therefore be limited to the state of political science in the 1950s: his theses are much closer to our theories today. It is therefore necessary to revise our views on the development of political science in the twentieth century and to place Duverger in his rightful place in international comparative politics.

This is also one of the aims of this book. It is based on three academic texts, none of which have been published in English before. One was published in Czech [cf. Novák 2015b], the second [cf. Novák 2015a] and the third [cf. Novák 2021] in French. For this book in English, I have updated, revised, and expanded all three. The way this book is conceived has the certain disadvantage that some points may be somewhat repetitive in its various parts. The great advantage, on the other hand, is that the individual parts can be read independently. Above all, however, I would like to stress that this book forms a closely connected whole and the sequence of its parts is logical.

1 Sartori devotes considerable attention to a critique of a Lijphart's more recent typology of majoritarian and consensus democracy in his late 1994 book *Comparative Constitutional Engineering*.

PART ONE

**DUVERGER'S SOCIOLOGICAL LAWS:
THEIR GRADUAL FORMULATION
AND THEIR METHODOLOGICAL
ASPECTS**

In fact, the effect of an electoral system could be compared to a brake or accelerator pedal: one electoral system may facilitate the increase in the number of parties *caused by other factors* [emphasis M. N.], another electoral system makes the increase in the number of political parties more difficult, etc. Electoral systems, however, do not play the role of an actual engine; that is played by national characteristics, ideologies and, above all, *socio-economic structures, whose influence is decisive in general* [emphasis M. N.]. [Duverger 1951a: 235, Duverger 1981: 292]

INTRODUCTION

In 1951, Duverger's landmark book *Les partis politiques* was published and translated into eleven languages, including English, German, Italian, and Spanish [cf. Hoffmann-Martinet 2005: 307].² This book stimulated a systematic investigation of parties, party systems, and the relationship between electoral and party systems in political science and political sociology worldwide. In her 1963 essay *On Revolution*, the well-known political philosopher Hannah Arendt writes of this book that it "supersedes and by far excels all former studies on the subject" [Arendt 1963: 326, n. 70].³ The year before, in 1950, Duverger edited a collective monograph *L'influence des systèmes électoraux sur la vie politique* (The Influence of Electoral Systems on Political Life), in which he wrote the key synthetic chapter of the same name [Duverger 1950: 10–68].⁴ This contains Duverger's most complete formulation of his laws. I will attempt to summarize, interpret, and critically analyze Duverger's theses, formulated especially in these two key works of his, in light of later scholarly literature.

2 I also count the 2016 Czech translation [Duverger 2016], which did not exist at the time Vincent Hoffmann-Martinet published his article.

3 The most enthusiastic review of the English translation of this book was written by the British political scientist Samuel Edward Finer (1915–93) [cf. Finer 1954]. On the other hand, among the most critical is a detailed fifteen-page (!) review by Aaron Wildavsky (1930–93) [cf. Wildavsky 1959].

4 This synthetic chapter by Duverger was also published in English translation as an article [cf. Duverger 1951c].

In Part One I will proceed as follows. I will first draw attention to Duverger's methodological principles, taking into account his methodological textbook *Méthodes des sciences sociales* [Duverger 1964c]. This will help me in the subsequent critical analysis and interpretation of Duverger's laws on the influence of electoral systems on parties and party systems. Among those who have built on Duverger's pioneering work, I will pay special attention to Giovanni Sartori, who proposed his own sophisticated typology of party systems [cf. Sartori (1976) 2005] and, in connection with it, made the most ambitious attempt to reformulate "Duverger's laws" [see, among others, Sartori 1994].

METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF MAURICE DUVERGER

Before presenting the three Duverger's laws as formulated primarily in his 1950 book *L'Influence des systèmes électoraux sur la vie politique*, I will recall some of his methodological principles described in this book. In fact, Duverger uses them to answer in advance most of the objections that will be addressed to his famous book published a year later.

Incidentally, in 1959 Duverger edited a remarkable university textbook for its time on the methods of political science, *Méthodes de la science politique* [cf. Duverger 1959]. The third revised edition of 1964, published under the title *Méthodes des sciences sociales* [cf. Duverger 1964c] was also published in English translation under the title *An Introduction to the Social Sciences: With Special Reference to Their Methods* [cf. Duverger 1964d]. In this methodological textbook, Duverger clearly states his principles.

Here he presents his 1951 book on political parties as an example of "investigative models," which he distinguishes from "predictive models" as they are known primarily in economics. In addition, Duverger distinguishes between mathematical and non-mathematical models. The two divisions of models do not coincide, although most predictive models are mathematically based, while investigative models are usually non-mathematical (but the use of game theory opens up some

perspectives for investigative models on a mathematical basis, according to Duverger).

Duverger's conception of the psychological effect of electoral systems, in fact, has become one of the favorite subjects of investigation, especially in Anglo-Saxon political science, to which game theory has been applied. This is logical because this conception assumes that actors act "rationally." However, as the eminent French sociologist and methodologist Raymond Boudon (1934–2013) pointed out long ago, in contemporary social sciences the concept of "rationality" is usually understood too narrowly (most often reduced to the so-called "instrumental rationality"). This is the case, for example, in the "theory of rational choice," which leads to unnecessary pseudo-problems, namely the so-called "paradox of voting" [see, among others, Boudon 2009].

Duverger understands an investigative model as "a coordinated set of working hypotheses which present a simplified and schematic picture of reality" [Duverger 1964c: 347–48]. Non-mathematical investigative models lie between the level of working hypotheses and the level of general laws. They assume first that the most accurate typology is established. Typologies tend to be hypothetical, if not explicitly artificial, in the social sciences. The use of investigative models makes it possible to verify the value of initial typologies and to correct them. Investigative models, however, are not just a typological framework, a classification scheme. The models thus serve to test the accuracy of these hypotheses. The validation of working hypotheses and the search for sociological laws leads to the refinement, possibly correction, of the classifications that served as the basis of the research [cf. Duverger 1964c: 348–49 and 324].

In his undergraduate textbook *Sociologie politique*, Duverger says: "Any even slightly thorough analysis of a social group rests far more on approximations and hypotheses than on scientifically established facts. In the social domain, scientific methods remain much less operational than in the physical domain" [Duverger 1966: 7]. And further: "To wish to describe reality or to seek operational results based solely on scientific observations would be, as one American political scientist put it, 'to imitate the drunkard who has lost his

watch in a dark alley and is stubbornly looking for it only under the street lamp at the beginning of the alley because it is the only lighted place” [Duverger 1966: 7].

Roman Chytilek judges that Duverger actually follows a retroductive logic of research. Andrew Sayer [1992: 107] defined retroduction as “that mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating (and identifying) mechanisms which are capable of producing them.” According to Chytilek, the essential feature of this retroductive research logic is the repeated testing of a formal model (a “hypothetical description” of existing phenomena and their relations) based on a postulated relationship between observable regularities and unobservable mechanisms (which are the product of “theoretical investigation”), its refinement, and the simultaneous effort to develop research tools [cf. Chytilek 2007].

The term “retroduction” is little used, but it is more common to encounter the term “abduction,” which is sometimes considered its equivalent, as is the term “reduction.”⁵ By abduction (in the logical-epistemological sense) we reach conclusions that are only probable, but in doing so we produce new knowledge. Abduction (*apagogo*, Lat. *abductio* or *reductio*) was expounded by Aristotle in the *Prior Analytics* [cf. Aristotle 1989; An. Pr. II, 25, 69a 20–85].

The author who commonly used this term was Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). According to him, abduction or inference of the best explanation belongs, together with induction and deduction, to the main kinds of reasoning. What does abduction consist of? We observe a phenomenon. If we can imagine what its cause might be, we hypothetically infer that the phenomenon is caused by that cause. “(1) *The surprising fact, C, is observed*; (2) *But if A were true, C would be a matter of course*. (3) *Hence there is reason to suspect that A is true*” [Nubiola 2005: 126; cf. also Tiercelin 1993 and Paavola 2021]. Abduction as a process of generating explanatory hypotheses characterizes creative activity. Peirce even considers abduction as the only logical operation that leads to new knowledge.

5 Reduction in this sense must not be confused with *reductio ad absurdum* arguments.